

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid. Years earlier, when he had revealed his true identity to them, he appeared to have forgiven them for selling him as a slave. That was the theme of last week's essay.

Yet the brothers were not wholly reassured. Maybe Joseph did not mean what he said. Perhaps he still harboured resentment. Might the only reason he had not yet taken revenge was respect for Jacob. There was a convention in those days that there was to be no settling of scores between siblings in the lifetime of the father. We know this from an earlier episode. After Jacob had taken his brother's blessing, Esau says, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27: 41). So the brothers come before Joseph and say: "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. (Gen. 50: 16-17)

The text makes it as plain as possible that the story they told Joseph was a lie. If Jacob had really said those words he would have said them to Joseph himself, not to the brothers. The time to have done so was on his deathbed in the previous chapter. The brothers' tale was a "white lie." Its primary aim was not to deceive but to ease a potentially explosive situation. Perhaps that is why Joseph wept, understanding that his brothers still thought him capable of revenge.

The sages derived a principle from this text. Mutar le-shanot mipnei ha-shalom: "It is permitted to tell an untruth (literally, "to change" the facts) for the sake of peace."¹ A white lie is permitted in Jewish law.

This is not the only place where the sages

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in memory of
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חיים ניסן בן יצחק אייזיק ז"ל
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invoked this principle. They even attributed it to G-d himself.² When the angels came to visit Abraham to tell him and Sarah that they were about to have a child, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" G-d then asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18: 12-13).

G-d did not mention that Sarah believed that not only was she too old to have a child. So was Abraham (this turned out to be quite untrue: Abraham had six more children after Sarah's death). The sages inferred that G-d did not mention it because he did not want there to be bad feeling between husband and wife. Here too the sages said: it is permitted to change for the sake of peace.

It is clear that the sages needed both episodes to establish the principle. Had we only known about the Sarah case, we could not infer that it is permitted to tell a white lie. G-d did not tell a white lie about Sarah. He merely did not tell Abraham the whole truth.

Had we only known about the case of Joseph's brothers, we could not have inferred that what they did was permitted. Perhaps it was forbidden, and that is why Joseph wept. The fact that G-d himself had done something similar is what led the sages to say that the brothers were justified.

What is at stake here is an important feature of the moral life, despite the fact that we seem to be speaking of no more than social niceties: tact. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin pointed out that not all values coexist in a kind of platonic harmony. His favourite example was freedom and equality. You can have a free economy but the result will be inequality. You can have economic equality, communism, but the result will be a loss of freedom. In the world as currently configured, moral conflict is unavoidable.³

This was an important fact, though one about which Judaism seems never to have been in doubt. There is, for example, a powerful moment in Tanakh when King David's son Absalom mounts a coup d'etat against his father. David was forced to flee. Eventually

² Midrash Sechel Tov, Toledot, 27: 19.

³ Isaiah Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty,' in Isaiah Berlin, Henry Hardy and Ian Harris, *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. See also the important work by Stuart Hampshire, *Morality and Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983.

¹ Yevamot 65b.

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there was a battle between Absalom's troops and David's. Absalom, who was handsome and had fine hair, was caught by it when it became entangled in the branches of a tree. Left hanging there, Joab, captain of David's army, killed him.

When David heard the news he was overcome with grief: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Samuel 18: 33). Joab is brutal in his words to the king: "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life ... You love those who hate you and hate those who love you ... Now go out and encourage your men" (2 Sam. 19: 6-8). David's grief at the loss of his son conflicts with his responsibilities as head of state and his loyalty to the troops who have saved his life. Which comes first: his duties as a father or as a king?

The existence of conflicting values means that the kind of morality we adopt and society we create depend not only on the values we embrace but also on the way we prioritise them. Prioritising equality over freedom creates one kind of society – Soviet communism for example. Prioritising freedom over equality leads to market economics. People in both societies may value the same things but they rank them differently in the scale of values, and thus how they choose when the two conflict.

That is what is at stake in the stories of Sarah and Joseph's brothers. Truth and peace are both values, but which do we choose when they conflict? Not everyone among the rabbinic sages agreed.

