

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you will also take this one from before me and a [deadly] accident will happen to him, and you will bring my gray hairs down, with wickedness, to the grave.” This is how Yehudah described the conversation when Yaakov was resistant to letting his youngest son, Binyamin, accompany his ten older brothers down to Egypt (Beraishis 44:29). Yet, just two verses later (44:31), when Yehudah describes what will happen if they return home without Binyamin, he says, “and it will be when he sees that the lad is not [with us], and he will die, and your servants will bring the gray hairs of your servant our father down, with sorrow, to the grave.” Why did Yehudah change the wording from “with wickedness” to “with sorrow”?

I have previously written about Rav Eliyahu Dessler's concept of “nekudas habechira,” literally “the point at which free will operates” (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/yomKippur.pdf). “Free will” refers to our ability to make choices, and, from a religious perspective, having the ability to choose between “right” and “wrong” (or “truth” and “falsehood,” see *Michtav Me'Eliyahu I*, pgs. 113-116). An addict may not be able to “choose” not to feed his addiction, and someone who keeps kosher meticulously may not even consider eating a cheeseburger, so doesn't have to “choose” not to. They will have other internal “right vs. wrong” battles, but these aren't among them.

In the case of the addict, the battle will not be whether or not to smoke the cigarette in his pocket or whether or not to take a drink in a bar, but whether or not to carry the cigarettes around, or whether or not to enter the bar (and/or whether or not to get treatment). The battle is waged where there is still a possibility of winning and losing, not when already in a situation where winning is next to impossible. Choosing to avoid situations that are difficult to overcome (or that present battles we might not win) is the key, and whether or not we avoid them is the primary battleground of “free will.”

When Yaakov was talking to his sons about the

possibility of sending Binyamin down to Egypt with them (putting him in a dangerous situation), the word used to describe the result was “wickedness,” as making a poor decision that allows for bad consequences is where the “evil” lies. However, when Yehudah tells Yosef what will happen if Binyamin does not return home, he uses the word “sorrow” because by that point, although it is unfortunate that what they had feared would happen indeed happened, the “evil” aspect had already occurred, i.e. making the decision that allowed it to happen.

This discussion came up (in a different context) at work recently, regarding an athlete who made headlines not (just) in the sports section, but also on the front page. Temptation can be very hard to resist, and my co-workers agreed that in order to maintain a strong marriage, they have to avoid situations where temptations may arise.

Unfortunately, our community is not immune from these types of headlines. As individuals, and as a community, we must be diligent in avoiding situations that allow weaknesses to manifest themselves. If someone loves children in a way other than just wanting to help educate them, they shouldn't be in education (no matter how talented an educator they are). The “evil” choice is not just giving in to temptation, or being in a situation where it becomes possible to give in to temptation (because it's too easy to be tempted to put oneself into such a situation). A different vocation must be found. And the onus isn't only on the individual to be strong enough to remove him or herself from the picture. Every school should have a zero tolerance policy regarding teacher/student relationships, and every organization should have a zero tolerance policy for their staff members as well. If no student is ever allowed to be alone with a teacher (no closed doors, no unsupervised private tutoring), they can never be victimized—neither the student, nor the teacher (through false accusations). If a Rav never locks the door of his office when he's inside, if he always makes sure that there's someone else to vouch for his not being alone with a congregant (whether by having a glass door or by having that person knock and enter at regular intervals), he can't be accused of doing anything untoward, and the congregant will not be in danger of being taken advantage of. It is up to the community to insist that these procedures be put in place in order to protect all involved.

