

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**J**oseph forgives. That, as I have argued before, was a turning point in history. For this was the first recorded act of forgiveness in literature.

It is important here to make a key distinction between forgiveness, which is characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and the appeasement of anger, which is a human universal. People are constantly harming others, who then become angry, indignant and "disrespected." If the offender does nothing to turn away their wrath, they will take revenge.

Revenge is one way of restoring the social order, but it is a very costly and dangerous one because it can lead to a circle of retaliation that has no natural stopping point, (Rene Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*, argues that religion was born in the attempt to find a way to stop cycles of retaliation and revenge.) One of my family offends one of your family (think of Montagues and Capulets, or Corleones and Tattaglias), so one of your family takes revenge, which one of my family must retaliate for the sake of family honour, and so it goes, sometimes for generations. The cost is often so great that it is in everyone's interest to find a way of stopping the cycle. That is universal. It exists in every human group, and some non-human ones as well. (See Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among primates*, Harvard University Press, 1989.)

The general way of bringing this kind of conflict to an end is what the ancient Greeks called *sungnome*, often translated as "forgiveness," but which actually -- as David Konstan shows in his masterly study, *Before Forgiveness* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) -- means something like pardon, appeasement, a willingness to make allowances, or accept an excuse, or grant an indulgence. The end result is that the victim forgoes revenge. The offender does not atone. Instead he or she makes some kind of plea in mitigation: I couldn't help it; it wasn't that bad; it's human nature; I was carried away. In addition the offender must show,

in words or body language, some form of humility or submission.

One classic example in the Torah is Jacob's conduct toward Esau when they meet again after more than twenty years, during which time Jacob had been away in the home of Laban. He knew that Esau felt wronged by him and had declared his intention to take revenge after their father Isaac had died. That is why Jacob fled in the first place. When they meet again, Jacob does not mention the earlier incident. But he does attempt to appease Esau by sending him an enormous gift of livestock, and by abasing himself, bowing down to him seven times, and calling him "my lord," and himself "your servant."

(Note that the word Jacob uses to himself (Gen. 32:21) comes from the verb k-p-r which will later be used in Leviticus to mean atonement, and is the source of the phrase Yom Kippur. It means literally to "cover over." It is what Noah does when he covers the ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). It also means a ransom (Num. 35:32) such as might be paid to compensate a family for the murder of one of its members, something forbidden in Jewish law.)

For his part, Esau does not mention the earlier episode, whether because he had forgotten it, or it no longer rankled with him, or because he was mollified by Jacob's self-abasement. This was not remorse and forgiveness, but submission and appeasement.

What Joseph does toward his brothers is different. When he first reveals himself to them, he says, "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Gen. 45:5). This sounds like forgiveness, but, as this week's parsha makes clear, it is not necessarily so. The word "forgiveness" is not used. And the brothers may well have assumed that, as in the case of Esau, Joseph intended to take revenge but not during the lifetime of their father. That is what provokes the drama at the end of this week's parsha: "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph

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holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?' So they sent word to Joseph, saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: Please forgive [sa] your brothers' wrong and the sin they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.'" (Gen. 50:15-17)

This was Joseph's response: "Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." (Gen. 50:19-21)

This is forgiveness. Joseph does not use the word, but he makes it clear that he foregoes all thought of revenge. What is happening here and why did it not happen in other cultures? This is one of the most fascinating features of Judaism, and why it eventually made such a difference to the world.

Note what has to happen for forgiveness to be born. First, Joseph engages in an elaborate plan, hiding his identity, to make sure the brothers were capable of remorse and atonement. This happens on their first encounter in Egypt, when he accuses them of being spies, and they say in his presence -- not knowing that he could understand them -- "Surely we are guilty 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 upon us" (Gen. 42:21). They know they have done wrong. They acknowledge their guilt.

Second, Joseph arranges a trial that will test whether Judah., the brother who proposed selling him into slavery in the first place, is indeed a changed person. He has Benjamin brought before him on a false charge, and is about take him as his slave when Judah intervenes and offers to become a slave in his place so that Benjamin can go free. This is what the sages and Maimonides defined as complete repentance, that is, you have so changed that you are now a different person. These two elements tell us what has changed in the brothers so that they, the wrongdoers, can be forgiven.