There is, for example, a famous argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what to say about the bride at a wedding.⁴ The custom was to say that "The bride is beautiful and graceful." Members of the school of Shammai, however, were not prepared to say so if, in their eyes, the bride was not beautiful and graceful. For them the supreme value was the Torah's insistence on truth: "Keep far from falsehood" (Ex. 23: 7).

The school of Hillel did not accept this. Who

was to judge whether the bride was beautiful and graceful? Surely the bridegroom himself. So to praise the bride was not making an objective statement that could be tested empirically. It was simply endorsing the bridegroom's choice. It was a way of celebrating the couple's happiness.

Courtesies are often like this. Telling someone how much you like the gift they have brought, even if you don't, or saying to someone, "How lovely to see you" when you were hoping to avoid them, is more like good manners than an attempt to deceive. We all know this, and thus no harm is done, as it would be if we were to tell a lie when substantive interests are at stake.

More fundamental and philosophical is an important Midrash about a conversation between G-d and the angels as to whether human beings should be created at all: Rabbi Shimon said: When G-d was about to create Adam, the ministering angels split into contending groups. Some said, 'Let him be created.' Others said, 'Let him not be created.' That is why it is written: 'Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed' (Psalms 85:11). Mercy said, 'Let him be created, because he will do merciful deeds.' Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood.' Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will do righteous deeds.' Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he will never cease quarrelling.' What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground. The angels said, 'Sovereign of the universe, why do You do thus to Your own seal, truth? Let truth arise from the ground.' Thus it is written, 'Let truth spring up from the earth' (Psalms 85:12).⁵

This is a challenging text. What exactly were the angels saying? What does it mean to say that "G-d took truth and threw it to the ground?" And what happened to the claim made by the angel of Peace that humans "will never cease quarrelling"?

I interpret it as meaning that humans are destined to conflict so long as contending groups each claim to have a monopoly of the truth. The only way they will learn to live at peace is by realising that they, finite as all humans are, will never in this life achieve truth as it is in Heaven. For us, truth is always partial, fragmentary, the view from somewhere and not, as philosophers sometimes say, "the view from nowhere".⁶

This deep insight is, I believe, the reason why the Torah is multi-perspectival, why Tanakh contains so many different kinds of voices, why Mishnah and Gemarra are structured around argument, and why Midrash is built on the premise that there are "seventy faces" to Torah. No other civilization I know has had so

⁵ Bereishit Rabbah 8: 5.

⁶ Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. The only person to have achieved a non-anthropocentric, G-d's-eye-view of creation, was Job in chs. 38-41 of the book that bears his name.

⁴ Ketubot 16b.

subtle and complex an understanding of the nature of truth.

Nor has any other so valued peace. Judaism is not and never was pacifist. National self-defence sometimes requires war. But Isaiah and Micah were the first visionaries of a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." Isaiah is the poet laureate of peace.

Given the choice, when it came to interpersonal relations the sages valued peace over truth, not least because truth can flourish in peace while it is often the first casualty in war. So the brothers were not wrong to tell Joseph a white lie for the sake of peace within the family. It reminded them all of the deeper truth that not only their human father, now dead, but also their heavenly Father, eternally alive, wants the people of the covenant to be at peace, for how can Jews be at peace with the world if they are not at peace with themselves ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Gather together and I shall tell you what is to happen at the end of the days" (Genesis 49:1) The portion of Vayechi, and the entire Book of Genesis, concludes with Jacob's deathbed scene in which he "reveals to his sons what will befall them at the end of the days," expressing the various strengths and weaknesses of each of his heirs and foretelling what each tribe will contribute to the great collage of future Jewish history. He is both Jacob the father of a family as well as Israel the father of a nation - and he leaves the world in the fullness of his success as a parent who has finally united his family and as a patriarch who has established the guidelines for an emerging nation with a mission to unite the world.

Jacob is indeed called by our Sages "the chosen one of the Patriarchs." What made him deserve this very special accolade? What is the unique contribution which he made to the legacies of Abraham and Isaac? Our Sages compare Abraham to a mountain, Isaac to a field and Jacob to a house (or household) (Pesachim 88a).

