

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

FThere are moments that change the world: 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press (though the Chinese had developed it four centuries before), or 1821 when Faraday invented the electric motor, or 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web. There is such a moment in this week's parsha, and in its way it may have been no less transformative than any of the above. It happened when Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers. While they were silent and in a state of shock, he went on to say these words: "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that G-d sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But G-d sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d." (Gen. 45: 4-8)

This is the first recorded moment in history in which one human being forgives another. According to the Midrash, G-d had forgiven before this,¹ but not according to the plain sense of the text. Forgiveness is conspicuously lacking as an element in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and the cities of the plain. When Abraham prayed his audacious prayer for the people of Sodom, he did not ask G-d to forgive them. His argument was about justice not forgiveness. Perhaps there were innocent people there, fifty or even ten. It would be unjust for them to die. Their merit should therefore save the others, says Abraham. That is quite different from asking G-d to forgive.

Joseph forgave. That was a first in history. Yet the Torah hints that the brothers did not fully appreciate the significance of his words. After all, he did not explicitly use the word 'forgive.' He told them not to be

¹ There are midrashic suggestions that G-d partially forgave, or at least mitigated the punishments of, Adam and Eve and Abel. Ishmael was said to have become a penitent, and there are midrashic interpretations that identify Keturah, the woman Abraham married after the death of Sarah, with Hagar, implying that Abraham and Isaac were reunited and reconciled with Sarah's maidservant and her son.

distressed. He said, 'It was not you but G-d.' He told them their act had resulted in a positive outcome. But all of this was theoretically compatible with holding them guilty and deserving of punishment. That is why the Torah recounts a second event, years later, after Jacob had died. The brothers sought a meeting with Joseph fearing that he would now take revenge. They concocted a story: They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers for 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: 16-18]

What they said was a white lie, but Joseph understood why they said it. The brothers used the word "forgive" – this is the first time it appears explicitly in the Torah – because they were still unsure about what Joseph meant. Does someone truly forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph wept that his brothers had not fully understood that he had forgiven them long before. He no longer felt ill-will toward them. He had no anger, no lingering resentment, no desire for revenge. He had conquered his emotions and reframed his understanding of events.

Forgiveness does not appear in every culture. It is not a human universal, nor is it a biological imperative. We know this from a fascinating study by American classicist David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: the origins of a moral idea* (2010).² In it he argues that there was no concept of forgiveness in the literature of the ancient Greeks. There was something else, often mistaken for forgiveness. There is appeasement of anger.

When someone does harm to someone else, the victim is angry and seeks revenge. This is clearly dangerous for the perpetrator and he or she may try to get the victim to calm down and move on. They may make excuses: It wasn't me, it was someone else. Or, it was me but I couldn't help it. Or, it was me but it was a small wrong, and I have done you much good in the past, so on balance you should let it pass.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with these other strategies, the perpetrator may beg, plead, and perform some ritual of abasement or humiliation. This is a way

² David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: the origins of a moral idea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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of saying to the victim, "I am not really a threat." The Greek word *sugnome*, sometimes translated as forgiveness, really means, says Konstan, exculpation or absolution. It is not that I forgive you for what you did, but that I understand why you did it – you could not really help it, you were caught up in circumstances beyond your control – or, alternatively, I do not need to take revenge because you have now shown by your deference to me that you hold me in proper respect. My dignity has been restored.

There is a classic example of appeasement in the Torah: Jacob's behaviour toward Esau when they meet again after a long separation. Jacob had fled home after Rebekah overheard Esau resolving to kill him after Isaac's death (Gen. 27: 41). Prior to the meeting Jacob sends him a huge gift of cattle, saying "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." (Gen. 32: 21). When the brothers meet, Jacob bows down to Esau seven times, a classic abasement ritual. The brothers meet, kiss, embrace and go their separate ways, but not because Esau has forgiven Jacob but because either he has forgotten or he has been placated.

