

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

If you want to understand what a book is about, look carefully at how it ends. Genesis ends with three deeply significant scenes.

First, Jacob blesses his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasheh. This is the blessing that Jewish parents use on Friday night to bless their sons. My predecessor Lord Jakobovits used to ask, why this blessing of all the blessings in the Torah? He gave a beautiful reply. He said, all the others are from fathers to sons -- and between fathers and sons there can be tension. Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasheh is the only instance in the Torah of a grandparent blessing a grandchild. And between grandparents and grandchildren there is no tension, only pure love.

Second, Jacob blesses his twelve sons. There is discernible tension here. His blessings to his eldest three sons, Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, read more like curses than blessings. Yet the fact is that he is blessing all twelve together in the same room at the same time. We have not seen this before. There is no record of Abraham blessing either Ishmael or Isaac. Isaac blesses Esau and Jacob separately. The mere fact that Jacob is able to gather his sons together is unprecedented, and important. In the next chapter -- the first of Exodus -- the Israelites are, for the first time, described as a people. It is hard to see how they could live together as a people if they could not live together as a family.

Third, after the death of Jacob, the brothers asked Joseph to forgive them, which he does. He had also done so earlier. Evidently, the brothers harbour the suspicion that he was merely biding his time until their father died, as Esau at one point resolved to do. Sons do not take revenge within the family while the father is alive -- that seems to have been the principle in those days. Joseph speaks directly to their fears and puts them at rest. "You intended to harm me but God intended it for good," he says.

The Torah is telling us an unexpected message here: the family is prior to all else, to the land, the nation, politics, economics, the pursuit of power and the accumulation of wealth. From an external point of view, the impressive story is that Joseph reached the heights of power in Egypt, the Egyptians themselves mourned the death of his father Jacob and accompanied the

family on their way to bury him, so that the Canaanites, seeing the entourage said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning" (Gen. 50:11). But that is externality. When we turn the page and begin the book of Exodus, we discover that the position of the Israelites in Egypt was very vulnerable indeed, and all the power Joseph had centralised in the hands of Pharaoh would eventually be used against them.

Genesis is not about power. It is about families. Because that is where life together begins.

The Torah does not imply that there is anything easy about making and sustaining a family. The patriarchs and matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel especially -- know the agony of infertility. They know what it is to wait in hope and wait again.

Sibling rivalry is a repeated theme of the book. The Psalm tells us "how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together." It might have added, "and how rare." Almost at the beginning of the human story, Cain kills Abel. There are tensions between Sarah and Hagar that lead to Hagar and Ishmael being sent away. There is rivalry between Jacob and Esau, and between Joseph and his brothers, in both cases coming close to murder.

Yet there is no diminution of the significance of the family. To the contrary, it is the main vehicle of blessing. Children figure as central to God's blessing no less than the gift of the land. It is as if the Torah were telling us, with great honesty, that yes, families are challenging. The relationship between husband and wife, and between parent and child, is rarely straightforward. But we have to work at it. There is no guarantee that we will always get it right. It is by no means clear that the parents in Genesis always got it right. But this is our most human institution.

The family is where love brings new life into the world. That in itself makes it the most spiritual of all institutions. It is also where we have our most important and lasting moral education. To quote Harvard political scientist, the late James Q. Wilson, the family is "an arena in which conflicts occur and must be managed." People within the family "love and quarrel, share and

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

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.  
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives & various websites. It is presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL  
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

sulk, please and disappoint." Families, he says, "are the world in which we shape and manage our emotions." (The Moral Sense, Free Press, 1993, 162)

The Torah guides us through areas that have been identified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the most important arenas of conflict. Freud saw the Oedipus complex -- the desire to create space for yourself by removing your father -- as one of the primary drivers of human emotion. Rene Girard saw sibling rivalry as a, perhaps the, source of human violence. (Violence and the Sacred, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977)

I have argued that the story of the Binding of Isaac is directed precisely at the Oedipus complex. God does not want Abraham to kill Isaac. He wants him to relinquish ownership of Isaac. He wants to abolish one of the most widespread beliefs of the ancient world, known in Roman law as the principle of *Patria potestas*, that parents own their children. Once this has gone, and children become legal personalities in their own right, then much of the force of the Oedipus complex is removed. Children have space to be themselves.

