

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

It is one of the great questions we naturally ask each time we read the story of Joseph. Why did he not, at some time during their twenty-two year separation, send word to his father that he was alive? For part of that time -- when he was a slave in Potiphar's house, and when he was in prison -- it would have been impossible. But certainly he could have done so when he became the second most powerful person in Egypt. At the very least he could have done so when the brothers came before him on their first journey to buy food.

Joseph knew how much his father loved him. He must have known how much their separation grieved him. He did not know, could not know, what Jacob thought had happened to him, but this surely he knew: that it was his duty to communicate with him when the opportunity arose, to tell his father that he was alive and well. Why then did he not? The following explanation, is a tantalising possibility.

The story of Joseph's descent into slavery and exile began when his father sent him, alone, to see how the brothers were faring.

"His brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, 'As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.'

"Very well,' he replied.

"So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron." (Gen. 37:12-14)

What does the narrative tell us immediately prior to this episode? It tells us about the second of Joseph's dreams. In the first, he had dreamt that he and his brothers were in the field binding sheaves. His stood upright while the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to him. Naturally, when he told them about the dream, they were angry. "Do you intend to reign over us? Would you rule over us?" There is no mention of Jacob in relation to the first dream.

The second dream was different: "Then he had

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for a refuah shelaima

another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'

"When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind." (Gen. 37:9-11).

Immediately afterwards, we read of Jacob sending Joseph, alone, to his brothers. It was there, at that meeting far from home, that they plotted to kill him, lowered him into a pit, and eventually sold him as a slave.

Joseph had many years to reflect on that episode. That his brothers were hostile to him, he knew. But surely Jacob knew this as well. In which case, why did he send Joseph to them? Did Jacob not contemplate the possibility that they might do him harm? Did he not know the dangers of sibling rivalry? Did he not at least contemplate the possibility that by sending Joseph to them he was risking Joseph's life?

No one knew this better from personal experience. Recall that Jacob himself had been forced to leave home because his brother Esau threatened to kill him, once he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing. Recall too that when Jacob was about to meet Esau again, after an interval of twenty-two years, he was "in great fear and distress," believing that his brother would try to kill him. That fear provoked one of the great crises of Jacob's life. So Jacob knew, better than anyone else in Genesis, that hate can lead to killing, that sibling rivalry carries with it the risk of fratricide.

Yet Jacob sent Joseph to his other sons knowing that they were jealous of him and hated him. Joseph presumably knew these facts. What else could he conclude, as he reflected on the events that led up to his sale as a slave, that Jacob had deliberately placed him in this danger? Why? Because of the immediately prior event, when Joseph had told his



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father that "the sun and moon" -- his father and mother -- would bow down to him.

This angered Jacob, and Joseph knew it. His father had "rebuked" him. It was outrageous to suggest that his parents would prostrate themselves before him. It was wrong to imagine it, all the more so to say it. Besides which, who was the "moon"? Joseph's mother, Rachel, the great love of Jacob's life, was dead. Presumably, then, he was referring to Leah. But his very mention of "the sun and moon and eleven stars" must have brought back to his father the pain of Rachel's death. Joseph knew he had provoked his father's wrath. What else could he conclude but that Jacob had deliberately put his life at risk?

Joseph did not communicate with his father because he believed his father no longer wanted to see him or hear from him. His father had terminated the relationship. That was a reasonable inference from the facts as Joseph knew them. He could not have known that Jacob still loved him, that his brothers had deceived their father by showing him Joseph's bloodstained cloak, and that his father mourned for him, "refusing to be comforted." We know these facts because the Torah tells us. But Joseph, far away, in another land, serving as a slave, could not have known. This places the story in a completely new and tragic light.

Is there any supporting evidence for this interpretation? There is. Joseph must have known that his father was capable of being angered by his sons. He had seen it twice before.

The first time was when Shimon and Levi killed the inhabitants of Shechem after their prince had raped and abducted their sister Dina. Jacob bitterly reprimanded them, saying: "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed" (Gen. 34:30).

The second happened after Rachel died. "While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah -- and Israel heard of it" (Gen. 35:22). Actually according to the sages, Reuben merely moved his father's bed, (Rashi

ad loc) but Jacob believed that he had slept with his handmaid, an act of usurpation.

