

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he deception has taken place. Joseph has been sold into slavery. His brothers dipped his coat in blood. They bring it back to their father, saying: "Look what we have found. Do you recognise it? Is this your son's robe or not?" Jacob recognises it and replies, "It is my son's robe. A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." We then read: Jacob rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned his son for a long time. His sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "I will go down to the grave mourning for my son." (Gen. 37:34-35)

There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief -- shiva, sheloshim, a year. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. The Talmud says that God admonishes one who weeps beyond the appointed time, "You are not more compassionate than I." (Mo'ed Katan 27b) And yet Jacob refuses to be comforted.

A Midrash gives a remarkable explanation. "One can be comforted for one who is dead, but not for one who is still living," it says. In other words, Jacob refused to be comforted because he had not yet given up hope that Joseph was still alive. That, tragically, is the fate of those who have lost members of their family (the parents of soldiers missing in action, for example), but have as yet no proof that they are dead. They cannot go through the normal stages of mourning because they cannot abandon the possibility that the missing person is still capable of being rescued. Their continuing anguish is a form of loyalty; to give up, to mourn, to be reconciled to loss is a kind of betrayal. In such cases, grief lacks closure. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

Yet on what basis did Jacob continue to hope? Surely he had recognised Joseph's blood-stained coat - he said explicitly, "A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." Do these words not mean that he had accepted that Joseph was dead?

Wishing my dear husband David Kaplan  
a happy birthday!

With my gratitude to him for printing out  
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The late David Daube made a suggestion that I find convincing. (Studies in Biblical Law, Cambridge: University Press, 1947) The words the sons say to Jacob -- haker na, literally "identify please" -- have a quasi-legal connotation. Daube relates this passage to another, with which it has close linguistic parallels: If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his neighbour for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbour did not lay hands on the other person's property...If it [the animal] was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal. (Exodus 22:10-13)

The issue at stake is the extent of responsibility borne by a guardian (shomer). If the animal is lost through negligence, the guardian is at fault and must make good the loss. If there is no negligence, merely force majeure, an unavoidable, unforeseeable accident, the guardian is exempt from blame. One such case is where the loss has been caused by a wild animal. The wording in the law -- tarof yitref, "torn to pieces" -- exactly parallels Jacob's judgment in the case of Joseph: tarof toraf Yosef, "Joseph has been torn to pieces."

We know that some such law existed prior to the giving of the Torah. Jacob himself says to Laban, whose flocks and herds had been placed in his charge, "I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself " (Gen. 31:39). This implies that guardians even then were exempt from responsibility for the damage caused by wild animals. We also know that an elder brother carried a similar responsibility for the fate of a younger brother placed in his charge, as, for example, when the two were alone together. That is the significance of Cain's denial when confronted by God as to the fate of Abel: "Am I my brother's guardian [shomer]?" (Gen. 4:9).

We now understand a series of nuances in the encounter between Jacob and his sons upon their



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return without Joseph. Normally they would be held responsible for their younger brother's disappearance. To avoid this, as in the case of later biblical law, they "bring the remains as evidence." If those remains show signs of an attack by a wild animal, they must -- by virtue of the law then operative -- be held innocent. Their request to Jacob, *haker na*, must be construed as a legal request, meaning, "Examine the evidence." Jacob has no alternative but to do so, and by virtue of what he has seen, to acquit them. A judge, however, may be forced to acquit someone accused of a crime because the evidence is insufficient to justify a conviction, while still retaining lingering private doubts. So Jacob was forced to find his sons innocent, without necessarily trusting what they said. In fact Jacob did not believe it, and his refusal to be comforted shows that he was unconvinced. He continued to hope that Joseph was still alive. That hope was eventually justified: Joseph was still alive, and father and son were ultimately reunited.