This issue of *Toras Aish* is dedicated

לזכר נשמת

ר' ראובן בן ר' אהרן

מרת עשרת בת ר' ראובן

by Ramin Kohen

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By switching from the word "wickedness" when discussing the decision-making process to the word "sorrow" when discussing the possible result of that process, Yehudah was teaching us where the main battle between "good" and "evil" is-not when we are faced with temptation, as by then it may be too late, but when we have the chance to avoid being tempted in the first place. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And Israel said, 'There is much! My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die.' (Genesis 45:28)

One of the most poignant scenes in the Bible is the heartfelt and tear-filled reunion - after 22 years of separation - between an old grieving father Jacob and his long-lost, beloved son Joseph. But almost equally emotional is the moment of revelation, when the brothers return from Egypt with the amazing, mind-boggling report that Joseph is still alive: "And they told him, saying, 'Joseph is still alive; he is the ruler of the entire Land of Egypt.' And (Jacob's) heart became numb, for he could not believe them. Then they spoke all the words that Joseph had told them. When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob was revived." (Genesis 45:26-27)

Permit me to raise a number of questions arising from this text. First of all, what was it about the wagons that revived aged Father Jacob's faint heart, and enabled him to accept the veracity of his sons' report? Secondly, the anonymous "arranger" of the seven sections or stops (aliyot) in the Biblical reading concludes the fourth section with verse 27 cited above, and begins the fifth section with verse 28, "And Israel

said, 'there is much! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.'" This last verse is obviously the result of Jacob's renewed heart and his newly-found vigor. Doesn't this verse belong in the same section as the previous one? Why begin a new portion (aliyah) in the midst of Jacob's reaction?

Finally, why does Jacob make the difficult journey to Egypt? Would it not have been more logical - and filially proper - for the young son to visit his elderly father, and not the other way around?

I once heard in the name of the British Dayan Golditch a question which provides the key to answering all three questions. Imagine, he said, a situation in which your child leaves home for university, but fails to show up at the campus. You are at your wits end, not knowing what to think. After ten years in which no "tracing missing persons" office can come up with a clue as to his whereabouts, you would surely be in despair.

Suddenly, out of the blue, your son contacts you wishing to reestablish a relationship. Which would give you greater peace of mind, if he sent you airplane tickets to his home in Los Angeles (where he is now an Assistant Professor of Biology), or if he asked when would be best for him to come home for a Sabbath or Festival visit?

Dayan Golditch, z"l, of London suggested that the preferred option would be the airplane tickets since they would enable you to see the environment in which your child lives, and to assure yourself that he is at least keeping a kosher kitchen (or else he wouldn't have invited you). It would also allow you to check out his marital status or at least his prospective partners. If he came to you for the Sabbath or even Passover, you would learn very little about where he really is at; anyone can wear a kippah and rehearse childhood songs and customs for a day or even a week when they are trying to make a good impression. Hence, when Joseph sends wagons to bring his father to Egypt, Jacob is confident that his beloved son has not wandered too far from the covenantal mission of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "and so the spirit of their father Jacob was revived."

But then, after Jacob's initial unbelievable joy at having discovered that his beloved Joseph is indeed alive, he begins to think the unthinkable and to question the unquestionable: how did his sons get the bloodied stained tunic to bring home, claiming that a wild animal had torn Joseph apart? And how did Joseph end up in Egypt? Slowly, but irrevocably, old father Jacob began to piece together the improbable tale of his sons' betrayal of their brother and deception towards their father, a story he can barely face but whose truth he recognizes.

Then his thoughts turn to Joseph: "Why should I travel to him?" he thinks. "For many years, he has held an exalted position in Egypt. Why didn't he at least contact his old, grieving father and let him know of his

good fortune? He is a mere ingrate, who doesn't deserve my undertaking such a difficult journey; he owes me the visit."

But then Jacob continues to ponder. "So much has occurred in our family. Joseph's brothers were overcome with jealousy because I showed blind, undue favoritism to my beloved wife's first-born son. I was at least partly responsible for whatever they did to him. Perhaps Joseph himself came to resent me and my favoritism as well, realizing that I had woefully mismanaged the family affairs."