There is a change in Joseph too, as we noted in last week's Covenant and Conversation. He has reframed his life, so that the entire story of his relationship with his brothers has now become utterly secondary to the drama of Divine providence that is still unfolding. As he explains: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." This is what allows the victim, Joseph, to forgive.

These, though, are details. What is absolutely fundamental is that Judaism represents, for the first time in history, a morality of guilt rather than shame. In the past we've explored some of the elements that made it possible. Earlier this year we spoke of the difference between tradition-directed cultures and -- what the call to Abraham initiates -- inner-directed ones. Tradition-directed individuals, when they break the rules, feel shame. Inner-directed personalities feel guilt.

We also spoke about the difference between cultures of the eye and of the ear. Visual cultures are almost always shame cultures. Shame is what you feel when you imagine other people seeing what you are doing. The first instinct when you feel shame is to try to hide or to wish you were invisible. (That is what, I suggest, was at stake in the Garden of Eden, which is all about shame and hiding. Adam and Eve followed their eyes rather than their ears.) In cultures of hearing, however, morality is represented by an inner voice, the voice of guilt that you cannot hide from even if you are invisible to the world.

The key difference between the two is that in shame cultures, wrongdoing is like a stain on the person. Hence the only way to be rehabilitated is to have the stain covered up somehow (the meaning, as we noted, of the verb k-p-r). You do this by placating the victim of your wrong so that in effect he "turns a blind eye" to what you did. His resentment, indignation and desire for revenge have been appeased.

In guilt cultures, however, there is a fundamental distinction between the person and his or her acts. It was the act that was wrong, not the person. That is what makes forgiveness possible. I forgive you because, when you admit you did wrong, express remorse and do all you can to make amends, especially when I see that, given the opportunity (as was Judah) to repeat the crime you do not do so because you have changed, then I see that you have distanced yourself from your deed. Forgiveness means I fundamentally reaffirm your worth as a person, despite the fact that we both know your act was wrong.

(Note that in certain cultures, forgiveness is not held to require remorse, atonement and the like. Maimonides himself says (Hilkhos Deot 6:9) that if you regard the person who wronged you as incapable of handling criticism, then you may forgive him unilaterally. Note however that this kind of forgiveness does not signal that you reaffirm the moral worth of the

person you forgive. To the contrary, you regard him as beneath contempt. Judaism seems always to have known this. The Christian theologian who understood it best was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who called it, "cheap grace.")

Forgiveness exists in righteousness-and-guilt cultures. It does not exist in honour-and-shame cultures like those of ancient Greece and pre-Christian Rome.

Contemporary culture in the West, often thought by secularists to be morally superior to the ethics of the Hebrew Bible, is in fact -- for good or bad - - a regression to pre-Christian Greece and Rome. That is why, nowadays, people who are found to have done wrong are publicly shamed. Examples are not necessary: they abound in every day's news. In a shame culture, the main thing to do is not to be found out, because once you are, there is no way back. There is no place in such a culture for forgiveness. At best you seek to appease. As in ancient Greece, the culprit argues, "I couldn't help it; it wasn't that bad; it's human nature; I was carried away." They undergo some ritual of self-abasement. Eventually they hope, not that people will forgive but that they will forget. This is an ugly kind of culture.

Which is why Judaism remains the eternal alternative. What matters is not outward appearances but the inner voice. And when we do wrong, as we all do, there is a way forward: to confess, express remorse, atone, make amends, and, like Judah, change. To know that however wrong our deeds, "the soul You gave me is pure," and that if we work hard enough on ourselves, we can be forgiven, is to inhabit a culture of grace and hope. And that is a life-changing idea. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

"**A**nd when the days of mourning for Jacob were over, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh saying, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, and he declared: I am dying. In my grave that I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me...'" [Gen. 50:4-5].

Why does the normally flashy, confident Grand Vizier of Egypt make such a meek request to Pharaoh to bury his father in his family's ancestral homeland? Does the number two figure in the most powerful nation on earth, who undoubtedly confers with the king on a daily basis, need an appointment to see the monarch?

