

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Jacob was on his death-bed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died.

But the text begins with a strange semi-repetition: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel." (Gen. 49:1-2)

This seems to be saying the same thing twice, with one difference. In the first sentence, there is a reference to "what will happen to you in the days to come" (literally, "at the end of days"). This is missing from the second sentence.

Rashi, following the Talmud, (Rashi to Gen. 49:1; Pesachim 56a; Bereishit Rabbah 99:5) says that "Jacob wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine presence was removed from him." He tried to foresee the future but found he could not.

This is no minor detail. It is a fundamental feature of Jewish spirituality. We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We make the future by our choices. The script has not yet been written. The future is radically open.

This was a major difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. The Greeks believed in fate, moira, even blind fate, ananke. When the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would have a son who would kill him, he took every precaution to make sure it did not happen. When the child was born, Laius nailed him by his feet to a rock and left him to die. A passing shepherd found and saved him, and he was eventually raised by the king and queen of Corinth. Because his feet were permanently misshapen, he came to be known as Oedipus (the "swollen-footed").

The rest of the story is well known. Everything the oracle foresaw happened, and every act designed to avoid it actually helped bring it about. Once the oracle has been spoken and fate has been sealed, all attempts to avoid it are in vain. This cluster of ideas lies at the heart of one of the great Greek contributions to

civilization: tragedy.

Astonishingly, given the many centuries of Jewish suffering, biblical Hebrew has no word for tragedy. The word *ason* means "a mishap, a disaster, a calamity" but not tragedy in the classic sense. A tragedy is a drama with a sad outcome involving a hero destined to experience downfall or destruction through a character-flaw or a conflict with an overpowering force, such as fate. Judaism has no word for this, because we do not believe in fate as something blind, inevitable and inexorable. We are free. We can choose. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily said: "We must be free: we have no choice!"

Rarely is this more powerfully asserted than in the *Unetaneh tokef* prayer we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even after we have said that "On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed... who will live and who will die", we still go on to say, "But teshuvah, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree." There is no sentence against which we cannot appeal, no verdict we cannot mitigate by showing that we have repented and changed.

There is a classic example of this in Tanakh.

"In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, 'This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.' Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, 'Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: 'Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people: This is what the Lord, G-d of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.'" (2 Kings 20:1-5; Isaiah 38:1-5)

The prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah he would not recover, but he did. He lived for another fifteen years. G-d heard his prayer and granted him stay of execution. From this the Talmud infers, "Even if

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a sharp sword rests upon your neck, you should not desist from prayer." (Berakhot 10a) We pray for a good fate but we do not reconcile ourselves to fatalism.

Hence there is a fundamental difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. A prophet delivers not a prediction but a warning. He or she does not simply say, "This will happen", but rather, "This will happen unless you change." The prophet speaks to human freedom, not to the inevitability of fate.

I was once present at a gathering where Bernard Lewis, the great scholar of Islam, was asked to predict the outcome of a certain American foreign policy intervention. He gave a magnificent reply. "I am a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is pass." This was a profoundly Jewish answer.

In the twenty-first century we know much at a macro -- and micro-level. We look up and see a universe of a hundred billion galaxies each of a hundred billion stars. We look down and see a human body containing a hundred trillion cells, each with a double copy of the human genome, 3.1 billion letters long, enough if transcribed to fill a library of 5,000 books. But there remains one thing we do not know and will never know: What tomorrow will bring. The past, said L. P. Hartley, is a foreign country. But the future is an undiscovered one. That is why predictions so often fail.

That is the essential difference between nature and human nature. The ancient Mesopotamians could make accurate predictions about the movement of planets, yet even today, despite brain-scans and neuroscience, we are still not able to predict what people will do. Often, they take us by surprise.

The reason is that we are free. We choose, we make mistakes, we learn, we change, we grow. The failure at school becomes the winner of a Nobel Prize. The leader who disappointed, suddenly shows courage and wisdom in a crisis. The driven businessman has an intimation of mortality and decides to devote the rest of his life to helping the poor. Some of the most successful people I ever met were written off by their teachers at school and told they would never amount to

anything. We constantly defy predictions. This is something science has not yet explained and perhaps never will. Some believe freedom is an illusion. But it isn't. It's what makes us human.

