

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

Throughout Jewish history, our nation has been plagued with a lack of unity. The term "Jew" itself embodies this, as it comes from the word "Yehudi," which literally means someone from the Tribe of Yehuda. However, after Israel split into two kingdoms (northern and southern), it was used to refer to those in the southern kingdom of Yehuda, and when the northern kingdom of Yisroel (usually associated with Yosef's son, Efrayim) was exiled, and the only known Children of Israel were those in the south, "Yehudi," or "Jew," became a way to identify an "Israelite." Although the differences that exist in contemporary Jewish society cannot all be traced to the differences between Yosef and his brothers, taking a closer look at how their differences developed (and could have possibly been avoided) may help us understand how we can deal with ours.

"And Yosef brought their evil speech to their father" (Beraishis 37:2). One of the primary causes of the poor relationship between Yosef and his brothers was his telling their father about the things they did that he thought were inappropriate. Rashi, based on Chazal, tells us that Yosef suspected his brothers of eating the meat of an animal before it had been slaughtered, referring to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah as servants, and of having improper relationships. Numerous commentators explain the actions of Yosef's brothers to be based on their following the laws as they applied to Jews, even if the same actions would be forbidden for non-Jews

(see [www.RabbiDMK.posterous.com/Parashas-Vayeishev-5770](http://www.RabbiDMK.posterous.com/Parashas-Vayeishev-5770)). For example, a live calf found inside a properly slaughtered cow technically does not need to be slaughtered. Just as any other "limb" of the slaughtered mother can be eaten without any further "slaughtering," so can this calf be eaten without first being slaughtered (or killed by another method). [In order to avoid others seeing an "unslaughtered" animal being eaten without realizing that this animal is considered a limb of an already slaughtered animal, we slaughter it anyway.] Such an animal can only be eaten because it is considered to have already undergone "shechita," ritual slaughter; since the concept of "shechita" only applies to Jews, for non-Jews it is not considered a limb of its mother, and eating any part of this animal before it was

dead is forbidden (it's one of the seven Noachide laws, "eiver min ha'chai"). Since the brothers considered themselves full Jews, they thought they could eat such meat, while Yosef thought they shouldn't.

Given this difference of opinion, what should Yosef have done? Was he wrong for bringing it to their father's attention, hoping that Yaakov would get them to do the right thing? Let's put aside the brothers' reaction to Yosef telling on them (perhaps had they not let this affect their reaction to his dreams, their relationship could have been repaired, or wouldn't have spiraled so far out of control). Yosef saw his brothers doing things he thought were inappropriate, and pointing this out to them didn't get them to change their ways. Should he have let them continue to do things he thought were wrong? Is Yosef partially to blame for the enmity his brothers felt towards him because he tattled on them?

"Do not respond to a disagreement to dissuade" (Shemos 23:2). The above translation is mine; other translators, as well as the commentators, give numerous other possible ways of understanding the message the Torah is trying to convey with these words. These multiple messages are not mutually exclusive, and, as always, the depth of the Torah's divine words are designed to teach us many different things simultaneously. I would like to focus on the explanation of one of the commentators, the Chizkuni.

The Chizkuni explains these words to be directed towards an experienced, smart judge, who finds himself in a situation where his fellow judges are about to rule erroneously (Jewish courts have a minimum of three judges sitting on any case; some situations call for a court of 23 judges, and if necessary, there can be as many as 71 judges hearing a case). "Even if you consider yourself to be very sharp, [as you are] able to show a reason why the verdict should be different, and your colleagues aren't as sharp as you [as they are unable] to plumb the depths of the judgment, the verse is admonishing you not to respond with that reason to dissuade them." In other words, even if you think you are right and they are wrong, don't go overboard trying to convince them that they are wrong; let it go and allow them to be wrong. The Chizkuni doesn't mean that we should keep any dissenting opinion to ourselves, or that we shouldn't try to convince others that they are mistaken. (Unkoles actually explains the verse to mean that we should not withhold an opinion.) Rather, the Chizkuni is referring to insisting that your reasoning is correct even after it was rejected

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by the majority. This is evident from the continuation of his thought; after quoting the rest of the verse ("you shall follow the majority"), the Chizkuni says, "rather, you must [allow] the verdict to be handed down (lit. completed) based on [the opinion of] the majority." It is continuing to argue the point after it was already made and (incorrectly) dismissed, trying to make it again when the others are ready to make their final decision, that the Chizkuni says is going too far. According to this Rishon (early commentator), there is a Biblical mandate to back off and allow others to be wrong, even if/when you are sure that you are right.