Appeasement as a form of conflict management exists even among non-humans. Frans de Waal, the primatologist, has described peacemaking rituals among chimpanzees, bonobos and mountain gorillas.³ There are contests for dominance among the social animals, but there must also be ways of restoring harmony to the group if it is to survive at all. So there are forms of appeasement and peacemaking that are pre-moral and have existed since the birth of humanity.

Forgiveness has not. Konstan argues that its first appearance is in the Hebrew Bible and he cites the case of Joseph. What he does not make clear is why Joseph forgives, and why the idea and institution are born specifically within Judaism.

The answer is that within Judaism a new form of morality was born. Judaism is (primarily) an ethic of guilt, as opposed to most other systems, which are ethics of shame. One of the fundamental differences

between them is that shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. In shame cultures when a person does wrong he or she is, as it were, stained, marked, defiled. In guilt cultures what is wrong is not the doer but the deed, not the sinner but the sin. The person retains his or her fundamental worth ("the soul you gave me is pure," as we say in our prayers). It is the act that has somehow to be put right. That is why in guilt cultures there are processes of repentance, atonement and forgiveness.

That is the explanation for Joseph's behaviour from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the point where, in this week's parsha, he announces his identity and forgives his brothers. It is a textbook case of putting the brothers through a course in atonement, the first in literature. Joseph is thus teaching them, and the Torah is teaching us, what it is to earn forgiveness.

Recall what happens. First he accuses the brothers of a crime they have not committed. He says they are spies. He has them imprisoned for three days. Then, holding Shimon as a hostage, he tells them that they must now go back home and bring back their youngest brother Benjamin. In other words, he is forcing them to re-enact that earlier occasion when they came back to their father with one of the brothers, Joseph, missing. Note what happens next: They said to one another, "Surely we deserve to be punished [ashemim] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us" ... They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. [Gen. 42: 21-23]

This is the first stage of repentance. They admit they have done wrong. Next, after the second meeting, Joseph has his special silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack. It is found and the brothers are brought back. They are told that Benjamin must stay as a slave.

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? G-d has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup." [Gen. 44: 16]

This is the second stage of repentance. They confess. They do more: they admit collective responsibility. This is important. When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery it was Judah who proposed the crime (37: 26-27) but they were all (except Reuben) complicit in it.

Finally, at the climax of the story Judah himself says "So now let me remain as your slave in place of the lad. Let the lad go back with his brothers!" (42: 33). Judah, who sold Joseph as a slave, is now willing to become a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free. This is what the sages and Maimonides define as complete repentance, namely when circumstances

³ Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

repeat themselves and you have an opportunity to commit the same crime again, but you refrain from doing so because you have changed.

Now Joseph can forgive, because his brothers, led by Judah, have gone through all three stages of repentance: [1] admission of guilt, [2] confession and [3] behavioural change.

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Repentance presupposes that we are free and morally responsible agents who are capable of change, specifically the change that comes about when we recognise that something we have done is wrong and we are responsible for it and we must never do it again. The possibility of that kind of moral transformation simply did not exist in ancient Greece or any other pagan culture. Greece was a shame-and-honour culture that turned on the twin concepts of character and fate.⁴ Judaism was a repentance-and-forgiveness culture whose central concepts are will and choice. The idea of forgiveness was then adopted by Christianity, making the Judeo-Christian ethic the primary vehicle of forgiveness in history.

Repentance and forgiveness are not just two ideas among many. They transformed the human situation. For the first time, repentance established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent I show I can change. The future is not predestined. I can make it different from what it might have been. Forgiveness liberates us from the past. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of reaction and revenge. It is the undoing of what has been done.⁵

Humanity changed the day Joseph forgave his brothers. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are no longer prisoners of our past. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Joseph could not hold himself back in front of all who were standing around him... And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; Is my father still alive?'" (Genesis 45:1-3) Why does Joseph suddenly wake up to his familial ties and reveal himself as the long-lost son and brother? Apparently, he was inspired by Judah's stirring speech which opens our Torah reading of Vayigash. How did Judah strike such a responsive chord in a Joseph whose heart had previously been so impervious to filial and sibling sensitivity? I believe that the crucial phase is, "because your servant guaranteed my father that I would serve as a surety for the youth" (Genesis 44:32);

⁴ See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

⁵ Hannah Arendt makes this point in *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 241.