I have argued also that the story of Jacob's wrestling match with the angel is directed against the source of sibling rivalry, namely mimetic desire, the desire to have what your brother has because he has it. Jacob becomes Israel when he ceases wanting to be Esau and instead stands tall as himself.

So Genesis is not a hymn to the virtue of families. It is a candid, honest, fully worked-through account of what it is to confront some of the main problems within families, even the best.

Genesis ends on these three important resolutions: first, that grandparents are part of the family and their blessing is important. Second, Jacob shows it is possible to bless all your children, even if you have a fractured relationship with some of them. Third, Joseph shows it is possible to forgive your siblings even if they have done you great harm.

One of my most vivid memories from my early days as a student was listening to the BBC Reith Lectures in 1967. The Reith lectures are the BBC's most prestigious broadcast series: the first to deliver them was Bertrand Russell in 1948. In 1967 the lecturer was the Cambridge Professor of Anthropology, Edmund Leach. I had the privilege of delivering these lectures in 1990.

Leach called his lectures *A Runaway World?*, and in his third lecture he delivered a sentence that made me sit up and take notice. "Far from being the basis of the good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents." (*A Runaway World?*, Oxford University Press, 1967.) It was an important sign that the family was about to be dethroned, in favour of sexual liberation and self-expression. Rarely has so important an institution been abandoned so thoroughly and so lightly.

In the decades that followed, in many parts of society, cohabitation replaced marriage. Fewer people were getting married, they were getting married later, and more were getting divorced. At one point, 50% of marriages in America and Britain were ending in divorce. And 50% of children were being born outside marriage. The current figure for Britain is 42%.

The consequences have been widespread and devastating. To take one example, the birth rate in Europe today is far below replacement rate. A fertility rate of 2.1 (the average number of children born per woman of the population) is necessary for a stable population. No country in Europe has that rate. In Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece, it is down to 1.3. The overall average is 1.6. Europe is maintaining its population only by immigration on an unprecedented scale. This is the death of Europe as we knew it.

Meanwhile in the United States, a significant part of the population is living in neighbourhoods with few intact families, disadvantaged children, damaged neighbourhoods, poor schools, few social facilities, and a desperate shortage of hope. This, for sections of America, is the end of the American dream.

(This is the thesis of two important books: Charles Murray, *Coming Apart*, Crown Forum, 2012, and Robert Putnam, *Our Kids*, Simon & Schuster, 2015. See also Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, Basic Books, 2016.)

People who look to the state, politics and power, to deliver the good, the beautiful and the true -- the Hellenistic tradition -- tend to regard the family and all it presupposes in terms of fidelity and responsibility as a distraction. But for people who understand not just the importance of politics but also its limitations and dangers, relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, grandparent and grandchildren, and siblings, are the most important basis of freedom. That is an insight that runs all the way through Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (p. 340), summed up in his statement that "as long as family feeling was kept alive, the opponent of oppression was never alone."

James Q. Wilson put it beautifully: "We learn to cope with the people of this world because we learn to cope with the members of our family. Those who flee the family flee the world; bereft of the former's affection,

tutelage, and challenges, they are unprepared for the latter's tests, judgements, and demands." (The Moral Sense, 163)

That, surprisingly, is what Genesis is about. Not about the creation of the world, which occupies only one chapter, but about how to handle family conflict. As soon as Abraham's descendants can create strong families, they can move from Genesis to Exodus and their birth as a nation.

I believe that family is the birthplace of freedom. Caring for one another, we learn to care for the common good. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

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

The petty rivalries have been laid aside, the sturm und drang of exiles, wars, famines and inter-sibling savagery unto death have seemingly been forgotten; a divided family torn asunder by jealousies and ambitions is turning into a nascent nation, united—if only during this brief period—by their aged Patriarch, whose last words are presenting the blueprint for the Divine destiny set aside for the purveyors of the Abrahamic blessing, that all the families on earth will be blessed with peace because of this unique nation.

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

As I have written in a previous commentary, the Malbim explains that Isaac had originally intended to split the inheritance, giving the more material blessings to the more aggressive and materialistically oriented son, Esau, who would know how to train and equip an army, how to navigate the stock market and how to

initiate start-up hi-tech projects, as it were, and to give the more spiritual, Messianic birthright legacy to the wholehearted, tent-dwelling Jacob, who could more naturally deal with that mission of Israel, to teach morality and peacefulness to all the nations of the earth.