We are free because we are not merely objects. We are subjects. We respond not just to physical events but to the way we perceive those events. We have minds, not just brains. We have thoughts, not just sensations. We react but we can also choose not to react. There is something about us that is irreducible to material, physical causes and effects.

The way our ancestors spoke about this remains true and profound. We are free because G-d is free and He made us in His image. That is what is meant by the three words G-d told Moses at the burning bush when he asked G-d for His name. G-d replied, Ehyeh asher Ehyeh. This is often translated as "I am what I am," but what it really means is, "I will be who and how I choose to be." I am the G-d of freedom. I cannot be predicted. Note that G-d says this at the start of Moses' mission to lead a people from slavery to freedom. He wanted the Israelites to become living testimony to the power of freedom.

Do not believe that the future is written. It isn't. There is no fate we cannot change, no prediction we cannot defy. We are not predestined to fail; neither are we pre-ordained to succeed. We do not predict the future, because we make the future: by our choices, our willpower, our persistence and our determination to survive.

The proof is the Jewish people itself. The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is engraved on the Merneptah stele, inscribed around 1225 BCE by Pharaoh Merneptah IV, Ramses II's successor. It reads: "Israel is laid waste, her seed is no more." It was, in short, an obituary. The Jewish people have been written off many times by their enemies, but they remains, after almost four millennia, still young and strong.

That is why, when Jacob wanted to tell his children what would happen to them in the future, the Divine spirit was taken away from him. Our children continue to surprise us, as we continue to surprise others. Made in the image of G-d, we are free. Sustained by the blessings of G-d, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

In a most uplifting and inspiring deathbed scene, grandfather Jacob/Israel peacefully takes leave of this world by blessing, evaluating and prophesying about every one of his sons, delineating the tribe that will emanate from each and foreshadowing the nation that will emerge from all of them together.

The petty rivalries have been laid aside,

the sturm und drang of exiles, wars, famines and inter-sibling savagery unto death have seemingly been forgotten; a divided family torn asunder by jealousies and ambitions is turning into a nascent nation, united-if only during this brief period-by their aged Patriarch, whose last words are presenting the blueprint for the Divine destiny set aside for the purveyors of the Abrahamic blessing.

For those of us who have been carefully following the adventures of this remarkable family, fraught with intrigue but always propelled onward by a Divine Spirit of "compassionate righteousness and moral justice," there is one jarring note in Grandfather Israel's will and testament of prophetic blessing: In each previous generation, the elder and the more aggressive son was rejected in favor of his younger and gentler brother (Isaac trumps Ishmael, Jacob trumps Esau) and in this latter instance, Rebekah demonstrates to Isaac, albeit by deception, that Jacob, if necessity warrants it, has the wherewithal to utilize the hands of Esau to get what is rightfully his. Hence Isaac eventually rejects Esau and gives both the physical double portion of the blessings and the more spiritual Messianic birthright legacy to Jacob.

As I have written in a previous commentary, the Malbim even explains that Isaac had initially intended to split the inheritance, giving the more material blessings to the more aggressive and materialistically oriented son, Esau, who would know how to train and equip an army, how to navigate the stock market and how to initiate start-up hi-tech projects, as it were, and to give the more spiritual, Messianic birthright legacy to the wholehearted, tent-dwelling Jacob, who could more naturally deal with that mission of Israel, to teach morality and peacefulness to all the nations of the earth.

Rebekah argued that in order for Torah ethics and spirituality to be enabled to "conquer" the world, if G-d was indeed to be enthroned on earth, then Torah would require a protective army and a strong financial base to make this a real possibility. And when Rebekah proved her point by "coating" Jacob with the external garb and might of Esau, Rebekah won the day and both blessings and birthright went to Jacob.