Why is he forced to traverse through the usual hierarchy of gatekeepers through whom only junior staff and guests must pass? For that matter, why does the Torah even go to the trouble of reporting the process by

which Joseph makes this apologetic petition?

Rabbi Ovadia Seforno (16th Century Italy) explains that in this particular instance, court etiquette prevented Joseph from making his request personally of Pharaoh because he was dressed in mourning clothes (and was presumably in need of a haircut and shave). However, Jewish law dictates that whatever one has to do in order to properly bury one's dead is permissible. Joseph certainly could have made himself presentable had his external appearance posed a problem, especially since his request was to properly bury his father in the Land of Israel!

In contrast, Rabbi David Pardo (18th Century Italy, Sarajevo and Jerusalem), author of *Maskil l'David*, maintains that a careful reading of the verse indicates a change in Joseph's status. His sudden loss of access could well be a warning of new palace tremors that would eventually erupt into the enslavement of his descendants. Joseph seems to have been demoted.

I would like to suggest another explanation. Perhaps the obsequious manner in which Joseph must arrange to have his request brought before Pharaoh is not to shed light on a change in Joseph's political position, but rather to emphasize the delicate nature of this particular petition itself. In other words, it serves as a moment of truth for Joseph as well as for Jews of every generation. Permit me to explain.

Joseph has reached the top of the social ladder in Egypt. He speaks Egyptian, dresses as an Egyptian, is referred to by an Egyptian name (Tzafenat-Pane'ach), and is married to a native Egyptian. From slave to prime minister, Joseph has certainly lived out the great Egyptian dream. Now, however, he is forced to face the precariousness and vulnerability of his position.

Ordinarily a person wants to be buried in his own homeland, where his body will become part of the earth to which he feels most deeply connected. Indeed, in the ancient world, the most critical right of citizenship was the right of burial. Jacob wisely understands that Pharaoh expects Joseph to completely identify with Egypt, to bring up generations of faithful and committed Egyptians in return for all that his adopted country has given to him. But this is impossible for Jacob, and the patriarch hopes that it would also be impossible for his children and grandchildren.

True, they were in Egypt, but they were not of Egypt. They might contribute to Egyptian society and the economy, but they could never truly become Egyptians. Jacob understands that his burial in Canaan would be the greatest test of Joseph's career, and would define the character of his descendants forever. Hence, he makes his sons solemnly swear not to bury him in Egypt [ibid., 49:29-32].

Joseph, too, understands that Pharaoh would be shocked at the request, a petition expressing the Hebrew's rejection of the world's greatest superpower.

Indeed, it is such a difficult and sensitive matter that Joseph cannot face his patron, Pharaoh, directly with it.

At that moment, Joseph understands an even deeper truth: neither he nor his progeny will ever ultimately identify with Egypt. If he, his brothers, his children and grandchildren were to make the choice to live as Jews, with their own concepts of life and death, they would never be accepted and would likely be persecuted. It is this realization in the aftermath of Jacob's death that can be seen as the beginning of the slavery of the Israelites [Rashi to Gen. 47:28].

In Egypt, Joseph's kinsmen may have everything: Goshen Heights and Goshen Green, progeny and patrimony. But as long as they are determined to remain Jews – to live as Jews and to die as Jews – servitude and persecution are never far off. They may rejoice in their preferred Egyptian status, where "they took possession of it and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" [ibid., 47:27], but they can never pause to enjoy this good fortune.

The realization upon Jacob's death of the transient and illusory nature of their good fortune comes upon them inexorably and imperceptibly, as in the blink of an eye. Such is the ultimate fate of the Jewish People in every exile. The roller-coaster experience in Egypt, foretelling future exiles, teaches that we have just one true national home, Israel, where we can fully live the ideals of the Torah and serve as a model nation for all the peoples of the earth! ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Torah in this week's reading records for us the end of the Egypt of our patriarchs and matriarchs.

The era ends on a note of serenity, family harmony and bountiful success. The Jewish family is enjoying the best that the Egyptian civilization and economy could offer. However, nothing in human life that is physical is permanent.