The refusal to be comforted sounded more than once in Jewish history. The prophet Jeremiah heard it in a later age: "This is what the Lord says: / 'A voice is heard in Ramah, / Mourning and great weeping, / Rachel weeping for her children / Refusing to be comforted, / Because her children are no more.' / This is what the Lord says: / 'Restrain your voice from weeping, / And your eyes from tears, / For your work will be rewarded,' says the Lord. / 'They will return from the land of the enemy. / So there is hope for your future,' declares the Lord, / 'Your children will return to their own land.'" (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Why was Jeremiah sure that Jews would return? Because they refused to be comforted -- meaning, they refused to give up hope.

So it was during the Babylonian exile, as articulated in one of the most paradigmatic expressions of the refusal to be comforted: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept, / As we remembered Zion... / How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land? / If I forget you, O Jerusalem, / May my right hand forget [its skill], / May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth / If I do not remember you, / If I do not consider Jerusalem above my highest joy." (Psalms 137:1-6)

It is said that Napoleon, passing a synagogue

on the fast day of Tisha B'Av, heard the sounds of lamentation. "What are the Jews crying for?" he asked one of his officers. "For Jerusalem," the soldier replied. "How long ago did they lose it?" "More than 1,700 hundred years." "A people who can mourn for Jerusalem so long, will one day have it restored to them," the Emperor is reputed to have replied.

Jews are the people who refused to be comforted because they never gave up hope. Jacob did eventually see Joseph again. Rachel's children did return to the land. Jerusalem is once again the Jewish home. All the evidence may suggest otherwise: it may seem to signify irretrievable loss, a decree of history that cannot be overturned, a fate that must be accepted. Jews never believed the evidence because they had something else to set against it -- a faith, a trust, an unbreakable hope that proved stronger than historical inevitability. It is not too much to say that Jewish survival was sustained in that hope. And that hope came from a simple -- or perhaps not so simple -- phrase in the life of Jacob. He refused to be comforted. And so -- while we live in a world still scarred by violence, poverty and injustice -- must we. *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 there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver, and they brought Joseph down to Egypt. (Genesis 37:28) Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed? An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

Let's consider this scene of déjà vu. We know that Isaac was actually blind when he planned to give the blessings to his favored son, Esau, who turned out to be Jacob because of Rebecca's planned deception. Now, we find Jacob is equally blind in his relationships with his own sons, for "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors' [Gen. 37:3]. This infuriated his brothers. 'And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him' [Gen37:4]. The Talmud declares:

“A parent must never favor one child among the others; because of a piece of material worth two selahs (the coat of many colors) that Jacob gave to Joseph more than his other children, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter degenerated until our forefathers were forced to descend to Egypt.” (B.T. Shabbat 10b)

Apparently, our Sages felt that Jacob bore ‘ministerial responsibility’ for the tragedy of the brothers, although his sin was certainly inadvertent. Jacob suffers grievously for his mistake in family management, believing for twenty-two years that his beloved son is dead. But nevertheless he certainly is not the main culprit.

Joseph doesn’t do anything to assuage his brothers’ feelings: he recounts his dreams that flaunt his superiority and eventual domination over the other family members [Gen. 37:5–11]. Then, in a fateful move, the still unaware (blind) Jacob sends Joseph to Shekhem to see “whether all is well with his brothers, and well with the flock” [Gen. 37:14]. Sighting Joseph from a distance and clearly aggrieved by their father’s favoritism, Joseph’s brothers conspire in their hearts to kill him. They tear off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit. Shortly afterwards, the brothers spy an approaching caravan, prompting Judah to suggest that since killing isn’t profitable, they should rather sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite caravan and tell their father he was devoured by a wild beast.

Undoubtedly, the moment Joseph is sold into slavery is one of the turning points in the Torah. It is considered the most heinous crime of the biblical period – the sin of sibling hatred foreshadowing the Jewish divisiveness that led to the destruction of the Second Holy Temple and its aftermath of tragic exile and persecution.

