

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The scene that brings the book of Genesis to a close is intensely significant. Joseph's brothers were terrified that, after the death of their father Jacob, Joseph would take revenge against them for selling him into slavery. Years before, he had told them that he forgave them: "Now, do not worry or feel guilty because you sold me. Look: God has sent me ahead of you to save lives" (Gen. 45:5). Evidently, though, they only half-believed him.

Their fear was based on the fact that, as is clear from the earlier story of Esau, sons were not allowed to take revenge against their brothers in the lifetime of their father. Esau had said, "The days of mourning for my father will be here soon. I will then be able to kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). That is what the brothers now feared: that Joseph had not really forgiven them but was simply waiting until Jacob died.

That is why, after Jacob's death, the brothers 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 the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father" (Gen. 50:16).

So Joseph had to tell them again that he forgave them: "'Don't be afraid,' said Joseph. 'Am I in 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.'" (Gen. 50:19-20)

The episode is moving in itself, but it also resolves one of the central questions of the book of Genesis -- sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. Can brothers live peaceably with one another? This question is fundamental to the biblical drama of redemption, for if brothers cannot live together, how can nations? And if nations cannot live together, how can the human world survive?

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by
Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg
in memory of
Mr. Hyman Weisberg z"l
חיים ניסן בן יצחק אייזק ז"ל
נפטר ט"ו טבת תש"כ

Only now, with the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers, can the story move on to the birth of Israel as a nation, passing from slavery to freedom.

These words of Joseph, though, tell us something more. I have previously argued that the entire drama Joseph put the brothers through when they came to buy food in Egypt -- accusing them of being spies, and so on -- was to test whether they had done teshuvah. Did they realise the wrong they had done in selling Joseph and had they really changed as a result? At the height of the drama, as soon as Judah said he would stay as a slave so that his brother Benjamin could go free, Joseph revealed his true identity to them and forgave them. Judah, who had proposed selling Joseph as a slave, had completely changed. He had done teshuvah. He was now a different person.

Yet something more is revealed in this last conversation between Joseph and his brothers. It concerns the most paradoxical of all rabbinic statements about teshuvah. It was said by one of the great baalei teshuvah, penitents, of the Talmud: the third-century sage known as Reish Lakish. Originally a highway robber, he was persuaded by Rabbi Yochanan to give up his lawless ways and join him in the house of study. Reish Lakish repented and became Rabbi Yochanan's disciple and colleague (and also his brother-in-law: he married Yochanan's sister).

Perhaps speaking from his own experience, he said: Great is repentance, because through it deliberate sins are accounted as though they were merits, as it is said, "When the wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (Yoma 86b citing Ezekiel 33:19). This statement is almost unintelligible. How can we change the past? How can deliberate sins be transformed into their opposite -- into merits, good deeds?

The quotation from Ezekiel does not prove the point. If anything, it does the opposite. The prophet is speaking about a person who, having undergone teshuvah, now does good instead of evil -- and it is because of his good deeds, not his earlier evil ones, that "he shall live." The verse says that good deeds can overcome a previous history of wrongdoing. It does not say that they can turn bad into good, deliberate sins into merits.

Reish Lakish's statement is intelligible only in the light of Joseph's words to his brothers after the

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death of their father: "You intended to harm me but God intended it for good." The brothers had committed a deliberate sin by selling Joseph into slavery. They had then done teshuvah. The result, says Joseph, is that -- through divine providence ("God intended it") -- their action is now reckoned "for good."

Not only is this the source of Reish Lakish's principle; it also enables us to understand what it means. Any act we perform has multiple consequences, some good, some bad. When we intend evil, the bad consequences are attributed to us because they are what we sought to achieve. The good consequences are not: they are mere unintended outcomes.

Thus, in the case of Joseph, many positive things happened once he had been brought to Egypt. Eventually he became second-in-command of Egypt, overseer of its economy, and the man who saved the country from ruin during the years of famine. None of these consequences could be attributed to his brothers, even though they would not have happened had the brothers not done as they did. The reason is that the brothers neither foresaw nor intended this set of outcomes. They meant to sell Joseph as a slave, and that is what they did.

However, once the brothers had undergone complete repentance, their original intent was cancelled out. It was now possible to see the good, as well as the bad, consequences of their act -- and to attribute the former to them. Paraphrasing Shakespeare's Mark Antony, the good they did would live after them; the bad was interred with the past (Julius Caesar, act III, scene 2.). That is how, through repentance, deliberate sins can be accounted as merits, or as Joseph put it: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." This is a hugely significant idea, for it means that by a change of heart we can redeem the past.