In a century or more, all of this goodness and security will disappear, to be replaced by slavery, idolatry and the crushing of the Jewish spirit and body. Yaakov is aware through the divine spirit that has been restored to him that difficult times will come to visit his descendants. Yosef is also well aware that there are bad years ahead. In effect, he is reliving the interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh that catapulted him to greatness and power.

There will be a period of good years for his children and grandchildren in Egypt but they will be followed by years of persecution and slavery. So much so that the good years will be forgotten and only the bitter memories will remain and be etched in the Jewish psyche forever.

However, he promises his family that they will

be redeemed and restored to the national and spiritual greatness, and that when that happens they should remove his remains from Egypt and bring him home with them to the land of Israel. This poignant request marks the defining final moment of the era of our patriarchs and matriarchs. It becomes the symbol for all later generations... that no matter how dark the night of exile may be, eventually we will all return home to our promised land – even the bones of the dead will be brought back.

The Egyptians thought that they would hold the Jewish people in eternal slavery and that the bones of Joseph could be held as hostage to Jewish attempts to leave Egypt. They embalmed him, placed his remains in a lead casket and in true mafia style, sank it in the Nile River.

The Egyptians were not willing to let Joseph go, just as the Ukrainians today are not willing to let the remains of Rav Nachman of Breslov leave Uman. After all, without Uman there really is very little tourist industry active in today's Ukraine. How ironic it is that the Ukraine with its bloody history of anti-Semitism and Jewish persecution for century's, profits from the grave of a very Jewish leader and holy man! But I digress.

Joseph's interpretations of the dreams of Pharaoh are meant to give us an insight into the progression of Jewish history throughout the ages. Even when we forgot what our homeland looked like, when we felt like we wanted to go home, we always knew where that home was located. Even when others lived in our home we still believed that the bones of Joseph and those of his descendants would guide us to our true home.

This perhaps the greatest legacy that Jacob and Joseph have left us and for all future generations. Both Jacob and Joseph still live. ©2017 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah states: "And the days of Israel (Jacob) drew near to die; and he called his son Joseph, and said to him: 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, please... deal with me kindly and truly; bury me not in Egypt.'" (Genesis 47:29).

What does the phrase "kindly and truly" come to teach us?

Rashi enlightens us as to the meaning of "kindly and truly." Kindness which is shown to the dead is true kindness, for one who does chesed (kindness) for a dead person certainly does not look forward to any payment. When someone does something for another person so that the person will in turn do him favors, the

action cannot be considered true kindness. Rather, it is a form of bartering in which the merchandise is not objects, but favors.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained the concept of truth in regards to kindness (*chesed shel emes*) in the following manner: "People often do kindness because of emotions, without considering whether the kindness is a true kindness. Kindness with truth, however, is a love that does not forget what is essential when practicing *chesed*."

"Jacob knew quite certainly that Joseph would bury him with all possible splendor. But he said, 'With all the *chesed* do not forget truth.' Yaakov stressed his request not to be buried in Egypt. By this request was manifest that the homeland of the Jewish people is in Eretz Yisroel, the Land of Israel, although they had lived in Egypt 17 years."

Whenever we do an act of *chesed* for someone, we must make sure that it is spiritually beneficial as well as physically beneficial. *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**s Ya'akov (Jacob) blesses his children, he tells his eldest, Reuven, that kingship will not come from him as he forfeited the birthright when he had relations with Bilha, Ya'akov's wife/maidservant. (Genesis 49:4)

Shimon and Levi suffer a similar fate in that their blessing, too, is a disappointment. Their mistake was the destruction of the entire city of Shechem after the rape of Dinah. (Genesis 49:5-7)

What is striking is that during both of these incidents, Ya'akov remained virtually silent. In the Reuven story the Torah tells us that Ya'akov heard what had happened but the text indicates no reprimand from the patriarch. (Genesis 35:22)

In the Shechem story, Ya'akov tells Shimon and Levi that they had made him look bad because the inhabitants of the city could retaliate. This was only a mild rebuke on the part of Ya'akov. (Genesis 34:30)

Why does Ya'akov hold back and say nothing or little until the end of his life?

Perhaps Ya'akov's approach teaches us something about speech. On the one hand it is speech which makes us unique. Rabbi Yehuda Halevy in his *Kuzari* labels the human being as a *medaber*. Speaking is central to human relationships. As long as a couple for example, is speaking to each other even acrimoniously, the relationship is soluble. But if they are silent, unable to talk, trouble is at hand.

There are occasions when it is best not to speak, as saying something could destroy a relationship. Good judgment is needed to know when the timing is appropriate to reveal a deep hurt. But it

often takes great wisdom to know when it is best not to talk and not to reveal a deeper emotion.

It may be that Ya'akov does not speak as these incidents unfolded, fearful that whatever he would say could possibly ruin his relationship with his eldest children. Only years later, when the relationships were solid, was it the time right to speak out. Openness is often best displayed in a safe environment and silence can sometimes preserve relationships.

Silence also sometimes is a reaction, when words simply will not suffice. It is told of the Klausenberger Rebbe that after losing his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust that he gave the following *dvar Torah* at a *brit* (circumcision ceremony): He proclaimed that the words *be-damayich chayi*, by your bloods shall you live, the verse said twice in the *brit* ceremony, should be understood to mean by your silence you should live. The word *dam* can mean blood, but it also could come from the word *domem*, which means silence. There are times in our relationships, even in our relationship with God that it is best to remain silent, for words simply cannot express the profound pain that is sometimes felt in times of tragedy.

So, too, in the human encounter. The test of a relationship is one's ability to take off masks, open up and express one's deepest feelings. But there are occasions when one must hold back and not speak; silence should prevail. At times, silence is the pathway to saving a relationship. ©2017 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

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## The Coffin

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**"A**nd he placed him in a coffin in Egypt" (Genesis 50:26.) In ancient times people were buried in coffins of wood, stone, metal or clay. However in order to fulfill the Mitzvah "And you shall return to dust" (Genesis 3:19), either the bottom of the coffin would be removed or at least holes would be bored in the bottom or side thereby creating a direct connection to the earth.

These holes served an additional purpose by restricting the defilement (*tumaah*) from ascending. For the law is if there is a space of a *tefach* (8-10 centimeters) between the deceased and the coffin or there are holes in the side of the coffin, the coffin would not defile everything surrounding it.

Today in Israel, the deceased are buried without a coffin which fulfills more carefully the obligation to bury directly in the ground. Indeed many sages objected strenuously to people being buried in a closed coffin, though this is what is done in the

Diaspora as well as for the fallen soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces.

A coffin and any garments that a deceased is adorned in, is forbidden to be used in any way as well as any board or nails found at the Cemetery. This is done for fear that they originated from the deceased coffin that may have been exhumed. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

**RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN**

## Dying to Learn

In Parashat Vayechi we experience two significant deaths of leaders of the Jewish people. The last of the Avot, Yaakov, prepares for his death at the beginning of the parasha and Yosef prepares for his death at the end of the parasha. Their deaths present a contrast and parallel of these two great men. Both leaders prepare the family for their surmise and both make their families take an oath concerning their eternal rest. Circumstances cause these oaths to be divergent, and this divergence may help us to understand the greatness of these two men.

Yaakov understood the importance of being very precise in his words and deeds especially when dealing with the non-Jewish world. He had learned well from his trials and tribulations with Lavan. He understood that no matter what had been promised by anyone, there were factors which might interfere with that promise. Yaakov knew that Par'oh needed to appear to his people as a supreme being in order to maintain his aura and his power. Par'oh would understand that an oath taken by Yosef to his father in Hashem's Name could not be broken any more than an oath taken to Par'oh. The Midrash tells how Yosef had sworn an oath to Par'oh that he would not reveal that Par'oh could not speak Lashon Hakodesh (the Holy Hebrew language), which would have diminished Par'oh in the eyes of his people. If Par'oh forced Yosef to break his oath given in Hashem's Name, what hope could he have that Yosef would keep his oath to Par'oh? Yaakov understood this logic and therefore made Yosef swear.