Now that it's Jacob's turn to bestow material blessings and Messianic birthright, I would have thought that he, of all people, based on his own experience, would have given both gifts to the same favored and beloved wise son of his old age, to the son of his most beloved Rachel, to Joseph. But no, Jacob does what his father Isaac had thought to do initially: He creates a division between the physical blessings and the spiritual birthright. He bequeaths the blessings of heavenly rain and earthly produce, innumerable seed and a double tribal portion of land, and even the mighty bow of vanquishing warfare upon the financially adept Grand Vizier, Joseph (Gen. 48:22- 49:26) and he

awards dominion over the family, the majestic and spiritual birthright of King Messiah, the recipient of fraternal fealty as well as peaceful homage from the ingathering of all of the nations, to the ba'al teshuva (penitent) Judah. Why does Jacob revert to the concept of Isaac rather than to that of Rebekah, the mother who so adored him? You will remember that the victory of Rebekah over Isaac may have been short-lived. Jacob was plagued by his deception of his father until his dying day. Almost from the moment he left his father's house for Laban-land, his mother's brother substituted his elder daughter for her younger sister under the marriage canopy with the prescient words, "It is not the practice in our place to give the younger before the elder," and not only his ten sons but even his beloved Joseph deceived him-the ten brothers with the bloody coat and Joseph with his garb of Grand Vizier.

Jacob understands only too well that the bearer of the righteous legacy of Abraham dare not descend into deception; and so only when he succeeds in disgorging the Esau from within himself, the unfortunate result of twenty-two years with Laban, will he be empowered with the name Yisra-El, purveyor of the G-d of righteousness (Yashar-El).

Moreover, when the head of a family must decide upon who is to be the real continuator of his legacy, he must choose the individual child who most represents the major ideals and goals to which the family is dedicated.

However, when one is about to form a nation, a consortium of twelve (or thirteen) tribes which will comprise the peoplehood of Israel, the goal becomes "e pluribus unum," a united vision which emerges from joining together multiple strengths and different ideas; not a conformity but rather a cultural pluralism which combines together and unites behind a commitment to the ideal of morality and peace.

In such a situation, no brother is to be rejected unless he will do damage to the ultimate vision; there is room for many leaders, each with his particular gift and emphasis, as long as they all stand behind a G-d who demands compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Since acceptance of the eventual goal depends upon the ability of Israel and the nations of the world to repent, to return to G-d in Heaven, on both counts, Grandfather Jacob/Israel chose Judah, the consummate ba'al teshuva and the unifier of the family, to receive the prize legacy of Messianic leadership.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The conclusion of the book of Bereshith reaches its climax this week with the recording for us of the death of our father Yaakov and of Yosef. The era of the founders of our people ended in relative tranquility and contentment, albeit on foreign soil. It will

be a long and arduous journey for the descendants of Yaakov to return home to the Land of Israel.

A dark and forbidding era is about to begin but, though still in the future, it was foretold already many years earlier to our father Avraham. From the simple meaning of the words of the Torah, it is apparent that the family of Yaakov found themselves comfortable and well settled in their home in Goshen.

The promise of Yosef that the Lord would take them forth from Egypt was certainly remembered and passed on from one generation to the next. Nevertheless there was no sense of immediacy regarding this promise and its fulfillment, and the Jews would view Egypt as their home rather than the Land of Israel for a long time.

They hastened to return home after burying Yaakov in the Cave of Machpela, seeing Egypt as their home and the Land of Israel as a far distant goal and dream that would somehow eventually be realized but that had no immediate bearing on their day-to-day living.

This attitude remained constant throughout the long history of the Jewish people and of its various exiles, in Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Europe and today the entire world, outposts that have hosted and still host the Jewish people in our far-flung diaspora. The Jewish people were never in a hurry to leave any of these places and to return to the Land of Israel. This still seems to be the case in our time as well.

It is difficult to understand why the holy family of Yaakov seems so passive and unresponsive in relation to the Land of Israel. There are commentators who state that they were aware of the heavenly decree that they would have to be strangers in a strange land for many centuries and that they accepted their lot and decided to make the best of it under the circumstances.

However, as Maimonides points out regarding the Egyptian enslavement of the Jewish people, Egypt was not preordained to be the oppressor and enslaver of Israel. And, it was also apparently not preordained that those early generations of Jews living in Egypt were to fulfill the vision of Avraham to be strangers and slaves in a land that did not belong to them.

Apparently according to Maimonides the Egyptians had a choice as to whether to enslave the Jews, and the Jews before their enslavement occurred had an equal choice of leaving Egypt and returning to their ancestral home in the Land of Israel.