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it’s hard to figure out who it was who actually sold the hapless brother, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites or the brothers who initiated the plan. (Gen 37:27,28)

Joseph himself initially considers the brothers responsible, as he said when he first reveals his true self to them, “I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt.” (Gen. 45:4)

However, the Rashbam maintains that since the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him, they could not be considered as the only guilty party; but they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil, even those whose hands remain clean while others do the actual dirty work.

I share the view of Rashbam. One must do something – not merely think something – in order to be

responsible, but the one who sets the ultimate crime in motion by his action, even though he might not have perpetrated the act of the sale itself, must nevertheless certainly take responsibility. Hateful intentions alone cannot create culpability, but placing an individual in a vulnerable position – like casting him into the pit – inciting others to participate in that hatred as well as actively aiding and abetting the perpetrators of the crime, certainly makes one a partner in crime who must assume a share of the guilt.

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph twenty-two years later when Joseph was Grand Vizier of Egypt, he looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, sub specie aeternitatis, under an Eternal gaze. From his vantage point, when he stands as Master rather than hapless victims, he continues ‘But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you (all) might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you...to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God...’ [Gen. 45:5–8].

Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because it was the brothers who began the process which led to the sale, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime, concluded – owing to divine guidance and Joseph’s own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and thus to look upon the sale from a divine perspective, which turned a tragic family transgression into a truly mighty salvation! ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he narrative in the Torah portion of Vayeshev, of how the Jewish people came down to Egypt and settled there for centuries, is in the form of a personality dispute between Joseph and his brothers. The Torah never covers up for anyone and is never hagiographic. It presents for us figures of great people, but it does not demand perfection from them. In short, they are human with all that this connotes.

The brothers’ attitude towards Joseph is colored by one negative emotion – jealousy. Joseph is too handsome, too talented, too beloved by his father and too brash a personality. They and he are longer able to communicate with each other civilly and rationally. This jealousy eventually morphs into hatred, and as all human history indicates to us, hatred easily turns into persecution and violence. The brothers truly feel justified in their behavior and actions. They feel

compassionate towards Joseph in having sold him into slavery instead of murdering him on the spot. Jealousy and hatred are such strong self-justifying emotions that they can cover up even the most vicious crimes and violent behavior.

In the original story of murder in the Torah, Cain seems to realize that he has committed an evil act in murdering his brother. However, as civilization proceeded through the generations, there is little stigma of guilt associated with murdering people who the murderer feels unjustly has more power, wealth and ability than he does. The concept of justifiable homicide thus becomes one of the tenets of human civilization. And the brothers feel completely at ease in employing this concept regarding their treatment of Joseph and his being sold into slavery.

The Rabbis have taught us that much if not all Jewish history is simply a replay of the script of the story of Joseph and his brothers. It explains not only the differences that exist and have always existed in Jewish life, both religious and general, but it also illustrates how these differences oftentimes descend into acts that are unworthy of the chosen people. And, as with Joseph and his brothers, all differences are magnified and become reasons for the disagreements and for the satisfying self-justification that allows these disputes to perpetuate and recur again and again.

Eventually, history and events – these are the divine instruments by which G-d guides the world – will reconcile Joseph and his brothers. But the scars of their decades of contention will always remain, even after reconciliation has been achieved. So too, Jewish history reflects the repetition of old differences, albeit decked out in new forms and ideologies. Eventually all of these fall away in the face of the truth of Torah and the survival of the Jewish people. The scars remain and oftentimes the differences are revisited by later generations who willingly or unwillingly ignore the past. It is for this reason perhaps that the Torah spends so much space and detail on this story of Joseph and his brothers. It is really the millennia old story of internal Jewish life and society. ©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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he dreams of the butler (sar ha-mashkim) and baker (sar ha-ofim) seem quite similar. Each of their dreams contain food (grapes, bread), the relinquishing of the food (grapes to Pharaoh, bread eaten by the birds) and the number three (three branches, three baskets). (Genesis 39:9-11, 16-17) If so much alike, what prompted Yosef (Joseph) to offer

such divergent interpretations? The butler, Yosef proclaimed would be restored to his post, while the baker would be hanged. (Genesis 39:12, 19)