And even more to the point: "Maybe Joseph thought that I was in on the plot to get rid of him, nudging him in the direction of Egypt. The last thing he heard from me before I sent him on his dangerous errand to the city of Shekhem to check up on the welfare of his hate-filled siblings was my displeasure at his grandiose dream (Gen. 37:10). Still, he, the good son that he was, responded to my request with 'hineni,' just as Abraham had responded to G-d. After all, I sent him out on what turned into the 'sacrifice of Joseph' (as Leon Kass calls it). He must have figured that just as Abraham banished Ishmael, and Isaac rejected Esau leaving the blessing and birthright to Jacob, so too I, his father, may have cast him out. No, if I begin to blame anyone, I would only be deflecting blame from the one who deserves it most, myself. And I would risk losing my twelve tribes, and the distinction of starting our new nation, the House of Israel."

The arranger of the portions (aliyot) therefore takes a pause for all of Jacob's complex thoughts and decisions, giving the listener the opportunity to reflect along with him. Finally, Jacob concludes, "There is much [at stake]." Jacob realizes that it is best that he remain silent, pretending not to have figured out the true villainy of the brothers. And turning a blind eye to Joseph's silence over the last years he decides: "My son Joseph is still alive; I must go and see him before I die." After all is said and done, the bottom line is that Jacob loves Joseph, and he needs him as he needs all of his sons. They are his future, and for the sake of that future, he must now keep his peace and journey to Egypt. © 2009 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Judah has passed the test so elaborately contrived by Joseph. Twenty-two years earlier, it was Judah who had proposed selling Joseph into slavery. Now Joseph—still unrecognized by his brothers—has put him through a carefully constructed ordeal to see whether he is still the same character, or has changed. Judah had changed. Now he is willing to become a slave himself so that his brother Benjamin could go free.

That is all Joseph needed to know. Now, at last, he reveals his identity to his brothers in a moment of intense emotion. The most important feature of the

scene, however, is Joseph's complete forgiveness for what the brothers had done to him all those years before.

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that G-d sent me ahead of you... G-d sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d..."

Joseph makes no reference to the brothers' plot to kill him or to the fact that they had sold him into slavery. He makes no mention of the lost years he spent, first as Potiphar's slave, then as a prisoner in jail. Not only does he forgive them: he does everything possible to relieve them from a sense of guilt. He tells them that they were not really responsible; that it had been G-d's plan all along; that it had been for the best, so that he could save lives during the years of famine, and so that he could act as their protector in the years to come. It is a moment of supreme generosity of spirit.

Nor is this the only such moment. Five chapters later, at the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph repeats the act of forgiveness. Jacob has died, and the brothers now fear that Joseph will take revenge after all. They are afraid that his apparent friendliness was merely a way of biding his time until their father was no longer alive (recall that Esau said: "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob"). This is what Joseph said on that second occasion:

"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of G-d? You intended to harm me, but G-d intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."

It is sometimes said that Judaism lacks the concept of forgiveness. Occasionally the claim is more specific: in Judaism, G-d forgives; people do not. This is simply not so. Here is how Maimonides puts it:

"It is forbidden to be obdurate and not allow yourself to be appeased. On the contrary, one should be easily pacified and find it difficult to become angry. When asked by an offender for forgiveness, one should forgive with a sincere mind and a willing spirit... forgiveness is natural to the seed of Israel." (Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 2:10)

Nor is it necessary for the offender to apologize: "If one who has been wronged by another does not wish to rebuke or speak to the offender—because the offender is simple or confused—then if he sincerely forgives him, neither bearing him ill-will nor administering a reprimand, he acts according to the standard of the pious." (Deot 6:9)

Why then is there so little reference to interpersonal forgiveness in the Bible? It is not that G-d forgives, while human beings do not. To the contrary, we believe that just as only G-d can forgive sins against G-d, so only human beings can forgive sins against

human beings. That is why Yom Kippur atones for our sins against G-d, but not for our sins against other human beings.

The reason lies elsewhere. The Bible is a book—a library of books—about the relationship between G-d and human beings. It is about heaven and earth, Divine command and human response. It is not primarily about interpersonal relationships at all. Once the Torah has established the principle of human forgiveness, which it does here in the Joseph narrative, it does not need to repeat it.