As a result of these two episodes, Jacob virtually broke off contact with his three eldest sons. He was still angry with them at the end of his life, cursing them instead of blessing them. Of Reuben, he said: "Unstable as water, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it." (Gen. 49:4)

Of his second and third sons he said: "Shimon and Levi are brothers -- / Their swords are weapons of violence. / Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, / For they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. / Cursed be their anger, so fierce, / And their fury, so cruel! / I will scatter them in Jacob / And disperse them in Israel." (Gen. 49:5-7)

So Joseph knew that Jacob was capable of anger at his children, and of terminating his relationship with them (that is why, in the absence of Joseph, Judah became the key figure. He was Jacob's fourth son, and Jacob no longer trusted the three eldest).

There is evidence of another kind as well. When Joseph was appointed second-in-command in Egypt, given the name Tzafenat Pa'nea, and had married an Egyptian wife, Asenat, he had his first child. We then read: "Joseph named his firstborn Menasheh, saying, 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's house.'" (Gen. 41:51)

Uppermost in Joseph's mind was the desire to forget the past, not just his brothers' conduct towards him but "all my father's house." Why so, if not that he associated "all my trouble" not just with his siblings but also with his father Jacob? Joseph believed that his father had deliberately put him at his brothers' mercy because, angered by the second dream, he no longer wanted contact with the son he had once loved. That is why he never sent a message to Jacob that he was still alive.

If this is so, it sheds new light on the great opening scene of Vayigash. What was it in Judah's speech that made Joseph break down in tears and finally reveal his identity to his brothers? One answer is that Judah, by asking that he be held as a slave so that Benjamin could go free, showed that he had done teshuva; that he was a penitent; that he was no longer the same person who had once sold Joseph into slavery. That, as I have argued previously, is a central theme of the entire narrative. It is a story about repentance and forgiveness.

But we can now offer a second interpretation. Judah says words that, for the first time, allow Joseph to understand what had actually occurred twenty-two years previously. Judah is recounting what happened after the brothers returned from their first journey to buy food in Egypt: "Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' But we said, 'We cannot go down.

Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

"Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces.' And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery.'" (Gen. 44:27-31)

At that moment Joseph realised that his fear that his father had rejected him was unwarranted. On the contrary, he had been bereft when Joseph did not return. He believed that he had been "torn to pieces," killed by a wild animal. His father still loved him, still grieved for him. Against this background we can better understand Joseph's reaction to this disclosure: "Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?'" (Gen. 45:1-3)

Joseph's first thought is not about Judah or Benjamin, but about Jacob. A doubt he had harboured for twenty-two years had turned out to be unfounded. Hence his first question: "Is my father still alive?"

Is this the only possible interpretation of the story? Clearly not. But it is a possibility. In which case, we can now set the Joseph narrative in two other thematic contexts which play a large part in Genesis as a whole.

The first is tragic misunderstanding. We think here of at least two other episodes. The first has to do with Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac, we recall, loved Esau; Rebecca loved Jacob. At least one possible explanation, offered by Abarbanel (Bereishit 25:28) is that Rebecca had been told "by God," before the twins were born, that "the elder will serve the younger." Hence her attachment to Jacob, the younger, and her determination that he, not Esau, should have Isaac's blessing.

(Isaac loved Esau, Abarbanel argues, because he was the firstborn. Isaac believed, therefore, that he would inherit the divine blessing and covenant. From her oracle, Rebecca knew otherwise. On this reading, the drama unfolded because of a failure of communication between husband and wife.)

The other concerns Jacob and Rachel. Rachel had stolen her father's terafim, "icons" or "household gods," when they left Laban to return to the land of Canaan. She did not tell Jacob that she had done so. The text says explicitly, "Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods" (Gen. 31:32). When Laban pursued and caught up with them, he accused Jacob's party of having stolen them. Jacob indignantly denies this and says "If you find anyone who has your gods, he

shall not live". Several chapters later, we read that Rachel died prematurely, on the way. The possibility hinted at by the text, articulated by a Midrash and by Rashi, (Bereishit 31:32; Bereishit Rabbah and Zohar ad loc) is that, unwittingly, Jacob had condemned her to death. In both cases, misunderstanding flowed from a failure of communication. Had Rebecca told Isaac about the oracle, and had Rachel told Jacob about the terafim, tragedy might have been averted. Judaism is a religion of holy words, and one of the themes of Genesis as a whole is the power of speech to create, mislead, harm or heal. From Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers ("They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him"), we are shown how, when words fail, violence begins.