There are many meforshim that deal with the question of why Yaakov was so insistent that he be buried in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash Hagadol says that if Yaakov allowed himself to be buried in Mitzraim, the tribes might begin to think of Mitzraim as a holy land. The tribes might think that since they left the land, Hashem's promise to give them the land would no longer valid. Rashi tells us that Yaakov understood the nature of idolaters and was afraid that the Mitzriim might begin to worship him. The Aznaiim L'Torah explains that when a person is buried, that burial acts as a kapara (atonement) for him; burial atones in every place. Our rabbis tell us that burial in Eretz Yisrael is a greater atonement than in outside of the land. For centuries during the diaspora, Jews came to Eretz

Yisrael when they became old so that they could die and be buried in Eretz Yisrael. Ya'akov similarly made Yosef swear to bury him in Eretz Yisrael.

The Rabbis tell us that Yosef told Par'oh that Yaakov specified in his command to him that he be buried "b'kivri asher kariti li b'erezt Canaan shama tikb'reini, in my grave that I dug out myself in the Land of Canaan, there you will bury me." Yosef explained to Par'oh that the word kariti comes from the word kirah which means a pile. This refers to the huge pile of money that Yaakov gave to his brother Esav to buy out his portion of the Ma'arat Hamachpela. Par'oh would understand the potential great loss of money and sympathize with that loss. Yaakov had not mentioned that purchase when commanding his sons because he knew that their focus would not be on the money but instead on performing their father's wishes.

Why, then did Yosef not insist on an immediate burial in Canaan as his father had done? The same factors were relevant to Yosef when he made the brothers take a second oath prior to his death. Yet Yosef knew that the brothers would not be able to take him out of Mitzraim immediately because they would not wield the same power that Yosef could. Yosef knew by Ruach Hakodesh that he would not be buried in the ground of Mitzraim but would be cast into the Nile River. This would be done by Par'oh to prevent the Jewish people from fulfilling their oath to Yosef. For this same reason, he understood that the people would not worship him because his casket would not be visible to them. Yosef also knew that he would not be buried in the family plots in Ma'arat Hamachpela but in Shechem according to the inheritance from his father. Therefore, the connections to his father's oath were limited to the idea of kapara, atonement, which was greater in Eretz Yisrael. Still Yosef understood that he would have to sacrifice his own desires for a greater purpose.

To understand that purpose we must comprehend the words of Yosef's oath. The Torah says, "Vayashba Yosef et B'nei Yisrael leimor, pakod yifkod Elokim etchem v'haalitem et atzmot mizeh, and Yosef made the Children of Israel swear saying, Elokim will surely refocus on you and you will take my bones up with you from this place." What is the purpose of this oath? Is it to remind the Jews that they should not forget him when they leave? That hardly seems to be a purpose worthy of an oath and indeed sounds selfish. One must remember that an oath was not taken lightly as it carried with it the name of Hashem.

As we examine Yosef's oath alongside of Yaakov's oath, we will see that their message is the same and yet different. Yaakov wanted to demonstrate by his insistence on an immediate burial in Eretz Yisrael that no Jew should think of Mitzraim as anything other than galut, dispersion from our true land. Yosef understood that the future generations in Mitzraim

might forget their homeland which they had never seen. He made clear that it would not be possible for him to be buried in Eretz Yisrael immediately but that he would have to leave Mitzraim when the proper time would come. Yosef's message carried another important piece of information for the B'nei Yisrael. Yosef reminded them that he was their pikadon, their surety that pakod yifkod Elokim, that Hashem will certainly refocus on them and take them out of Mitzraim. Times were to become very bleak for the Jews in Mitzraim as they were to be slaves for several generations. Yet they could always say to themselves that Yosef would never have agreed to be buried here and he had faith that Hashem would eventually take them out. His willingness to postpone his departure from Mitzraim was that surety. Yosef also warned them that all of the B'nei Yisrael needed to understand that Mitzraim and its way of life was not for them. They would have to commit themselves to leaving when Hashem would come to save them.

Yaakov and Yosef both understood the singular holiness of Eretz Yisrael. The land was not only a land of burial but a land of living and spiritual growth. Ya'akov taught the B'nei Yisrael the importance of Israel, but Yosef sacrificed his own temporary purity and rest for the benefit of the B'nei Yisrael. May we also dedicate our existence to the benefit of all of the B'nei Yisrael while we recognize the importance of being in our homeland. ©2017 Rabbi D.S. Levin

### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## **Perceptions**

"Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years, and Ya'akov's days, the years of his life, were 147 years." (Bereishis 47:28) It has only been a couple of weeks since the loss of Rabbi Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman, zt"l. True, he was 104 years old at the time he left this world, and his health had been failing, but it does not minimize the loss to the Jewish people and the world in general. His time may have come, but that does not lessen the impact of the loss of a Gadol HaDor.

What is that loss? We can only imagine. Who knows what affects what in Heaven, and how much? There may have already been major consequences resulting from the loss of this Torah giant, but we would never know. It takes a prophet to reveal such things, and we have none today. Besides, the Torah world is busy trying to fill the gap as best as possible, and life must go on, and does, b"H.

The Torah does give us a glimpse somewhat of what it means to lose a Gadol HaDor in this week's parsha: "Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years, and Ya'akov's days, the years of his life, were 147 years." (Bereishis 47:28)

"Why is this section [completely] closed? Because, as soon as our father Ya'akov passed away,

the eyes and the heart of the Jewish people were 'closed,' (i.e., it became 'dark' for them) because of the misery of the slavery, for they started to subjugate them." (Rashi)

Normally a parsha begins on a new line, just as a new paragraph does. This is called an "open parsha." A "closed parsha" is when the new parsha begins on the same line that the previous parsha ended. The end of the previous parsha and the beginning of the new parsha enclose a space between them.

It doesn't usually happen, and certainly not without reason. This is what prompted the Midrash to provide an explanation for it, which Rashi quotes. The "closed" parsha alludes to the "closing" of the eyes of the Jewish nation that Ya'akov Avinu left behind. Though the actual enslavement of the Jewish people did not begin until the death of Levi 78 years later, it was in motion since the death of Ya'akov Avinu.

Because Ya'akov Avinu died the people were enslaved? As a punishment? No, as a consequence.

As long as Ya'akov Avinu was alive, no one moved out of Goshen, the Jewish community in Egypt. Yosef had worked hard to set his family up there, and Ya'akov had worked hard to keep them spiritually strong there. He commanded that no one leave, with few exceptions. But, after Ya'akov died, Jews started to move out and "up" into Egyptian society until they had become neighbors with them.

Thus, the holiday that celebrates the redemption is called "Passover," since God had to skip over Jewish houses to kill the Egyptians during the Plague of the Firstborn. It took 78 years, but what Ya'akov and Yosef had built had come undone enough to warrant God allowing the Egyptians to enslave, torture, and even murder His people.

Probably by the time that happened, no one associated their plight with the loss of Ya'akov Avinu. It had happened so long ago, and many of those who suffered had never known him. They probably looked for more immediate causes of their suffering, or just stopped looking altogether.

Since the generation that lost Ya'akov Avinu wasn't immediately enslaved, they had no idea what his death really meant. If they had, they may have taken more measures to try and counteract Ya'akov death, to save themselves and future generations from hardship. As the Talmud says, the wise person is someone who sees what is happening now, and what it could lead to (Tamid 32a).

It's not just the presence of a great Torah scholar that makes the difference. It's not just that he can be accessed, and that his words and Torah wisdom can be published and disseminated throughout the Torah world. That is certainly a large part of what helps a generation to stay the course, but there is a lot more as well.

There is the "invisible" aspect as well.

Physically, Rabbi Shteinman was quite small, and looked malnourished. He barely ate anything, and foods we eat without second thought were luxuries to him that he tried to avoid. On a scale, he would not have counter-balanced much at all.

Spiritually, Rav Shteinman was a giant. His soul was HUGE. If souls could be weighed, it could have taken millions to counterbalance his. Taking him off that scale, so-to-speak, would have sent the other side crashing down. We may yet see the historical effects of that in our lifetime, even soon.