Note how profound the passage really is. Joseph does more than forgive. He wants to make sure that the brothers, especially Judah, have changed. They are no longer people capable of selling others into slavery. The "Truth and Reconciliation" process established in South Africa by Nelson Mandela could only come about once apartheid had been ended. It would have been absurd for the victim to forgive while the crime was still being committed or while the criminal was still unrepentant.

Nor is it Judah alone who has to change. So does Joseph. He has to rethink the entire sequence of events. He no longer sees it in terms of a wrong done against him by his brothers. He sees it as part of a providential plan to bring him to where G-d needed him to be ("So then, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d"). He thinks not only of the moment twenty two years earlier when he was sold as a slave, but of its long-term consequences. It is as if Joseph has to come to terms with himself before he can do so with his brothers. That is why forgiveness lifts the one who forgives even more than the one who is forgiven.

But the real significance of this passage goes far beyond the story of Joseph and his brothers. It is the essential prelude to the book of Exodus and the birth of Israel as a nation. Genesis is, among other things, a set of variations on the theme of sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. The book begins with fratricide and ends with reconciliation. There is clear pattern to the final scene of each of the four narratives:

(1) Cain/Abel: Murder (2) Isaac/Ishmael: The two stand together at Abraham's funeral (3) Jacob/Esau: Meet, embrace, go their separate ways (4) Joseph/brothers: Forgiveness, reconciliation, coexistence.

The Torah is making a statement of the most fundamental kind. Historically and psychologically, families precede society and the state. If brothers cannot live together in peace, then they cannot form a stable society or a cohesive nation. Maimonides explains that forgiveness and the associated command not to bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18) are essential to the survival of society: "For as long as one nurses a grievance and keeps it in mind, one may come to take vengeance. The Torah emphatically warns us not to bear a grudge, so that the impression of the wrong shall

be quite obliterated and be no longer remembered. This is the right principle. It alone makes civilization and human relationships possible." (Deot 7:8).

Forgiveness is not merely personal, it is also political. It is essential to the life of a nation if it is to maintain its independence for long. There is no greater proof of this than Jewish history itself. Twice Israel suffered defeat and exile. The first—the conquest of the northern kingdom followed a century and a half later by the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile—was a direct consequence of the division of the kingdom into two after the death of Solomon. The second—defeat at the hands of the Romans and the destruction of the Second Temple—was the result of intense factionalism and internal strife, *sinat chinam*.

When people lack the ability to forgive, they are unable to resolve conflict. The result is division, factionalism, and the fragmentation of a nation into competing groups and sects. That is why Joseph's forgiveness is the bridge between Genesis and Exodus. The first is about the children of Israel as a family, the second is about them as a nation. Central to both is the experience of slavery, first Joseph's, then the entire people. The message could not be clearer. Those who seek freedom must learn to forgive. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Joseph harnessed up his chariot and went to greet Yisrael, his father, and he appeared to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck continuously" (Gen. 26:29).

Rashi cites the comment of the Sages that Jacob (Yisrael) did not fall on the neck of Joseph and kiss him, because he was reciting the Shma Yisrael prayer at that moment.

Rabbi Pliskin writes, "I recall vividly how my father, Rabbi Shmuel Pliskin, of blessed memory, lived with this reality. He was in Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore after major surgery for cancer. I flew in from Jerusalem to visit him after having been away for seven years.

"As I walked into his hospital room, he immediately said Shma Yisrael. Then he said the following: 'Why did Ya'akov (Jacob) choose this moment to recite the Shma? Why not earlier or later? The answer is that after not having seen his beloved son for so many years he was overwhelmed with profound feelings of love and joy. These feelings can be channeled for love of the Almighty. That is exactly the right moment to say Shma Yisrael. Moreover, now the reciting of the Shma will bring out these feelings over and over again.'