This still sounds paradoxical. Surely time is asymmetrical. We can change the future but not the past. We can choose what is yet to be, but, in the words of the sages, "What has been, has been," (Pesachim 108a) and we cannot alter it.

We now see, through Joseph's and Reish Lakish's words, a revolutionary idea. There are two concepts of the past. The first is what happened. That

is something we cannot change. The second is the significance, the meaning, of what happened. That is something we can change.

The great truth about the role of time in our lives is that we live life forwards, but we understand it only looking back. Consider an autobiography. Reading the story of a life, we see how a deprived childhood led to the woman of iron ambition, or how the early loss of a parent drove the man who spent his later years pursuing fame in search of the love he had lost.

It might have been otherwise. The deprived childhood or the loss of a parent might have led to a life dominated by a sense of defeat and inadequacy. What we become depends on our choices, and we are often free to choose this way or that. But what we become shapes the story of our life, and only in hindsight, looking back, do we see the past in context, as part of a tale whose end we now know. If life is like a narrative, then later events change the significance of earlier ones. That is what the story of Joseph and his brothers is telling us, according to Reish Lakish.

Joseph was saying to his brothers: by your repentance, you have written a new chapter in the story of which you are a part. The harm you intended to do me ultimately led to good. So long as you stayed the people prepared to sell a brother into slavery, none of that good could be attributed to you, but now you have transformed yourself through teshuvah, you have transformed the story of your life as well. By your change of heart you have earned the right to be included in a narrative whose ultimate outcome was benign. We cannot change the past, but we can change the story people tell about the past. But that only happens when we ourselves change.

We can only change the world if we can change ourselves. That is why the book of Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and his brothers. It tells on an individual level the story that the book of Exodus tells on a national level. Israel is charged with the task of transforming the moral vision of mankind, but it can only do so if individual Jews, of whom the forerunners were Jacob's children, are capable of changing themselves.

Teshuvah is the ultimate assertion of freedom. Time then becomes an arena of change in which the future redeems the past and a new concept is born -- the idea we call hope. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, so the whole age of Jacob was one hundred and forty-seven years. And

the days of Jacob drew near to die..." (Gen. 47:28, 29) The final verse of the last portion of Vayigash summarizes the astonishing achievement of the Israelites in Egypt: 'And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the country of Goshen and they took possession of it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly' [Gen. 47:27]. Could anything be a clearer testament to the resilience of Jacob's descendants who, in a relatively short period of time, managed to grow rich in real estate, to be fruitful and to multiply?

Yet according to Rashi, this very next verse, the opening of Vayechi, sends us in the exact opposite direction, a 180-degree turn for the worse, informing us that the Egyptian bondage was then beginning! Interestingly, Rashi's interpretation is not based on the words of the verse itself [Gen. 47:28], but rather on the almost hidden or interior meaning of the Torah embedded in the white space – or lack of white space – between the final verse of Vayigash and the opening verse of Vayechi. The portion of Vayechi opens without a parchment hint that a new chapter is beginning, or that a new story is being told.

There are no paragraphs or indications of chapters in the text of the Torah scrolls. Rather, a white space – anywhere from a minimum of nine letters wide to the end of the entire line – is the Torah's way of indicating that a pause or separation of some kind exists between the previous verse and the following section.

What is unique about Vayechi is that it is the only portion in the Torah with no white space preceding it, as the last verse in Vayigash flows right into the opening verse of Vayechi. This lack of a division leads Rashi to comment that the reason why our portion is setumah (closed) is because '...with the death of Jacob the hearts and eyes of Israel become closed because of the misery of the bondage with which they [Egyptians] had begun to enslave them' [Rashi ad loc.].

For Rashi, the achievement of Vayigash lasts no longer than the blink of an eye, or the amount of time it takes to finish one verse and begin another. In one verse the Israelites may be on top of the world, but Rashi wants us to understand that the message of the lack of white space is that we are now witnessing the beginning of the end.

But the truth is that the slavery does not come until a generation – and a biblical book – later, when we are told of the emergence of a new king over Egypt, 'who did not know Joseph' [Ex. 1:8]. In the meantime we are still in the book of Genesis; Joseph, with the keys to the treasury in his pocket, is the Grand Vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and his kinsmen are doing astonishingly well on the Egyptian Stock Exchange. So why does Rashi's commentary appear to be 'jumping the gun'?

