

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

One of the most fundamental questions about the Torah turns out to be one of the hardest to answer. What, from the call of God to Abraham in Genesis 12 to the death of Joseph in Genesis 50, is the basic religious principle being taught? What does the entire set of stories about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives, together with Jacob's sons and daughter, actually tell us? Abraham brought monotheism to a world that had forgotten it, but where do we see this in the actual text of the Torah itself?

Here is the problem. The first eleven chapters of Genesis teach us many fundamentals of faith: that God brought the universe into being and declared it good; that God made the human person in His image; that God gave us freedom and thus the ability to do not only good but also bad; that the good is rewarded, the bad punished and that we are morally responsible for our actions. Chapters 8 and 9 also tell us that God made a covenant with Noah and through him with all humanity.

It is equally easy to say what the rest of the Torah, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, teach us: that God rescued the Israelites from slavery, setting them on the road to freedom and the Promised land; that God made a covenant with the people as a whole on Mount Sinai, with its 613 commands and its purpose, to establish Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In short, Genesis 1-11 is about creation. Exodus to Deuteronomy is about revelation and redemption. But what are Genesis 12-50 about?

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all recognise God. But so do non-Jews like Malkizedek, Abraham's contemporary, described as "priest of God most high" (14: 18). So even does the Pharaoh of Joseph's day, who says about him, 'Can there be another person who has God's spirit in him as this man does?' (41: 38). God speaks to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he does likewise to Avimelech king of Gerar (Gen. 20: 3-7), and to Laban (31: 24). So what is special about the patriarchs?

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated in honor of  
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מזל טוב!

They seem to teach no new principle of faith. Other than childbirth and rescue from danger, God performs no world-transforming miracles through them. They deliver no prophecies to the people of their generation. Other than an ambiguous hint when the Torah says that Abraham took with him on his journey "the souls they had gathered" (12: 5), which may refer to converts they had made, but may equally merely refer to their servants, they attracted no disciples. There is nothing explicit in the text that says they sought to persuade people of the truth of monotheism or that they did battle against idolatry. At most there is a story about how Rachel stole her father's teraphim (31: 19) which may or may not have been idols.

To be sure, a persistent theme of the patriarchal stories is the two promises God made to each of them, [1] that they would have many descendants and [2] they would inherit the land of Canaan. But God also makes promises to Ishmael and Esau, and the Torah seems to go out of its way to tell us that these promises were fulfilled for them before they were fulfilled for the children of the covenant (see Gen. 25: 12-18 for the account of Ishmael's children, and Gen. 36 for those of Esau). About Esau's children, for example, it says, "These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites" [36: 31].

So the question is real and puzzling. What was different about the patriarchs? What new did they bring to the world? What difference did monotheism make in their day?

There is an answer but it is an unexpected one. One theme appears no less than six (possibly even seven) times. Whenever a member of the covenantal family leaves his or her own space and enters the wider world of their contemporaries, they encounter a world of sexual free-for-all.

Three times, Abraham (Gen. 12 and 20) and Isaac (Gen. 26) are forced to leave home because of famine. Twice they go to Gerar. Once Abraham goes to Egypt. On all three occasions the husband fears he will be killed so that the local ruler can take his wife into his harem. All three times they put forward the story that their wife is actually their sister. At worst this is a lie, at best a half-truth. In all three cases the local ruler (Pharaoh, Avimelech), protests at their behaviour when the truth becomes known. Clearly the fear of death was real or the patriarchs would not have been party to deception.

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In the fourth case, Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19), the people cluster round Lot's house demanding that he bring out his two visitors so that they can be raped. Lot offers them his virgin daughters instead. Only swift action by the visitors - angels - who smite the people with blindness, saves Lot and his family from violence.

In the fifth case (Gen. 34), Shechem, a local prince, rapes and abducts Dina when she "went out to visit some of the local girls." He holds her hostage, causing Shimon and Levi to practise deception and bloodshed in the course of rescuing her.

Then comes a marginal case (Gen. 38), the story of Judah and Tamar, more complex than the others and not part of the overall pattern. Finally there is the sixth episode, in this week's parsha, when Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph. Failing, she accuses him of rape and has him imprisoned.

In other words, there is a continuing theme in Genesis 12-50, a contrast between the people of the Abrahamic covenant and their neighbours, but it is not about idolatry, but rather about adultery, promiscuity, sexual license, seduction, rape and sexually motivated violence.