Apparently, the secret to a successful family - as well to a successful nation, which is after all, a family "writ large" - is to be found within the persona of Jacob, perhaps even within the very blessings he bequeaths to his sons. What is it? The major challenge to each of the Patriarchs was that of succession. Each needed to identify which of the children in the next generation would be the bearer of the Abrahamic legacy. The major struggle within Jacob's life was the deception he perpetrated upon his father, albeit at the behest of his mother, to wrest away the blessings Isaac had meant to bestow upon his older brother, Esau.

This act of deception, no matter how justified it

may have been in the light of the characteristics of each of the brothers, was to haunt Jacob for the rest of his life: He is deceived by Laban, who argues that in his place the younger sister does not receive a prize before the elder; he is deceived by his sons who tell him that a wild beast tore apart his beloved Joseph; and he is even deceived by Joseph who, while dressed up as the Grand Vizier, requests that Jacob send Rachel's only remaining son, Benjamin, to Egypt.

His punishment goes even further: His beloved Rachel dies before her time because she deceives her father Laban by stealing his household gods (in the Mari and Nuzu documents from that time, the one who got the household gods also received the parental inheritance).

And Jacob seems to be so resentful of his loving mother's role in suggesting and facilitating his deception that the Bible mentions his weeping over and providing the burial for his nurse Deborah with ne'er a mention of Rebekah's death and Jacob's mourning over her.

Now, at the end of his life, the time has come for Jacob to bless his own sons. In previous commentaries, I have maintained that Isaac wanted to give the material blessings to Esau and the spiritual "messianic" blessings to Jacob, whereas Rebekah had insisted that both areas of leadership must go to the same son, to Jacob.

And indeed, Joseph's dreams expressed his mastery in both the realm of the material (the 11 sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf) as well as of the spiritual (the 11 stars bowing down to him). Logic would indicate that Joseph would receive both of these blessings from Jacob.

But this is not to be the case. You will remember that, in the past, the rejected son was ousted from the family: Ishmael was actually banished from Abraham's household and Esau left the ancestral homeland for Seir-Edom. Jacob has learned that different strengths may warrant different blessings, that in a true family one victor need not be the recipient of all with the loser going into exile. A family - much like an orchestra - provides the possibility for different individuals (or tribes) each playing the instrument they can play best for the ultimate achievement of a harmonious symphony.

Hence Judah receives the spiritual blessing of the scepter of messianic leadership, the ingathering of all of the nations to Jerusalem when the world will be at peace (Gen. 49:10). And Joseph receives the blessing of material fruitfulness (the ten tribes, especially Ephraim and Manasseh) and the physical ability to overcome the arrows of our enemies (ibid. 22-26). Jacob succeeded in uniting his family and in giving a charge to the tribes for a united nation. The latter has yet to be achieved - and therein lies the prescription for the true coming of our redemption. ©2014 Ohr Torah

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The last seventeen years of the lifetime of our father Yaakov are, so to speak, the best years of his long and eventful life. When appearing before the Pharaoh of Egypt, Yaakov freely admits that the first one hundred thirty years of his life were sparse and difficult. He experienced a lifetime of troubles and travails from the moment he was born holding on to the heel of his brother Eisav.

He and Eisav will contend for the blessings of their father and for the immortality of founding an eternal people that will live throughout history against all odds. Yaakov will struggle to save his family and possessions from the wiles of Lavan and his sons. Yaakov will wrestle with an angel, be sorely tested and wounded, and yet prevail. Eventually he will receive the blessings of that angel which are encapsulated in the name of Yisrael.

Yaakov will suffer the indignity and trauma of his daughter being raped by Shechem and yet he will disapprove of the bloody revenge that his sons visited upon the community that spawned the perpetrators of that outrage. His beloved wife Rachel dies in childbirth and Yaakov is hard-pressed to recover from that blow.

Yaakov seeks a modicum of peace of mind and body when the greatest tragedy of his life – the story of Yosef and his brothers – rests upon him. In despair, he is convinced that he will go to his grave mourning for his beloved lost son. All in all, Yaakov's description of his life and its events when standing before the Pharaoh is unfortunately very accurate, if not even understated.