However we will deal with this baffling issue, there is no question that this represents a template for all later Jewish exiles and for Diaspora Jewry in all times and places. Apparently only tragedy moves the Jewish people...and throughout our history tragedies abound. Let us hope that somehow history does not repeat itself in our time as well. ©2015 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

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd the days of Yaakov, the years of his life, were seven years and one hundred and forty years" (B'reishis 47:28). Yaakov Avinu had the shortest life of our three Patriarchs, 147 years, whereas his father, Yitzchok, lived for 180 years (35:28), and his grandfather Avraham lived for 175 years (25:7). Our sages, of blessed memory, teach us that all three were supposed to live 180 years, but Avraham died five years early so that he wouldn't see the wickedness of Eisav (see Rashi on 25:30 and B'reishis Rabbah 63:12) and Yaakov died 33 years early, one year for every word said to explain to Pharaoh why he looked so old, when he described his years as "few and unpleasant" (see Tosfos on 47:9 and Torah Sh'laima 47:23).

When the years of Avraham's life are given, the Torah uses two words that aren't used by anyone else except for Adam (5:5), that these are the years "that [he] lived." Rabbi Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (Rinas Yitzchok II, on 47:28) quotes Rav Chaim Volozhin, z"l (see also Or Hachayim on 25:7), who says that these words appear only by Adam and Avraham because they didn't live out their full years; Adam was supposed to live 1,000 years, but gave 70 of his years to King David (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:12), who would have otherwise died at birth (Zohar I 91b, quoted in Otzar Ishay HaTanach), and Avraham was supposed to live for 180 years but died five years earlier. Rav Sorotzkin then asks why, if the words "that [he] lived]" are used to describe how long someone who didn't live out their full years actually lived, aren't they also used regarding how many years Yaakov lived, since he died 33 years earlier than he was supposed to. This question is also applied to Yosef, who lived for 110 years (50:26), since he was supposed to live till 120 but lived 10 years less - either because he didn't protest his father being referred to as his slave (see Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 39), because being a leader took its toll (see B'rachos 55a/Soteh 13b), or because he embalmed his father (see B'reishis Rabbah 100:3). [The question is left unanswered.]

As Or HaChaim points out (25:7), the words "that [he] lived" are added when a person didn't live the full amount of years he was supposed to, because he only lived this many years, not the amount of years that were originally given to him. However, there are many factors involved in the number of years a person is supposed to live, including maintaining one's health (as doing things that harm the body will negatively impact how long a person will live, just as medical intervention when there is a health issue can extend life expectancy) and not sinning (as sin can bring about a decree that shortens life, just as being constantly

connected to G-d can protect a person who would have otherwise been adversely affected by natural phenomenon or the actions of others). When one of these things impacts how long a person lives, although it does shorten (or lengthen) the amount of years the person will live (compared to how long he or she would have otherwise lived), it cannot be said that they should have lived longer, as their actions changed the circumstances so that this is now precisely how long the person should have lived.

After Yaakov's, and Yosef's, actions caused the number of years they lived to be fewer than they otherwise would have been, since it was now precisely how long they should have lived, adding the words "that [he] lived" would not be appropriate. Avraham, on the other hand, as well as Adam, based on these types of factors, should have still lived their full lives, 180 years for Avraham and 1,000 years for Adam; there was nothing inherent in their actions that changed the amount of years they should have lived. True, it was for Avraham's benefit that he didn't see Eisav's wickedness, but as far as his own health and righteousness, he should have lived his full 180 years. Similarly, even though Adam willingly gave up 70 years of his life so that Dovid could live (and the "daled" in Adam is said to stand for "Dovid" because he was a reincarnation of Adam, with "Moshiach" being the "mem" for the same reason), Adam still deserved to live his full 1,000 years (and was healthy enough to do so). Therefore, for Avraham and Dovid, and only for them, when the number of years they lived is given, the words "that [he] lived" are included. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

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. ©2015 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (Gen. 48:7).