The other theme, even more poignant, has to do with fathers and sons. How did Isaac feel towards Abraham, knowing that he had lifted a knife to sacrifice him? How did Jacob feel towards Isaac, knowing that he loved Esau more than him? How did Leah's sons feel about Jacob, knowing that he loved Rachel and her children more? Does my father really love me? -- that is a question we feel must have arisen in each of these cases. Now we see that there is a strong case for supposing that Joseph, too, must have asked himself the same question.

"Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me," says Psalm 27. That is a line that resonates throughout Genesis. No one did more than Sigmund Freud to place this at the heart of human psychology. For Freud, the Oedipus complex -- the tension between fathers and sons -- is the single most powerful determinant of the psychology of the individual, and of religion as a whole.

Freud, however, took as his key text a Greek myth, not the narratives of Genesis. Had he turned to Torah instead, he would have seen that this fraught relationship can have a non-tragic resolution. Abraham did love Isaac. Isaac did bless Jacob a second time, this time knowing he was Jacob. Jacob did love Joseph. And transcending all these human loves is divine love, rescuing us from feelings of rejection, and redeeming the human condition from tragedy. *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 Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his [Joseph's] neck." (Gen. 45:14) This poignant moment when these two brothers are reunited after a separation of twenty-two years is one of the most tender scenes in the Torah.

After a long chronicle of difficult brotherly

relationships – Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his other siblings – we finally come across two brothers who truly love each other. The only children of Jacob's beloved Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin shared the same womb, and when their mother died in childbirth, we can feel assured that Joseph drew Benjamin close to him, protected him, and shared with him the precious memories of the mother Benjamin never knew. Their exclusive relationship must have made their eventual separation even more painful and traumatic. After all, Benjamin was the only brother totally uninvolved in the family tension and sibling rivalry against Joseph.

But I'm left wondering: Where is the joy, the elation, the celebration? Why does the Torah only record the weeping of the brothers at this dramatic moment of their reunion?

Rashi cites and explains a midrashic interpretation which suggests that these tears relate to the future destruction of the two Temples allotted to the portion of Benjamin, and to the destruction of the sanctuary in Shilo allotted to the portion of Joseph. Rashi stresses that Joseph's tears are for Benjamin's destruction, and Benjamin's tears are for Joseph's destruction.

But why should Rashi extrapolate such terrible events in the future from the tears of the brothers? I believe that the answer lies in our being mindful of the two archetypal sins in the book of Genesis: The first is the sin of eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which symbolizes rebellion against God, and the second is the sin of the sale of Joseph by his brothers, which epitomizes the sins of enmity between people, internecine strife.

Of the two, the Zohar considers the latter more severe. In the tradition of 'the events of the fathers foreshadow the history of the children,' we can see that all tragedies to befall the Jewish people have their source in the 'DNA' of the sale of Joseph as a slave. This act was the foundation of causeless hatred between Jews.

The Talmud [Gittin 55b], in isolating the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple, reports an instance of brotherly hatred within Israel. A wealthy man had a party and wanted to invite his friend Kamtza. Inadvertently, his avowed enemy Bar-Kamtza was invited instead. Thrown out and shamed, Bar-Kamtza took revenge. He went to the Roman authorities and lied in order to implicate the Jews in crimes against the state. The rest is history. Josephus writes that even as the Romans were destroying the Temple, Jews were still fighting amongst themselves. Down to this very day, we find the Jewish people hopelessly split in enemy camps politically and religiously, with one group cynically and sometimes even hatefully attacking the other.

Thus it is the sin of causeless hatred, the crime

of the brothers against Joseph, that can be said to be our 'original sin'. Indeed, during the Yom Kippur additional Amida, the author of the mournful Eileh Ezkera hymn of doxology, links the Temple's destruction and the tragedy of Jewish exile with the sin of the brothers' sale of Joseph.