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

Now that it's Jacob's turn to bestow material blessings and Messianic birthright, I would have thought that he, of all people, based on his own experience, would have given both gifts to the same favored and beloved wise son of his old age, to the son of his most beloved Rachel, to Joseph. But no, Jacob does what his father Isaac had thought to do initially: He creates a division between the physical blessings and the spiritual birthright. He bequeaths the blessings of heavenly rain and earthly produce, innumerable seed and a double tribal portion of land, and even the mighty bow of vanquishing warfare upon the financially adept Grand Vizier, Joseph (Gen. 48:22- 49:26) and he awards dominion over the family, the majestic and spiritual birthright of King Messiah, the recipient of fraternal fealty as well as peaceful homage from the ingathering of all of the nations, to the ba'al teshuva (penitent) Judah. Why does Jacob revert to the concept of Isaac rather than to that of Rebekah, the mother who so adored him? You will remember that the victory of Rebekah over Isaac may have been short-lived. Jacob was plagued by his deception of his father until his dying day. Almost from the moment he left his father's house for Laban-land, his mother's brother substituted his elder daughter for her younger sister under the marriage canopy with the prescient words, "It is not the practice in our place to give the younger before the elder," and not only his ten sons but even his beloved Joseph deceived him—the ten brothers with the bloody coat and Joseph with his garb of Grand Vizier.

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

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

However, when one is about to form a nation, a

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

In such a situation, no brother is to be rejected unless he will do damage to the ultimate vision; there is room for many leaders, each with his particular gift and emphasis, as long as they all stand behind a God who demands compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Since acceptance of the eventual goal depends upon the ability of Israel and the nations of the world to repent, to return to God in Heaven, on both counts, Grandfather Jacob/Israel chose Judah, the consummate ba'al teshuva and the unifier of the family, to receive the prized legacy of Messianic leadership. ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he conclusion of the book of Bereshith sets the stage for all of the remaining history of the Jewish people. Jacob and his family have settled in the land of Egypt, and live under the most favorable of circumstances. Their son and brother, Joseph, is the de facto ruler of the country that has provided them with prosperity. However, Joseph himself warns them that the situation is only temporary and that there are troubled days ahead.

He tells them that they will leave the land of Egypt, whether they wish to or not, and that when they leave they should remember him and take his bones with them, to be buried in the land of Israel, the home from which he was so brutally taken when he was about 17 years old.

I would imagine that the family of Jacob, when hearing these predictions of Joseph, were amazed, and probably were unable to fathom how their situation could change so drastically from greatness and wealth to slavery and persecution.

The Jewish people are by nature an optimistic people. We always believe that somehow things will turn out well, no matter how bleak the present circumstances may appear to be. Yet, only by remembering Joseph's words would the eventual redemption from Egyptian bondage be realized. Joseph's warnings would accompany them with his remains through the 40-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai. It would remind them to be aware of the historical dangers they would always have to face.

The conditions under which Jews have lived in exile and in the diaspora for millennia have always varied and fluctuated. But the basic message was that we were we were not really at home. We continually ignored warning signs, and somehow believed that

things would get better. Ignoring the warnings of Joseph, many times in our history we doomed ourselves to tragedy and disaster.

If Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, warned us that Egypt is not our home, then that message could not have been clearer to Jews in the coming millennia. But as the story of Egypt and the Jews unfolds in the book of Shemot, the majority of Jews forgot Joseph's message. And it remained only for Moshe himself to bring Joseph's bones out if Egypt for eventual burial in the Land of Israel.

The Torah will record for us that later Egyptian pharaohs and the Egyptian nation forgot about Joseph and his great accomplishments. The ironic tragedy is that much of the Jewish people as well forgot about Joseph and his message to them. In the annals of Jewish history, this forgetfulness on the part of Jews has often been repeated -- and always with dire consequences. The story of Joseph and of the Jewish settlement in Egypt provides the prototype for all future Jewish history. We always need to ask ourselves what Joseph would have to say about our current Jewish world. This is worthy of contemplation. ©2020 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**

**D**escribing the brothers' feelings after the death of their father Ya'akov (Jacob), the Torah states, “Now Yosef's (Joseph) brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, ‘perhaps Yosef will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him.’” (Genesis 50:15)

On a simple level the brothers concern was well founded. While Ya'akov was alive, the brothers thought their father would protect them from any acts of revenge on the part of Yosef. Once Ya'akov died, the brothers felt vulnerable. They feared that Yosef's anger would finally be unleashed at them for selling him.