"While this is a concept I had heard before, I learned from my father how to internalize a Dvar Torah into a living reality. Torah insights are not merely ideas

to be repeated, but are meant as instructions for living. As I write this I can once again feel the love my father had for me and the love which we should all feel for our Heavenly Father." *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and torah.org*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The long hoped for reunion of Yaakov and Yosef actually occurs in this week's parsha. The Torah records for us this poignant and emotional moment. Yet, it tells us that Yaakov remained apparently emotionless while Yosef wept. The rabbis of the Talmud compound the mysterious behavior of Yaakov by stating that Yaakov at that moment recited Shema. What does this mean?

Many commentators interpret this to mean that since in all of the years of Yaakov's separation from Yosef he was in a depressed mood, the Divine Spirit could not have rested upon him and he was therefore unable to communicate with Heaven? the understanding of Shema being that ability to communicate with Heaven. Now that he saw Yosef in front of his eyes, alive and well, his joy of the moment allowed that Holy Spirit to descend upon him once again and that is what meant by his reciting the Shema.

But this does not really explain why Yaakov was apparently emotionless at that moment. One can recite Shema with great fervor and intensity and still weep. In fact we find it strange that in the entire parsha Yaakov does not ask the brothers how Yosef ended up as the ruler of all Egypt and why did he so torture the brothers on their previous trips to Egypt. One would have thought that all of these questions would be uppermost in Yaakov's mind and therefore should have been posed on his lips as well. The Torah makes no mention of this. Why?

Well, I am not presumptuous enough to say that I have the answer to these questions regarding the behavior of our holy father Yaakov. However, there is an insight here that I do wish to share with you. Yaakov is well aware of the tensions that existed between Yosef and his brothers. He is also cognizant that his sons misled him when they showed him Yosef's bloody shirt. He is also aware of the dreams of Yosef for he himself harbored them as well over all of the long painful decades of separation from his beloved son.

And Yaakov, who was able to survive Lavan's schemes and machinations, is certainly not naive. As he will say on his deathbed to Yosef, "I know, my son, I know." He meant that I know everything that has transpired in our family regarding you and your brothers. But Yaakov chooses not to mention it directly. He does not want to display undue emotion to Yosef or to his brothers. He contains his tears for his weeping will only

rip open a scab on a wound that has to heal slowly and carefully.

The less said the better is his motto in this instance. Not every family secret need be publicly revealed nor every family dispute constantly rehashed. Yaakov says effectively, "I am aware of all that has transpired between you and your brothers. I prefer to let the matter rest and not pursue it further." Reuniting the family is his prime goal.

Tears, emotional outbursts and reproaching them for their past errors, which the brothers themselves now recognize as being errors, will not realize his goal of building a united and strong family that will become the Jewish people. Many times, restraint and even silence are the best tools for family unity and tranquility. © 2009 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

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Bar-on Dasberg; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

According to the Midrash, Yocheved was born while Bnei Yisrael were entering Egypt. This is the subject of a disagreement in principle between two giants of Torah commentary, Avraham Ibn Ezra and the Ramban: Should this Midrash be accepted at face value or not?

Ibn Ezra claims that the Midrash is not reasonable, because it implies that Yocheved was 130 years old when she gave birth to Moshe, but the Torah did not mention the miracle of the birth as it did when Sarah gave birth at the age of 90. The Ramban, on the other hand, accepts the Midrash and proves it from other verses in the Torah. He claims that the Torah mentions miracles that took place in the wake of a Divine revelation, but that it ignores other miraculous events that took place in the miraculous atmosphere that existed at the time.

Evidently the root of the disagreement is whether it is possible to reconcile the Midrashic interpretations of the sages with the simple reading of the verses. This same controversy exists to this very day between various schools of learning and among a wide variety of commentators.

Note, however, that there are times when even Ibn Ezra adopts the approach of the Midrash, and similarly there are times when the Ramban explains a verse in a different way than the Midrash. In the general controversy of how to approach the Midrash it is evidently best to adopt both views at the same time: One should carefully weigh both the verses and the Midrash in logical terms, and then decide which is most appropriate.