Judah informs Joseph that he is an arev, a co-signer, a stand-in for Benjamin.

This concept is quite radical for these warring siblings and resonates in subsequent Jewish legal and ethical literature in the axiom that "all Israel are co-signers (or sureties) for each other."

Joseph was born into a family of jealousy and hatred. The six sons of Leah, the "hated" wife who had been forced upon Jacob under false pretenses, refused to recognize the beloved wife Rachel's son as a legitimate brother; hence the 17-year-old Joseph had no recourse but to find his companionship with the younger brothers, and compensated by "shepherding" his siblings, the sons of Leah, acting the big shot, and reporting all their foibles to his adoring father (Gen. 37:2).

Joseph always refers to his siblings as his brothers, but they never refer to him as "brother": "And he [Joseph] said, I am seeking my brothers... and Joseph went after his brothers... And they saw him from afar. The men said, each one to his brother, behold, that master of dreams is coming, let us kill him and throw him in one of the pits and say that an evil animal devoured him" (Gen. 37:16-20).

The young Joseph was desperately seeking a brotherly relationship with his siblings – but he was constantly rebuffed. When he tried to overcome their rejection of him by recounting his (perhaps compensatory) dreams of grandeur, it only caused them to hate him even more.

Even Reuben, who attempts to rescue Joseph, never calls him "brother," only referring to "him" as a pronoun (Gen. 37: 21, 22). It is only Judah who refers to him as a brother, but since he is desirous of making a profit by selling him as a slave, the use of the term may be ironic: "What profit have we in killing our brother? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, for he is our brother, our flesh" (Gen. 37:26-27).

As the story progresses, the lack of brotherliness towards the sons of Rachel is emphasized even more: "And the ten brothers of Joseph [they felt towards each other as brothers] went down to Egypt to purchase grain, but Jacob did not send Benjamin, brother of Joseph" (but not the brother of the other 10).

And when the sons of Jacob stand before the Grand Vizier, the Bible stresses the inequality in their relationship with a ringing declaration, pregnant with a double meaning, "Joseph recognized his brothers [their identity as well as a sibling relationship to them], but they did not recognize him" (Gen. 42:8).

The Hebrew word ah (brother) means to be tied together, the verb ahot meaning to sew or to stitch, even, if you will, to patch up. It derives from a sense of unity, oneness (ehad, ahdut) which comes from the understanding of having emanated from one father.

Since the source of their unity is their common

father; they should not want to cause pain to each other and certainly not to their father. Apparently, the hatred of the 10 brothers for Joseph even overwhelmed their filial concern for their father's welfare – and so they seemingly had no difficulty in telling Jacob that his beloved Joseph had been torn apart by a wild animal! When Judah declares to their father Jacob that he will stand as surety for Benjamin, he is expressing his newfound recognition that this youngest son of Rachel is truly an ah, a brother, an inextricable part of him, Judah, even though he was born of a different mother. When he tells the Grand Vizier that he is willing to be a slave instead of Benjamin – so that this son of Rachel may be restored to his loving father in order to save Jacob further pain – he is demonstrating the bond of ultimate unity between siblings, and between them and their father. This is ahva (brotherliness) and ahdut (unity) which creates an indissoluble bond (hibur, haverut, profound attachment). It is at this point of Judah's self-sacrifice for Rachel's youngest son that Joseph recognizes his brothers' repentance and is ready to forgive and reunite with them.

The prophet Ezekiel provides the ultimate vision of a united Israel when he is told by G-d to take one stick and write upon it "For Judah and the children of Israel his friends" (haver, hibur, bond), and to take another stick and write upon it, "for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and the entire house of Israel his friend," and to join both sticks so that they are united in his hand (Ezekiel 37: 15-20). This is the Jewish goal, learned from Judah, when every Israelite sees themselves as a co-signer (surety) for every other Israelite for the greater glory of our common Father in heaven. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As the Torah's narrative of the story of Yosef and his brothers reaches its dramatic climax in this week's parsha, one may feel justifiably surprised that the brothers were so shocked at Yosef's revelation to them. After all, there was no shortage of revelatory hints strewn by Yosef throughout the unfolding story.