The patriarchal narrative is surprisingly close to the view of Freud, that eros is one of the two primal drives (the other is thanatos, the death instinct) governing human behaviour, and the view of at least one evolutionary psychologist (David Buss, in his books *The Evolution of Desire* and *The Murderer Next Door*) that sex is the main cause of violence amongst humans.

This gives us an entirely new way of thinking about Abrahamic faith. Emunah, the Hebrew word normally translated as faith, does not mean what it is taken to mean in English: a body of dogma, a set of principles, or a cluster of beliefs often held on non-rational grounds. Emunah means faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity, honouring your commitments, doing what you said you would do and acting in such a way as to inspire trust. It has to do with relationships, first and foremost with marriage.

Sex belongs, for the Torah, within the context of marriage, and it is marriage that comes closest to the deep resonances of the biblical idea of covenant. A covenant is a mutual act of commitment in which two persons, honouring their differences, each respecting the dignity of the other, come together in a bond of love

to join their destinies and chart a future together. When the prophets want to speak of the covenantal relationship between God and His people, they constantly use the metaphor of marriage.

The God of Abraham is the God of love and trust who does not impose His will by force or violence, but speaks gently to us, inviting an answering response of love and trust. Genesis' argument against idolatry - all the more impressive for being told obliquely, through a series of stories and vignettes - is that it leads to a world in which the combination of unchecked sexual desire, the absence of a code of moral self-restraint, and the worship of power, leads eventually to violence and abuse.

That domestic violence and abuse still exist today, even among religious Jews, is a disgrace and source of shame. Against this stands the testimony of Genesis that faithfulness to God means and demands faithfulness to our marriage partners. Faith - whether between us and God or between us and our fellow humans - means love, loyalty and the circumcision of desire.

What the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs tell us is that faith is not proto- or pseudo-science, an explanation of why the natural universe is at it is. It is the language of relationship and the choreography of love. It is about the importance of the moral bond, in particular as it affects our most intimate relations. Sexuality matters to Judaism, not because it is puritanical but because it represents the love that brings new life into the world.

When a society loses faith, eventually it loses the very idea of a sexual ethic, and the result in the long term is violence and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. Women suffer. Children suffer. There is a breakdown of trust where it matters most. So it was in the days of the patriarchs. Sadly, so it is today. Judaism, by contrast, is the sanctification of relationship, the love between husband and wife which is as close as we will ever get to understanding God's love for us. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd a man found him, when he was wandering in the field, and the man asked him 'What are you seeking?' And he said, 'I am seeking my brothers.' (Genesis 37: 15). What is an angel, and what role do angels play in Jewish tradition? Perhaps we can find an explanation in part of the tale of Joseph and his brothers. The Bible has described Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph, son of his beloved wife Rachel, and the jealous hatred the other brothers felt as a result. It has told us of Jacob's request of Joseph that he make a journey to check on the welfare of the brothers who are herding sheep in Shechem. Joseph accepts his father's assignment, but he cannot find his brothers. An

anonymous "man" finds Joseph wandering and, after ascertaining the nature of his mission, directs him to Dothan. When Joseph's brothers see him there, they cast him into a pit and the drama of Joseph and his brothers begins in earnest.

Who is this anonymous individual who directs Joseph to his destiny? Rashi maintains that "this is the [angel] Gabriel" (literally, man of God). What kind of "man" was he? A winged creature moving between heaven and earth who managed to conceal his heavenly accessories? Or was he rather a Superman who appeared to Joseph as the harmless and mortal Clark Kent?

Nahmanides (the Ramban) completes the picture: "This story comes to further elucidate that 'the decree of God is truth and human effort is false.'" He explains that God prepared a guide for Joseph without his knowledge to bring Joseph into the brothers' hands. "And this is what our Sages mean when they say that these 'men' are angels, for it was not for naught that this tale was told, but only to inform us that the will of God will stand supreme."

The Ramban is saying that while we are given freedom to act as we wish, God's ultimate plan will ultimately come about. God will utilize human beings - often without their knowledge - to bring about His design. In this instance, Joseph had to get to Egypt, rise to prominence and thereby rescue his family, starting the cycle which would lead to our servitude in Egypt, eventual redemption from there, and entry into the Promised Land.