So it comes as no wonder that the final years of his life are called the years that he actually "lived." He is reunited with his beloved son Yosef, the family is bound together, at peace with one another and is protected, secure and prosperous in their new home in the land of Goshen. Yet Yaakov is aware that this rosy picture of Jewish life in Egypt is a temporary mirage, an illusion that will soon fade and that the years of hardship and bondage are already on the horizon.

The Lord had revealed that future to Yaakov's grandfather Avraham generations earlier and that bill was now coming due. G-d has promised Yaakov that these future troubles will not be seen by him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Yaakov is troubled by the darkened future of his people, a future that he is completely aware of.

Yet, we hear no note of pessimism in his final words to the Jewish people. Rather, both he and Yosef reassure the generations to come that the Lord is somehow with them, and that he will redeem them from all of their troubles and fashion them into the most eternal and influential people on the face of the globe.

It is this faith in the future, the belief that good will somehow prevail that is the most important legacy that our father Yaakov has left to us. It is this belief and attitude that is the unique hallmark of the people of Israel and guarantees to us our continuity and ultimate triumph and success. ©2014 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Describing the brothers' feelings after the death of their father Yaacov (Jacob), the Torah states, "Now Yosef's (Joseph) brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, 'perhaps Yosef will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him.'" (Genesis 50:15)

On a simple level the brothers concern was well founded. While Yaacov was alive, the brothers thought their father would protect them from any acts of revenge on the part of Yosef. Once Yaacov died, the brothers felt vulnerable. They feared that Yosef's anger would finally be unleashed at them for selling him.

However, it seems strange that the brothers would have such a fear, since Yosef had so embraced them in Egypt, providing for their every need.

Commenting on the words "now Yosef's brothers saw" the Midrash suggests that the brothers actually "saw" as they returned from burying Yaacov that Yosef stopped at the very pit into which he was thrown. (Midrash Agur quoted by Nechama Leibowitz) No doubt, they thought, he did so to plan an action against them in the very place that his life hit such a low point. Rashi adds that the brothers "saw" that Yosef no longer invited them to dine with him. (Rashi, Genesis 50:15) No doubt, the brothers thought, because Yosef was still incensed at the way he had been mistreated.

In both cases, however, the brothers misunderstood Yosef's actions.

In the first, the Midrash notes that Yosef returns to the pit to thank G-d for having saved him. In the second, Yosef may no longer have eaten with his brothers, reasoning that after Yaacov's death, the Egyptian persecution was soon to begin. He, therefore, feared that dining with his brothers could provoke the Egyptians to suspect that he was allying himself with his brothers to rebel against Egypt. (Gur Aryeh)

Note in the text that after the reunion between Yosef and his brothers, the brothers never say a word to Yosef until their father's death. The coming together after a long separation was so traumatic that they may have run out of emotional energy for the important everyday communication.

In the case of Yosef and his brothers, the trend

is compounded by the fact that the separation was due to a deep division. So deep, that even after the reunion, the brothers didn't feel free enough to talk openly with Yosef to express their deep feelings of fear. Had they been more open, Yosef would have told them that his intent was not to harm them. In the same breath, Yosef can be faulted for leaving false impressions rather than explaining his actions to his brothers.

Whether there has been a traumatic separation or not, often it is the case that disagreements arise because people don't express what is in their hearts. If we would only speak openly and honestly, we would find out that on many occasions, our concerns are based upon misunderstandings.

Although it exposes us to the risk of pain, openness is the pathway to healing and growth. ©2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd Yosef said to them, 'do not be afraid, for am I in G-d's place? [Although] you had bad intentions regarding [what you did] to me, G-d intended it to be good, in order to bring about the current situation, to keep a large nation alive' (B'reishis 50:19-20). After Yaakov died, his sons were concerned that Yosef would now avenge the way he was mistreated almost 40 years earlier, when they imprisoned him in a deep pit and then sold him into slavery. Yosef therefore assured them that he had no such intentions, pointing out that everything had worked out in the end, as G-d is ultimately in control. Nevertheless, the brothers' concern was based on Yosef treating them differently after Yaakov's death (see Rashi on 50:15); even if he had (while Yaakov was still alive) treated them better than he otherwise would have in his father's honor, if he really attributed everything that happened to G-d's master plan, why wouldn't he treat them like part of the royal family anyway (and not just for his father's sake)?