Rashi says that Jacob was explaining to Joseph why he did not bury Rachel in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, though he was requesting that he be buried there. Jacob said, "It was not because the distance to Hebron was long, because Bethlehem is near Hebron. It was also not because of bad weather

that I did not take her to Hebron, because it was the dry season. I buried her there because G-d instructed me to do so, so that when Jews would be driven into exile, they could pass her grave site and beseech her to intercede with G-d on their behalf."

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz asks, "Why all this lengthy explanation? Had Jacob simply said, 'G-d told me to do so,' Joseph would have believed him." Rabbi Shmulevitz derives an important lesson from this: If we have a personal reason and a strong interest in doing something, we may convince ourselves that it is the will of G-d that we do so. We are very clever in rationalizing and deceiving ourselves. Only when we have no personal gain, when it is not for our comfort or convenience, can we be sure that it is indeed G-d's will and not our own.

How cautious we must be not to deceive ourselves about our motivation for our actions. Not only must we be careful not to justify a wrong action, but we must also make certain that the right things we do are for the right reason! *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Y a'akov called for his sons and said, 'Gather and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End-of-Days.'" (Bereishis 49:1) When we look at history in the brother's time and history in our day, it seems as if theirs took place on a different planet than ours, in another solar system altogether. Our reality is just so completely different than their reality was, which is why we tend to disassociate ourselves from it. Their story just seems like good fiction to us.

Actually, they're identical. Shocking, eh? It's like someone saying about fraternal twins, "Identical, right?" when they really look and act so different from one another. The only thing about them that is identical as far as you can see is their birthdate!

Then, to your utter amazement and surprise, the mask comes off one of them, revealing a face that looks just like the other. Then the other stops with a fake accent, and all of a sudden he sounds just like his brother. After that, they explain how they were acting different from one to appear different, but now that the charade is over they can be themselves, which is just like each other.

The same thing happened with Yosef and his brothers. When they first stood before Yosef, he was dressed and more than likely "decorated" like the rest of Egyptian royalty. If what we see on cave walls is accurate, then he would have looked very different than his brothers at that time.

We certainly know he acted very different from them. They were humbled by that time and acted contritely before Yosef. He on the other hand was

unduly harsh and accusatory. He did such a good job that they believed him all the way to the end, not suspecting once that it was him. As far as they were concerned, he was the farthest thing from them.

Then he revealed himself. The mask came off, and his demeanor changed. Within a second, he and his brothers were the same again, to the brothers' utter surprise. All of a sudden what had appeared to them to be so far from their reality was in fact the same as theirs.

History changes but man does not. He just develops more sophisticated means to do what he has always done: make life physically comfortable.

I know of couples who are happily married today, but only as a result of the persistence of one of the two. The other one said repeatedly that they did not think that the shidduch was relevant and refused to go out. Undeterred, the rejected party kept at it until finally, for one reason or another, the rejecting party agreed, perhaps just to put the final nail in the coffin.

It didn't happen that way though in the end. To the rejecting side's surprise, they actually took a liking to the rejected, and eventually were married. The persistent side never doubted the match. The side that did is grateful that the other side kept at it and never gave up. So much in life is never what it seems on the surface. That is why someone must look below the surface to see what is really going on.

For example, when Moshe Rabbeinu went down to Egypt and demanded the release of the Jewish people, Pharaoh balked. When Moshe Rabbeinu threatened Pharaoh in the Name of G-d, Pharaoh balked even more. He just didn't believe in G-d, at least not the G-d of the Jewish people, or at least not the kind of G-d that interferes with human history.

Is it any different when Professor Steven Hawking claims that science explains Creation better than the Bible? Is it different when Richard Dawkins pushes Evolution while claiming to be an atheist? There was a battle between religion and the "science" of that time, and there is a battle between religion and the science of our time.

One may argue and say that the two arguments cannot be compared. Hawking et al are geniuses who have used extreme intelligence and modern physics to come to their conclusion. Pharaoh fought against G-d in his time out of ignorance and because of superstition. His conclusion may have been ahead of its time, but it was for the wrong reason.

Or so agnostics and atheists would like to believe. The basic belief is, knowledge is accumulative, so whatever the Egyptians knew in their time was the most basic of basics. Some people try to read mystery into some of their greatest accomplishments, but for the most part we do not have much respect for their understanding of how the world actually works.