Some suggest that Yosef knew the interpretation, for he was keenly aware of the political workings of Pharaoh's kingdom. In other words, he knew that the butler was worthy and the baker was not. Others suggest that it was pure ruach ha-kodesh, a revelation from heaven that directed Yosef's interpretation.

However, the commentator Benno Yaakov says that the text itself indicates that despite the similarities, there was a fundamental difference between the butler's and baker's dream. The butler describes himself as being active-"I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand." (Genesis 40: 11) Here, there is a preponderance of words of action.

The baker on the other hand, was completely passive. Three baskets were on my head, he said, and the birds were eating from the baked goods. (Genesis 40:17) Here, there are no verbs descriptive of what the baker did in his dream.

Dreams reveal much about character. In fact, they often express one's deepest subconscious feelings. The butler's dreams showed he was a doer, a person of action. Observing this phenomenon, Yosef concluded that the butler was worthy of returning to Pharaoh's palace. This is in contrast to the baker's dream, where he describes himself as a man who is sitting back and doing nothing. Therefore, Yosef concluded, he was unworthy of a reprieve.

A story: an artist was selling a picture of a person with bread on his head. As the potential buyer negotiated the price, birds flew down and began to eat the food. "This piece is so good," the artist said, "the birds believe the baked goods to be real."

Replied the buyer: "The birds may believe the bread is real, but clearly they do not believe the person you've drawn is real, alive - or they would have been frightened away."

The baker is the person in our story. Being still as the birds ate bread from atop his head, the birds thought he was dead.

The message is clear. Good things invariably result from action. Doom and disaster are products of inaction. ©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

**RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## A Disguised Gift

**W**hen Yosef arrived in Egypt, he was sold into the house of Potifar. "And Yosef was brought down to Egypt and Potifar, a courtier of Par'oh, the chamberlain of the butchers, an important man of

Egypt, purchased him from the Yishm'eilim who brought him down to there. And Hashem was with Yosef and he became a successful man and he remained in the house of his Egyptian master. And his master saw that Hashem was with him and in all that he would do Hashem would make successful in his hand. And Yosef found favor in his (Potifar) eyes and he attended him, and he appointed him over his household and all that was his he placed into his hands. And it happened that from the time that he appointed him in his house and over all that was his that Hashem blessed the Egyptian's house on Yosef's account and Hashem's blessing was in all that he had, in the house and in the field. He left all that was his in Yosef's hand and he did not know anything that was with him except for the bread that he ate, now Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance."

Our Rabbis ask why Yosef was sold to Potifar when he could have been sold to anyone in Egypt. We must remember that we do not assume that anything that happened to the Forefathers (and was recorded in the Torah) could possibly have happened by chance. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that we are told three things about Potifar in the Torah's description of him which explain his significance to our story. Yosef was sold into the house of the man who was in charge of the butchers. Potifar is also consistently called an ish Mitzri, an important Egyptian. He represented Egyptian culture and its licentious morality. Potifar was not only a leader of this immorality but he was a man whose wife would try to involve Yosef in those same immoral activities. It is even recorded that Potifar's original intention was to buy Yosef for his own immoral activities, but he was made a saris, a word whose other meaning is a eunuch, which prevented him from using Yosef immorally. The Midrash tells us about three complaints that Yosef consistently brought to their father: (1) The brothers ate the meat that they slaughtered too soon. This paralleled Potifar's involvement with meat. (2) The sons of Leah treated the sons of the maidservants as if they were slaves. This parallels Potifar as an ish Mitzri, an important Egyptian who was above others. (3) The brothers were accused of involvement with women in the marketplace, a euphemism for inappropriate sexual behavior. This paralleled Potifar's licentious behavior. Yosef was punished midah k'neged midah, the punishment fit the crime.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch points out that the word "vay'hi, and it was", occurs three times in the second sentence. Yosef was "isolated, expelled and thrown out into such surroundings, the special care and protection of Hashem was necessary." That is why the pasuk begins with "vay'hi Hashem et Yosef, and Hashem was with Yosef," using the word et to mean "with". We have seen previously that et is a dependent form indicating Yosef's dependence on Hashem. The