The way some Midrashim (e.g. B'reishis Rabbah 100:8) describe it, while Yaakov was alive the family would often eat together, including Yosef. Although he was uncomfortable sitting at the head of the table because Yehudah was really the "king" and R'uvein was the firstborn, since Yaakov insisted that as the Egyptian Viceroy he should sit at the head (or in order to allow his father to eat with his entire family), Yosef acquiesced. After Yaakov's death, though, in order to avoid having to do so based on Egyptian protocol, he stopped inviting his brothers to join him. The point the Midrash seems to be trying to make is that it was Yosef's reluctance to sit at the head when

Yehudah and R'uvein were there that caused him to no longer invite them, not any animosity he harbored against them for having sold him. However, if no longer being invited to the royal table was what instigated the brother's concern, all Yosef had to do to alleviate this concern is explain the real reason he no longer invited them, which had nothing to do with anything they had done to him. By addressing the larger issue of the sale rather than finding out why they thought he still held it against them (if he didn't) and correcting any misperception, it seems that Yosef did, in fact (to some extent at least), have some ill will towards his brothers for what they had put him through, and was only reassuring them that despite those feelings, he wouldn't do anything to them.

Other Midrashim (e.g. M'gilah 16b; see also B'reishis Rabbah 100:9) have Yosef telling his brothers that they have no need to be concerned because "if ten candles cannot extinguish one," referring their attempt to get rid of him, "how could one candle extinguish ten?" His response was not "don't be concerned because I have no reason to try to 'extinguish' you," but that he would be unable to even if he tried. Since the brothers message to Yosef, said to be from their father, was a request for forgiveness for what they had done to him (50:17), any response other than "I forgive you" or "I had already forgiven you" indicates that he hadn't. Therefore, by saying that he cannot "take G-d's place" to punish them for what they had done (as that's G-d's job, not his), Yosef was also saying that all was not forgiven. [Rabbeinu Bachye (50:17) says that because Yosef never forgave his brothers, they had to be reincarnated as the "Ten Martyrs" in order to be cleansed from their sin, a loss we lament on Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur.]

In Yosef's situation, he was able to see how well things worked out in the end (which was the next part of his statement to his brothers), making it easier to accept what had happened. In most circumstances it's not easy to just accept difficulties as being part of G-d's plan -- and therefore ultimately for the good -- rather than blaming those who seem to have contributed to, or caused, those difficulties. If G-d is just, anything that happens must be deserved (at least on some level), yet we are held responsible if we cause harm to others -- harm that they must have ultimately deserved anyway. How do we balance taking -- and assigning -- responsibility for actions that cause harm with G-d's attribute of absolute justice?

Rashi (D'varim 22:8) deals with this issue to some extent regarding building a fence around a roof to prevent any accidental falls, even though the person who would fall if there was no fence must have been worthy of falling anyway, telling us that what happens to a victim is separate from the responsibility to try to prevent accidents from happening. But how does that work?

Rabbeinu Bachye (B'reishis 18:19), based on the Ramban, explains how G-d runs the world: "[G-d's] supervision over the lower world regarding the species of man is both general and specific, [whereas] for other living creatures it is [only] general, not specific, except in order to maintain the species. And the specific (read: individualized) supervision regarding the species of man is divided into two sections: supervision of him (meaning each individual) by being aware of every detail of his actions and thoughts, and supervision of him by protecting him and saving him from happenstances (a term we will define shortly). The supervision of him by being aware of all of his actions applies to every person, Jewish or not. The supervision of him by saving him from happenstances does not apply to every person, even among the Jewish people; only the righteous among them, as G-d saves the righteous from the happenstances that everyone else is subjected to." [Since G-d's knowledge is absolute, the implication that He is not aware of the specific actions of animals may seem problematic. However, since animals do not have free will, every action/reaction they do/have is already built into the system, so there is nothing specific to have to be aware of that G-d wasn't already aware of; anything that "changes" based on the choices people make is included in His knowledge of every person's actions.]