Now Rashi's interpretation assumes profound significance. In the midst of brotherly hatred, the love between Joseph and Benjamin stands out as a shining example of the potential for unconditional love. Rashi links their tears during their meeting to the destruction of our Sanctuaries – the result of jealousy and enmity between Jew and Jew. Indeed, they each weep for the future tragedies that will befall their descendants. But although each brother will be blessed with a Sanctuary on his allotted land, the brothers weep not for themselves, but each for the other. This act of selfless weeping and unconditional love, becomes the only hope against the tragedies implicit in the sale of Joseph into slavery. The only thing which can repair that sin – and by implication the sins of all the causeless hatred between factions down the long road of Jewish history – is nothing less than a love in which the other comes first, causeless love, when one weeps for the other's tragedy rather than for his own.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook taught that if the Temples were destroyed because of causeless hatred, the Temple will only be rebuilt because of causeless love, exemplified by the tears of Joseph and Benjamin. Rashi is providing a prescient lesson as to know we can achieve true peace and world redemption in this very special period of our return to Zion. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**A**fter Joseph is reunited with his brothers, and Jacob and his family journey to Egypt to settle there, Joseph brings his aged father in front of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh, who was Emperor then of the entire civilized world, asks Jacob a strange question. He asks him: "How old are you?" On the surface, this can appear to be a natural question that people ask when encountering someone of very advanced years.

Nevertheless, the question itself is disturbing to the one who is being questioned. It indicates that somehow that person has outlived his time and his usefulness. Otherwise why would the question be asked and of what value is it to the questioner if the older person responds and gives him a number indicating how long he has lived on the face of this earth.

Jacob senses that there is a note of derision implicit in the question of the Pharaoh. He is reading the mind of the Egyptian king and he realizes that

Pharaoh considers him and all that he represents to be a relic of the past, a has-been, someone who is irrelevant to the current world, its challenges and accomplishments.

Because of this deeper understanding of the frame of mind of the Pharaoh when he first sees Jacob, Jacob himself answers in what initially appears to be a very strange fashion. He says that his life as been short and bitter with troubles and that he has not yet achieved in his days the accomplishment of his ancestors. In effect he is telling the Pharaoh not to discount him and his life, short and troubled as it may have been. The old man is implying that he has something left in him yet to teach and guide future generations, and even the Pharaoh himself.

This is borne out at the conclusion of the short conversation between Pharaoh and Jacob. We are told that Jacob blessed Pharaoh though the text does not reveal what specific blessings Jacob bestowed upon Pharaoh. However Jewish tradition teaches us that the blessing was that the famine, that then engulfed the world and had Egypt itself on the verge of collapse, would end.

Joseph had already confiscated all the wealth, land and people of Egypt in order to feed them during the first two years of the famine. Apparently now there were no resources left for the Pharaoh to overcome this deadly famine. The Pharaoh does not realize that the old man standing in front of him, a person that he seems to view with little value and importance is really the messenger of God who will save Egypt, and in fact the throne of Pharaoh as well, from destruction and annihilation.

Pharaoh was looking for new solutions, new ideas, new gods in order to extricate himself from the problems that faced him and his people. Jacob represents the old way, the way of faith and belief in service to God and to God's creatures on earth. It is true that this may not have, at first, appeared to be a popular package for the Pharaoh to adopt, but eventually it will be the only thing that will save him in Egypt. The old confer blessings upon later generations. This is not often realized and therefore the blessings are discarded, but eventually it will be only Jacob's blessings that will prove to be worthwhile and effective.

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### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hen Yaakov (Jacob) meets his son Yosef (Joseph) after seventeen years of separation the Torah states, "And he wept on his neck." (Genesis 46:29) Since the sentence speaks of only one

individual crying, "and he wept," who is the Torah referring to? Was it Yaakov or was it Yosef who cried?

One could argue that it was more likely that Yosef did the crying. After all, Yosef must have been filled with feelings of deep regret. Regret for having stirred his brother's jealousy through his dreams and regret for having failed to contact his father during the years of separation.

On the other hand, Yaakov must have also felt deep regret which may have prompted his crying. Yaakov, who grew up in a family wrought with friction due to his parents' playing of favorites, should have known better than to play favorites himself. His favoring of Yosef eventually led to Yosef's sale. Yaakov also made the mistake of sending Yosef to his brethren to make peace with them. It was this plan that backfired and led directly to Yosef being sold to Egypt. Tears of remorse would have been understandable.