Since this could never have occurred without Joseph meeting his brothers in Dothan, the individual who gave him the directions to get to his brothers - thereby facilitating God's design is, in hindsight, seen as an angel, or divine messenger. I believe that God is constantly dispatching such mortal angels in order to help bring about His will in the world, and it is critical that those of us who come in contact with such agents take advantage of the opportunities they present.

Allow me to give one national and one personal example. An Israeli pilot recounted that three years after the Six Day War, Syria began dangerous provocations. He was ordered to fly a plane at supersonic speed extremely low over the main business section in Aleppo in order to send a warning to the Syrian government as well as the population. He carried out his mission successfully, and the provocation stopped.

Ten years later, this same pilot was driving from Haifa to Tel Aviv when he picked up a hitchhiker in IDF uniform. He discovered that his passenger was a Syrian Jew whose family had made aliya by walking all the way from Aleppo about 10 years previously. The soldier recounted the following story.

"I was just bar mitzva when one night an Israeli plane flew over the business section in Aleppo right near our home. The supersonic boom was deafening; it scared us all. Moreover, the glass frontage of the stores

crashed to the floor, and although no one was physically hurt, the damage was considerable. But it was a great miracle, since only the Syrian stores had their glass windows broken; nothing happened to the Jewish stores. As a result, my father decided it was time to leave Syria and come to our real homeland. Many other Jewish families did the same."

Despite the fact that the pilot had certainly been an "angel," the reason for the salvation of the Jewish stores was quite logical. The Syrians didn't allow Jewish businessmen to front their stores on the main street, but only on side streets. And since the jet flew parallel to the main street, the Jewish shops were not affected.

The personal story: A girl from an assimilated Jewish family visited Germany with her school and, having studied the Holocaust there, asked her parents if she could spend the following summer in Israel. Her mother, who had never entered a synagogue, inquired about trips to Israel at the local Conservative Center. "Is your daughter observant?" asked the executive director. The mother misunderstood the question, taking "observant" to mean alert and attentive rather than religiously observant. So she responded, "My daughter is very observant!" The director promptly signed the girl up for a Yeshiva University tour of Israel. The director was my angel because that young daughter became my wife! © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**A**ppearances often times deceive the beholder. In this week's parsha this human tendency to rush to judgment on the basis of external appearances and physical circumstances plays an important part in the narrative of the Torah. The brothers of Yosef misinterpret the cloak given to him by their father as a symbol of hatred towards them. "Why should he be allowed to dress differently than we?" is their complaint.

Parents who are fortunate to have a number of children will immediately recognize this situation and the whining that accompanies it. Yet out of this seemingly minor event, a great and historical tragedy and a fulfillment of a dire prophecy emerges. Yosef's attitude and his dreams certainly did not help the situation, but in the judgment of the Torah and its commentators, the brothers misread the situation and badly overreacted.

They would pay a great price for this misjudgment. They would now take every action and statement of Yosef as being a direct threat to them and their roles in founding the Jewish people. He was "different" than they were and "different" people often and regularly have been misunderstood and oftentimes needlessly and wrongfully persecuted in the history of Jewish society.

Yosef's physical beauty, his attention to his appearance and his brilliant and charming personality only intensified the hatred of his brothers towards him.

He was far too "different" than they-and in the words of the Torah itself, the brothers never really recognized Yosef as the great, noble and holy person that he was until very late in their relationship with him.

In the Torah, we are told of the instance where Yehuda sees a woman sitting at the crossroads of a highway. He does not recognize her even though she is his daughter-in-law. She is dressed in a "different" manner and he immediately comes to the conclusion that because of the circumstances, she must be a harlot. He will be eternally and publicly shamed for mistaking Tamar's appearance-and out of this unlikely union the future of the Jewish people will arise-but it is obvious that this was not Yehuda's finest hour. He judged the woman by her appearance and he was mistaken. He will later admit publicly that she was the more righteous one.

Yosef is attractive and charming and well liked by all who come into contact with him. He is entrusted with everything in Potiphar's house. The wife of Potiphar misreads Yosef's appearance and is convinced that he will succumb to her wiles and seductions. The brothers of Yosef, who could not see past his cloak of many colors given to him by their father, will also be unable to see past the royal garments of Egyptian power that he wears.

Yosef recognizes his brothers but they do not recognize him. They see only a person clothed in the garb of an Egyptian viceroy standing before them. How painful it is and how destructive it is to have to be judged merely by appearance and raiment. In truth, the Torah teaches us that "humans only see physically what appears before their eyes but that the Lord, so to speak, sees into the heart and essence of the person." © 2011 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 DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**P**arashas Vayeishev deals with Yosef being brought down to Egypt, and what happened to him there.

This narrative is interrupted by Yehuda's family issues; getting married, having children, his oldest two children dying, then having two more children with his former daughter-in-law, Tamar. One of the twins born to Tamar, Peretz, had two sons of his own, who are included in the "70 souls" that went down to Egypt with Yaakov (B'raishis 46:12). Since Tamar had been married to Yehuda's oldest sons, her sons were the age Yehuda's grandsons could have been; Yehuda's narrative therefore spans the equivalent of four generations (Yehuda, what could have been Yehuda's sons, the sons who could have Yehuda's grandsons, and his grandsons, who could have been his great-grandsons). Being that only 22 years elapsed between

the time of Yosef's sale and when Yaakov moved to Egypt with the "70 souls" that came with him (Yosef was 17 when he was sold, see 37:2, was 30 when he appeared before Pharaoh, see 41:46, and Yaakov moved after the seven "years of plenty" and two years of famine;  $30-17=13$ ,  $13+7+2=22$ ), there was not much time for Yehuda's family tree to produce three generations. Numerous commentators raise this issue; I have come across three basic approaches that deal with it.

Ibn Ezra (38:1, see also Ralbag) expands the time frame by positing that Yehuda got married before Yosef was sold, even though the verse says that he got married "at that time," i.e. when Yosef was sold. He brings another cases where a verse implies one time frame when it must mean another, adding that we don't find anyone under 12 years old that can father children. Since the Yehuda narrative starts with his getting married and ends with his fathering children with his former daughter-in-law, children that could have been the same age as his grandchildren, Yehuda's narrative must expand beyond its placement in the Yosef narrative, overlapping with it for many years. It is not that difficult to suggest that the overlap was on both ends of the narrative rather than only on the back end (see Ralbag). If a father must be at least 12 years old, each of Yehuda's son had to be 12 when they either married Tamar or when she thought they should marry her ( $12+3$ , figuring a year for each pregnancy/birth); add another three pregnancies/births (Peretz and each of his two sons) and the 12 years of Peretz before he could father a child ( $12+3$ ), and we have 30 years ( $12+3+3+12$ ). Since Yehuda was, at most, four years older than Yosef (Yosef was born at he end of the second set of seven years that Yaakov worked for Lavan, see 30:25, while Yehuda was Leah's fourth son, all of whom were born after the second set of seven years started), he was no older than 21 at the time of the sale ( $17+4=21$ ). Yehuda himself therefore must have gotten married when he was 12-14 years old (he was 43 when they moved to Egypt;  $43-30=13$ ). Did all of Yaakov's sons get married that early? Did they leave their wives and young children (Yehuda had three) in Chevron when they went to Shechem with Yaakov's sheep? Did their families go with them to Shechem (and then Dosan)? Were the women and children oblivious to Yosef's arrival and then disappearance?

Another issue raised if Yehuda's narrative doesn't start after Yosef was sold is why it was told here. If Yehuda left Chevron to start his own after seeing how devastating Yosef's sale was for the family, we can understand why his narrative starts where it does. But if he had started his family years earlier, why was Yosef's narrative interrupted at this point? Even if the words "at that time" refer to the two narratives overlapping in time, shouldn't Yehuda's narrative have been told before Yosef's dreams? (Based on Ibn Ezra's requirements, Yehuda was already married with

children by then.) Several connections/contrasts with Yosef's narrative are mentioned by the commentators, including Yosef's coat being dipped in the blood of a goat (37:31) and Yehuda owing Tamar a goat (38:17), Yehuda telling his father to "identify" Yosef's coat (37:32) and Tamar telling Yehuda to "identify" his signet and robe (38:25), and Potifar's wife coming on to Yosef with Tamar enticing with Yehuda, connections that are more obvious with Yehuda's narrative inserted either right after or right before the contrasting points in Yosef's narrative. The most famous answer to this issue, however, is found in many Midrashim, and quoted by Rashi; we are told of Yehuda's "descending from his brothers" immediately after Yosef's sale in order to tell us that his status among the brothers had fallen because he didn't prevent the sale.

Many assume that Rashi must mean that this was when Yehuda's narrative started. However, if this were the case, Rashi wouldn't have asked why Yehuda's narrative was taught here; the reason it was taught here would be because that's when it started- Yehuda left his family because of the devastation of the sale, and that's when he got married. It's only because Yehuda's narrative didn't necessarily start here that Rashi had to explain why it was inserted here. Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash Seichel Tov, which give the same explanation as Rashi for the placement of Yehuda's narrative, say explicitly that Yehuda got married and had children before Yosef was sold. (They say that Yehuda's third son, Shaila, was born when the sale was happening, which is why Yehuda wasn't with his wife when he was born.) Obviously, Yehuda's "descent" being caused by the sale does not indicate that this was when his narrative started. (Shaila being born when the sale occurred does not help our original issue much; rather than three generations being born in 22 years, it was over a 25 year period instead.)

Another approach is suggested by Rav Yaakov Meidan (<http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.59/11vayig.htm>; Nechama Leibowitz z"l quotes Shadal-R' Sh'muel Dovid Luzzato-as saying something very similar, see [http://www.lookstein.org/nechama\\_parasha17\\_vayeshev.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/nechama_parasha17_vayeshev.htm), but I couldn't find it there), stretching the time frame at the back-end rather than at the front-end. The end of the 22-year time frame is based on Peretz's sons being born in Canaan, prior to Yaakov's "70 souls" moving to Egypt. Rav Meidan suggests that the number 70 was so important (as it corresponded to the 70 nations of the world) that Yehuda's two eldest sons, who had died, acted as "placeholders" for two of those slots, which were eventually filled by Peretz's sons (after they were born). This is why Er and Onan are mentioned in the "census" even though they died years earlier, and why Peretz's sons were introduced with "and Peretz's sons were" (46:12), rather than just "the sons of Peretz" (as everyone else was). Removing one generation from the 22-year span does alleviate the problem, but creates a

whole new one instead (the Torah strongly implying that Peretz's sons were already born in Canaan when they really weren't). Additionally, the extra word ("were") is past tense; Rav Meidan is using to indicate something that will happen in the future. (See Netziv for a similar explanation without these shortcomings.) Besides, if Yehuda's eldest sons hadn't died, Peretz and Zerach wouldn't have been born (as Tamar would have still been married to Er), so they replaced Er and Onan in the "census" (they were their reincarnated souls, see Rabbeinu Bachye on 38:1), not Peretz's sons.

Seder Olam (2, see also Chizkuni on 38:1 and Midrash HaGadol on 46:12) fits everything into 22 years by saying that Er, Onan and Peretz all got married when they were seven years old. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 69b) does discuss the possibility of becoming a father at such a young age, although it does not try to prove it from here. (See Ibn Ezra's short commentary on Sh'mos 24:14, where he accepts as being completely true the tradition that in earlier generations eight year olds could become fathers, even though he rejects using it to explain the verses.) If seven year olds could impregnate their wives (and we're discussing three sons, who shared the same genes), Yehuda could have gotten married after Yosef was sold, married his oldest sons off when they were seven, impregnated Tamar 10 years after the sale (one year each for the pregnancy/birth of his eldest sons, seven years till they could become fathers, and one year that Tamar waited for Shaila, see B'raishis Rabbah 85:6 and Nazir 4b-5a), leaving 12 years for Peretz to be born and have two children. (This even leaves time for Onan to have been nine when he did "yibum;" there are more years available if Shaila was born at the time of the sale.)

Although compressing the years by relying on our tradition certainly addresses the issue, it leaves us with another one. How could Er and Onan be punished for doing something when they were so young? This is discussed by several commentators, but I would like to suggest a possibility based on a related issue; even if it was physically possible for eight year olds to become a father, why would G-d have put these youngsters in such a position? Why not have them be more mature before dealing with everything that puberty brings? (Some do suggest that they were fully mature in all ways, which is why they were held accountable for their actions.)

As mentioned above, G-d wanted "70 souls" to descend to Egypt. This could explain why He had Peretz mature so early; by becoming a father (of two) at such an early age, the "magic number" of 70 was reached. But what about Er and Onan? Why would G-d want them to mature so early? "G-d said to Yehuda, 'you have no children, therefore you don't know of the [emotional] pain from children, and you tricked your father and told him 'your son died.' By your life, you will marry a woman and bury her children so that you will know the pain from children.' This is why it says, 'and Er

and Onan died" (Midrash Tanchuma manuscript, quoted in Ishay HaTanach). G-d may have accelerated the maturation process of Er and Onan in order for Yehuda to be able to experience the kind of pain he had inflicted on his father, thus enabling him to fully repent (as evidenced by his refusal to leave Binyamin in Egypt). Er and Onan's quick maturity put them in the same circumstance they would have been in had they matured more slowly. They were therefore punished, but got another chance, reincarnated as Peretz and Zerach, who also matured quickly. This time, however, they didn't repeat their mistake, and Peretz had two children within two years, thereby completing the "70 souls" that descended into Egypt. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**fter Joseph's two dreams his siblings are naturally upset - believing that Joseph had aspirations to control them. The rage turns into jealousy when Jacob seems to give credence to Joseph's dreams. (Genesis 37:11)

In response, Joseph's brothers set out to Shechem. This is where, just a few years earlier, two of them killed all of the male inhabitants for the rape of Dinah, their sister. (Genesis 34) According to the Midrash, the brothers again go to Shechem to decide how to, once again, take retribution, this time against Joseph. (Rashi, Genesis 37:12)

This is where Jacob sends Joseph to seek out to his brothers' welfare. (Genesis 37:13) Sforno, the 15th century Italian commentator, explains that, although Jacob could have sent a servant to find out if his sons were well, he purposefully sent Joseph in the hope that he would be able to make peace with them.

This begs the question: With the brothers' enmity towards Joseph so great, wasn't Jacob, who knew of the previous incident in Shechem, placing Joseph in danger?

Indeed, it can be suggested that Joseph felt that his father had set him up. Note that Joseph doesn't contact his father even after becoming second to the King of Egypt. Joseph may have felt that he was being cast aside, just like those who came before him. [Esau was cast aside by Isaac, and Ishmael by Abraham.]

Yet, Joseph, in his feelings of being set up, could have misread his father. Jacob may have sent Joseph to his brothers because of what occurred to him (Jacob) in his younger years. After Jacob took the blessings from his brother Esau, he is advised by his mother to flee to avoid Esau's wrath. (Genesis 27:43-46) In the end, the advice has devastating results as Jacob does not see his family for twenty-two years.

As he has now grown older, Jacob doesn't want to make the same mistake. And so, when Jacob's sons feud, he adopts a plan-one that is the direct opposite of

what was suggested to him when he was younger. Rather than have Joseph separate from his brothers, he sends Joseph to his siblings in the hope that they will reconcile.

It is often the case that children vow not to make the mistakes of their parents. What is ironic is that even as we try a different path, nothing is a guarantee. Despite Joseph being sent to, rather than from, his brothers, he remains separated from his family for 22 years.

The message: While Jacob should be lauded for trying a new path, it is often the case that no matter what we do or how hard we try, we cannot control everything and, at times "the song remains the same." (aval hamanginah tamid nisheret) © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah 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. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“**A**nd the pit was empty, it had no water” [Bereishit 37:24] - It had no water but it did have snakes and scorpions" [Shabbat 22]. In his book "Ein Ayah" Rav Kook explains the lesson of the above verse for all generations. There are three possibilities for a pit: (1) It may be full of water, which is in general beneficial, although there is some danger that a person might drown (but precautions can be taken to avoid this). (2) It may be empty, which might also cause harm, but it can be useful if somebody fills it with water. (3) There are also pits full of snakes and scorpions which provide no benefit. Because of their danger, these pits should be destroyed.

The exile has been compared by the prophets to a pit. "With the blood of your covenant I will also release your prisoners from a pit that has no water" [Zecharia 9:11]. At times of calm during the exile it sometimes seems that the situation can be compared to a pit full of water because of the good relationship with the other nations of the world. But the truth is that the exile cannot even be compared to an empty pit but

only to one that is filled with snakes and scorpions. It is unthinkable to settle in the exile permanently.

Snakes and scorpions symbolize the two types of harm that exist in the exile. A snake bites with the intention of doing harm, because G-d has created hatred between the snake and the woman, and between the offspring of the snake and the offspring of the woman (see Bereishit 3:15). A scorpion, on the other hand, has no intention of doing harm when it strikes, rather it stings using its tail without any conscious intention. However, a scorpion is more dangerous than a snake, since the amount of poison available to the snake decreases with each bite. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, a scorpion's venom does not decrease in strength, and it can continue to sting its victim over and over again (Berachot 5:1).

Some nations of the world make a conscious attempt to destroy Yisrael, "to kill and to eradicate all the Jews" [Esther 3:13]. That is the way it was at the time of Haman, and the same was true of the eras of Stalin in Russia and Hitler in Germany. These are the strikes of a snake, which caused great harm to Yisrael. But the venom became steadily weaker, and in the end their audacious intentions enhanced the holiness of Yisrael, when many Jews passed the test and sanctified the Holy Name in their lives and in their death. "I was struck in the house of those who love me" [Zecharia 13:6] - They caused My Father in Heaven to love me more." [Vayikra Rabba 32:1]. This is very different from blows that come unintentionally, in our contact with those who give the appearance of giving us respect and giving us equality but who in reality minimize the holiness of our nation and the Torah. These scorpion stings, which are not intentionally harmful, can be worse than the bites of a snake, since the venom of a scorpion does not lose its strength. It strikes over and over again, since the nation does not rise up against it and the people do not realize that this is in fact a fight to destroy our traditions.

The events that happened to our ancestors are signs for us, their offspring. We must learn that the pit is empty and there is no way to get any salvation from it. In addition, it has snakes and scorpions - both intentional and unintentional danger, which will come to an end only when the people are lifted up out of the pit.

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### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

“His brothers said to him, 'Would you then reign over us? Would you then dominate us?' And they hated him even more-because of his dreams and because of his words." (37:8) R' Eliyahu David Teomim-Rabinowitz z"l (1843-1905; rabbi of Mir, Ponovezh, and Yerushalayim; known by his initials as "the Aderet") asks: How did Yosef's dream regarding

sheaves of wheat imply that he expected to rule over his brothers? He explains: The midrash records that Yosef dreamed that his bundle of wheat was fresh, while his brothers' bundles were spoiled. Thus, Yosef's dream was quite similar to Pharaoh's dream in next week's parashah, which also featured healthy wheat and sickly wheat.

The Torah records in next week's parashah that Pharaoh was not satisfied with the interpretations that his advisors offered for his dreams. The midrash relates that Pharaoh's advisors offered him interpretations that were personal ("You will father seven daughters and they will die"), while Pharaoh believed that a king's dreams must relate to affairs of the state. Similarly, here, Yosef's brothers reasoned that the only reason Yosef would dream that he had healthy wheat and everyone else had spoiled wheat was because he considered himself to be their monarch. (Sefer Parshiyot)

"Reuven heard, and he saved him [Yosef] from their hand; he said, 'Let us not strike him mortally... Throw him into the pit in the wilderness...!' (37:21-22) The Gemara (Shabbat 24a) states that this pit was home to snakes and scorpions. The halachah is that if a man falls into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, he is deemed dead and his widow may remarry. Yet, the Torah refers to Reuven's act as saving Yosef!

In contrast, Yehuda convinced his brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and to sell him into slavery. Yet, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says that whomever praises Yehuda for this angers Hashem. Why?

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) explained: Reuven caused Yosef to be lowered into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but the pit was in Eretz Yisrael. Yehuda saved Yosef's physical life, but he caused Yosef to be taken out of Eretz Yisrael. It is far better, said R' Chaim, to remain in Eretz Yisrael surrounded by snakes and scorpions than to live outside of Eretz Yisrael. (Quoted in the journal Yeshurun Vol. VI, p. 200)

"All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted." (37:35) Rashi z"l explains: A person does not accept consolation for one who is living, but whom he believes to be dead. The reason is that, while G-d has decreed that one who is dead will eventually be forgotten [at least in a relative sense], it was not so decreed with regard to the living.

R' Dov Kook shlita (Teveryah, Israel) adds: Yosef was alive not only physically, but spiritually, as demonstrated by the fact that he refused to be seduced by Potiphar's wife. Notably, the same word ("&#1493;&#1497;&#1502;&#1488;&#1503; / but he refused") is used to describe Yaakov's refusal to be comforted and (in 39:8) Yosef's rejection of the advances of Potiphar's wife. (Zvi Kodesh) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org