However, it seems strange that the brothers would have such a fear, since Yosef had so embraced them in Egypt, providing for their every need.

Commenting on the words “now Yosef's brothers saw” the Midrash suggests that the brothers actually “saw” as they returned from burying Ya'akov that Yosef stopped at the very pit into which he was thrown. (Midrash Agur quoted by Nechama Leibowitz) No doubt, they thought, he did so to plan an action against them in the very place that his life hit such a low point.

Rashi adds that the brothers “saw” that Yosef no longer invited them to dine with him. (Rashi, Genesis 50:15) No doubt, the brothers thought, because Yosef was still incensed at the way he had

been mistreated.

In both cases, however, the brothers misunderstood Yosef's actions, judging him unfavorably.

In the first, the Midrash notes that Yosef returns to the pit to thank God for having saved him.

In the second, Yosef may no longer have eaten with his brothers, reasoning that after Ya'akov's death, the Egyptian persecution was soon to begin. He, therefore, feared that dining with his brothers could provoke the Egyptians to suspect that he was allying himself with his brothers to rebel against Egypt. (Gur Aryeh)

Note that after the reunion between Yosef and his brothers, the brothers never say a word to Yosef until their father's death. The coming together after a long separation was so traumatic, they lacked the emotional energy for everyday communication.

In the case of Yosef and his brothers, the rendezvous is more complex, as the separation was due to a deep divide. So deep, that even after the reunion, the brothers didn't feel free enough to talk openly with Yosef to express their deep feelings of fear. Had they been more open, Yosef would have told them that his intent was not to harm them.

In the same breath, Yosef can be faulted for leaving false impressions rather than explaining his actions to his brothers.

Often it is the case that disagreements arise because people don't express what is in their hearts. If we would only speak openly and honestly, we would find out that on many occasions, our concerns are based upon misunderstandings.

Although it exposes us to the risk of pain, openness is the pathway to healing and growth. ©2020 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

## **Migdal Ohr**

"[Yaakov said] I know, my son, I know. He will be a nation and will be great, but his younger brother will be greater and his children will fill nations." (Beraishis 48:19) Hearing that his father was ill, Yosef brought his children to their grandfather to be blessed. Yosef arranged them so that the eldest, Menashe, was at Yaakov's right hand but Yaakov switched his hands and placed his right hand (symbolizing strength) on the head of Ephraim, who was standing to his left. Yosef was distressed for several reasons.

It seemed that Yaakov assumed Yosef had erred by placing the bechor at his own right hand. If that was not the case, then Yaakov, by choosing the younger one over the older, was reenacting what had

happened in Yosef's own life by favoring a younger son, leading to jealousy and unrest. Yaakov assured Yosef that all was well and that he understood the situation properly.

He explained that the younger son would eclipse the older one but not because of the blessing. Rather, this was already the Divine prophecy that Yaakov could see as he saw their descendants. (Moshe would similarly look at the Egyptian who was beating the Hebrew to see whether he would have any worthy descendants before opting to kill him.)

Since Ephraim's children would be greater, he needed a greater flow of divine assistance so Yaakov used his right hand to bless him. The Midrash Tanchuma tells us who these children were. Menashe would be the ancestor of Gideon, a judge who won a miraculous war and kept the peace for many years. Ephraim, however, would bear Moshe's disciple Yehoshua, who would lead the Jews into Israel and teach them Torah. Yehoshua is said to have many, many children because one who teaches someone Torah is considered to have borne him and he was the teacher of the Jewish People after Moshe.

Interestingly, the Midrash mentions Gideon's miracle but not Yehoshua's. Yehoshua merited to stop the sun in the sky and to split the Jordan River, yet we don't compare these two miracles to the one of Gideon. Yehoshua's greatness was not attested to by what Hashem would do for him but rather by what he did for others. Therein lies the greatness.

A Jewish leader is not acclaimed for his own growth, but for the growth he engenders in his followers. When he is no longer able to assist them, he is recalled from service, as we find Moshe said, "I am no longer able to come and go," referring to his ability to connect with his flock. Here the Torah testifies that Ephraim's progeny would be greater than Menashe's because they were more concerned for others than themselves.

It is also interesting to note that Menashe played a crucial role in terms of government, and he sired Gideon who would also play that role, while Ephraim who studied Torah begat Yehoshua who focused on Torah and through that he rose to greatness both spiritually and militarily. It seems that the acts we do have an impact on the acts of our descendants. This teaches us how to be great and what to focus on for true greatness. May we all follow the path of greatness and achieve it for ourselves and our families.

*When R' Elyashiv z"l's Rebbetzin (she was the daughter of R' Aryeh Levin z"l, the "Tzaddik of Yerushalaim,") was on her deathbed, she was asked if her husband should be called to her side. She recoiled and said, "I am about to meet my Maker. What do I have in the World of Truth but the merit of my husband's Torah study? And now you want to take him*

*away from that?! No, I'd rather he learned another half-hour instead of sitting here with me."*

*And so it was. R' Elyashiv continued learning and was called only in her final moments. He came in, said Shema with her, and she was gone. To the end, she understood where her greatness and purpose were to be found. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## Directing Our National Character Traits

**Y**a'akov's death was the first death reported in the Torah that was preceded by deterioration of health. This enabled him to send for his sons in order to bless them. The blessing that each son received was a reflection on each one's personality and midot. Ya'akov had wished to tell them his sons the future, but he lost that divine vision just before telling them. His blessings, however, do give each of the sons an idea of his own future and the part that each will play in the Land of Israel. Ya'akov blessed each according to his character traits.

Ya'akov began his blessings with his eldest son, R'uvein. He then grouped Shimon and Levi together with his second b'racha. Our Rabbis find these two b'rachot to be very difficult as they appear to be more like curses rather than b'rachot. While each of the b'rachot is important, we will concentrate on the messages of these first two b'rachot for our discussion. The section begins: "R'uvein you are my firstborn, my strength, and the first of my acquisitions, pre-eminent in office and pre-eminent in power. You are unstable (alternatively, impulsive) like the waters, so you will not be pre-eminent, because you went up to your father's bed and you profaned my bed by your going up. (This last translation is one of many interpretations of the text)." R'uvein was punished for moving Bilhah's bed from Ya'akov's tent after Rachel died.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, explains the tragedy found in Ya'akov's words. R'uvein was to receive three things because of his firstborn status: (1) He was "b'chori, my firstborn" so he would receive a double portion of inheritance, (2) He was "kochi, my strength" so he was to replace Ya'akov as the leader of the government, and (3) He was "reishit oni, the first of my acquisitions (alternatively translated the first of my vigor)," so he would have received also the priesthood. Instead, each of these three things was taken from him: (1) "you will not be pre-eminent" so you will not get twice the allotment of your brothers, (2) "you went up to your father's bed" so you will have your power usurped and will not receive the government, for only a son who is respectful of his father may inherit his kingship, and (3) "you profaned my bed by your going up" so as a "chalal, profaner" you are ineligible for the priesthood.

Rashi and the Ramban explain the "sin" of

R'uvein. The Gemara makes it clear that R'uvein did not have any relations with Bilhah when he moved Ya'akov's bed. Rashi understood the sin to be against the Shechinah, that part of Hashem that rests in one place. The Shechinah had chosen to rest just above Ya'akov's bed. Ya'akov's bed was like the Holy Ark in that it was the place where Hashem dwelled and from where Hashem spoke to Ya'akov. The Ramban explains that in Mishlei it is clear that the sin was committed against the bed, not the Shechinah. The Ramban understands this to mean that a defilement of the bed was similar to a defilement of the authority of his father. When R'uvein chose to move this bed because of his impulsive behavior, he insulted both his father and the Shechinah. HaRav Sorotzkin says that R'uvein acted impulsively because he felt that his mother, Leah, had been slighted by Ya'akov's replacing Leah with the handmaiden, Bilhah. R'uvein's impulsive act interrupted his father's grief. It was this insensitivity which disqualified R'uvein from the sensitive position of leadership in government and the priesthood. Both these positions demanded sensitivity.

The Torah tells us of Ya'akov's blessing to Shimon and Levi. This blessing is given together to them as no other two brothers exhibited the closeness and unity of Shimon and Levi. They acted together as one and as one they are blessed. "Shimon and Levi are brothers; stolen tools are their weapons. Into their design may my soul not enter, with their congregation do not unite, o my honor, for in their rage they killed a man, and in their wish, they hamstrung an ox. Accursed is their rage for it is mighty and their wrath for it is harsh, I will divide them in Ya'akov and I will disperse them in Yisrael." HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Shimon and Levi were brothers but they also acted as a unified set within a larger, disunited set. They saw themselves responsible for Dinah but not for another member of their family, Yosef. They were unified in their actions against Shechem, but they did not consult the other brothers to present a united front against Shechem. Instead they did not attempt to broaden the concept of "brothers" among the rest of their family. For this they are criticized by our Rabbis.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the tragedy of Shimon and Levi. The brothers were filled with the qualities that would have easily made them the leaders in place of R'uvein, but they too were unable to harness those qualities without negative, outside influences. Their unity could have been an example to their brothers but they acted in anger. "In their anger they killed a man," is not meant to be an indictment against them for the killing of Shechem. He was worthy of the death penalty by his actions in kidnapping and raping Dinah. Ya'akov's displeasure with their actions came from the murder of innocent people, even though they did not speak out against Shechem. The brothers defeated the people of Shechem by pretending

friendship and then weakening them in order to kill them. Ya'akov was upset because their act was not heroic. Ya'akov cautioned the other brothers not to act in this same fashion.

Our Rabbis tell us that everyone is born with a particular inclination in his behavior. One may be quiet or forceful, aggressive or passive, impulsive or reticent by nature. There is nothing wrong with any behavioral inclination but it must be controlled and directed within the paths of the Torah. The impulsiveness of R'uvein or the aggressiveness of Shimon and Levi must be channeled properly to fit the moral and proper midot required by the Torah. This is perhaps the message of this tragedy. But there is another message here too. Ya'akov's desire to bless these three brothers acknowledged their strengths while his rebuke challenged them to channel their impulsive and aggressive behavior in a way which would serve Hashem. May we learn to rebuke as Ya'akov did; to enable those who were rebuked to see how they can direct their normal tendencies to become stronger and better people. And may we learn to control our own behavioral tendencies within the scope and direction of the Torah. ©2020 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

### **Perceptions**

"Ya'akov called for his sons and said, 'Gather and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days.'" (Bereishis 49:1) It all started when I decided to make sure my passports were up-to-date. I had stopped traveling outside of Eretz Yisroel for a couple of years already, and hadn't needed them for a while. But as family gets older, you never know when you might have to make a quick trip, and updating passports takes time. So I decided to check out my Canadian passport, since I had already renewed my Israeli passport the previous year.

To not misplace them, I usually left my Canadian and Israeli passport in an inside pocket of my computer bag. Since I always took that bag on the plane with me when I did travel, I left them there even when not traveling. And I always kept my bag in a specific place so I would know where it was at all times.

The first time I thought of this and looked for my bag, I could not find it. It was not in its traditional place, nor close by. I did a light check in a couple of other possible places, but did not find it. Not wanting to spend any more time, I abandoned my search for the time being, assuming that a more thorough look would reveal it to me.

I considered looking for it again a few more times, but it wasn't until I decided to accept a speaking invitation in the States that I began to hunt in earnest. I was certain that it had to be in my house somewhere, since I rarely used my computer outside of the house. Theft seemed out of the question because not too

many outside people have come through our home over the years, at least that I could remember.

One of the rooms that I know I had brought the bag to was full of things, and it seemed a good chance that if I could not find the bag somewhere else, it could be buried underneath a bunch of stuff. But when we had occasion to clean that room shortly after, to my surprise and dismay, the bag was not there.

Of course I did the Rebi Binyomin segulah for finding lost objects. And though it has had some very interesting results in the past, even Rebi Binyomin could not find my bag for me. And even though I remain convinced that the bag is somewhere in my house, I had to consider getting replacement passports while I still had time.

The Israeli passport was easy to replace, b"H. I could do it close to home, and after filling out the proper paperwork, paying the fee again for the second time in two years, I received a replacement passport within a week. One down, one to go.

Canadian passports are only issued through the Canadian Embassy in Tel Aviv, about an hour from my home, depending upon the traffic going into Tel Aviv. According to a scan of my passport that I kept in my computer, I could have had to renew it in another year anyhow. I filled out the forms, including the one reporting that it was lost, paid the fee on line, and sent my documents by 24 courier service to Tel Aviv.

Ten days later, my envelope had yet to be delivered, and even worse, the post office had no idea where it was. The only problem is that it was the one time I had sent my original documents in, my Ontario birth certificate and driver's license, instead of photocopies. I had not read all the small print in the instructions, and forgot to have my guarantors sign copies of both sides of each document. To save time, I sent in the originals.

Now I had to wonder if someone at the post office had felt the identification pieces in an envelope addressed to the Canadian Embassy, and stolen them. Was someone running around using my identity for all kinds of diabolical schemes, like the stories talk about?

After pressing the post office, they finally found it, b"H, and told me that it was out for delivery. Weird, but at least that episode was over. Now I just had to hope that the Canadian government would not cause any problems for me, because the clock was ticking.

In the meantime, the people bringing me over to the States wanted to lock in my flights, so we booked them. In which name? The name I always use, my English one, "Paul," since that it is the name on my Canadian passport which I use outside of Israel. Didn't even think twice about that one.

The Canadian Embassy contacted me the following week and said, for the first time, that they would need a scan of my Israeli passport, which, b"H, I had already received. I dutifully sent it off with a little

note saying, "You will notice that my name on my Israeli passport is 'Pinchas.' That's just my Hebrew name which I use together with my English name."

A couple of days later, I received a reply from the embassy explaining that Pinchas on my Israeli travel document constituted an official name change. I would have to change my Hebrew documents back to "Paul," a MAJOR headache, or receive documentation from the Misrad HaPanim, the Israeli Ministry of Interior, confirming my name change from "Paul" to "Pinchas." It would also have to be translated to English, and then notarized. Ching-ching. More money.

As I considered my two options, it occurred to me that it would be much easier to change everything to Pinchas once-and-for-all, than everything back to Paul. EXCEPT, I all-of-a-sudden realized, by newly booked plane ticket. I remembered once hearing that plane tickets, once issued, are non-transferable.

I called up the agent responsible for the booking and explained the situation. "That's a catastrophe," she told me. "The airlines will not let you change your name on the ticket now that it has been issued!" Great. Not only did I not have a Canadian passport to go to the States, which would have necessitated paying for a visa as an Israeli citizen, but I didn't have a ticket either. And if I had to book a whole new ticket from scratch in the right name, it would have eaten up most of my speaker's fee. I was already racking up the expenses from taxis, etc.

I contacted KLM, my overseas carrier directly, about the situation. They politely told me that they could not help because the ticket was not purchased directly from them, but through an agent. So I called my agent again and pleaded with her to plead with them and see what they would be willing to do under the circumstances.

Not that much. Turns out that since my domestic carrier is different than my overseas operator, everyone's hands are tied... to my pockets. All said and done, I had to pay a fine and cost for a more expensive ticket that is about one-third my speaking fee. OUCH. But at least I have a ticket, b"H, and at least it wasn't for the FULL replacement value.

I still have not found my briefcase, and probably won't until I have finished going through everything, so it can laugh at me while I cringe. I personally delivered my notarized document to the embassy last week, the highpoint being that I got to use the high-speed train between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv for the first time. It was great! Quick, smooth, comfortable, and I got to work the whole time both ways, b"H.

I am still awaiting my Canadian passport, but hopefully that is just a matter of another week or so, b"H. Once I have that, b"H, that part of the saga will finally be over. Hallelukah!

Well, kind of. Turns out that when I rebooked

my ticket, I had to change airlines. Originally I was supposed to arrive in my host city by 2 pm, giving me about six hours until I have to speak that night. Now, instead, I will arrive at 6 pm, b"H, and if on time, I will have only TWO hours to get behind the podium and do what I was brought in to do.

So now I will be on pins and needles until I arrive, b"H, concerned about making people wait for me. And I will probably have to only pack a carry-on to avoid any luggage hold ups at the other end, which means taking less clothes than I will probably need over a week.

What a story. Why have I had to go through all of this? There can be dozens of reasons, and whatever the right one is, it is ALL for the good. I really know that. But there is one really important thing to point out here, something that has been in my mind ever since the situation began to go south... WITHOUT my passport.

But it will have to wait until next week, b"H, and though it will address Parashas Shemos, it will address this week's parsha as well. I didn't drag you through my personal passport misery looking for "company." If you want a hint to what I mean, take a look at the verse with which we began. ©2020 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

## 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

