

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Conflict Between Judah & Joseph

The prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars and the moon- of a time when he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

Joseph's dreams always come to fruition. In fact, whatever Joseph sets his mind to accomplish, he is successful. When he arrives in Egypt after being sold by his jealous brothers he works for an influential person in Egypt's government. When he is thrown into jail he finds favor with the head of the prison. And when he finally interprets Pharos dream he is elevated to the position of Viceroy, perhaps the most powerful position next to the king himself. Everything that Joseph touches seems to turn to gold.

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems to work out for him. He presents to his brothers his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and to be publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph, only to be humiliated into owning up to his mistake of initiating and carrying out his sale into slavery-and realizing that he is standing before his long lost brother, the dreamer-and that his dreams have come true!

Yet despite the apparent shortcomings of Judah, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that this exalted position representing the forerunner to the Messiah would come from Joseph rather than Judah!

Our sages explain that perhaps one reason for this is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who ultimately undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to

Jacob his father that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as "Yhudim", Jews, and for his descendent, David, to be designated to herald the messianic times.

But even more important -and this is the character trait that is so compelling to me and brings me to identify with Judah-is his humanness and the fact that he makes mistakes in his lifetime yet has the strength and ability to confess his wrongdoings and start over. His descendent, King David has these same personality traits. David, on a simple level-displays poor judgment with reference to Bat Sheva, and a host of other incidences as stated in the book of Samuel, but is always able to rise up from his mistakes and begin anew. His character, which is essentially the character of his ancestor Judah, is one who is represented by the typical Jew who is faced daily with religious challenges and sometimes falters and sometimes is successful. The strength of the Jew is the ability to admit wrongdoing and then start anew.

This appreciation of the fallibility of the human being is one that parents should keep in mind when judging their children and placing undue burdens and responsibilities on them expecting them to be perfect in every way. Parents very often use their children as scapegoats to realize their dreams, without concern for what is really good for their children. Teachers also, often, have unreasonable expectations of their students not allowing them to falter even one bit, without concern that they are after all only dealing with children and that everyone should be given some slack at different times in their lives. I have seen parents who make sure that their children are enrolled in every conceivable activity after school, without keeping in mind that children need some down time and space for themselves and sometimes make mistakes.

One of the strengths of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet continually tries until he is able to ascend and reach great heights. ©2006 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah recently made Aliya and are living in Allon Shvut. All comments are welcome at ravmordechai@aol.com

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RABBI DOV LERNER

Worth Fighting For

In the first verses of this week's Parsha we confront a scene striking for its subtlety. Last week, Joseph, with his identity still masked from his brothers, decrees Benjamin's eternal servitude; the remaining siblings can return home, but Benjamin must stay. Our scene opens with Judah stepping forward and saying as follows:

בִּי אֲדֹנָי, יְדֹבֵר-נָא עִבְדְּךָ דָּבָר בְּאַזְנֵי אֲדֹנָי, וְאַל-תִּחַר אַפְּךָ
בְּעַבְדְּךָ, כִּי כְמוֹד, כְּפָרְעָה.

Please my Lord, let your servant say a word in my Lord's ears, do not flare your anger against your servant, for you are like a Pharaoh.

Judah, calm and composed, asks to whisper into the ear of Egypt's Viceroy. Let us imagine for a moment Judah's mental state: the man who, years ago, rid himself of that unrelenting dreamer, having organized Joseph's sale, must have spent the past two decades drowning in remorse. Joseph's absence meant less irritation and less aggravation, but a lead weight must have pulled hard on his conscience. Each day, Judah had to witness his father's grief, see the soul drained from him, the sparkle in his eye absent, as Jacob sat as a shell of his former self. The man who had grown up with a murderous twin, had his daughter abducted and abused, tricked in love, attacked at night, limped his way through life with only one joy, Joseph; and Judah had taken that from him. For over twenty long years, Judah had to watch Jacob wither under heartache, he had to watch his spirit shrivel into shadow.