This concept is not limited to judges trying to decide a court case; it applies to any group decision. If the majority of a committee, or board of trustees, sees things one way, no matter how wrong that decision may be, the minority must allow the majority to make it. Putting aside the possibility that the majority may actually be right, more damage is usually done by continuing to disagree than is done by reaching a wrong decision. I would extend this concept to individuals as well. Just as G-d doesn't step in, on the spot, to correct every wrong (or prevent it from happening), letting people learn from their mistakes (and hopefully grow out of them instead), we should emulate G-d and allow others to be wrong without constantly insisting that they change their perspective. (This gets a bit complex if the mistake adversely affects others; until it becomes counterproductive, we can't allow others to be wronged, only that others can be wrong.) When someone says or does something that is incorrect, a polite conversation can (and perhaps should) take place, and as many reasons for the other perspective as there are can be calmly presented. However, as soon as there is resistance, we must move on, allowing others to remain mistaken until they are ready to consider another perspective. Whether the issue is what Nusach to daven, which days to say (or skip) Tachanun, the importance of a Jewish government in the Holy Land (even if it's secular), how much divine insight Chazal had, if G-d could have used evolution when creating the world, Torah Umadda (or "im derech erez") vs. Torah only, or one of many other issues that divide us, if we don't allow others to be wrong, we will never be able to move past the things that divide us and recognize how many more things there are that we share.

Yosef may have been sure that his brothers shouldn't do anything that wasn't permissible for non-Jews. Nevertheless, his relationship with them might have been very different had he just allowed them to make that mistake rather than doing whatever he could to try to prevent them from continuing to make it. This doesn't excuse the harshness with which his brothers responded; hopefully we can learn from the mistakes they made that divided them, and overcome any differences we still have today. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

In this week's parsha, our father Yaakov marks a moment of great transition in the story of the establishment of the Jewish people as a national entity. Until Yaakov's family appears on the scene, the story of Judaism and Jews is one of lonely and singular individuals. Avraham has to break away from the idolatrous home of Terach and wander to fulfill his dream of monotheism and morality. He is forced to make hard choices within his own family circle as to who his successor in this mission of nation building will be.

His faithful servant Eliezer is eliminated from the succession contest as is Yishmael and the numerous other children that Avraham sired. For only in Yitzchak will Avraham find a successor to further his ideals, beliefs and value system of life. Yitzchak is also faced with a winnowing process in designating an heir to the vision and destiny of his father Avraham.

Though he attempts to somehow salvage Eisav as well, in the end he fully recognizes that only through Yaakov can the mission, of uniqueness and G-dliness that is to become the Jewish people, be fulfilled. Until Yaakov's family arrives on the scene, the heritage and vision of morality and monotheism is entrusted only to one member of the family while the others so to speak are discarded by the wayside of history.

But Yaakov fathers twelve sons and a daughter. Is the pattern of only one of them being the true heir of Yaakov's dream and mission to be repeated in his family as well? Past family history seems to indicate that such a scenario was possible if not even probable.

This perhaps explains the reaction of the brothers to the favoritism exhibited by Yaakov towards Yosef. The brothers were apprehensive that the mission of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov would again be entrusted to only an individual- only to one of them- and the other members of the family would again be historically discarded. And that chosen brother, judging by their father's favoritism to him, would be Yosef.

And, they felt that Yosef was the incorrect choice for solely carrying on the heritage and mission that began with their grandfather Avraham. What they failed to grasp was that Yaakov and his family now marked the great transition, from Judaism being the

faith and belief of individuals to now being the religion which would be embodied in a people, a society, and a national entity.

Since no two individuals are alike physically, mentally, or emotionally, the people that would emanate from Yaakov and his family would be made up of diverse individuals and ideas. But the cement and glue that would bind them all together would be the vision and faith of Judaism that was their common heritage and would be their common destiny as well.