There is another approach, one that doesn't emphasize tears of regret but rather tears of emotion. Here, the classical commentaries disagree. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh argues that Yaakov, who lived isolated in one place for twenty two years, was immersed in the pain of the loss of his son. When meeting Yosef he doesn't cry because "his tears had long since dried up." When the reunion finally takes place, Yaakov has no more tears left. Joseph however, had experienced "so many changes of fortune" since he left home and did not have time to dwell on his homesickness. When he meets his father, all the feelings that had been suppressed, rose to the surface. His crying showed the sudden rush of this pent up emotion.

Ramban sees it differently. He offers perhaps the most penetrating psychological insight. He argues that Yaakov was more likely to have wept. After all, when considering the emotions of an elderly father on the one hand, and the emotions of a young strong son, it seems clear that the father is more apt to shed tears. In Ramban's words: "By whom are tears more easily shed? By the aged parent who finds his long lost son alive after despairing and mourning for him, or the young son who rules?"

When addressing this text, I often ask my students: "How many of you have seen your mother cry?" Invariably, many students respond in the affirmative. But when I ask the same about their fathers, very few hands are raised. Somehow, we mostly associate crying with women and not men. This should not be. Indeed, the Torah never mentions Avraham (Abraham) or Sarah, Yitzchak (Isaac) or Rivka (Rebecca) crying before their children. Yaakov is the first. His tears reflect an openness of emotional love that allows a parent to cry freely before his / her child.

No wonder we are called the children of Yaakov (b'nei Yaakov) or the children of Israel (Yisrael),

Yaakov's additional name. Built into our personal lives and the lives of our nation are profound and deep tears. They are reflective of deep emotional feelings. The expression of such feelings should not be denied, but encouraged. Just as there are times where joy and smiles should be shown to everyone, there are times that almost demand the flowing of tears.

Blessed are the children who have the privilege and chance to glimpse into the depths of their parents' emotions and witness a spontaneous flowing of tears. ©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

## Is it Ya'akov or Yisrael

Over the past few weeks, we have watched the cliff-hanger story of Yosef and his brothers. In this week's parasha Yosef finally revealed to his brothers his true identity and urged them to bring their father and all of their families to Egypt speedily to avoid the hardship of the five years remaining in the seven years of famine. The brothers were then faced with the difficult task of telling their father that Yosef did not die, as they had said, but instead was now alive and the leader of Egypt. The Torah does not go into detail as to their discussion with their father other than to tell us that he almost died from the shock of this news. Ya'akov immediately decided to travel to Egypt to see his favorite son once more before he died.

The Torah tells us, "And Yisrael said, 'It is too much, Yosef my son still lives, I will go and see him before I die. And Yisrael traveled with all that was his to B'eersheva and he sacrificed sacrifices to the Elokim of his father Yitzchak. And Elokim said to Yisrael in a vision of the night, and He said, 'Ya'akov, Ya'akov', and he said, 'I am here.' And He said, 'I am Keil the Elokim of your father, do not be afraid of going down to Egypt because I will make you a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you and I will also surely bring you up (out of Egypt), and Yosef will lay his hand upon your eyes.'"

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch makes notice of the change in name from Ya'akov to Yisrael. We remember that Ya'akov was renamed Yisrael when he fought with the angel as he was returning to his brother Eisav in Canaan. Unlike the name change given to Avram to become Avraham, Ya'akov never stopped being called Ya'akov even though he was sometimes called Yisrael. Hirsch points out that "up till now, with one single exception, when he pulled himself together to make a decision and mastered his doubts, he was always referred to as Ya'akov." At this point, however, he regained his strength and courage upon hearing that his son was still alive. The question then is why Hashem continues to refer to him as Ya'akov

rather than as Yisrael. We will deal with that problem later in our discussion.

The Kli Yakar explains that according to the Midrash, Hashem had promised Ya'akov that if none of his sons died during his lifetime, he would not spend any time in geihinam, similar to Purgatory, where he would be punished for his sins until his soul was cleansed and then would proceed to Olam Habah, the World to Come. Ya'akov was promised that he would see Olam Habah immediately upon his death, just like his forefathers, rather than having to go through a cleansing process. Ya'akov was particularly concerned because he believed that he had sinned by not fulfilling the mitzvah of kibud av va'eim, honoring father and mother, during the time that he was escaping his brother's wrath. The Kli Yakar sees this Midrash as the reason that Ya'akov later offers sacrifices only to the Elokim of Yitzchak and not to the Elokim of Avraham. The Ramban presents a second explanation for the sacrifices to Yitzchak to the exclusion of Avraham. Ya'akov understood that his going down to Egypt was the beginning of the exile which was prophesized to Avraham. He was reluctant at first to bring his children along, but he realized that he should not interfere with the prophecy. He now brought the sacrifice to the pachad Yitzchak, the Fear of Yitzchak, "in order that Divine judgment should not be aimed against him." Ya'akov was faced with a dilemma. There were two precedents for him: (1) Avraham had gone down to Egypt when there was a famine but (2) Yitzchak did not leave during a famine because of Hashem's instruction to him. Ya'akov came to Be'ersheva in order to pray to Hashem and receive an answer as to which of the Avot he was to emulate at this time. Ya'akov was fearful that his sins caused him to be unworthy of Hashem's protection.

The Or HaChaim says that the Shechinah, the quality of Hashem that resides in a particular place, went down to Egypt with Ya'akov and the B'nei Yisrael as promised. This was a major concern for Ya'akov. The Or HaChaim asks how this was possible as many sources say that Moshe later had to exit the city-state of Mitzrayim in order to speak with Hashem. Egypt was so corrupt that Hashem could not have dwelled there. Yet the Or HaChaim says that there are many sources which indicate that the Shechinah was in Mitzrayim. He indicates that there are many different levels of dwelling in which the Shechinah participates. The greatest level was the Shechinah's presence over the Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark of the Temple. The lowest level was the one that Hashem permitted to live in Mitzrayim and then only because the B'nei Yisrael were promised that the Shechinah would accompany them into exile. But Hashem's promise here to Ya'akov goes even further. The Kli Yakar explains that the Shechinah went into Egypt even before Ya'akov entered so that there would be no moment that the B'nei Yisrael were in Egypt in

which the Shechinah was not already there protecting them.

Hirsch explains the difference between Ya'akov and Yisrael. Ya'akov was his birth name which meant "the one who is destined to hold on to the heel." Yisrael comes from the word "sarah" which is "one of the aspects of ruling, that of being superior, greater." "Only when a Ya'akov, one who, to all outward appearances is under the heel of others, obtains the victory over the most vicious attacks of enemies fully equipped with all material means, does this victory show the existence of a spiritual power which outweighs all material might and power." It is Ya'akov's outward appearance of weakness that reinforces our belief that only Hashem could bring about his victory over his enemies, and this leads us to the name Yisrael.

Today we have a State, a homeland for the Jewish People. How appropriate that this State should proudly carry the name of Yisrael. Yisrael (Israel) is the living proof of Hashem's power over all. Through the centuries there have been many attacks against His people both verbally and physically, yet He has kept His people alive and vibrant. Hashem's promise to Avraham that He would only bless those who blessed Avraham has been demonstrated as nation after nation who have turned against His people have been utterly destroyed. Ya'akov may appear to be weak, but Yisrael has been able to defeat nations far greater in number and far superior in weaponry, though only through Hashem's help and protection. May we always be worthy of the name Yisrael, and may we recognize that, though we may feel like Ya'akov during difficult and trying times, Hashem will always bring us to the victory of Yisrael under His protection. ©2018 Rabbi D. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Flattery

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

In this week's portion, Yehudah confronts Joseph with the sharp words, "For you are like Pharaoh", whose hidden meaning our sages explain; just as Pharaoh decrees and does not execute so you do as well. With this statement Yehudah fulfilled the Mitzvah of "Thou shalt not bring guilt upon the land" ("Bamidbar35;33"). Thus one is not permitted to flatter a killer citing his good points or his strengths or his family. In our case, since Joseph had the power to execute a person at will, similar to Pharaoh, Yehudah could have chosen the path of flattery but instead uttered the truth.

We are commanded not to flatter a person to their face even if they act properly, and even not in their presence if these qualities and words are untrue. This was the sin of our sages quoted in the Talmud. Agrippas whose lineage was questionable (he was a non-Jew) was the king of Israel. When reading from the Torah on Succot he cried when reaching the words "Thou shalt not place over you a foreign man who is not

your brother" (Devarim 17;15). In response our sages flattered him and said "Do not fear for you are our brother". Because of this they were punished, for no one has the right to flatter a person if their words are not true for people will rely on these words and ultimately this can harm many people.