There are several points that need to be made regarding Rabbeinu Bachye's thoughts. First of all, his approach is the dominant one among the traditional commentators (even if that's not how things are often presented). Secondly, since G-d knows what everyone does (and thinks), and based on that knowledge He determines who is considered "righteous" (and therefore worthy of individualized supervision), the terms "general supervision" and "specific supervision" can be misleading. After all, whether an individual is subject to happenstance or not is decided on a case by case basis; even those individuals left unprotected are only left unprotected after it has been determined that they are not worthy of divine protection. As the Meiri (Sotah 2a) puts it, being left unprotected is a punishment for not being worthy enough to deserve protection. The specific outcome may not be the result of a divine decree directed at that individual, but the fact that this individual is now susceptible to the outcome of the situation is the result of a specific determination about that specific individual.

As far as what "happenstance" ("mikre") is, a precise definition would be an outcome that was not specifically (or primarily) the purpose of the factors that brought it about. For example, if I see a bug on the ground and purposely step on it, that step was specifically intended to kill the bug. If I am purposely walking on a specific sidewalk to get from one place to another, and one of my steps lands on a bug, that bug may be just as dead as the one I purposely killed, and

my steps in both cases may have had a specific purpose, but the death of the second bug is the result of "happenstance," while the first is not. The factors that contribute to happenstance include: the laws of nature (each of which has a specific purpose, even if that purpose did not include every consequence of that natural law; see <http://tinyurl.com/n93xgfw> for more), man's free will (even if an outcome was the specific intent of a specific choice made by a person, the fact that G-d gave us the ability to make choices that can impact others was not specifically intended for that specific outcome), and divine decrees that also impact those whom the decree was not directed at (such as the non-wicked inhabitants of a wicked city that G-d punishes, see Rambam, Hilchos T'shuva 3:2). The cumulative outcome of these factors create circumstances whereby people are affected, even though a specific outcome may not have been the specific intent of any of those factors. All of those factors come from G-d (in the case of free will, it is our ability to choose that comes directly from Him, not the choices we make), and whether we are protected from what those factors may bring is determined by G-d for each person individually, but if the specific outcome wasn't the specific (or primary) purpose of what caused it, it qualifies as "happenstance."

If something bad happens to a person, there are dual causes that brought it about/allowed it to happen, one based on how the bad thing came about and the other based on who it happened to. If something was a direct punishment from G-d, the two causes coincide, as the sin caused G-d to need to punish the sinner, and the sin caused the sinner to be punished. If it was the result of happenstance, though, what brought it about is initially disconnected from the person affected by it; one set of factors caused it to happen, while another factor (the person affected not being worthy of divine protection) allowed it to happen. However, we cannot always control (and are never fully in control) of the factors that can adversely affect us, while we are always in control of whether we can become worthy of divine protection. Therefore, even though it may be true that had some of the factors that brought something about been handled more appropriately (e.g. had the homeowner built a fence around his roof) the unfortunate outcome could have been avoided, it is also true that had the person adversely affected been worthy of divine protection, the outcome would have been avoided as well.

Yosef was certainly worthy of divine protection (and received it, regarding the merchandise the caravan that brought him to Egypt was carrying -- see Rashi on 37:25; when he was a slave -- see 39:2; when he was in prison -- see 39:21 and 39:23; and when he was summoned to Pharaoh -- see 41:38-39), but his brothers didn't think he was (see Or Hachayim on 37:21, although his notion that those worthy of divine

protection can be adversely affected by the free will of others is far from being universally accepted). After Yaakov died, when the brothers were concerned that Yosef would punish them for what they had done to him, his response was very straightforward. First, regarding their role in his being sold as a slave, he pointed out that it is not his job to worry about their poor choices, (since those choices can no longer cause any harm; obviously if something can be done to prevent any further harm to anyone, it must be done); that is G-d's jurisdiction. Regarding his own role in the outcome being allowed to happen (i.e. his being sold as a slave), normally the optimal reaction is to accept responsibility to either deserve the direct punishment or to deserve to be subject to the outcome of happenstances (and to then correct that). In Yosef's case, he went a step further, telling his brothers that, from his perspective, there was no bad outcome, as even though "you intended to do bad to me, G-d intended it to be good." © 2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