Kli Yakar indicates that the three uses of vay'hi are signs that Yosef was growing and maturing and that each indicated a step in this process. This also marked three different levels of trust and responsibility that Potifar gave to Yosef. In the beginning Hashem was with Yosef alone. As he grew, Hashem increased his efforts and made him successful for Potifar. Finally, as Potifar recognized that Hashem was with Yosef, Hashem spread his influence also over the household of Potifar. This success was not Yosef's alone. As Potifar recognized that Hashem was with Yosef, then Hashem also made Potifar successful. Eventually this success also spread to the sons of Potifar who were in his household. Potifar was convinced that it would benefit him if Yosef were in charge of all that was his. He trusted that Hashem would guide Yosef to make all the right decisions.

Our Rabbis tell us a powerful Midrash about Yosef's success. Yosef was so excited that he was raised to be a "governor" of the household that he allowed his new position to cloud his thinking. He forgot that he was still a slave in spite of his raised position. He began to think too highly of himself and he no longer remembered the hardships that he had endured from his brothers. He did not remember that his father was mourning his loss and could not be consoled. As part of Yosef's arrogance, he began to fix his hair, preening for his beauty. Hashem immediately decided that Yosef needed to be punished and learn from that punishment. At that time Potifar's wife began to take an inappropriate interest in Yosef. We know that the effect of this inappropriate interest ended with Yosef being thrown into jail with no apparent hope of being freed.

In spite of the fact that Yosef was once again thrown into a "pit" from which he would need to be extracted, we are told that Yosef never lost his faith in Hashem. Hirsch explains Hashem's special relationship with Yosef. "Hashem was always near and with him, and there he developed into the striking personality, the makings of which he had always within him. He only needed just such happenings to bring these personality traits out, fully awakened and cleansed from all the little human weaknesses which had stuck to him in happier circumstances. If 'Hashem was with Yosef' that could only have been because Yosef was with Hashem. If the purposes which a man strives to achieve coincide with Hashem's purposes, then He arranges circumstances to be favorable and helpful for their achievement." Yosef needed the trials and tribulations through which he suffered in order to become the person who could accomplish Hashem's goals.

Here we see a theme which we have visited before. Our lives carry within them many challenges; it can be a world of great happiness and great suffering. Each challenge that we have is a challenge through

which Hashem wishes to help us grow to reach our true potential. We often mistake these challenges and believe that Hashem is making us suffer. Yet after experiencing difficult situations we are left with a newfound strength and purpose. This is not coincidental; it is the entire reason for that situation to have occurred. Each incident is a disguised gift from Hashem which can help us to find something that was lacking in our personalities but was always part of our potential. May we always be aware of Hashem's gifts. ©2018 Rabbi D. Levin

### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Embarrassing Someone

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ur sages derive from this week's portion that "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person". This we derive from the actions of Tamar, who refused to state that Judah made her pregnant for fear that he would be embarrassed.

It would seem therefore that this mitzvah is one that a person should give up his life, rather than transgress. Though we only list three sins that one must forfeit one's life rather than transgress, (namely, morality, killing, and idol worship), this mitzvah to not humiliate someone, is included in the transgression of killing, for when one becomes embarrassed, one's face turns white, which indicates a loss of blood which is considered akin to killing.