Rabbi David Pardo explains in his commentary Maskil l'David that the first intimations of Jewish slavery

are indeed to be found in the portion of Vayechi, but in a later verse describing an apparently uncomfortable situation in the wake of Jacob's demise: And 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 which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me...' (Gen. 50:4-5)

Does this request sound like the words spoken by the Grand Vizier of Egypt? Does the number two figure at a Fortune 500 company, who undoubtedly confers with the president on a daily basis, need an appointment to see him, forced to go through the usual hierarchy of secretaries that junior staff have to go through? Why not a simple knock on the door on the part of Joseph? Why does the Torah even go to the trouble of reporting the process by which Joseph presents a petition – through intermediaries – to have his father buried? And Joseph doesn't even go through a secretary; he begs ('if I have found favor in your eyes') the 'house of Pharaoh', which generally refers to the household staff, the servants of Pharaoh. The Grand Vizier asks a maid or butler to whisper his need to bury his father in Pharaoh's ear. Is this the level to which a second-in-command must stoop in order to get time off for a parent's funeral?

I would suggest that perhaps the almost obsequious manner in which Joseph must arrange to have his request brought before Pharaoh indicates not so much a general change in Joseph's political position, as the delicacy of this particular petition. Therefore, it serves as a moment of truth for Joseph as well as for the readers of his story.

Joseph may have reached the top of the social ladder in Egypt. He speaks Egyptian, dresses as an Egyptian, has become renamed Egyptian (Tzafenat-Pane'ah), and is married to a native Egyptian (perhaps even to his previous master's daughter). 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. The wise Jacob understands that Pharaoh expected Joseph to completely identify with Egypt, to bring up generations of faithful and



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committed Egyptians after all that his adopted country has given to him. But this was impossible for Jacob – and the patriarch hoped that it would also be impossible for his children and grandchildren as well. They were in Egypt but not of Egypt. They might contribute to Egyptian society and economy, but they could never become Egyptians. Jacob understood 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 beloved son solemnly swear not to bury him in Egypt. Hence our Midrash understands that Hebrew servitude in Egypt begins at this very juncture, when Joseph understands that the Hebrews would always be stranger-slaves in Egypt. Indeed, Egypt is a story of every Jewish Diaspora in history. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The era of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people ends with this week's Torah reading. There are times when the passing of a generation happens without even notice. But there are other times when even a casual observer of the world scene realizes that the old era has ended and that a new one is about to begin. The passing of Jacob and his children, in the entire generation of the 70 souls that descended into Egypt, was noticed by both their descendants and by the Egyptian government and people as well.

The benevolence extended to Jacob and his family – albeit because of Joseph and his act of saving Egypt from starvation – was to end. The Torah does not expand on this attitude change except to remark the ancient anti-Semitic canard, that there are too many Jews and that they are too influential and not loyal. This excuse would be used to enslave the Jewish people and persecute them.

In history, sometimes things move slowly from one generation to the next whereas at other times they move rapidly and uncomfortably. By ending the book of Bereishith with the death of Jacob and Joseph, the Torah prepares us for the next book which will show the Jewish people in a completely different state of being. It is most interesting that the Torah calls this story of the end of the era by the word that indicates life. Life is always seen as a new beginning and no matter what the changing circumstances may be, Jacob and his descendants will continue to live.

Jacob has his wish fulfilled and is buried with his ancestors in the land of Israel. However, when it came time to bury Joseph, it is obvious that the Pharaoh and the Egyptian people will not allow him, even in death, to leave their borders. But Joseph has a strategy that he knows will outlive the decrees and policies of any of the pharaohs of Egypt. He has his descendants take a solemn oath that they will take his

body from the sealed casket of the Nile River and return him to the home of the Jewish people, the land of Israel.