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Chazal observe that twice in Parshas Vayechi the Torah refers to Yosef and his sons, Ephraim and Menashe, as not being subject to the negative impact of an ayin hara -- an "evil eye". Yaakov blesses Ephraim and Menashe that they should multiply like fish -- just as fish are not seen as they swim underwater (either due to their depth or due to refraction), so too the descendants of Yosef are protected from those who may look at them with an ayin hara. Yosef receives his personal blessing from Yaakov and is described as one who is "alei ayin -- above the eye". This blessing also acknowledges that Yosef is not influenced by the evil eyes that surround him. What is the significance of ayin hara and why are Yosef and his children immune from its negative influence?

Ayin hara can be understood to be synonymous with jealousy, which begins when one looks at what others have. A jealous person both wants the desired object for himself and does not want the other person to have it. As such, his looking at others with negativity is literally an ayin hara. Yosef, of all people, seems to be the most impacted by the ayin hara of jealousy. In Parshas Vayeishev we learn that "vayir'u echav -- his brothers saw", i.e. they saw the favoritism symbolized by the kesones passim, and this led to their jealousy and the extreme ayin hara with which they viewed, and dealt with, Yosef. How does Yosef, the man whose brothers sold him into slavery due to their jealousy, eventually become the one who no longer has to ever worry about this powerful ayin hara of jealousy?

The trait of jealousy which manifests itself in our relationship to our fellow man emanates from a deficiency in our relationship with Hashem. "Kol mah

d'avid rachmana l'tav avid -- whatever Hashem does is for the good". A sincere belief in the ultimate goodness even of what appears evil enables a person to look at everyone and everything with an ayin tov -- a good eye. One who fully internalizes this perspective and thus views everything in life positively will never be jealous of others because he never views himself as lacking anything.

Throughout his life, Yosef exhibited tremendous optimism. In every difficult situation he makes the best of his lot and succeeds to whatever degree he can notwithstanding the challenges that face him. What is the source of this powerful positive outlook that enables Yosef to survive his brothers selling him into slavery and later his imprisonment for false accusations? How does he cope with the pain of being forcibly separated from his father and the difficulties of surviving alone in a foreign land?

The Torah reveals this secret of Yosef in one of his last conversations with his brothers. They are frightened that upon the death of Yaakov, Yosef will punish them for all that they had done to him. With tears in his eyes, he consoles them saying, "Elokim chashva letova -- Hashem planned it for the good". These were the words that kept Yosef positive throughout all of his ordeals; he truly believed that at every moment of his life, Hashem was planning for the good. Yosef's genuine belief in "Kol mah d'avid rachmana l'tav avid" left no room for negativity in his heart. Watching others prosper didn't induce jealousy because Yosef truly believed he was receiving only the good of Hashem. "B'mida she'adam moded kach modidin lo -- the way one acts to others is how Hashem responds to him". One who never exhibits an ayin hara to others because everything is for the good is not subject to the potential affects any ayin hara directed towards him.

Yosef, despite having initially suffering greatly jealousy-driven actions of others, emerges as one who is immune to the effects of the ayin hara of others due to his lifelong commitment to always seeing the good of Hashem in everything. This lifelong commitment and avodah transformed Yosef and his descendants into people who were "alei ayin" -- above and immune to the jealous eyes of others. © 2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"The time approached for Yisrael to die, so he called for his son Yosef." Be'er Mayim Chaim -- How did Yaakov know that he was nearing the end of his days in this world? Furthermore, we usually associate the end of life with a diminution of power, of slowing down, of weakening. Considering what might be his frailty and mortality, we would have expected that the name "Yaakov" be used in this pasuk, since

that is the name associated with him in a more muted or powerless state. Instead, as he readies himself to take leave of this life, he assumes the role of "Yisrael," which is used to designate him in his powerful, triumphant, potentiated state.

Avrohom is described towards the end of his life as "old, having come into days." (Bereishis 24:1) The last phrase begs for explanation; the Zohar (1:224A) provides one. Every day of his life, says the Zohar, brought new elevation to Avraham. He did not miss a single one; he came into all his days, and emerged with something positive from each one. All of us, continues the Zohar, are put to the same challenge. Each day has its purpose. On the day of our final judgment, we will have to give an accounting for every day that we failed in our private missions, each person according to his level. For some people, failure to accomplish what we were supposed to achieve will mean having to return as a in some reincarnated form.

While each person is different -- and each day in every individual's life is different -- the growth is still cumulative. By the time a person's sojourn in this world is over, his soul should be sufficiently elevated to join effortlessly with its Divine source. This means, optimally, having achieved excellence in every important measure.

In several places in Shas, Tanaim and Amoraim saw visions before their deaths of great tzadikim. This follows from what we have been saying. Just prior to their passing from this world, these great people had finished their life's work of elevating their souls. Those souls were therefore attuned to great spiritual elevation. The great tzadikim they saw in their visions symbolized the sterling quality of the souls they themselves possessed as they were poised to enter eternity.

This, then, is what happened to Yaakov. As he approached the end of his days, he attained levels of perfection that he had not reached before. Any slight flaws he previously might have possessed were erased or had faded. Freed of any deficiencies, his soul now reigned with full power. He could not accurately be called Yaakov at this moment. Even though his body was about to give out, his core being rose to its greatest position of power. He could only be called Yisrael -- not Yaakov -- at such a time of spiritual ascendancy. (This is what Chazal mean (Bava Metzia 84A) when they say that the beauty of Yaakov was like that of Adam. The luster of Yaakov's neshamah at the end of his life resembled that of Adam before the first sin, in his state of perfection. This might also explain why Chazal (Taanis 4B) insist that Yaakov never died. Death became part of our world only after the first sin in the Garden. Yaakov at the end of his life resembled Adam before the first sin -- before death had been ordained as part of human existence. How, then, could death possibly relate to him?)

As all this transpired, Yaakov was aware of the significance of the changes he was undergoing. He realized that he was transitioning to a life in the world of the neshamos; his soul was being prepared for taking its eternal place. He knew, in other words, that the time approached for him to die, and it was time to have the conversation with Yosef. (Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 47:29) ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When Jacob blesses his children before he dies, he says about his son Yissachar: "And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and he bowed his shoulders to bear." (Genesis 49:15). What does this mean?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz explains that the tribe of Yissachar was noted for its devotion to Torah study. Yissachar "knew that rest was good" and peace of mind were necessary to master the Torah. What did he do? "He bowed his shoulder to bear" -- by training himself to bear any difficulties, he was able to reach the highest levels of peace of mind in all situations.

People seek peace of mind by trying to obtain physical peace, to seek comfort. This is exactly what creates so much stress and tension in people's lives. A person who becomes used to having peace of mind only when nothing is missing in his life is more inclined to be stressed by unusual circumstances. A person who seeks peace of mind by having physical comforts is similar to a person who drinks salt water to quench his thirst. For a moment it appears that he is quenching his thirst, but very soon his thirst will be stronger than ever.

When a person experiences one stressful situation after the other, they add up and can become overwhelming. How can one develop peace of mind? Be aware of your ultimate goals in life -- developing your character, doing acts of kindness, emulating the Almighty and cleaving to Him. When you are aware of what life is really about and keep your focus on this, you are constantly in one situation: traveling towards your goal. When you internalize this awareness you will never be overly disturbed or distressed. The person who views all life situations as a means to reach his ultimate goals experiences less stress and will be able to cope with difficulties.

Soldiers are trained for battle. A prerequisite is to have peace of mind though they are in danger and in chaos. They are trained by removing all comforts -- to cope with situations when all the comforts of home are missing -- to ignore difficulties and to focus on their goal to win. Likewise, for peace of mind, we need to focus on the goal and to know that physical comfort is neither the goal nor the means. ©2014 Rabbi Y. Kamenetzky & torah.org