Others believe that this Mitzva is only hinted in the Torah while the cardinal three prohibitions cited above are mentioned explicitly. Indeed the Meiri states that the expression "that it is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person" is only a "good idea" ("Heara"), that one should be aware of and sensitive to the feelings of others.

Is one permitted to embarrass oneself?

If we compare embarrassing another to killing, then just as it is forbidden for one to injure him/her self purposely so too it should be forbidden for one to embarrass oneself. As a result a person should not wear shredded clothing, even though his intent might be to show humility or even if it is done as a way to acquire money.

However the same Meiri cited above states that one is permitted to embarrass oneself and it is not considered immoral.

In order to avoid transgressing the prohibition "not to embarrass anyone", our sages implemented the law that when one brings his "First Fruit" ("Bikurim") to Jerusalem, he had to place his fruits in baskets of reeds rather than elaborate gold or silver so that the poor would not be humiliated. As well, in many congregations there is a designated reader from the Torah so that one, who is unable to read because of

lack of knowledge or unpreparedness, would not be shamed. However there are also some congregations who are not concerned in this case with embarrassment and insist that the person who is given an Aliya to the Torah reads their section, as an incentive that one should be prepared properly. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

### RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

## Perceptions

**"A**nd Ya'akov dwelled..." Bereishis 37:1 This is the parshah in which everything breaks loose. Ya'akov had thought he'd seen everything and passed all of his tests. What more could there be left? He survived Lavan, he survived the angel of Eisav and then Eisav himself. He even survived the episode of Shechem and the near destruction of his family that could have resulted. It was time to settle down, he had understandably thought.

How wrong he was. He should have been able to spend the rest of his years celebrating his victories. He was about to spend the next 22 years mourning the loss of a son and doubting his mission. It was like the Akeidah, except stretched out over two decades.

When a person goes in for an operation, he knows that he is not going to a party. He tries to mentally prepare himself for what is going to happen to him on the operating table. He might even prepare himself for bad news that might come after the operation if it isn't a success.

If a person goes to a party however he expects to have a good time. If something goes terribly wrong it will catch him off guard and maybe even shock him. Some people never fully recover from some experiences that surprised them even though they would have if they had been prepared for them. Being prepared psychologically for a negative situation is like wearing a layer of armor for an impending attack.

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, "What is prepared for the righteous in the World-to-Come is not sufficient for them, but they seek [also] to dwell in tranquility in this world!" (Rashi, Bereishis 37:2)

This is a particularly difficult statement to understand. To begin with, it wasn't as if Ya'akov wanted to "goof off" the rest of his life, as the expression goes. He began his life with intense and continuous Torah study and it is very safe to assume that this was how he planned to spend the rest of his days as well. He longed all the time he was on the run to return to the tents of Torah study once again, and to remain there undisturbed.

Secondly, it wasn't as if Ya'akov hadn't paid his dues. If anyone deserved to settle down and retire to a life of Torah study, it was him. All he wanted to do was grow closer to God with each passing day, something that was a lot harder to do while ducking the arrows of his enemies.

Not only this, but this is not unique to Ya'akov Avinu. This is true of every righteous person. All they want to do is serve God without distraction. They're prepared to work hard continuously, but to learn and perform mitzvos, not to deal with enemies of truth. If they have to, they will. But if there is a way to avoid it so that they can focus their energies on Torah, why not? How could God complain about that?

He's doesn't. What God is actually doing is stating an immutable fact about Creation. He is explaining that peace in this world is not really possible until after Moshiach comes and brings it. As the second verse of the Creation story states, the basis of this world is not order but chaos. As the Talmud reminds us, it is always trying to disrupt whatever order exists, which is only possible to achieve through Torah learning and the performance of mitzvos.

Eisav, Lavan, and Shechem were all a function of this built-in chaos. Had Adam HaRishon not eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they would never have existed. Adam would have been Moshiach, and evil would have gone out of Creation as fast as it came in.