Let's break it down and see where the real

myth is. The Egyptians may have had a far more sophisticated understanding of the world than we think, but for the sake of this discussion, it really doesn't matter. What counts is that they had a model that made sense out of reality, and believed in it wholeheartedly.

In some instances they may have actually been scientifically correct. Where they weren't, they had explanations that worked for them, especially since they apparently knew how to perform miracles via sorcery, which is basically technological advancement without the math to make it work. If a person went back just 200 years in time with a cell phone and used it, he would be burned at the stake as a witch.

G-d, on the other hand, was the true Force behind everything, which Moshe Rabbeinu tried to explain to Pharaoh. G-d, however, did not fit into the Egyptian model, especially because He made demands that were not consistent with the Egyptian approach to life. Acceptance of G-d implied moral responsibility and a spiritually responsible lifestyle, and the Egyptians, rejecting that, rejected G-d.

Scientists today cannot say with 100 percent certainty that their version of Creation is correct. They can only say that it is the best model they have thus far come up with to explain reality as THEY see it, which in itself is very limiting. Just because a person cannot see around a corner does not mean around the corner does not exist, or that it does not impact the reality they are able to see.

If there are parts of reality that they are not seeing, for one reason or another, it means that their explanation of existence is only partly true, if at all. This is because there are other aspects of existence that may change their equations when factored into the big picture. Science is constantly being revised to account for newly discovered facets of existence. It is becoming increasingly more accurate, but is not yet necessarily accurate enough.

One inherent problem with science is a couple of assumptions it has made, perhaps for convenience sake. It assumes firstly that all aspects of the equation to explain existence are physical. Based upon this assumption, many scientists tend to believe, it should be possible to find the missing components of their equation in the physical world, with physical means.

What if, though, at some point, or on some level, the "components" stop being physical? What if science hits a proverbial wall at some point because of its assumption? What are the options at that point, and what determines the direction of the scientist?

It seems that there are two options. The first is popular with secularists and those who do not like the idea of an objective morality that is binding on mankind: Seeing is believing, so if we can't see it we don't have to believe in it. The second option is to accept the fact that there is more to reality than what the physical eye can see, and that believing also leads to seeing. It's the

old Jews versus the Greeks thing again, which was the old Jews versus the Egyptians thing again.

As it says in Tehillim, some lights can only be seen with G-d's light (Tehillim 36:10). Kabbalah explains that this amounts to "believing is seeing," because the key light for seeing ALL of truth, not just a part of it, is only available to people who are spiritually responsible. This idea is covered in a book called "Chanukah Lite." Torah is a tree of life, but only for those who "grasp" it (Mishlei 3:18), that is, who delve into it and make a sincere effort to understand its truth.

It's a standoff, just like it was back in Egypt. The science side is stubborn and holds fast to its non-G-d approach because it needs G-d to not exist to keep it alive. Inject G-d into the picture and it undermines the work of many scientists and their genius. It's not easy being bright and finding out that you were wrong about the truth, or only partially right. Just ask Yosef's brothers, who went completely speechless when he revealed himself to them.

The Yes-G-d side is stubborn because it knows the truth. Some religions have evolved over time, but not Torah Judaism. It started with the big picture and has struggled to maintain it, not build one after the fact. Its righteous adherents have literally seen the light, the "Hidden Light" of Creation because they have merited to do so. It has only further "confirmed" that which was already confirmed.

The problem is, though this something you can talk about with a non-believer, it is not something you can share with him. Until a person is willing to open himself up to G-d's truth he will remain on the other side of the looking glass, from a side that is blurry at best. Then he will "merit" to be a stumbling block for himself and others, because G-d works measure-for-measure, allowing a person to hang himself with the noose he himself ties.

Of course, the disbeliever thinks that the believer is bluffing, delusional, or both. Thinking that knowledge and wisdom are the same thing, he assumes that people less intelligent than himself cannot possibly know more than him about life. He is convinced that their difference of opinion is the result of ignorance, not intelligence. They refuse to consider otherwise.

It was true in Yosef's time.

It was true in Moshe's time.

It was true in the time of the Chashmonaim.

It will be true in Moshiach's time as well.