Taking a Gadol from the world is not like removing a kidney or a piece of a person's liver. It is like taking a major part of the heart. How is a patient supposed to survive then, without a major miracle? What if he doesn't get the miracle? What if he does, but doesn't deserve it? Either way, it's not a good thing. We may yet find out.

Part of the problem with learning Torah is that so much of the story is left out. It is bare bones. If all the details of every major event was included then each incident could be a book on its own. Tanach would be HUGE, much bigger than it is today.

Instead, God told Moshe Rabbeinu, and later the prophets, exactly what to write, and what to leave out. It makes Tanach kind of a cause-and-effect account: The person sinned, it angered God, and they were punished. The nation strayed, they angered God, they were attacked by the enemy, they did teshuvah, and God saved them again. It's as if the impact always immediately and clearly followed the cause.

But it didn't. In Sha'ar HaGilgulim, it is revealed how God can punish a person in their next reincarnation for a sin performed in a previous one. Without a prophet to explain this to them, how were they supposed to know why they were suffering?

They don't have to. It is enough that they know they are suffering. It is enough that they understand that nothing is by coincidence, and that God is always just. No matter how innocent they think they are, or how justified they are in how they live, God knows better. He knows BEST. Only he can work out all the details of cause-and-effect for the betterment of a person or the entire world.

Likewise, when Ya'akov Avinu died, it was hard to know what the gaping spiritual "hole" would allow in or out. The Jewish people of his time didn't know what it would eventually lead to in advance, only after the fact.

They didn't have to know. It was enough to know what they lost, and what he meant to the nation. The loss of Ya'akov Avinu, the last of three four fathers was huge and dramatic. The response of the nation needed to be huge and dramatic, to avoid the need for God to eventually to do something huge and dramatic, to get Ya'akov's descendants back on track.

It is the same for us as well. We do not know how the loss of Rav Shteinman, zt"l, will impact our

history. We just know that it will, and that should be enough to push us to do the best we can to make up for what we lost. The alternative has never been pleasant for the Jewish people. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## **Weekly Dvar**

**P**arshat Vayechi, the last in the first Sefer (book) of Bereishit, is where Yaakov (Jacob) gives all of his sons their blessings. Ironically, though, Yaakov starts with the blessings for Ephraim and Menashe, who were Yosef's sons that were born to him in Egypt. It all started when Yosef found out that Yaakov was sick (48:1), Yosef "took his two sons with him." (presumably to bring them to Yaakov, although it doesn't say that anywhere). When Yosef and his sons got there, Yaakov "strengthened himself" (48:5) (which also seems strange), sat up on the bed, and told Yosef that his two sons would now be considered like Yaakov's children, and will get a portion in the land just like the rest of the brothers. Yaakov then called over the 2 children, placed his hands on their heads, and started blessing Yosef, giving him the famous "Hamalach" blessing (48:16), that the angel that protected Yaakov from evil should also protect Yosef's sons, and that Yaakov's name should be associated with them, along with Avraham and Yitzchak, and they should multiply in the land. All these events seem inconsistent, unless we put it in perspective.

When Yaakov got sick, the Torah doesn't say that Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov, but that Yosef took his sons with him. What it could mean is not that Yosef brought his sons physically to Yaakov, but that Yosef kept them close to himself, so that they wouldn't be spiritually influenced by their non-Jewish surroundings. Yaakov recognized this, which is why he felt strengthened when Yosef came to him with his sons. That's also why when Yaakov claimed the sons as his own, he made sure to stress that it was those two sons that were born in Egypt (48:5), because their greatness and Yosef's greatness was that they were Jews despite living in Egypt. And finally, although his hands were on the two sons, Yaakov's blessing was that Yosef's children, and anyone who has to live in a non-Jewish world, should be protected throughout history so that we can all be proudly called the children of Avraham and Yitzchak. But it won't happen unless we learn to put our hands on their heads and guide the next generation. The adults have a duty to take along and guide the kids, and the children have an equal responsibility to let themselves be guided. ©2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