It is much more difficult for a large group of people to retain a special identity and sense of mission than it is for an individual alone. The story of Yosef and the brothers that marks the concluding sections of the book of Bereshith is the supreme illustration of the challenge of molding individuals who are inherently different into a common and effective nation. This challenge still remains with us millennia later. © 2010 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“R**ecognize now the cloak of your son...” (Genesis 37:32). "Recognize now the owner of the signet ring, the cord garb and the staff" (Genesis 38:25).

This week's portion of Vayeshev introduces us to Joseph, the beloved firstborn son of Rachel and Jacob, whose personality will dominate the last five portions of Genesis. Yet strangely, Chapter 38 disrupts the Joseph narrative with an aside about his brother Judah. Why is Joseph's life story interrupted by Judah's? What does it teach us?

The birthright demands familial responsibility; a commitment to preserving the covenantal charge of transmitting compassionate righteousness and moral justice to the next generations. When Jacob's sons - including Judah - sell their brother Joseph, the heir apparent, into Egyptian slavery, they are reneging on their primary responsibility to maintain family unity. Judah, clearly the leader, bears the major blame for the sin against their father and their mission. In suggesting Joseph's sale, Judah has torn the family asunder.

Chapter 38 opens by recording an additional blemish on Judah's character as he "assimilates" by marrying a Canaanite woman - repeating the transgression of his uncle Esau. Judah's sins are further compounded when, after the death of his two elder sons, he refuses to allow his youngest, Shelah, to marry their widow Tamar. According to the laws of yibum (levirate marriage), Judah should have encouraged Shelah to marry Tamar in order to provide heirs for the childless deceased; Judah, however, refuses to permit the marriage, rendering all his sons -

and ultimately himself - without offspring. Just as his sale of Joseph robbed Jacob of progeny from his favored son, now Judah has robbed Jacob of descendants from himself as well.

Tamar, however, is determined to continue the line. She disguises herself with the shawl of a prostitute (a cloak reminiscent of Jacob's costume in deceiving his father Isaac, and Joseph's coat of many colors), hides her face with a veil, and agrees to sell herself to Judah in exchange for a goat (reminiscent of the goat's blood in which the brothers soaked Joseph's coat before giving it to their father to identify). As Judah does not have a goat with him, Tamar extracts collateral; she keeps his signet ring, his outer garb, and his staff of leadership - the three external symbols of Judah's identity. When Judah is told three months later that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he sentences her to death. But Tamar responds by sending Judah his ring, wrap and staff, telling him to "recognize" his possessions and thereby admit paternity. Judah rises to the challenge: declaring publicly that Tamar is correct, admitting his error in not allowing her to marry Shelah, and accepting fatherhood of the twins in her womb.

The name of the crossroads where Judah and Tamar's rendezvous took place is Petah Enayim, literally "opening of the eyes." Perhaps the name symbolizes the clarity which resulted from the encounter. Tamar has taught Judah to own up to his mistakes and fulfill his familial responsibilities; he can now return to Jacob's family as a son and father, loyal to his past and committed to his destiny.

This interlude about Judah is intimately linked to the story of Joseph. The literary device connecting the two chapters is the repetition of the two Hebrew words *haker na* ("Recognize now"). The words which the brothers used when they brought Joseph's bloody coat to their father Jacob for identification (37:32) are the same words that Tamar uses when she forces Judah to recognize the pledges he gave her in lieu of money (38:25). With these words, Tamar teaches Judah to see through disguises. This skill will prove useful to him in later life, when Joseph stands before him dressed in the clothes of the Egyptian grand vizier. According to some commentators, Judah saw through Joseph's uniform and because he was able to recognize his brother, he was able to speak passionately and reunite the family, thereby atoning for his earlier sins. Judah redeems himself, proving himself truly worthy of the Abrahamic legacy of familial leadership (the *bechora*). This search for a worthy leader for our people is the underlying theme of the Book of Genesis from the election of Abraham to the death of Jacob.