However, one is permitted to flatter another if it is a question of saving lives ("Pikuach Nefesh"), or to promote peace ("Darkei Shalom") even though he might not be telling the entire truth ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Pharaoh said to Jacob, 'How many are the years of your life?' and Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'I have lived one hundred and thirty years. The years of my life were few and bad and they have not reached the years of my fathers'" (Genesis 47;8-9).

Ultimately, Jacob lived 33 years less than his father, Isaac. Why was he not granted the years of his father?

The commentary Daas Zkainim cites the Midrash that Jacob was punished for saying that the days of his life were few and bad. He lacked appreciation for life. The Midrash tells us that the 33 years he was denied correspond to the 33 words in verses 8-9.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz often cited this Midrash and explained that we should gain such a great appreciation for life itself that even if we have many difficulties in life, we will still live a life of joy. Experiencing this daily joy of living, we would be unable to say that our life was bad. The ultimate level to strive for is feeling a tremendous joy in living; then trivial matters will not cause you to complain. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin* ©2018 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

#### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

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

Rabbi Haber goes on to explain that Yosef was



empowered by one sentence:

"You didn't send me here, G-d did!" The fact is they did send him there, but from Yosef's perspective that was something THEY had to deal with. As far as Joseph was concerned, it was all an act of G-d. He was not the judge, he was a brother and he was a Jew. He would act like a brother and he would act like a Jew. We can learn SO much from Yosef today! It is not for us to play G-d. If we could just memorize and adapt one line into our lives? "it wasn't you that sent me here; it was G-d"? we'd all be closer to all our "brothers", and we'd all be better Jews. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc

### **RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS**

## **Judah vs. Joseph**

**T**he prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars and the moon- of a time when he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

Joseph's dreams always come to fruition. In fact, whatever Joseph sets his mind to accomplish, he is successful. When he arrives in Egypt after being sold by his jealous brothers he works for an influential person in Egypt's government. When he is thrown into jail he finds favor with the head of the prison. And when he finally interprets Pharos dream he is elevated to the position of Viceroy, perhaps the most powerful position next to the king himself. Everything that Joseph touches seems to turn to gold.

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems to work out for him. He presents to his brothers his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and to be publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph, only to be humiliated into owning up to his



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of initiating and carrying out his sale into slavery- and realizing that he is standing before his long lost brother, the dreamer- and that his dreams have come true! Yet

despite the apparent shortcomings of Judah, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that this exalted position representing the forerunner to the Messiah would come from Joseph rather than Judah!

Our sages explain that perhaps one reason for this, is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who ultimately undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to Jacob his father that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as "Yhudim", Jews, and for his descendent, David, to be designated to herald the messianic times.

But even more important -and this is the character trait that is so compelling to me and brings me to identify with Judah-is his humanness and the fact that he makes mistakes in his lifetime yet has the strength and ability to confess his wrongdoings and start over. His descendent, King David has these same personality traits. David, on a simple level-displays poor judgment with reference to Bat Sheva, and a host of other incidences as stated in the book of Samuel, but is always able to rise up from his mistakes and begin anew. His character, which is essentially the character of his ancestor Judah, is one who is represented by the typical Jew who is faced daily with religious challenges and sometimes falters and sometimes is successful. The strength of the Jew is the ability to admit wrongdoing and then start anew.

This appreciation of the fallibility of the human being is one that parents should keep in mind when judging their children and placing undue burdens and responsibilities on them expecting them to be perfect in every way. Parents very often use their children as scapegoats to realize their dreams, without concern for what is really good for their children. Teachers also, often, have unreasonable expectations of their students not allowing them to falter even one bit, without concern that they are after all only dealing with children and that everyone should be given some slack at different times in their lives. I have seen parents who make sure that their children are enrolled in every conceivable activity after school, without keeping in mind that children need some down time and space for themselves and sometimes make mistakes.

One of the strengths of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet continually tries until he is able to ascend and reach great heights. ©2006 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years . He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at [ravmordechai@aol.com](mailto:ravmordechai@aol.com)