Instead, he did sin, man was expelled, and evil has lingered ever since. Tohu -- chaos -- has lurked around every corner which is why every time the world advances the cause of peace chaos seems to come back with a vengeance. Remember 20 years ago? Boom times, right? Take a look at the world around you today. These might be "boom times" as well, but not in the way we want.

The point is not that we can't have peace, or even sustained peace. The point is that it is not a natural backdrop of everyday life yet. Peace comes at a cost. You have to sacrifice for it, and when you don't, it is either a temporary gift of Divine mercy or the calm before a storm. Ya'akov was not criticized for wanting peace. He was "criticized" for thinking he could have it at no additional cost. Not in this world, not yet.

In the end, he was not completely wrong. According to the Pri Tzaddik, he did enjoy his last 17 years of life, even in Egypt, in an other-worldly kind of way. The pieces were allowed to fall into place. He had all 12 sons once again. He lived to see them make peace with one another. Life in Egypt worked for them while he still lived, and he was even able to plan for the future Mishkan: "And acacia wood: Where did they get these [trees] in the desert? Rabbi Tanchuma explained that our father Ya'akov foresaw with the holy spirit that the Jewish people were destined to build a Mishkan in the desert, so he brought cedars to Egypt and planted them. He commanded his sons to take them with them when they left Egypt." (Rashi, Shemos 25:5)

Nevertheless, according to the Zohar, he was also keenly aware that his peace was just the calm before the storm: "Ya'akov had wanted to rectify the [Malchus below] b'sod the [lower] unity, and established

the [unity of the] 24 letters, which is, 'Boruch Shem kevod Malchus l'olam va'ed -- Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever.' He did not complete it with 25 letters [as the Shema has], since [in Ya'akov's time] the Mishkan had yet to be rectified." (Zohar, Terumah 139b)

The Torah later says that Ya'akov Avinu, just prior to his death, had wanted to reveal the time of the Final Redemption to his sons (Bereishis 49:1). However, as the Talmud explains, the prophecy left him, and this made him wonder about the extent of the teshuvah his sons had actually done since Shechem. So he asked them: "Perhaps, God forbid, there is something unfit from my bed, just as Yishmael [who was unfit and] was born to Avraham, and Eisav [the evil was born] to my father Yitzchak?"

"His sons answered [him], 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,' [as if to say that] just as only [God is] one in your heart, so too in our hearts there is only One." (Pesachim 56a)

Their father's answer of, "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va'ed," based upon the explanation of the Zohar, indicates that Ya'akov remained unconvinced of their complete sincerity. He already knew then that cracks in the family shell remained and were bound to result in future no good. He knew then that additional tikun was necessary for his family and their descendants before Moshiach would come and usher in the Final Redemption.

Ya'akov Avinu died almost 3600 years ago. We are those descendants waiting for Moshiach and the Final Redemption. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then, and a lot of Jewish blood for that matter. All of it has been part of the final rectification Ya'akov had hoped to see in his lifetime. He thought it was close enough to try and reveal the End-of-Days to his sons.

He lost the prophecy and now we know why. We can see what had to happen before Moshiach can come. We're still seeing it. We don't even know what is coming up next. The final War of Gog and Magog (two have already occurred) looms, and history is crazy today. Once again chaos rules the day as we sit and wait for the next attack, God forbid, the next potentially devastating event that could trigger the unthinkable, or at least the unspeakable.

Or, previously unspeakable. All of a sudden the term, "World War III" is being used today. Comparisons are being made between the shooting down of the Russian jet by Turkey (is that name not earned now?), and the start of World War I. From a historical point of view, it is concerning. From a Divine Providence point of view, it is insightful and maybe even advance warning.

On the other hand, I can't help but wonder what the world would be like if there was peace in Syria and no ISIS to worry about. I suspect that my presently

peaceful life would be a lot less peaceful. More than likely the UN would be all over Israel and there would be world pressure to acquiesce to all Arab claims. This would make Israel a bigger international pariah than they already claim we are.