And now, Benjamin—the child who has restored a fraction of Jacob's joy—is threatened by the Egyptian Empire. Can we not imagine the sudden panic and fear, the waves of dread washing over Judah's now fragile mind—How can this be? What can I tell my father? What can I do? At last, Judah can redeem his blunder; he has a chance to spare his father grief, to stand up to injustice and oppression, to the ruthlessness of cruel power. Yet, as we read, Judah is calm and composed; he simply whispers. With his pulse rushing, his mind racing, Judah's diplomacy stands for us as a model of self-control and restraint.

But is that it? What if the viceroy had dismissed him? Would Judah have simply meandered home, giving Jacob the bad report?

If we turn to the pages of our Sages, we see that they saw beneath the text an underworld of passion.

מיד כעס יהודה ושאג בקול גדול והלך קולו די מאות פרסה... שני שילטונין זולגות דם... וחמשה לבושים היה לובש, נימה אחת היתה לו בלבו כיון שהיה כועס קורע את כולם (ב"ר צג: ז)

In the *Midrashic* imagination there was far more than a mere whisper; there was sound and fury. Judah's essence is exposed and raw; he lets out a resounding shriek, his eyes bleed, his hair bursts through his clothing—he cannot contain the intensity of feeling. Judah is driven by his fervour to protect his family.

Where did our Sages see this energy and anger? What clue or hint lies in the text toward such a dramatic depiction? Perhaps it lies in a particular repetition; the short speech that Judah whispers to the Egyptian Viceroy contains the word 'אב'—'father' 14 times. It is clear that Judah suspects Joseph's identity and uses linguistic lunges at his soft spot, alluding to the man he missed most; father, father, father, father, father... Judah knew what the Russian Jewish writer Isaac Babel taught us not 80 years ago when he wrote, "No iron spike pierces a human heart as icily as a period in the right place." Beneath Judah's whisper lay a whirlwind of conviction; beneath his perfect calm, his complete equanimity, lay a fiery passion and fervour to protect his family.

Perhaps the text leaves this ambiguity for our sages to unveil precisely because it means to teach us the necessity of both layers. We need calm; to communicate and to convey we need equanimity, but buttressing that composure must be a heartfelt passion, and energetic and enthusiastic conviction. It is this nuance that John Stuart Mill promotes when he said that "War is an ugly thing, but uglier still is thinking there is nothing worth fighting for."

At RIETS we are trained in both these spheres. As a student, I see myself and my peers tutored in public speaking, pulpit politics, professional development; we are polished by the best in the profession. At the same time we are instilled with a conviction and confidence in our cause—to make synagogues and study halls islands of hope—we are driven by models of excellence to embody passion for our spiritual inheritance.

We know that war is an ugly thing, that we must navigate the waters of the Rabbinate with care, with caution, and with compassion. And at the same time we know that what we have is worth fighting for. ©2012 Rabbi D. Lerner

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It was once present when the great historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, was asked to predict the course of events in the Middle East. He replied, "I'm a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is

more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is passe." Predictions are impossible in the affairs of living, breathing human beings because we are free and there is no way of knowing in advance how an individual will react to the great challenges of his or her life.

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate, all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave (Gen. 37:26-27), whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, "At that time Judah went down from among his brothers" (Gen. 38:1). The commentators take this to mean moral decline.

Yet history turned out otherwise. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, disappeared from the pages of history after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, while it was Judah's descendants, starting with David, who became kings. The tribe of Judah survived the Babylonian conquest, and it is Judah whose name we bear as a people. We are Yehudim, "Jews." This week's parsha explains why.

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family had reached deadlock. They desperately needed food, but they knew that the Egyptian viceroy had insisted that they bring their brother Benjamin with them, and Jacob refused to let this happen. He had lost one child (Joseph) of his beloved wife Rachel and he was not about to let the other, Benjamin, be taken on a hazardous journey. Reuben, in keeping with his unstable character, made an absurd suggestion: "Kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safely." It was Judah who with quiet authority -- "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him" -- persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them.

Now in Egypt the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. At this point Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes: "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father." (Gen. 44:33-34)

No sooner has he said these words than Joseph, overcome with emotion, reveals his identity and the whole elaborate drama reaches closure. What is happening here and how does it have a bearing on leadership?

The sages (Berakhot 34b) articulated a principle: "Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand." The Talmud brings a proof-text from Isaiah: "Peace, peace, to those far and near" (Is. 57:19) placing the far (the penitent sinner) before the near (the perfectly righteous). However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as ha-tzaddik, the righteous.

Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became "second to the king." Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve perfect repentance (teshuvah gemurah), defined by the sages as one who finds himself in a situation to repeat an earlier sin but who does not do so because he is now a changed person.

Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave: "Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed." (Gen. 37:26-27)

Now, faced with the prospect of leaving Benjamin as a slave, he says, "Let me stay as a slave and let my brother go free." That is perfect repentance, and it is what allows Joseph to reveal his identity and forgive his brothers.

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah's character. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child and immediately admits: "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26). This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong. If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar -- mother of Perez from whom king David was descended -- who was ultimately responsible.

Perhaps Judah's future was already implicit in his name, for though the verb le-hodot from which it is derived means "to thank" (Leah called her fourth son Judah saying ""This time I will thank the Lord," Gen. 29:35), it is also related to the verb le-hitvadot, which means "to admit, to confess," and confession is, according to Maimonides, the core of the command to repent.

Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role. Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules. Do you declare a war in which people will die, or to you refrain from doing so at the risk

of letting your enemy grow stronger with the result that more will die later? That was the dilemma faced by Chamberlain in 1939, and it was only some time later that it became clear that he was wrong and Churchill right.

But leaders are also human and they make mistakes that have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual conduct of John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton was less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David when he sinned with another man's wife.

What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent -- you recognise and admit your wrong, and you change as a result. As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a prophet. Both said chatati, "I have sinned." But their fates were radically different. Saul lost his throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated and made excuses before admitting his sin.

The stories of Judah and of his descendant David tell us that what mark a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the burning bush -- stammering, hesitant -- is not the mighty hero we see at the end, "his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated." A leader is one who, though he may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than he was before. ©2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Yehuda finally confronts Yosef and in his frustration at the way events have developed, he speaks to the ruler of Egypt with direct and even harsh words. But what is most amazing in the whole Torah narrative regarding the brothers and Yosef is that not for a moment do the brothers realize that the Egyptian ruler, who has so unfairly tormented them, is in fact Yosef, their brother.

The brothers ask themselves all of the right questions - "Why does he ask about our father and our family? Does he think that we wish to marry into his family? What does Heaven want from us that we are so severely tested and tried? How could Binyamin steal the cup - is he the same type of 'holy' thief that was his mother? How come Shimon looks so fit after his imprisonment? Who put the money into our food sacks? How did the Egyptian ruler know our ages and our proper seating arrangement at his table? But they never arrive at the right answer.

Somehow they cannot connect the dots, obvious as the connection now appears to be. There are many explanations offered by the commentators throughout the ages as to the blindness of the brothers to the matter. But all of the reasons advanced trace themselves back to one basic explanation and idea.

And that idea is that the preconceived notion that the brothers had of Yosef's insufferable behavior and wild dreams that so affected and frightened them did not allow them to recognize Yosef and they could not imagine that somehow Heaven voted in his favor and that they were completely wrong in their assessment of him and the future of the house of Yaakov.

Many times in the Jewish world and in its history, Jews have tended to fall into this trap of preconceived notions and ideas. The brothers of Yosef were great and holy personages. They are the founders of our people and are our very ancestors. Yet, their error of preconceptions and fixed ideas blinded them to recognizing their brother and to the unexpected, even unwanted on their part, fulfillment of his dreams.

It is dangerous, both physically and spiritually to assert that events in the Jewish world will or never will happen. The Divine plan and its execution in real time is always hidden from us. "For your thoughts are not My thoughts nor are your paths (of their execution) necessarily My paths, says the Lord."

Since the State of Israel did not come into being according to anyone's preconceived program, many cannot bring themselves to deal with its reality even today, sixty-five years later. There are so many Jews that do not look like us and perhaps do not behave like us - therefore there are many who cannot recognize them as the true brothers to us that they are. Letting go of preconceptions, even those that we deemed to be holy and once infallible, is a necessary step in the process of national redemption and brotherly reconciliation. Necessary is not always easy. ©2013 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

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And when (Jacob) saw the wagons Joseph had sent to transport him, then the spirit of Jacob their father came back to life" (Gen. 45:27)

At the conclusion of last week's portion it seemed as though the glorious family of Abraham - with its lofty mission of bringing the blessings of compassionate righteousness and moral justice to the world - was about to implode. Sibling jealousy, hatred and deception threatened to effectuate its dissolution even before the twelve sons of Jacob could begin to develop into the nation Israel. Now, in our poignantly

compelling portion of Vayigash, totally unexpectedly, the deceptions are unmasked and the dysfunctional personalities are transformed by repentance, forgiveness and love. What are the necessary steps leading to this remarkable familial reunion?

The Bible opens with the egregious sin of Cain murdering his brother Abel, apparently due to jealousy. His weak defense, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) is answered affirmatively by the Bible in the example of Abraham, who wages a successful war against the four terrorist kings who captures his nephew Lot and even argues valiantly against G-d not to destroy Sodom if there are a significant number of innocent people within the city. We are also given countless commandments which teach that we must all see ourselves as our brother's keepers, that we are all siblings under one G-d, and we must therefore love and protect each other.

Abraham passes the baton of leadership to the son he bore with Sarah, and Rebecca convinces Isaac that in the next generation, the prize of the first-born as well as the material blessings must be granted to Jacob, the more deserving of the twins. It is now Jacob's turn to choose the heir apparent to the Abrahamic legacy - and he is blessed with twelve sons.

Joseph is beautiful of appearance, brilliantly precocious of mind, but at a tender age is already having dreams of personal grandeur and dominion over his brothers, hardly traits which would endear him to his siblings. He is also the obvious favorite of his father. When Jacob bestows upon Joseph the special tunic, symbol of tribal leadership, the brothers are overcome with jealousy, convinced that Joseph's hankering after agricultural Egypt and cosmic adulation (his two dreams) disqualify him completely.

Father Jacob seems to be unaware of the internal hatred created by his blatant favoritism and Joseph's arrogance; he sends Joseph as his "agent" to look after the welfare of his brothers" (Gen. 37:14), a fitting task for the leader of the tribe. The brothers, aware that Joseph sees them not as his beloved siblings whom he must protect, but rather as his lowly servants whom he is destined to dominate (they bow down to him in the dream), seek to kill him. The elder and most respected brother; Yehudah convinces them at least to derive benefit from Joseph by selling him as a slave, even as he reminds them that Joseph "is their brother, part of their very flesh" (Gen. 37:27). Sadly, his suggestion defies that brotherly description. (Yehudah continues to make light of the brotherly responsibility expressed by yibum when he refuses to give his youngest son Shelah in marriage to his dead brother's wife Tamar. See Gen. 38:11).

Jacob spends more than two decades of mourning for Joseph, his lost heir, and in suppressing his suspicions that his other sons were responsible for that loss. But when the brothers return with the report that Joseph is indeed alive and that he is the Grand

Vizier, Jacob "looks at the wagons which Joseph had sent to transport him" - and he has an epiphany.

Rashi explains that the last Torah subject Jacob and Joseph had studied together before Joseph's disappearance was that of the "broken-necked heifer", the sacrifice brought by the elders of the community when an unsolved murder had occurred. (In Hebrew, *agalah* means wagon and *eglah* means heifer.) The elders had to give such an offering because they had to take ministerial responsibility for the conditions of poverty and insufficient social services which generally lead to such crimes (Deut. 21:7, B.T. Sotah 45b). I believe that Rashi (based on Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 94:3) is saying that at that moment, Jacob realized that he could no longer blame the brothers nor Joseph for his beloved son's tragic disappearance; he, Jacob, the elder of his family-community, had to forgive his children and accept responsibility for his having erred in his blatant favoritism.

Yehudah, the son who must assume legal responsibility for the sale of Joseph and subsequent cover-up before Jacob, demonstrates that he has learned his lesson when he takes protective sibling responsibility for Benjamin (Rachel's second son) and offers himself as slave in Benjamin's stead before the Grand Vizier (Gen. 44:33-34). Moreover, he demonstrates his ability to "recognize his brother" Joseph even under the Egyptian garb and Egyptian demeanor of the Grand Vizier.

And Joseph has learned that the bearer of the Abrahamic legacy was not born to rule, but rather to serve G-d in His ultimate plan for this covenantal family. Even after his dreams have been realized, he forgives his brothers, explaining that it was G-d who brought him to Egypt in order to save the family from starvation in Canaan. (Gen. 45:5). Now that repentance and forgiveness have been expressed, the healing and rapprochement can begin. ©2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

During the discussion/confrontation between Yosef and his brothers, Yehudah referred to his father as "your servant" five times, which is understandable since he was talking to the Viceroy of Egypt, and deference is necessary when speaking to authority. However, unbeknownst to Yehudah, his father was also the Viceroy's father, so by calling his father the Viceroy's servant, he was also saying that the Viceroy's own father was his servant, which is extremely inappropriate. While Yehudah was not punished for this (since no intent to dishonor his father was intended, nor from his perspective was any done), Yosef, who let his father be referred to as his servant without protesting, did suffer because of it. Either he lost ten years of his life (Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 39), only had

two children instead of twelve (Hadar Z'kaynim on 44:31), and/or was referred to as a corpse during his lifetime (Sotah 13b).

One discussion that takes place among the commentaries is why the number 10 is significant in Yosef's punishment (at least according to the first two approaches) if Yehudah didn't refer to his father as Yosef's servant ten times, but five (B'reishis 43:28, 44:24, 44:27, 44:30 and 44:31). The standard answer (see the commentaries on Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer) is that since there was a translator who repeated, in Egyptian, what Yehudah had said in Hebrew, Yosef actually heard his father being referred to as his servant ten times (five times in Hebrew and five times in Egyptian). [It should be noted that Yehudah referred to his father more than five times, but only referred to him as the Viceroy's servant five times. Apparently, Yehudah only felt it necessary to do so when his father was the primary focus of what he was saying, and only the first time he is referred to in the clause (see 44:24 and 44:25). For example, when reiterating that he had previously told the Viceroy that it was dangerous for his youngest brother to leave his father's side (44:22), since the focus was on Binyamin, Yehudah did not refer to his father as "your servant."] The bottom line is that Yosef seems to have been punished for not protesting his father being called his servant.

Whatever reason Yosef had for putting his brothers, and father, through such an extended ordeal even after he became Viceroy and could have sent word that he was alive and well and now part of the Egyptian royalty (see page 2 of <http://tinyurl.com/lr7teku>; Rabbi Moshe Shamah suggests that Yosef had to first bring his brothers to the point of accepting their father's choosing Rachel's children over Leah's children in order for there to be any chance of family unity), not allowing his father to be referred to as "your servant" would have blown his cover. Why was Yosef punished if he had to play along as if Yaakov was not his father in order to accomplish what needed to be accomplished? (I am assuming that Yosef was justified for concealing his true identity for as long as he did; if he wasn't, the consequences for making his father, and innocent younger brother, suffer should have been much more severe.)

If the interpreter knew who the Viceroy was, it could be suggested that Yosef was punished for not telling him to avoid using the words "your servant" in the translation; not doing so reflecting on all ten times that Yaakov was referred to as his servant (not just those said in Egyptian). However, it is doubtful that Yosef would risk having his true identity being discovered by telling the interpreter (even if it was his son Menashe, see Rashi on 42:23) who he was. After all, just a momentary change of facial expression could give things away. Even though after the first time Yehudah called his father "your servant" Yosef had an opportunity (after the brothers left, before the goblet was

discovered) to instruct the interpreter not to include those words in his translation anymore, doing so might raise some suspicion about Yosef's identity-not only for the interpreter, but for his astute brothers, who might pick up on the change in the translation (even if they didn't know the meaning of the actual words), as well.

Although the Talmud (Sotah 13b) does not connect Yosef dying early with his not protesting against his father being called his servant, the punishment it does attribute to his not protesting (being referred to as a corpse while still alive) is immediately followed by the reason Yosef died before his brothers did (even though almost all of them were older than him): because he acted like a leader. Although Maharsha (B'rachos 55a) wonders why the punishment normally associated with acting like a leader (which often entails misusing authority) was applied to Yosef as well (since we can assume that Yosef did not misuse his authority), it would seem that rather than being a punishment, having a shorter life is a natural consequence of having to deal with leadership issues (see Rashi on Bamidbar 11:28). If so, it would seem that the Talmud is listing two things that affected Yosef as natural consequences of his actions; he was adversely affected by hearing his father being referred to as his servant (referring to himself as a corpse, indicating that remaining silent weighed heavily upon him for the rest of his life) and he was adversely affected by being in a leadership position. Since the reward for honoring parents is long life (see Sh'mos 20:12, see also the Bayis Gadol Biur Maspik commentary on Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 39), doing something that runs counters to it results in having a shorter life (or worrying about living a shorter one, or having fewer children to be honored by).

That we are held responsible for not fully honoring our parents even when we can't be expected to is evident from elsewhere in the Talmud as well (Kidushin 31b, see Rashi d"h ashray), although that statement may refer to the fact that we can't be expected to be perfect yet are held responsible for those moments that we aren't. Nevertheless, all mitzvos have intrinsic value, independent of the "reward and punishment" aspect that G-d put in place in order to motivate us even before we are prepared to follow the Torah because of its inherent advantages, or ready to just follow G-d's will because it is G-d's will. We can't expect to benefit from the inherent value of a mitzvah we didn't fulfill, even when there was a valid reason why we couldn't fulfill it. Should we somehow attain the knowledge we would have gained from attending a shiur (lecture) that we didn't attend in order to take care of something that takes precedence? If nothing else, suffering the consequences of doing something that we had to (or not doing something that we couldn't do) provides substantial motivation to minimize any collateral damage from occurring when trying to accomplish something.

At its most basic level, honoring parents brings long life because the example it sets impacts the next generation, who will, in turn, honor their parents, taking care of them when they need it, thereby extending their lives. Even if Yosef couldn't protest when Yehudah referred to his father as his servant, the very fact that he didn't had negative consequences, even if it wasn't a "punishment" per se.

This coming week (6 Teves), with G-d's help, my parents will be celebrating their 50th anniversary. My paternal grandmother passed away shortly before I was born, and my paternal grandfather passed away when I was quite young. However, I was able to see the mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice) of my parents, especially my mother, when she took care of her parents. May G-d bless them with long life, and many more happy years together. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ARI WEISS

Except for Chanukah

Throughout the many generations, the Jewish people have had sages of the highest caliber who dedicated their genius to the Torah and its interpretation, and were subsequently made immortal by their rulings and decisions which last until today. While everyone admits to the brilliance and erudition of all of our great scholars, when it comes to the question of which to follow, especially when there is a conflict of opinions, specific communities of Jews will often follow the rulings of their sage, while others will follow the leader of their respective community.

One common example is that of Maimonides (Rambam). Maimonides wrote a commentary which he claimed would put an end for the need of any future commentary, entitled the Mishne Torah, which is a complete book of Jewish life and law. Any person with a question regarding an aspect of religious practice need only open the correct volume of Mishne Torah and there he or she will find the guidance being sought. However, an astute Jew of Eastern-European descent may quickly realize that Maimonides cites and rules almost entirely according to Sefardic practice, rarely taking into account Ashkenazic custom and tradition. One will find, therefore, that although Jews of Eastern-European descent respect and admire Maimonides, they usually will follow the rulings of Ashkenazic sages as, for example, the commentary of Tosafot, which contains rulings of generations of Ashkenazic scholars beginning with the grandsons of Rashi in the twelfth century. Sometimes Ashkenazim and Sefardim will follow Maimonides, perhaps both may follow Tosafot, but whenever in disagreement, Ashkenazim always side with Tosafot (or perhaps a different Ashkenazic sage), and Sefardim with Maimonides.

Except for Chanukah.

For some reason, when it comes to the holiday of Chanukah, something goes awry. When one opens

up the Talmud one sees many hot topics of debate regarding observance of Chanukah (this was long before the well-known debate which came about with the advent of the English language, namely, how to spell Chanukah). One such debate involves how many Chanukiot (Menorahs) one must light in the home. The debate is taken up by the commentators, and Maimonides maintains that every member of the household should have his or her own candelabra, a custom which should be familiar to most Ashkenazic families. Tosafot, on the other hand, maintain that too many flames in the window detracts from the mitzvah and therefore, instead, one person only should light one Menorah on behalf of the entire household, a custom recognized and practiced by Sefardim throughout the world. So, there you have it: On Chanukah Sefardim follow Tosafot instead of Maimonides, and Ashkenazim do the opposite, choosing Maimonides over their own Tosafot. Why should there be such an anomaly in Jewish law, and how might its occurrence be associated with Chanukah?

Perhaps an answer can be gleaned from how the Torah describes the lighting of the first Menorah, the one in the Tabernacle. There, after G-d commands Moses to instruct Aaron the High Priest to kindle the lights of the Great Menorah, and Aaron dutifully follows the instructions exactly, the Torah continues with an out-of-place description of the Menorah: "V'zeh maaseh Hamenorah, Mikshah Zahav. Ad yereich, Ad pircha, mikshah he" - "This is the way the Menorah was made: from one piece of gold. From its center branch (thick section) to its flowers (delicate, thin sections), it was one piece of gold."

Now, we already know what the Menorah looks like from an earlier account. What, then, is the significance of this superfluous description when all we're really interested in hearing about is the lighting of the Menorah?

The answer, I believe, is that the lighting of the Menorah is a symbol of the unity of the Jewish people. Just as the Menorah is fashioned from one solid piece of gold, so too are all Jews intimately connected at our source. Some Jews might be like the thin, delicate flower ornaments of the Menorah, representing a weak or relatively small connection to Jewish heritage, while others are like the thick, sturdy center column of the Menorah, representing a strong sense of Jewish identity, upon which others may rely for strength. Either way, we are all hewn from the same piece of gold. The act of lighting the Menorah, which brings together all the branches into one Mitzvah, therefore symbolizes the powerful and holy unity of the Jewish people.

How better to express this feeling of unity than for Ashkenazim and Sefardim to follow the rulings of each others' Halachic leader. We don't have to agree in order to be unified, but we must never lose sight of our connection one to another, and that which binds us together as Jews: the Torah and our adherence to its

precepts. After all, that's what the Maccabees were fighting for, and it is truly the message of the holiday of Chanukah. ©2011 Rabbi A. Weiss

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states, "And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph" (Genesis 45:3) when he reveals his true identity to his brothers.

The Chofetz Chaim comments that from the time the brothers first came to Egypt to get food -- when Joseph spoke with them roughly and accused them of being spies -- they were puzzled about what exactly was happening and why it was happening. In both encounters with Joseph they had many questions about their experiences. As soon as they heard the words, "I am Joseph" all their questions were answered. The difficulties they had in understanding the underlying meaning of the events -- why Joseph accused them of being spies, yet treated them well, accused them of lying and stealing, but gave them a banquet, insisted on bringing the younger brother to Egypt, etc. -- were now completely clarified.

Similarly, says the Chofetz Chaim, when the entire world will hear the words "I am the Almighty" at the final redemption of the Jewish people, all the questions and difficulties that people had about the history of the world with all of its suffering will be answered. The entire matter will be clarified and understood. Everyone will see how the hand of the Almighty caused everything ultimately for our benefit.

When one realizes that the Almighty has a plan and a purpose for all the events that occur, it gives meaning to the hardships and suffering. Even if you do not know the exact meaning of a particular event, the knowledge that there is an ultimate meaning will enable you to view the situation in a positive, albeit painful, manner. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2013 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

When Yaakov (Jacob) meets his son Yosef (Joseph) after seventeen years of separation the Torah states, "And he wept on his neck." (Genesis 46:29) Since the sentence speaks of only one individual crying, "and he wept," who is the Torah referring to? Was it Yaakov or was it Yosef who cried?

One could argue that it was more likely that Yosef did the crying. After all, Yosef must have been filled with feelings of deep regret. Regret for having stirred his brother's jealousy through his dreams and regret for having failed to contact his father during the years of separation. On the other hand, Yaakov must have also felt deep regret which may have prompted his crying. Yaakov, who grew up in a family wrought with friction due to his parents' playing of favorites, should

have known better than to play favorites himself. His favoring of Yosef eventually led to Yosef's sale. Yaakov also made the mistake of sending Yosef to his brethren to make peace with them. It was this plan that backfired and led directly to Yosef being sold to Egypt. Tears of remorse would have been understandable.

There is another approach, one that doesn't emphasize tears of regret but rather tears of emotion. Here, the classical commentaries disagree. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh argues that Yaakov, who lived isolated in one place for twenty two years, was immersed in the pain of the loss of his son. When meeting Yosef he doesn't cry because "his tears had long since dried up." When the reunion finally takes place, Yaakov has no more tears left. Joseph however, had experienced "so many changes of fortune" since he left home and did not have time to dwell on his homesickness. When he meets his father, all the feelings that had been suppressed, rose to the surface. His crying showed the sudden rush of this pent up emotion.

Ramban sees it differently. He offers perhaps the most penetrating psychological insight. He argues that Yaakov was more likely to have wept. After all, when considering the emotions of an elderly father on the one hand, and the emotions of a young strong son, it seems clear that the father is more apt to shed tears. In Ramban's words: "By whom are tears more easily shed? By the aged parent who finds his long lost son alive after despairing and mourning for him, or the young son who rules?"

When addressing this text, I often ask my students: "How many of you have seen your mother cry?" Invariably, many students respond in the affirmative. But when I ask the same about their fathers, very few hands are raised. Somehow, we mostly associate crying with women and not men. This should not be. Indeed, the Torah never mentions Avraham (Abraham) or Sarah, Yitzchak (Isaac) or Rivka (Rebecca) crying before their children. Yaakov is the first. His tears reflect an openness of emotional love that allows a parent to cry freely before his / her child.

No wonder we are called the children of Yaakov (b'nei Yaakov) or the children of Israel (Yisrael), Yaakov's additional name. Built into our personal lives and the lives of our nation, are profound and deep tears. They are reflective of deep emotional feelings. The expression of such feelings should not be denied, but encouraged. Just as there are times where joy and smiles should be shown to everyone, there are times that almost demand the flowing of tears.

Blessed are the children who have the privilege and chance to glimpse into the depths of their parents' emotions and witness a spontaneous flowing of tears. ©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.