Lest we doubt the significance of this tale, history repeats itself when the twins born to Judah and Tamar enter the world with the younger (Perez) overtaking the elder (Zerah) - much in the way Jacob overtook Esau by grasping at his heel. The Book of

Ruth teaches us that the younger son Perez is destined to be the forefather of King David, progenitor of the Messiah. © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg  
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

One who reads about the affair of Yosef and his brothers might come to the conclusion that the argument by the brothers was the cause of the exile of our people in Egypt. But from the preceding passages it is clear that the exile was predicted in advance, and that in fact it was decreed on the occasion of the Covenant of the Pieces. This shows us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, exploits human actions in order to move His goals forward.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the midst of harsh events that are hard for us to understand, but in the end we discover that we are within a process of redemption that is taking place through these same events. "On that day, G-d will be one and His name will be one" [Zecharia 14:9]. The Talmud asks about the logic of this verse—isn't G-d already one even today? The answer is that today we recite the blessing "Dayan Ha'emet" for a sad event and the blessing "Hatov V'Hameitiv" for a happy event. "In the future, the blessing for bad will be recited in the same way as the blessing for good" [Pesachim 50a]. But we can still wonder why any bad will exist in the distant future. The answer is that in the future we will understand that the very same events for which we recited Baruch Dayan Ha'emet in the past led to an improved situation, and that we can recite the blessing Hatov V'Hameitiv in order to recognize them. This corresponds to what Yosef said to his brothers—"You wanted to harm me, but G-d planned it for the good" [Bereishit 50:20].

Yaacov and the heads of the tribes did not understand this concept. Yaacov complains, "Why did you harm me by telling the man that you have a brother?" [Bereishit 43:6]. And the Holy One, Blessed be He responds angrily: "Here I am busy getting his son appointed as a king in Egypt, and he asks why I did him harm? This is as it is written, 'Why should Yaacov say and Yisrael declare that the ways of G-d are mysterious?' [Yeshayahu 40:27]."

The sages have taught us that while Yehuda was busy choosing a wife and Yaacov, Reuven, and Yosef were occupied with sackcloth and fasting, the Holy One, Blessed be He, was busy creating the light of the mashiach.

The story of the selling of Yosef appears in two chapters, which are interrupted by the story of Yehuda and Tamar and the births of Peretz and Zerach. This teaches us that the Almighty prepares the cure before the heavy blow comes. Before the exile began, He was already working on the creation of the mashiach.

When Yosef meets Yaacov he falls on his father's neck, weeps, and kisses him. But Yaacov does not fall onto Yosef's neck. The rabbis tell us, "This teaches us that Yaacov was busy reciting the Shema" [Rashi, Bereishit 46:29]. Was this the right way for Yaacov to react at the moment when his dreams came true?

The point is that when Yaacov saw that Yosef had a royal position in Egypt but that he still held on to his Judaism and was able to unify the entire family around him, Yaacov understood how wrong he had been to complain about the Almighty's guidance. Then he understood the declaration that in the future G-d will be one and that the blessing for the bad will be the same as the one for good. And he was able to recite Shema Yisrael—"Listen, Yisrael: G-d is one."

Here is what Rav A.Y. Kook wrote after the terrible riots of 1929: "Anybody who follows the events related to our settlements can feel intuitively how every downfall that we suffered led to greater growth and the development of great lights... We see with our own eyes how a great light burst forth from total darkness... This must teach us a great lesson—we should not be despondent even after we witness a great downfall... We can be sure that the great blow that we have suffered will be the source of a fantastic solution to our problems. [Ma'amarei Hare'iyah page 360].

### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftarah

This week's haftarah sensitizes us to the severity of injustice. The prophet Amos begins by informing us of the limits of Hashem's tolerance. Hashem says, "I can be patient over the three offenses of the Jewish people, but the fourth is inexcusable. Namely, the sale of the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. They anticipate the dirt placed on the head of the impoverished." (2:6, 7) Amos admonishes the Jewish people here for their insensitivity towards injustice. He complains about the judges who would bend the law for nominal sums and exchange justice for an inexpensive pair of shoes. They would discriminate against the poor and even drag the impoverished through the dirt when they refused to comply with their unjustified sentence. Over these Hashem expresses serious disturbance and declares them unforgivable.

The Radak, in explanation of the above passages, magnifies this disturbance and interprets the three offenses mentioned here to be the three cardinal sins—idolatry, incest and murder. Hashem explains that the most cardinal sins do not receive an immediate response from Above. For these Hashem is somewhat patient and allows the offender the opportunity to repent and correct his outrageous behavior. But the injustice shown to the poor evokes Hashem's immediate response. Rabbeinu Bachya (see introduction to our Parsha) explains the basis for this and reminds us that

the poor place their total trust in Hashem. Their financial resources do not command any respect or assistance from others which forces them to place their total trust in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem pledges to come immediately to their defense and responds harshly to any injustice done to them.

The Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer (Chapter 38) sees in the above passages a reference to the infamous sale of Yoseif Hatzaddik by his brothers, the tribes of Israel. Chazal explain that the brothers sold Yoseif for the equivalent of twenty silver dollars and that each brother purchased a pair of shoes with his portion of the money, two silver dollars. According to R' Eliezer, this is the incident Amos refers to when reprimanding the Jewish people for selling the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. The prophet tells us that this sin was unforgivable and was viewed with greater severity than every cardinal offense. With this statement the prophet alludes to the fact that the greatest scholars of Israel, the ten holy martyrs would be brutally murdered in atonement for this sin. Hashem said that the sale of Yoseif, unlike all other sins, could never be overlooked and that one day the greatest Tannaim (Mishnaic authors) would suffer inhuman torture and be taken from us in atonement for this sin. No offense of the Jewish people ever evoked a response so harsh as this one and the torturous death of the ten martyrs remains the most tragic personal event in all of Jewish history.

This week's haftorah shares with us an important perspective regarding the offense of Yoseif's sale by focusing on a particular aspect of the offense. As we glean from the prophet's words it was not the actual sale that aroused Hashem's wrath, rather the condition of the sale. Amos refers to the indignity shown to Yoseif and the insensitivity towards his feelings, being sold for an inexpensive pair of shoes. When lamenting the ten martyrs during the liturgy in the Yom Kippur service we accent this dimension and recount that the wicked Roman ruler filled the entire courtroom with shoes. This was his fiendish way of reminding the martyrs about their indignant behavior and insensitivity towards their brother.

The upshot of this is that there was some room to justify the actual sale of Yoseif. The Sforno (37:18) explains that the brothers truly perceived that their life was in serious danger as long as Yoseif remained in their surroundings. After closely following his actions and anticipating the outcome of his inexcusable attitude and behavior the brothers found it necessary to protect themselves from his inevitable attack of them. Although they totally misread the entire situation from the start it can be argued that their precautionary measures were somewhat justified and permissible. However, Sforno draws our attention to their insensitivity during these trying moments. The brothers are quoted to have reflected on their decision and said, "But we are guilty for observing his pain when he pleaded with us and we turned a deaf ear to it." (Breishis 42:21) Even they

faulted themselves for their insensitivity towards their brother. When he pleaded for his life they should have reconsidered and adjusted their harsh decision. It is this insensitivity that the prophet refers to when focusing upon the sale for shoes. Apparently, they purchased these shoes in exchange for Yoseif to indicate that he deserved to be reduced to dirt. Their statement reflected that whoever challenged their authority deserved to be leveled and reduced to nothing. (see Radal to Pirkei D'R'Eliezer)

This expression of indignation was inexcusable and required the most severe of responses. Hashem chose the illustrious era of the Tannaim to respond to this offense. During those times a quorum of prominent scholars presided over Israel which personified the lessons of brotherhood and sensitivity. An elite group was chosen for the task, including: the Prince of Israel, the High Priest and Rabbi Akiva who authored the statement, "Love your friend as yourself" is the fundamental principle of the Torah." In atonement for the inexcusable sale Hashem decreed upon these martyrs the most insensitive torturous death ever to be experienced. The Tzor Hamor (see Seder Hadoros year 3880) explains that the lesson this taught the Jewish people was eternal. After this horrifying experience the Jewish people were finally cleansed from all effects of the infamous offense done to Yoseif. From hereafter they could be authentically identified as a caring and sensitive people.

From this we learn how sensitive we must be and even when our harsh actions are justified we must exercise them with proper sensitivities. As difficult as the balance may be we must always feel for our Jewish brethren and show them the proper dignity and compassion they truly deserve. © 2010 Rabbi d. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

The dreams of the butler (sar ha-mashkim) and baker (sar ha-ofim) seem quite similar. Each of their dreams contain food (grapes, bread), the relinquishing of the food (grapes to Pharaoh, bread eaten by the birds) and the number three (three branches, three baskets). (Genesis 39:9-11, 16-17) If so much alike, what prompted Yosef (Joseph) to offer such divergent interpretations? The butler, Yosef proclaimed would be restored to his post, while the baker would be hanged. (Genesis 39:12, 19)

Some suggest that Yosef knew the interpretation, for he was keenly aware of the political workings of Pharaoh's kingdom. In other words, he knew that the butler was worthy and the baker was not. Others suggest that it was pure ruach ha-kodesh, a revelation from heaven that directed Yosef's interpretation.

However, the commentator Benno Yaakov says that the text itself indicates that despite the similarities, there was a fundamental difference between the butler's and baker's dream. The butler describes himself as being active-"I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand." (Genesis 40: 11) Here, there is a preponderance of words of action.

The baker on the other hand, was completely passive. Three baskets were on my head, he said, and the birds were eating from the baked goods. (Genesis 40:17) Here, there are no verbs descriptive of what the baker did in his dream.

Dreams reveal much about character. In fact, they often express one's deepest subconscious feelings. The butler's dreams showed he was a doer, a person of action. Observing this phenomenon, Yosef concluded that the butler was worthy of returning to Pharaoh's palace. This is in contrast to the baker's dream, where he describes himself as a man who is sitting back and doing nothing. Therefore, Yosef concluded, he was unworthy of a reprieve.

A story: an artist was selling a picture of a person with bread on his head. As the potential buyer negotiated the price, birds flew down and began to eat the food. "This piece is so good," the artist said, "the birds believe the baked goods to be real."

Replied the buyer: "The birds may believe the bread is real, but clearly they do not believe the person you've drawn is real, alive - or they would have been frightened away."

The baker is the person in our story. Being still as the birds ate bread from atop his head, the birds thought he was dead.

The message is clear. Good things invariably result from action. Doom and disaster are products of inaction. © 2010 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.

#### **CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**F**rom Vayeshev to the end of the book of Bereishit we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. From the very beginning we are plunged into a drama of sibling rivalry that seems destined to end in tragedy. All the elements are there. There is favouritism. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. The Torah says this was because "he had been born to him in his old age." But we also know it was because Joseph was the son, the first son, of his beloved Rachel who had been infertile for many years.

Jacob gave this favouritism a visible symbol, the richly ornamented robe or coat of many colours that he had made for him. The sight of this acted as a constant provocation to the brothers. In addition there were the bad reports Joseph brought to his father about

his half-brothers, the children of the handmaids. And by the fourth verse of the parashah we read the following: "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him, velo yachlu dabro le-shalom." (37:4)

What is the meaning of this last phrase? Here are some of the standard translations:

"They could not speak a kind word to him."

"They could not speak peacefully to him."

"They could not speak to him on friendly terms."

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz, however, recognised that the Hebrew construction is strange. Literally it means, "they could not speak him to peace." What might this mean? Rabbi Eybeschutz refers us to the command in Vayikra 19:17: You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprimand your neighbour and not bear sin because of him.

This is how Maimonides interprets this command as it relates to interpersonal relations: "When a person sins against another, the injured party should not hate the offender and keep silent... it is his duty to inform the offender and say to him, why did you do this to me? Why did you sin against me in this matter?... if the offender repents and pleads for forgiveness, he should be forgiven." (Hilchot Deot 6:6)

Rabbi Eybeschutz's point is simple. Had the brothers been able to speak to Joseph they might have told him of their anger at his talebearing, and of their distress at seeing the many-coloured coat. They might have spoken frankly about their sense of humiliation at the way their father favoured Rachel over their mother Leah, a favouritism that was now being carried through into a second generation. Joseph might have come to understand their feelings. It might have made him more modest or at least more thoughtful. But lo yachlu dabro le-shalom. They simply couldn't bring themselves to speak. As Nachmanides writes, on the command: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart": "Those who hate tend to hide their hate in their heart."

We have here an instance of one of the Torah's great insights, that conversation is a form of conflict resolution, whereas the breakdown of speech is often a prelude to violent revenge.

The classic case is that of Absalom and Amnon, two half brothers who were sons of king David. In a shocking episode, Amnon rapes Absalom's sister Tamar: "Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

"Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.' And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.

"When King David heard all this, he was furious. And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar." (2 Samuel 13:19-22)

Absalom maintained his silence for two years. Then he invited all of David's sons for a feast at the time of sheep-shearing, and ordered his servants to wait until Amnon was drunk, and then kill him, which they did. Hate grows in silence. It did with Absalom. It did with Joseph's brothers. Before the chapter ends, we see them plot to kill Joseph, then throw him in to a pit, and then sell him into slavery. It is a terrible story and led directly to the Israelites' exile and slavery in Egypt.

The Talmud (Berakhot 26a) uses the phrase, *Ein sichah ela tefillah*, which literally means, "Conversation is a form of prayer," because in opening ourselves up to the human other, we prepare ourselves for the act of opening ourselves up with the Divine Other, which is what prayer is: a conversation with G-d.

Conversation does not, in and of itself, resolve conflict. Two people who are open with one another may still have clashing desires or competing claims. They may simply not like one another. There is no law of predetermined harmony in the human domain. But conversation means that we recognize one another's humanity. At its best it allows us to engage in role reversal, seeing the world from the other's point of view. Think of how many real and intractable conflicts, whether in the personal or political domain, might be transformed if we could do that.

In the end Joseph and his brothers had to live through real trauma before they were able to recognize one another's humanity, and much of the rest of their story—the longest single narrative in the Torah—is about just that.

Judaism is about the G-d who cannot be seen, who can only be heard; about the G-d who created the universe with words and whose first act of kindness to the first human being was to teach him how to use words. Jews, even highly secular Jews, have often been preoccupied with language. Wittgenstein understood that philosophy is about language. Levi Strauss saw cultures as forms of language. Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker pioneered study of the language instinct. George Steiner has written about translation and the limits of language.

The sages were eloquent in speaking about the dangers of *lashon hara*, "evil speech," the power of language to fracture relationships and destroy trust and goodwill. But there is evil silence as well as evil speech. It is no accident that at the very beginning of the most fateful tale of sibling rivalry in Bereishit, the role-specific failure-of language is alluded to, in a way missed by virtually all translations. Joseph's brothers might have "spoken him to peace" had they been open, candid and willing to communicate. Speech broke down at the very point where it was needed most.

Words create; words reveal; words command; words redeem. Judaism is a religion of holy words. For words are the narrow bridge across the abyss between soul and soul, between two human beings, and between humanity and G-d. Language is the redemption of

solitude, and the mender of broken relationships. However painful it is to speak about our hurt, it is more dangerous not to do so. Joseph and his brothers might have been reconciled early on in their lives, and thus spared themselves, their father, and their descendants, much grief. Revealing pain is the first step to healing pain. Speech is a path to peace. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

#### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

### **Legacy**

**A**ppearances can be deceiving. It is possible for two people to behave in exactly the same fashion, yet one is a hero and the other a scoundrel. What sets the two apart is motivation. The same act can be performed for selfish reasons or for the highest altruistic ideals, and it is the intent behind the act which determines its nature.

But how can we tell which is which? Very rarely will the selfish person admit he is motivated exclusively by greed and gratification. More often than not, he will pretend to be acting in the interest of others, for greatest good. How then is it possible to determine who is a true friend and who is a foe in disguise?

Furthermore, how do we evaluate our own impulses when motivated to do acts of kindness? Are our intentions really as altruistic as we would like to believe? Or is our supposed altruism a product of self-deception, a subconscious rationalization camouflaging ulterior motives?

Perhaps we can find the answers in this week's Torah reading. As the saga of Jacob's sons unfolds, we encounter two women, one portrayed as righteous, the other as an adulteress. And yet, on closer examination, there is a striking resemblance between them.

Tamar, the childless widow of Judah's son Er, marries her husband's brother Onan. But Onan also meets an untimely death, leaving his brother Shailah as Judah's sole surviving son. Twice widowed and still childless, Tamar wants to marry Shailah, but Judah refuses. Determined to give birth to a child from the bloodlines of Judah, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and ingratiates herself to Judah himself.