But the brothers, convinced of the rectitude of their actions and behavior, remained insensitive to Yosef and his words, dreams and vision to the end. This fact of willful blindness, no matter what facts are unfolding before one's eyes, is not a rare occurrence in life. It is unfortunately a very common human characteristic.

The combination of self-righteousness, so-called ideological purity, human stubbornness and the reluctance to admit past error is a lethal mix. It corrupts thought and behavior and blinds the eyes, even of the righteous. The Torah describes the effects of venal monetary corruption thusly: "For graft will blind the sight of the otherwise righteous and pervert the utterances of

the wise."

There is no greater graft or corruption than the self-righteousness of the ideologues amongst us. The brothers disbelieved Yosef's dreams from the onset and hardened their hearts and justified their behavior towards him. They convinced themselves that they could not have been wrong regarding such an important matter.

Blinded by their own convictions and worldview, of their exclusive role in creating the Jewish people without Yosef's participation, the brothers were blind to the facts that unfolded before their eyes. I am reminded of the sign that I once saw on the desk of a noted professor of law that said "Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up!" Even the greatest among us fall into that trap.

There is a portion of the Jewish people who sincerely believe, whether for religious or ideological reasons, that the state of Israel should never have been created. Great rabbinic leaders of the past assured their followers that the state could not last longer than fifteen years or fifty years at the most. The facts thankfully belie those dark predictions and certainties.

There were ideologues on the left who said that by abandoning Marxism the state of Israel was doomed, as was the world of the Western democracies generally. Once again the facts of the matter have arisen to deny this skewed and dire viewpoint. All of the naysayers of the past still deny the present and continue to fight against the raging sea of facts that appear before their very eyes.

Twenty years after the Oslo agreements, it is apparent to all that somehow this process failed to bring even a modicum of peace to Israel and its Arab antagonists. Yet, having committed themselves to and having invested so much effort in a failed process there are still many who refuse to face the facts and recognize that their worldview and assessment of the situation was wrong.

So even when Yosef stands before you, one is blinded by one's own prejudices and previous mindset. This is a very important lesson to be learned from the narrative of the Torah. The ability to admit wrong and change direction is one of the true hallmarks of human greatness. It certainly is necessary in our time and in our circumstances. ©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

What makes Yosef (Joseph) so keen on settling his families in a suburb of Egypt—a place called Goshen? Goshen seems so attractive that it

even appears that the assurance of living in Goshen helps Yaacov agree to leave his home and travel to Egypt. (Genesis 45:10, 27, 28)

Isaac Arama suggests that Goshen was not a special place. As is the case with many attractive areas, its importance lies in its location-far from the capital of Egypt. In the center of the politics of the Egyptian empire, one could easily fall prey to the intrigues and contradictions inherent in the Egyptian political system. Yosef and Yaacov understood the appeal of remaining far away from such a place.

Netziv, R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah of Berlin, sees it differently. For him, living in Goshen was a way in which Yaacov's family could have the opportunity to build a life of holiness.

The fundamental difference between these approaches is the following: Arama sees Goshen as a way to distance oneself from a negative-from the Egyptian political scene. Goshen in of itself had nothing positive to offer. Its only attraction was what it was not; the center of Egyptian life.

Netziv disagrees. Goshen had something positive to offer. It was there that the infrastructure of an autonomous sovereign people could be developed.

My Rebbe in Chumash, Nehama Leibowitz, notes that, as is often the case, the background of these commentators contributes to the differing views presented here. Arama lived in fifteenth century Spain and was involved in the Spanish political system. He knew the possible corruption of political office and understood how Yaacov would have wanted to keep his family far from the center of political life.

Netziv, whose life was meshed with the return to Zion, saw Goshen as a move towards realizing a dream: the building of a state within a state, as a hopeful step towards returning to Israel and developing our national homeland.

But as Nehama remarks, "in spite of all of Yosef's endeavors to prevent them settling down permanently in the land and becoming enmeshed in the attractions of the surrounding society, they forgot the temporary nature of their sojourn in Egypt. The last verse of our portion alludes to the dangers of assimilation when it states, 'and Israel settled in the land of Egypt and in the land of Goshen; they acquired holdings therein and were fruitful and increased greatly in numbers.'" (Gen. 47:27)

This is an important message for Diaspora Jewry today: No matter how developed and sophisticated we are, the dangers of assimilation exist when we are living under the rule of a society that is not Jewish. To be sure, individuals may maintain their Jewish identity in the exile; but for the community of Israel, our destiny lies not in the Goshens of this world, not in Egypt-but in a place where Judaism is the main compass, in the land of Israel. ©2011 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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Vayigash, Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, after making sure they didn't harbor any resentment. As Rabbi Haber points out, what's more amazing is that Yosef forgave his brothers, after being stuck in a dangerous pit crawling with poisonous snakes, screaming out for help while catching a glimpse of his brothers sitting down to break bread, ignoring his pleas for mercy. If one's brothers sold them as a slave, would they ever be able to forgive them, kiss and embrace them, and adhere to all the families' laws and customs after they caused you such profound pain? Yosef did all of these things. He didn't assimilate; he didn't become an anti-Semite. He defied every law of human nature. How?

Rabbi Haber goes on to explain that Yosef was empowered by one sentence: "You didn't send me here, G-d did" The fact is they did send him there, but from Yosef's perspective that was something THEY had to deal with. As far as Yosef was concerned, it was all an act of G-d. He was not the judge, he was a brother and he was a Jew. He would act like a brother and he would act like a Jew.

We can learn SO much from Yosef today, if we could just memorize and adapt one line into our lives -- "it wasn't you that sent me here; it was G-d" -- we'd all be closer to all our "brothers", and we'd all be better Jews. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When they (the brothers) related to him (Jacob) all the words that Joseph had spoken... the spirit of their father Jacob was revived" (Gen. 45:27).

This verse refers to the brothers telling their father that Joseph was alive after Jacob had mourned for Joseph the past 22 years. Why didn't Joseph send a message to his father that he was alive and well -- and, by the way, the ruler of Egypt? Secondly, why did Joseph ask his brothers "Is my father still alive?" when they already told him that Jacob was still living? What does it mean that "the spirit of their father Jacob was revived"?

Joseph knew that Jacob had prophetic vision. He assumed that Jacob knew exactly what had happened to him and where he was and therefore his father concurred with what the brothers did with him. It did not occur to Joseph that Jacob was deprived of the Divine spirit which allowed him prophecy. When Judah told him that Jacob said, "You know that my wife bore me two sons. One has left me and I presumed: Alas, he has surely been torn to pieces, for I have not seen him

since!" -- it was then that Joseph realized that Jacob had lost the Divine spirit.

The Talmud says, "The righteous are considered alive even after their death, whereas the wicked are considered dead even when they live" (Berachos 18a). The Torah considers the essence of human life to be spirituality rather than biology. Animals, too, breathe, look for food, seek shelter, reproduce and care for their young. Some show a degree of intelligence. Man is more than just an animal with greater intelligence. Man is a creature that can be master of his biology rather than a slave to it. A human being without spirituality is nothing more than an animal with intellect. He lives biologically, but is spiritually dead.

When Joseph asked the brothers, "Is my father still alive?" -- he was not asking if he was physically alive, but if he was spiritually alive. When Jacob found out that Joseph was alive he was spiritually revived! *Based on Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

The Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (45:28), "Yisrael said, 'How great! My son Yosef still lives!'" -- Yaakov said, "How great is the strength of my son Yosef! How many troubles caught-up with him, yet he remained righteous, unlike me [Yaakov] who sinned by saying (in the words of Yeshayah 40:27), 'My way is hidden from G-d' [i.e., G-d has hidden Himself and is not watching over me directly]. I am certain I will share in the reward about which it says (Tehilim 31:20), 'How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!'"

How did Yaakov know that Yosef had remained strong in his faith during all of his years in Egypt? Also, why did Yaakov expect to be rewarded for Yosef's faith? R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (Yerushalayim; 1843-1917) explains: Commentaries ask: Why didn't Yosef write to his father during the 22 years that Yosef was in Egypt and let Yaakov know that he was alive? The answer is that Yosef did not write because he understood that what was happening to him was part of a bigger plan. He may not have understood the exact meaning of events, but he recognized that he would be interfering with history by contacting Yaakov. Yaakov now understood Yosef's thinking and recognized that Yosef's decision required tremendous faith and a strong belief that Hashem is directing history. According to the midrash, Yaakov's own faith had not remained as strong.

In Olam Haba, one can receive reward in two ways, R' Yadler writes: either for his own meritorious actions, or for those of his children and students. The latter is what the verse refers to when it says, "How

abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!" Unlike the reward for a person's own deeds, which is finite (because he stops earning reward when he dies), the reward that a person earns for being a positive influence on others is infinite (and therefore "hidden"), for he continues to earn it as long as his positive influence continues to bear fruit. (Tiferet Zion)

"They took their livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt..." (46:6)

Rashi z"l comments: But all that Yaakov had gotten in Padan Aram he gave to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah. He said, "The possessions I obtained outside Eretz Yisrael are of no value to me."

The midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta (ch.19) relates that Yaakov and Esav divided the worlds between them--Esav took this world, and Yaakov took the World-to-Come. Later, when Esav saw that Yaakov had amassed a fortune while living with Lavan, Esav asked Yaakov, "What right do you have to enjoy this world?" Yaakov's answer (found in the midrash) has been given several interpretations. According to some, Yaakov answered that his fortune was a reward for his mitzvah observance and was not covered by their deal. Others explain that Yaakov answered that their deal permitted him to have what he needed to live. In any event, Rashi teaches that Yaakov then turned over those possessions to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah.

R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes: However Yaakov's answer is interpreted, that "excuse" is necessary only regarding belongings from outside of Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael is Hashem's portion, and we are His flock, so Yaakov was entitled to the wealth of Eretz Yisrael. This is why Yaakov divested himself of all the belongings he had amassed in Lavan's house and turned them over to Esav. He kept for himself only those belongings he had amassed in Eretz Yisrael. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pninei Rav Chaim Palagi p.381) ©2014 S. Katz & torah.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

Yosef sent gifts to his father upon wagons (agalos). When Yaakov saw the wagons, his spirit was rejuvenated because he was convinced that Yosef was still alive. Rashi cites the Medrash that by sending wagons (agalos), Yosef was sending a signal to Yaakov that he remembered the last thing they studied together before being separated. They had been studying the laws of the decapitated calf (Eglah

Arufah). (The term eglah [calf] has the same root as the word agalos [wagons].) The law of Eglah Arufah is that if a person leaves a city and is subsequently found dead, the elders of the closest city need to bring an atonement known as the Eglah Arufah, because it involves decapitating a calf.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos elaborate upon Rashi's comment. The Daas Zekeinim explain that when Yaakov sent Yosef on his mission (to look for his brothers) Yaakov accompanied Yosef part of the way. The Daas Zekeinim derive this from use in the narrative of the word "Vayishlacheihu" [and he sent him] [Bereshis 37:14]. The Daas Zekeinim say that throughout the Torah, the word Vayishlacheihu does not merely mean "he sent him"; rather it means "he escorted him."

When Yosef's father started accompanying him, write the Daas Zekeinim, Yosef urged him to go back home. At that point, Yaakov told Yosef that he wanted to teach him the Torah value of "levayah" [escorting someone on the road], which is learned from the law of Eglah Arufah. (This is by virtue of the fact that the Elders of the city need to state that they do not have blood on their hands because they did not refuse to escort the dead person on his journey.) The implication of the statement of the Elders in the procedure of Eglah Arufah is that someone who neglects to provide escort on the road is guilty of spilling innocent blood.

Why is levayah [escort] so important? The Maharal explains that the escort shows the person being escorted "you are still a part of us; you are not alone; you are still part of a community." As part of the community, the person still has the merit of the community and in this merit he should be confident that he will be protected on his journey. When one is "on his own," accidents can happen and thus the Elders of a community who let someone go off totally on his own retain a responsibility for what happens to him.

Yosef understood that Yaakov was teaching him much more than just the law of levayah. Implicit in Yaakov's message and implicit in the mitzvah of levayah is that one must care about his fellow Jew and look for opportunities to give him chizuk [strength]. This was the last message Yosef heard from his father before their separation and this is the message Yosef carried with himself for the next 20 years: The importance of worrying about one's fellow man and trying to strengthen him.

If we look back at the entire story of what happened to Yosef in Egypt, we see a pattern in his behavior throughout the narrative. To put it in very mundane terms (not really appropriate for Yosef HaTzadik), Yosef was always a 'nice guy.' Everything turned out for Yosef's good because he was a 'nice guy'. He was thrown into the dungeon. There he met the Wine Butler and the Baker. We know the story. He

interprets their dreams and as a result of that he is recommended to Pharaoh and ultimately becomes the Viceroy of Egypt. But how does it all start? It starts with Yosef being a 'nice guy.' Yosef saw them one morning and asked them "Why are you in such a bad mood?"

How many people sitting in a dungeon would have that attitude? Here are two Egyptians who probably would mistreat Yosef because he was a "lowly Jew" and Yosef was still genuinely concerned that they seemed to be upset. Yosef wanted to know what was bothering them and see if he could in any way put their minds at ease. Because of that kindness, everything turned around for Yosef. This was Yosef's attitude throughout his entire sojourn in Egypt. He was always worrying about the other person. This saved him.

When the brothers finally learned the identity of the Viceroy of Egypt and they were petrified of him, what was Yosef's reaction? "It is not your fault! The Master of the Universe sent me here. You do not need to worry! I was sent here to provide salvation from the famine." Yosef did not need to say that. He could have let them stew in their guilt. Why did he need to say that? Yosef said it because this is what he learned from his father: Be a nice person, strengthen your fellow man and care for him.

The Baal HaTurim interprets the pasuk "Al Tirgazu b'Derech" [Bereshis 45:24] to mean that Yosef told his brothers not to trespass on the way home. He warned them not to take short cuts through other people's property and rely on the fact that they were the brothers of the Viceroy of the country who had special perks. Yosef was constantly worried about doing the right thing and about not hurting another person.

This is the Torah lesson Yosef learned from Yaakov when they last saw each other. This is what saved him. Yaakov understands this message when he sees the 'Agalos'. Yosef is 'telegraphing' the message: "Father, do you know why I survived these past 20 years? It is because I never forgot the lesson of 'Eglah Arufah.'" © 2014 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd G-d said to Israel in a night vision, 'do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will turn you into a great nation there; I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes' (B'reishis 46:3-4). Obviously, even after hearing that Yosef was a ruler over Egypt, Yaakov was concerned about going down to see him. He therefore brought offerings to G-d in B'er Sheva, (near) where G-d had told Yitzchok not to go down to Egypt even though there was a famine in Canaan (26:2), hoping to receive a divine message either that it was okay for him to go to Egypt or that he shouldn't. G-d responded by telling him that he should go, adding that "Yosef will place his hand on your

eyes." What was G-d telling Yaakov by adding these words? Was it that integral to alleviating Yaakov's concerns about leaving Canaan and going to Egypt? What do these words even mean?

There are two basic approaches among the commentators regarding what "putting his hand on your eyes" means. Some (e.g. Rashbam, B'chor Shor) say the expression refers to Yosef taking care of all of Yaakov's needs. However, as the Netziv points out, Yosef's message to Yaakov explicitly included taking care of him and supporting him (45:11), so there doesn't seem to be a need for G-d to reassure Yaakov about this. S'fornu takes the expression more literally; Yaakov won't need to keep his eyes "open" in order to make sure that he and his family will be properly supported, as Yosef will take care of everything, thereby freeing Yaakov from having to associate with anyone or anything Egyptian, allowing him to focus solely on his spiritual growth. Shir M'on (Rav Shimon Sofer, the son of the K'sav Sofer/grandson of the Chasam Sofer) extends it beyond being supported; Yosef will use his position (his "hand") to carry out Yaakov's vision (his "eyes"), providing everything needed to build a nation that will carry out the mission started by our forefathers.

Others (e.g. R' Saadya Gaon, Ibn Ezra) explain that when someone dies with his eyes open, a son will manually close them; G-d was telling Yaakov that Yosef will do this for him, i.e. be with him when his soul leaves his body. The question then becomes what significance this has, and why it was important for Yaakov to know this before going down to Egypt. Chizkuni says that by telling Yaakov that Yosef would be there when he dies, G-d was letting him know that Yosef would be able to use his position to ensure that Yaakov could be brought back to Canaan for burial (see B'reishis Rabbah 94:6). Or HaChayim suggests that telling Yaakov that Yosef would be there when he died was a polite way of saying that Yaakov must stay in Egypt for the rest of his life. Radak combines the two approaches (Yosef supporting Yaakov and being there when Yaakov died), and positions it as if Yaakov's concern was not whether Yosef would support him, but whether Yosef would be around to support the family even after Yaakov's death. By telling him that Yosef would still be there to "close his eyes," Yaakov could now be confident that Yosef would support them afterwards as well. Another way to combine the two approaches is by having the expression "Yosef will put his hand on your eyes" be one end of the time-frame of Yosef's support; G-d was telling Yaakov that Yosef will always take care of him, up to and including the time of Yaakov's death (similar to how some understand teaching the wise son about not eating after the Afikoman to mean teaching him all the laws of the Seder up to, and including, the very last one). But there may be more to the story.

The 22 years Yosef was missing (and

presumed dead) were very hard on Yaakov; it was only after he finally believed that Yosef really was still alive that his "spirit lived" (45:27). Even if things had stabilized in the years after Yaakov was shown Yosef's bloody robe, over the last two years things had worsened. First Shimon was taken prisoner by the Egyptian government while his sons were accused of being spies, then, despite being told how traumatic it would be for their elderly father, the Viceroy insisted that Binyamin be brought down to Egypt as well. What a wicked person the Egyptian Viceroy must be! Then Yaakov finds out that this "wicked Viceroy" is none other than his own long-lost son, Yosef! How could his own son put him through such an ordeal? If he was the Viceroy, why didn't he send word to his worried, bereaved father that he was alive and well (see page 2 of <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/miketz.pdf>)? Even if Yosef wanted to (chas v'shalom) get even with his brothers, how could he do those things to his father? Was Yosef upset at his father too? Did he blame his father for sending him to check on his brothers knowing that they hated him? Did Yosef become so assimilated in Egypt that he would try to torture the family that had turned on him? Was his insisting that Yaakov should move down to Egypt the end of this long ordeal, or just the next step of a plan to continue to torment him? We (with the possible exception of Rav Yoel Bin Nun) may know that Yosef didn't blame his father, and therefore would never do anything to hurt his father (or brothers) if there was another option, but how could Yaakov know?

It is therefore possible that Yaakov was not only concerned about leaving the Holy Land because of the famine (since his father was told not to), about staying connected with G-d while in Egypt, about eventually returning to Canaan, and about his family assimilating into the Egyptian culture (see Malbim), but he was also concerned that perhaps Yosef's "invitation" was just the next stage of his ongoing torment of the family he thought had abandoned him. Therefore, when G-d gave Yaakov permission to go see Yosef in Egypt, He also reassured him that He would be there with him, would bring him back, that his family would become a great (and distinct) nation there, and that Yosef would help him until the day he died. By telling him that "Yosef will put his hand on your eyes," G-d was reassuring him that this was not a trap, as Yosef would support him, now and forever, even after Yaakov's death. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer



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