Each time, we were unable to convince the "other side" of its error in thinking. Each time, we could not win the debate because the other side was not in a position intellectually, and certainly not spiritually, to hear what they were missing. Each time, it remained a stand-off.

That is, until G-d Himself stepped in. Once He did, then the truth became clear to everyone, albeit too

late. Yosef's brothers suffered extreme humiliation and were never the same again. Pharaoh lost everything by the time the Jewish people finally went free. The Greeks were defeated and were soon replaced by the Romans.

As for our generation, we are still waiting for the debate to end. We are still waiting for an end to the stand-off between the believers and disbelievers. We're not going to do it on our own, that's for sure. Only G-d, through some incredible revelation, can finally show the world the other dimension they have discounted until now.

What will it be?

When will it happen?

More importantly, when such a Divine revelation finally does occur, will it be the last one the non-believers will be able to see? If the past is a sign of what will come, it would be wise for them to open their minds and hearts, at least for a moment, just to examine what it is they do not believe in. Then, perhaps, they will merit to walk the path that has a future. ©2015 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Hope in a Box

"**A**nd Yosef died at the age of one hundred and ten years and they put him in a coffin in Egypt." (Genesis 50:26) Thus ends the Book of Genesis. With those words the entire congregation rises in unison and shouts, "Chazak! Chazak! V'nischazek!" Be strong! Be strong! And may we all be strengthened!

It is troubling. First, Sefer Braishis (Genesis) ends in a state of limbo. Yosef is not even buried; he lies dormant in a box through the entire ensuing exile. He asks his children to remember him and eventually bury his bones with them upon their exodus. Why does he not seek immediate burial in Canaan like his father Yaakov?

Second, the entire juxtaposition seems inappropriate. After we end Sefer Braishis and declare that "Yosef was put in a box in Egypt," we all shout almost as in a cheer, "Be Strong and be strengthened." Are those somber words a proper lead-in to the shouts of Chazak?

Would it not have been more fitting to end the book of Genesis with the passing of Jacob, his burial in Israel, and the reconciliation of Yosef and his brothers? That would have been a morally uplifting ending and would have left the congregation with a sense of closure.

Yet, it seems that there is a definitive purpose in ending Genesis with Yosef's state of limbo. What is it?

Alexander the Great (356-322 B.C.E.), king of Macedonia, and ruler of most of the civilized world, died at a young age. Before he embarked on his conquest of

Asia, he inquired into the welfare and stability of his loyal followers, lest their dependents fall destitute during the long battle. After assessing their needs he disbursed nearly all his royal resources amongst his faithful. His friend General Perdiccas was surprised. "What have you reserved for yourself?" he asked the mighty ruler.

"Hope," answered the king. "There is always hope."

"In that case," replied his followers, "we who share in your labor shall share in your hope."

With that they refused the wealth that Alexander allotted them.

Perhaps there is great meaning behind the Torah's abrupt conclusion leaving a congregation to ponder as they hear the words "and he was put in a box in Egypt" juxtaposed with shouts of rejuvenation.

Yosef's quest was to leave this world with more than memories. He wanted to declare to his survivors that he, too, would not find his final rest during their tenure of suffering. Yosef, the first of the sons of Yaakov to die in a foreign land, understood that with his passing, the long exile would slowly emerge. The children of Jacob would slowly and painfully transform from saviors to visitors, and then from visitors to strangers. Finally they would be considered by their hosts as intruders worthy of enslavement. But Yosef also knew that one day the exile would end and that his people would once again be free. By remaining in a box, Yosef concurrently declared his message of hope and solidarity to the multitudes that simultaneously awaited his final burial and their redemption. Silently, in an unburied box, he waited with them as the echoes of his pact rang in their memories. "When G-d will indeed remember you, then you must bring my bones up with you."

It is a message for all generations. It is a message for all times. When we see the bones of Yosef, unburied and in a box—"we must not see a box of bones—see the hope that lies therein." We see the hope and faith that the patriarch declared to his children. "Do not bury me now, as you surely will be remembered one day. My hope is your hope."

And as the congregation finishes the Braishis on that unfinished note, they stand up and shout in unison, "Chazak! Chazak! V'nischazek!" Be strong! Be strong! May we all be strengthened!" For one day we will all be free. © 1996 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