Presently, Tamar's pregnancy is discovered, and she is accused of fornication. Judah sentences her to death, unaware that the child she is carrying is his own. When she is about to be executed, Tamar sends Judah some personal articles he had left in her possession, indicating that these articles belonged to the man by whom she was pregnant. Judah acknowledges her righteousness, Tamar's life is spared, and her child becomes the forefather of the Davidic dynasty.

Why was Tamar so determined to conceive a child by Judah? Our Sages tell us that Tamar knew prophetically that the Davidic dynasty was to descend from her. Therefore, when her father-in-law refused to

let her marry his last son, she resorted to desperate measures.

Meanwhile down in Egypt, the minister Potiphar's wife tries to seduce young Joseph, but he flees from her. She turns on Joseph and accuses him of trying to seduce her. Joseph is sent to prison, where he languishes for years until he is summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

Why did Potiphar's wife try to seduce Joseph? Once again, our Sages discern a desire to share in the ancestorhood of the Jewish people. Potiphar's wife knew great leaders of the Jewish people would be descended from her and Joseph, and she wanted to fulfill that destiny. In actuality, however, Joseph's union was to be with her daughter, not her.

Apparently, then, both Tamar and Potiphar's wife were striving to fulfill their destinies as ancestresses of the Jewish people. Both also chose rather unconventional methods to reach that destiny. Why then is Tamar admired as a heroine and Potiphar's wife remembered with contempt?

The commentators explain that the test of a person's motivation is his response to failure. A person of altruistic motives pursues his goal vigorously and tenaciously, and if, despite all his efforts, he fails, he is disappointed. A person motivated by greed and desire, however, reacts to failure with violence and vindictiveness.

Tamar wanted to bear the future seed of the Davidic dynasty in order to draw close to Hashem and reach exalted spiritual levels. This noble dream inspired her. And when all her attempts failed and she faced death, she bowed to the will of Hashem with humility and acceptance. She did not hurl public accusations at Judah. Instead, she responded with tact and subtlety, sending him his articles and relying on his own sense of decency and justice to vindicate her. This was indeed a righteous woman.

Potiphar's wife, on the other hand, responded to failure and rejection like a true woman scorned. Seething with vengeance, she flew into a rage, making false accusations. This woman was clearly not motivated by a desire to cleave to the Creator. All she cared about was the glory of being an ancestress of the Jewish people. Failure revealed her authentic colors.

In our own lives, when we examine our innermost thoughts and motivations, we should ask ourselves how we would react to failure. If we sense we would feel frustrated and angry, our motives are indeed suspect. But if we are convinced we would feel only sadness and disappointment, we can rest assured that our altruism is genuine. © 2010 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**R**av Kaminetsky explains that Yaakov had taught Yosef all that he'd learned in the Yeshiva (school)

of Shem and Eiver where he studied, and where Yitzchok AND Avraham studied as well. The main strength of that school was that they taught Torah that could survive in negative environments. Avraham used it to deal with the rest of the world, Yitzchok used it to deal with Yishmael, and Yaakov used it to deal with Lavan and Esav. Now Yaakov was teaching it to Yosef, and the brothers were worried. Were they as bad as Esav or Lavan? Why would Yaakov have to teach Yosef that Torah? Little did they know that Yosef would need it to deal with Egypt, and all the trials he would face there. Yaakov loved Yosef more because he learned more, and WANTED the other brothers to be jealous (that's why he made him the shirt), so that they'd want to learn it too! But instead they became jealous for the wrong reasons. It was THEN that Yosef tried to tell them that they shouldn't be jealous, because he had to learn for his OWN sake, because he'd have to be a leader in a foreign land (as the dreams with stocks suggested, since there were no stalks where they lived). But the brothers had let themselves be blinded by hate, and couldn't see the truth, as obvious as it may have been.

There's an important lesson in all of this, and that is that jealousy can be used in a good way, as Yaakov TRIED to do. But if we're not careful, we could miss the whole point, and end up doing things we shouldn't. The first test is to ask ourselves if we want something because we need it, or simply because someone else has it. We should be jealous of things we can learn and grow from, like Torah knowledge, good character traits, and even courage and persistence. Everyone has qualities we can and SHOULD be jealous of, as long as we use it NOT to prove ourselves, but to improve ourselves. © Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



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