Joseph is confident that this oath and the memory of it within the psyche of the Jewish people will be enough so that even centuries later they will see to it that his body is removed from Egyptian exile and reburied in the land of his fathers, the land of Jewish eternity. After generations of slavery, idolatry and forgetfulness, the Jewish people will be redeemed. When that happens, they will recall the ancient oaths that they took, that they would take Joseph out with them and bring him to the land of Israel. This is a paradigm, an example for all Jewish history and life. Even after centuries of exile, after moments of terrible forgetfulness and confusion, somehow the Jewish people remembered where their true home was, where they would achieve great and mighty accomplishments against all odds. That is why this holy book describes life itself. ©2018 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

Notified that his father Yaakov (Jacob) is sick, Yosef (Joseph) takes his sons Ephraim and Menashe to see their grandfather. As they enter, Yaakov proclaims "mi eileh?" "Who are these?" (Genesis 48:8)

Having already been in Egypt for 17 years, is it possible that Yaakov didn't know the identity of his grandsons?

Some commentators suggest a physical reason for Yaakov's question. Bearing in mind that Yaakov could not see, he could not recognize his grandsons even as they stand before him.

Other commentators suggest that Yaakov's question "mi eileh?" does not refer to his grandsons themselves, but rather a question about their progeny. Prophetically, Yaakov discerned that amongst the descendants of Ephraim and Menashe would be evil people. Yaakov inquires, "who are they?" How is it possible that such evil men could come from good people like Ephraim and Menashe?

Other commentators insist that Yaakov asked "who are these?" to precipitate a "nachas report" from Yosef about the moral, spiritual and religious progress of Ephraim and Menashe. (Genesis 48:9)

But there is another approach. Yaakov may not recognize his grandchildren because he has little relationship with them. This could be because Yosef rarely ever took them to Ya'akov.

Yosef may have denied his father this relationship because of possible ill will towards Yaakov

for having sent Yosef to his brothers to make peace, a plan which, of course, backfired. Not to mention, of course, Yaakov's favoring of him (Yosef) in the first place. Upset with his father, Yosef never contacts his father for 22 years and blocks his children from developing a close relationship with their grandfather.

Another suggestion: Maybe "mi eileh," is an existential question. Having grown up in Egypt, Ephraim and Menashe must have, on some level, assimilated into Egyptian society. Standing before Yaakov as Jews living in Egypt, Yaakov asks, "who are these?" What he is really asking is do my grandchildren identify themselves as Egyptians or Jews?

Whichever way one approaches Yaakov's "mi eileh" question, one point is certain: Yaakov is the first person to be recorded in the Torah as interacting with his grandchildren on any level at all. Not only does he interact with them, he actually gives each of them a blessing. In fact, the blessing is so powerful it becomes the standardized blessing of parents to children every Friday night. Placing our hands on our children, we say, "may God make you like Ephraim and Menashe." (Genesis 48:20)

A grandparent's relationship to a child, on some level, is deeper than a parent/child relationship. Unencumbered by parental responsibility, a grandparent, blessed with wisdom and maturity of life can powerfully bestow blessings upon their children. In a brief instant, a grandparent asks, "mi eileh," who are these, not so much as a question but as an expression of thanksgiving to God for having been blessed with such glorious grandchildren.

Even if they are not specifically for grandchildren, may our lives be filled with many such utterances of "mi eileh"-- expressions of thanks, awe and wonder of the incredible gifts given to us by the Divine. ©2018 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

A Symbiotic Relationship

We see in Parashat Vayechi that Ya'akov blesses each of his sons with a blessing that was designed for his particular traits. Though each tribe was different, two tribes were interrelated in a way that was unique among the tribes. Y'ssachar and Zevulun were economically and spiritually related in a way that was productive and beneficial for both. Zevulun became traders and lived near the harbors where the merchandise was brought by ships from far and wide. Y'ssachar became Torah scholars and spent their entire time studying Torah. Zevulun shared their profits with Y'ssachar, while Y'ssachar shared the rewards that they would receive for their Torah study with Zevulun. This symbiotic relationship provided for the needs of both tribes.

The Torah tells us, "Zevulun will live at a haven of seas, himself will become a haven for ships, and his extreme province will reach Sidon. Y'ssachar is a strong-boned donkey, crouching between the boundaries. He saw a resting place that it is good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer." The description of Zevulun is less poetic than that of Y'ssachar but there is still hidden meaning within the words. We are told that Zevulun "will live at a haven of seas" and also "will become a haven for ships." According to many, this describes the codependency of Zevulun and Y'ssachar. The first phrase indicates the source of Zevulun's livelihood while the second statement indicates the livelihood of Y'ssachar which was earned through Zevulun. The Kli Yakar describes the difficulties of Zevulun. The businessman often has no sleep as he must be available for business when the opportunity arises. He works long hours and does not have the time to devote to his family and to study. If he lives at home, he is thinking about the ships he has sent to sea and if he is at sea, he is worried about those he left behind. The Kli Yakar explains that although the businessman dwells in a home by the sea,

he is never at home. To his great sadness, he is always away from home with business.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Zevulun was given the responsibility of the import-export trade to benefit all of the brothers. Hirsch sees Zevulun tied exclusively to the land and not traveling on the sea. The phrase "his extreme province will reach Sidon," indicates that Zevulun would not travel the seas but limit himself to the land and prosper only through his trade with boats that sailed the seas. Sidon was the most important commercial harbor of the ancient world and Zevulun would not travel for business beyond this port. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Zevulun was given two parts of one b'racha: (1) that Zevulun should live close to the sea so that he would be there when boats arrive and be familiar enough with all of the sailors so that Zevulun would be the ones chosen for business, and (2) that others would not be in their way, for then Zevulun would have to do business with the first group of men who had already unloaded the boats and this would add to the cost of the products.

Rashi explains the imagery of the b'racha given to Y'ssachar. Y'ssachar is described as a strong-boned donkey. This is an indication that Y'ssachar would be burdened with a very heavy load. Hirsch explains that a donkey willingly gives of itself to accept the burden on its back. The idea that Y'ssachar would be "crouching between the boundaries" conveys the idea that an animal that does not stay in one place. It only takes its rest between the boundaries of others, rather than in the comfort of its own home. The Or HaChaim explains that Y'ssachar taught the lessons of Torah through Mussar, examples of proper behavior, and this required that he would travel from community to community. S'forno agrees with this description and explains that the burden of Y'ssachar was both the Law of Torah and the way of Derech Eretz (appropriate behavior). Y'ssachar was the source of the Law for many of the Jews throughout the land and their teachings were the source of Rabbinic Law which followed.

The blessing describes Y'ssachar, "And he saw a resting place that it is good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer." The Or HaChaim explains that the place of rest described here is the World to Come (afterlife). When we focus on the comfort and reward of the next life, we are able to find more comfort in this life too. The Kli Yakar associates this rest with Shabbat. Shabbat is a time when the burdens of this world are set aside and one has the time to contemplate his relationship with others and with Hashem. The Torah gives one a clear understanding of how one is to act with everything and everyone. It is that understanding which gives us comfort. S'forno explains that we are able to look at the land and understand that it is prepared to bring forth its

produce without our strain and give us our livelihood without difficulty if we are prepared to observe the Laws of Hashem. The land of Israel was created to reflect upon its inhabitants the same righteousness that its inhabitants exhibit.

S'forno tells us that there are two things which Y'ssachar "bent his shoulder to bear." Y'ssachar was willing to bear the responsibility of the Torah for the community and he was also willing to bear the needs of the community itself. Sorotzkin explains that this was also made possible by the fact that the land which was to be Y'ssachar's was not easily cultivated either for fields or vineyards. Y'ssachar traveled among the tribes to make his livelihood but used this travel as a means of influencing others to study Torah and gain from its comforting laws. Even though Y'ssachar was involved in Torah study, that did not eliminate the need for Torah study among each of the Tribes. Even Zevulun with its symbiotic relationship with Y'ssachar was not exempt from learning Torah at every opportunity. It was only because of its inability to set aside enough time for Torah study that Zevulun agreed to the partnership with Y'ssachar.

It has long been a custom in many Jewish families to skimp and save to send the brightest or the most motivated to Yeshiva or College. Jews have always understood the importance of education and the thirst and drive to learn. But education for education's sake is not the real goal. The more one learns, the more one is able to cope with the many difficulties that one faces on a daily basis. The more passion that one brings to his Torah studies, the more passion one receives from them in return. Hashem's love for us personally and for us as His people is shown not only through His actions but through our study of His perfectly molded set of Laws. It is this understanding of balance that gives us balance in our own lives. May we all be able to devote more of our time to Torah study as we know that the rewards will be significant to our lives.

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RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

TorahWeb

"Please forgive the sin of your brothers... now please forgive the sin of the servants of your father's G-d" (Bereishis 50:17). Yosef responds graciously, "Do not worry... Hashem intended it for good... I will sustain you... he consoled them, and spoke to their heart (50:19-21).

Rabbeinu Bachya (17) notes that the Torah does not say that Yosef forgave them; they died without his forgiveness, and their sin was not atoned. The punishment was exacted many years later, when the Romans killed the ten martyrs, as recounted during Musaf on Yom Kippur. As the piyut Eila Ezkera cites the Romans despot, "You must bear the sins of your ancestors". The second phrase in the passuk, "the sin

of the servants of your father's G-d" is not a redundancy, but an allusion to the ten martyrs killed, in part as a punishment for the sale of Yosef by his ten brothers. Earlier (44:17), Rabbeinu Bachya names all ten, and cites the capital punishment of those who kidnap and sell the person they kidnapped (Shemos 21:16). He adds that the brothers themselves were also punished when their troubles in Egypt began immediately after Yosef's death.

The Gemara (Yoma 87a) states, "One who asks forgiveness should not ask more than three times", as the word "na", found three times in 50:17, is an expression of a request (Rashi). Rav Elyashiv (Toras Ha'adam L'Adam vol. 3 p. 27) proves from here that Yosef did not forgive them. If he had forgiven them, then the gemara would have no proof regarding how one should behave when not forgiven after three times. The brothers (and later the ten martyrs) were punished even though they asked for forgiveness three times, presumably because they, as tzadikim, were held to a higher standard (See Yevamos 121b, and Tzon Kodashim Menachos 29b).

Rabbeinu Bachya (38:1) asks: only nine brothers sold Yosef, as Reuven wished to return him to Yakov (37:22), so why were ten (as opposed to only nine) martyrs killed as a result of the sale? He answers that Yosef also sinned by causing the brothers' sin when he angered them and glorified himself over them with his dreams. As such, the tenth martyr bore the sin of Yosef. Perhaps, alternatively, Yosef's sin that was borne by the tenth martyr was not forgiving the brothers for their sin against him.

Forgiving others is beneficial to the sinners who are forgiven, since it spares them from punishment. The formulation of forgiveness, recited by many nightly before Krias Shma Al Hamita, and annually in Tefila Zaka before Kol Nidrei, contains the phrase, "May no person be punished on my account." It seems from these two tefillos that forgiveness is effective even if the sinner does not confess and ask to be forgiven, and yet Rav attempted to have a sinner who sinned against him ask for forgiveness (Yoma 87a). Why did Rav not simply forgive him without encountering him? The answer may be that every interpersonal sin is also a sin against Hashem. One who was wronged can only forgive the interpersonal aspect, so that no person be punished on his account. However, in order to be completely forgiven for his sin against Hashem, the sinner must repent.

Repentance requires not only regret over the sin and resolution not to repeat it, but also confession (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 2:2). The confession must specify the sin and articulate regret and shame over it (1:1). Rav attempted to give the sinner the opportunity for complete teshuva so that he could be forgiven completely.

The Pele Yo'etz (Teshuva) proves from the

story of Rav that even though sincere forgiveness granted by one who was pained by another achieves a lot, it is not enough. The sinner must do that which is incumbent upon him, i.e. appease the victim of his sin, even if he feels shame. Shame is part of confession, achieves forgiveness (Berachos 12b), and avoids much, much greater shame in the World to Come.

The Mishna Berura (606:3) cites three rulings of the Mateh Efraim (2) regarding asking forgiveness: 1) one who asks forgiveness must specify the sin 2) if he knows that the victim will be shamed, he should not specify it 3) asking forgiveness from an entire group, as opposed to individually from the person he sinned against, is insufficient.

Why must the sin be specified? At first glance, the victim must know what he is forgiving. But if so, how is he forgiven when he does not specify it in order to avoid shaming the victim? And why is specifying before an entire group insufficient? The need to specify must have a different reason. It is not indispensable as a function of the ability of the victim to forgive. Rather, in the words of the Pele Yoetz, it is incumbent on the sinner as part of his obligation to appease the victim. By specifying the sin, his confession is shameful. Shame is a function of forgiveness by Hashem, and applies to all sins, as the Rambam writes.

When specifying the sin shames the victim, it is prohibited, and therefore not incumbent on the sinner. Hence, he is forgiven by Hashem, as well as by the victim who sincerely forgives whatever the sin may be. By contrast, asking forgiveness from a group, even if the sin is specified, is not as embarrassing for the sinner as a one-on-one conversation with each person he sinned against, and is therefore insufficient.

If the sinner's victim died, the sinner must bring ten men to his grave and confess "I have sinned to Hashem and to this man" (606:2). The Mishna Berura (ibid 15, again citing Mateh Efraim (5)) requires that the sin be specified. Since a dead man cannot forgive, the sinner must be seeking forgiveness from Hashem. Still, it is incumbent upon him to specify the sin, so that the confession causes him to feel shame. Here, too, if specifying the sin will bring disgrace to the dead man's memory, it must be omitted (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 131:5). In such a situation, since it is not incumbent on the sinner to specify it, Hashem forgives him completely without it being specified.

If specifying will cause the victim pain, not shame, the sinner is likewise prohibited from doing so (Mo'adim U'zmanim 1:54, citing Rav Yisrael Salanter). The Chafetz Chaim's (4:12) requirement to reveal the lashon hara he said when asking forgiveness must refer to a case that will not cause the victim pain (Dirshu fn. 10, citing Chut Shani (Yom Kippur) and Az Nidberu (7:66)). Otherwise, the Chafetz Chaim agrees that he may not specify the sin and cause the victim pain. Once again, since in such cases it is not

incumbent upon him to specify the sin, he is forgiven completely. (See Minchas Asher (Vayikra pg. 269) who reaches this conclusion, seemingly against both Rav Yisrael Salatner and the Chafetz Chaim. In our analysis, they both agree with this conclusion).

May one ask forgiveness more than the required three times? The Pri Chadash (606:1) cites a dispute on this matter, in which the Tur and Shulchan Aruch rule that one may, but the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 2:9) implies that one may not, rather he must leave the victim who refuses to forgive, and the one who does not forgive is now the sinner. The Pri Chadash agrees with the Rambam and adds that the sinner is forgiven if he attempts to appease the victim (Yoma 85b), even if the victim does not forgive him. (The Tur and Rabbeinu Bachya may disagree).

While this may make asking a fourth time unnecessary, why it is forbidden? Because having refused to forgive the sinner three times, there is a presumption (chazaka) that the victim will refuse again, and one may not cause him to sin. The Rambam's source (Bamidbar Raba 19:23) calls refusal to forgive sinful and cruel, a term cited by the Rama (606:1).

The Mishna Berura (8) adds that one who forgives another is forgiven by Hashem (Rosh Hashana 17a), and vice versa. Sha'ar Hatziyun (8) explains this as follows: in Shamayim they judge mida k'neged mida. As such, if one forgives a willful sin against him, Hashem forgives his willful sins as well. Thus, forgiving is beneficial not only to the sinner, but also to the victim who forgives, as he is thereby forgiven for his own sins.

Remarkably, recent studies have shown that letting go of grudges can protect against stress and the toll it takes on mental health (Time Magazine, Oct. 2, 2017, p. 31). Happiness results when one forgives others, and oneself, and makes a person physically healthier as well (p. 30). Thus forgiving benefits the one who forgave, both in this world and in the world to come.

The sale of Yosef is the paradigmatic sin bein adam l'chaveiro (See Meshech Chochma to Vayikra 16:30). Interpersonal sins caused the churban Bayis Sheini (Yoma 9b) and the murder of millions by the Romans, including the ten martyrs. The proper balance of truth and peace, and the avoidance of sin'as chinam, are critical conditions needed to reverse the tide of history and rebuild the Bais Hamikdash (See Radak to Zecharia 8:19).

Each member of Klal Yisroel can hasten the geula by avoiding interpersonal sins, by asking forgiveness from those he wronged, and by forgiving those who have wronged him. We must all learn the lessons taught by Rabbeinu Bachya, the Gemara, the Rambam and the Mishna Berura. We must seek forgiveness, despite the shame of specifying our misdeed, unless specifying will cause the victim shame or pain. We must grant forgiveness, realizing that we

may have caused the sinner to wrong us. Moreover, if we do not forgive, we are termed cruel and sinful. Finally, forgiving benefits both the sinner and the victim, in this world and the world to come. May we thereby witness the ultimate geula quickly.

Today, Asara b'Teves, may be the anniversary of mechiras Yosef (D'rashos Bais Yishaya, p. 242). The Chasam Sofer, quoting earlier sources, writes that each year, on Asara b'Teves, the Heavenly Court decides whether the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt during the coming year. By improving our interpersonal behavior, seeking forgiveness, and granting it, we can do our share to make this year the year of redemption. When we balance truth and peace properly, Asara b'Teves, and other fasts, will be days of joy and celebration (Zecharia 8:19). © 2018 Rabbi M. Willig and TorahWeb.org

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.
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