According to the Talmud, "Yosef gathered all the gold and silver in the world and brought it to Egypt, as is written, 'And Yosef collected all the money that existed... and the entire earth came to Egypt' [Bereishit 47:14;41:57]. And when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt they took it with them, as is written, 'They took everything out of Egypt' [Shemot 12:36]... It remained until the time of Rechavam. Shishak the king of Egypt came and took it from Rechavam... Zerach the king of Kush came and took it from Shishak. Assa came and took it from Zerach the king of Kush, and sent it to Hadrimon Ben Tavrimon. The people of Amon came and took it from Hadrimon Ben Tavrimon. Yehoshafat came and took it from Amon, and it remained until the time of Achaz. Sancheriv came and took it from Achaz. Chizkiya came and took it from Sancheriv, and it remained until the time of Tzidkiya. The Kasdim came and took it from Tzidkiya, the Persians came and took it from the Kasdim. The Greeks took it from the Persians. The Romans took it from the Greeks, and it remains in Rome to this day." [Pesachim 119a].

It seems that the money in this Midrash is an allegory for control of the world. The sages summarize the transfer of control based on an analysis of the verses in the Tanach and also on elements that do not appear in writing. (For example: No war is described in the Tanach between Kush and Egypt, but the sages assume that such a war took place, because the largest war described in the Tanach in numerical terms, between Assa and Kush, includes the area of Egypt.)

It is interesting to note that according to the sages the entire history of imperialism in the world started with Yosef in this week's Torah portion.

With respect to the priests of Egypt, we are told, "He did not buy the land from the priests, because the priests received a stipend from Pharaoh" [Bereishit 47:22], while with respect to the priests of Bnei Yisrael, "Moshe did not give a heritage to the tribe of Levi, the G-d of Yisrael is their heritage." [Yehoshua 13:33].

Evidently the Egyptians never heard of the words of our sages as brought by the Rambam: "One is forbidden to get any benefit from Torah study in this world. Our sages have said, anybody who enjoys a benefit from the words of Torah is detracting life from the world." [Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:11].

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 be 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. © 2009 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our portion opens with Yehudah (Judah) standing before Yosef (Joseph). Through Yehudah's plea, the entire family of Ya'akov (Jacob) is kept intact. It is fitting that it is Yehudah, among all of the brothers, who is responsible for this large family reunion because he succeeded in bringing his smaller nuclear family together again.

Yehudah, earlier in the book of Genesis, is blessed with twins-born from Tamar. His twins fundamentally differ from the other set found in Genesis.

From the womb possibly the most famous set of twins, Ya'akov and Esav (Esau) struggle. Rivkah (Rebecca), their mother, is in fact told that their struggle is indicative of an ongoing battle they would be engaged in throughout their lives. In fact the words used in this prophecy, verav ya-avod tzair (Genesis 25:23) can either mean the older one (rav) will serve the younger one or that the younger one will be in great (rav) service of the older one. This difference reflects their endless battles, not only in their lives, but throughout their nations' histories.

When Yehudah's twins, Zerach and Peretz, are born to him and Tamar the picture differs. Zerach puts his hand out first. The midwife ties a scarlet string (shani) on his hand to indicate he was first. (Genesis 38:28) But the emergence of the hand does not constitute being born first. Rabbi David Silber beautifully points out that the word shani spelled with a shin, nun and yud can also be revocalized as sheni, meaning second. In other words through the midwife's action it becomes clearer that Zerach would be second; the eldest would be Peretz who would at the last moment spring forward from his mother's womb first. For the first time in Genesis, all children in the family find their true place.

This is in marked contrast to what had transpired until now. Of Adam, only Shet survives as Noah comes from him. From the children of Noah, Shem is selected, as Avraham (Abraham) is his descendant. It is Yitzchak (Isaac), not Yishmael, and it is Ya'akov, not Esav who are chosen as patriarchs. Yehudah's case was the first in which neither of his children was cast aside. Both count. Conflicts within the family were resolved.

Rabbi Silber argues that Yehudah therefore knows the importance of bringing the entire family of Ya'akov together having done so with his inner family.

This in fact is the flow of Genesis. It moves from family fragmentation to family reconciliation. Only after Ya'akov embraces all of his children can the nation of Israel be born. The model of our nation is family and the cornerstone of family is that everyone counts, everyone can make a contribution.

In these times of great stress, each of us, along with all of Am Yisrael, needs to desperately heed Yehudah's message of unity, togetherness and respect. the true message of family. © 2009 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 NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

This week's parashah opens with the dramatic confrontation between Judah and the inflexible Egyptian viceroy. The tension builds to a fever pitch, and reaches its stunning climax with the revelation that the viceroy is none other than the long-lost Joseph. An emotional reunion follows, but Joseph's immediate concern is to send a personal message to his father Jacob. This important message has to prove that he, the Egyptian viceroy, is indeed Joseph. Concurrently, it must also alleviate Jacob's inevitable concerns about Joseph's spiritual condition after having lived apart from his family for so many years in the Egyptian den of corruption and immorality. So what message did Joseph choose to send?

He chose to remind his father that during their last meeting they had discussed the Torah laws regarding the ritual of the eglah arufah, which is performed when a wayfarer is found murdered on the open road and the assailant is unknown. The Torah (Devarim 21) commands that the elders of the city nearest to the scene of the crime come out and declare, "Our hands did not spill this blood!"

Joseph's knowledge of this private conversation was certainly clear proof of Joseph's identity, but how did it reassure Jacob that his son had maintained his high spiritual levels?

Let us take a closer look at the remarkable statement the elders when they visit the scene of the tragic crime. "Our hands did not spill this blood!" Are the elders really suspects in this unsolved murder case? Of course not, says the Talmud (Sotah 45b). The elders were declaring that the wayfarer had not been turned away from their city without being offered food and a proper sendoff on his journey.

But is the failure to offer a wayfarer food and a warm sendoff such a terrible thing? Why does the Torah value extending hospitality so highly that the failure to do so is considered "spilling blood"?

The commentaries explain that hospitality is not only meant to satisfy a person's physical needs. It also nourishes his very heart and soul. A wayfarer, separated from the support system of his home and family, inevitably feels forlorn and demoralized. But when he is welcomed into a home with warmth and affection, he once again feels connected and secure. And when he is given a warm sendoff, he is filled with renewed confidence and self-esteem. He holds his head a little higher, his shoulders are squared back, and there is a buoyant spring in his step. Such a person is an unlikely target for the predators that roam the highways. It is the beaten-down traveler who feels isolated and lost that is most vulnerable to attack. The restorative gifts of hospitality can fortify and sustain a person for the long road ahead to an immeasurable degree, and therefore, withholding these gifts is tantamount to "spilling his blood."

Joseph was addressing this concept between the lines of his message to his father. Do not be concerned that I have lost my spiritual bearings, that I have become an immoral Egyptian, he was saying. The spiritual gifts I received in your house during the years of my youth were my suit of armor all these years. They gave me the strength and courage to resist the corruption of Egypt and kept me on the exalted level of a future tribal patriarch of the Jewish people. Remember our discussions about the eglah arufah. Just as the wayfarer is fortified for his journey by a few hours of hospitality, I, too, was fortified for my whole life by my youth in your home. You need not worry. I am the same Joseph you once knew, only a little older.

This is a lesson of critical importance to all of us. We sometimes do not appreciate how profoundly the things we do and say can affect others. Certainly, our children deserve that we bring them up with warmth, sensitivity and strong values. If we do, they will always hold their heads a little higher, because we will have given them the confidence and self-esteem that will nourish them for the rest of their lives. But even in our myriad daily contacts with other people, we can do so much with a helping hand, a kind word, a simple smile. The smallest gesture of warmth and sincere compassion can sometimes penetrate the heart of a lonely wayfarer on the road of life and give him the restorative gifts that will enable him to reach his destination safely. © 2009 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