This is what the Vilna Gaon foretold hundreds of years ago. He said when the Final Redemption finally comes there will be a mixture of judgment and mercy. It will come slowly and bit-by-bit, he told his students, because we won't merit it and be spiritually ready to receive its light. So, negative events will occur simultaneously with positive ones, but they will all be for the sake of redemption.

The Gaon wasn't a prophet but he had ruach hakodesh. Ya'akov Avinu, however, was a prophet. Perhaps he lost the prophecy, as the Talmud says, or he saw, or sensed, that history was far from over. Maybe he saw all the history that had to happen along the way to complete redemption. Perhaps he even saw us and all that we are going through now.

This might be depressing if Chanukah was not about to begin. Chanukah says that a few people, with self-sacrifice for God and Torah, can turn even the most potentially disastrous situation around. If the fire of Torah burns within even a few Jews then it can ignite the entire world in a positive, redemption-oriented way. After all, the world of Eisav is not compared to straw for no reason: "Another interpretation of 'And Ya'akov dwelt'... The camels of a flax dealer [once] entered [a town], laden with flax. The blacksmith wondered, 'Where will all this flax go?' One clever fellow answered him, 'One spark will come out of your bellows, which will burn it all.' So did Ya'akov see all the chieftains [of Eisav] mentioned above, and wondered, 'Who can conquer them all?' What is written below? 'These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef' only, and it is written: 'And the house of Ya'akov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav shall become stubble' (Ovadia 1:18). One spark will emerge from Yosef, which will destroy and consume them all." (Rashi, Bereishis 37:1)

Lighting our Menorahs has never been more meaningful, or necessary. Just ask Ya'akov Avinu. © 2015 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Vayeshev relates a seemingly disturbing series of events. After telling us that Yosef snatched on his brothers, it says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all the other brothers and that's why he made him a striped shirt. Then it says of the brothers could no longer tolerate Yosef, and didn't believe his dreams of them bowing to him. First, why did Yaakov love one son more than the others? Second, why couldn't the brothers tolerate Yosef only after his father made him the striped shirt? Lastly, why

did Yosef insist on telling his brothers his dreams, when he must have sensed that they didn't want to hear them? Rav Kaminetsky explains that Yaakov had taught Yosef all that he'd learned in the Yeshiva (school) of Shem and Eiver where he studied, and where Yitzchok and Avraham studied as well. The main strength of that school was that they taught Torah that could survive in negative environments. Avraham used it to deal with the rest of the world, Yitzchok used it to deal with Yishmael, and Yaakov used it to deal with Lavan and Esav. Now Yaakov was teaching it to Yosef, and the brothers were worried. Were they as bad as Esav or Lavan? Why would Yaakov have to teach Yosef that Torah? Little did they know that Yosef would need it to deal with Egypt, and all the trials he would face there.

Yaakov loved Yosef more because he learned more, and wanted the other brothers to be jealous (that's why he made him the shirt), so that they'd want to learn it too. But instead they became jealous for the wrong reasons. It was then that Yosef tried to tell them that they shouldn't be jealous, because he had to learn for his own sake, because he'd have to be a leader in a foreign land (as the dreams with stalks suggested, since there were no stalks where they lived). But the brothers had let themselves be blinded by hate, and couldn't see the truth, as obvious as it may have been.

There's an important lesson in all of this: jealousy can be used in a good way, as Yaakov tried to do. However, if we're not careful, we could miss the whole point, and end up doing things we shouldn't. The first test is to ask ourselves if we want something because we need it, or simply because someone else has it. We should be jealous of things we can learn and grow from, like Torah knowledge, good character traits, and even courage and persistence. Everyone has qualities we can and should be jealous of, as long as we use it not to prove ourselves, but to improve ourselves. © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc

