

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid. Years earlier, when he had revealed his true identity to them, he appeared to have forgiven them for selling him as a slave. Yet the brothers were not wholly reassured. Maybe Joseph did not mean what he said. Perhaps he still harboured resentment. Might the only reason he had not yet taken revenge was respect for Jacob. There was a convention in those days that there was to be no settling of scores between siblings in the lifetime of the father. We know this from an earlier episode. After Jacob had taken his brother's blessing, Esau says, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). So the brothers came before Joseph and said: "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept." (Gen. 50:16-17)

The text makes it as plain as possible that the story they told Joseph was a lie. If Jacob had really said those words, he would have said them to Joseph himself, not to the brothers. The time to have done so was on his deathbed in the previous chapter. The brothers' tale was what we may call a "white lie". Its primary aim was not to deceive but to ease a potentially explosive situation. Perhaps that is why Joseph wept, understanding that his brothers still thought him capable of revenge.

The Sages derived a principle from this text. *Mutar le-shanot mipnei ha-shalom*: "It is permitted to tell an untruth (literally, "to change" the facts) for the sake of peace." (Yevamot 65b) A white lie is permitted in Jewish law.

This is not the only place where the Sages invoked this principle. They even attributed it to God Himself. (Midrash Sechel Tov, Toldot, 27:19) When the angels came to visit Abraham to tell him and Sarah that they were about to have a child, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" God then asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18:12-13).

God did not mention that Sarah believed that not only was she too old to have a child -- she believed that Abraham was as well (this turned out to be quite untrue: Abraham had six more children after Sarah's death). The Sages inferred that God did not mention it because He did not want there to be bad feeling between husband and wife. Here too the Sages said: it is permitted to change the facts for the sake of peace.

It is clear that the Sages needed both episodes to establish the principle. Had we only known about the Sarah case, we could not infer that it is permitted to tell a white lie. God did not tell a white lie about Sarah. He merely did not tell Abraham the whole truth. Had we only known about the case of Joseph's brothers, we could not have inferred that what they did was permitted. Perhaps it was forbidden, and that is why Joseph wept. The fact that God Himself had done something similar is what led the Sages to say that the brothers were justified.

What is at stake here is an important feature of the moral life, despite the fact that we seem to be speaking of no more than social niceties: tact. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin pointed out that not all values coexist in a kind of platonic harmony. His favourite example was freedom and equality. You can have a free economy but the result will be inequality. You can have economic equality, communism, but the result will be a loss of freedom. In the world as currently configured, moral conflict is unavoidable. ('Two Concepts of Liberty,' in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.)

This was an important fact, though one about which Judaism seems never to have been in doubt. There is, for example, a powerful moment in Tanach when King David's son Absalom mounted a coup d'etat against his father. David was forced to flee. Eventually there was a battle between Absalom's troops and David's. Absalom, who was handsome and had fine hair, was caught by it when it became entangled in the branches of a tree. Left hanging there, Joab, captain of David's army, killed him.

When David heard the news he was overcome with grief: "The King was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you -- O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Samuel 18:33)

Joab was brutal in his response to the King:

"Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life... You love those who hate you and hate those who love you... Now go out and encourage your men." (2 Sam. 19:6-8)

David's grief at the loss of his son conflicts with his responsibilities as head of state and his loyalty to the troops who have saved his life. Which comes first: his duties as a father or as a king?

The existence of conflicting values means that the kind of morality we adopt and society we create depend not only on the values we embrace but also on the way we prioritise them. Prioritising equality over freedom creates one kind of society -- Soviet Communism for example. Prioritising freedom over equality leads to market economics. People in both societies may value the same things but they rank them differently in the scale of values, and thus how they choose when the two conflict.

That is what is at stake in the stories of Sarah's laughter and Joseph's brothers. Truth and peace are both values, but which do we choose when they conflict? Not everyone among the rabbinic Sages agreed.

There is, for example, a famous argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what to say about the bride at a wedding. (See Ketubot 16b) The custom was to say that "The bride is beautiful and graceful." Members of the School of Shammai, however, were not prepared to say so if, in their eyes, the bride was not beautiful and graceful. For them the supreme value was the Torah's insistence on truth: "Keep far from falsehood" (Ex. 23:7). The School of Hillel did not accept this. Who was to judge whether the bride was beautiful and graceful? Surely the bridegroom himself. So to praise the bride was not making an objective statement that could be tested empirically. It was simply endorsing the bridegroom's choice. It was a way of celebrating the couple's happiness.

Courtesies are often like this. Telling someone how much you like the gift they have brought, even if you don't, or saying to someone, "How lovely to see you" when you were hoping to avoid them, is more like good manners than an attempt to deceive. We all know this, and thus no harm is done, as it would be if we were to tell a lie when substantive interests are at stake.

More fundamental and philosophical is an important Midrash about a conversation between God and the angels as to whether human beings should be created at all (Bereishit Rabbah 8:5): "Rabbi Shimon said: When God was about to create Adam, the ministering angels split into contending groups. Some said, 'Let him be created.' Others said, 'Let him not be created.' That is why it is written: 'Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed' (Psalms 85:11).

"Mercy said, 'Let him be created, because he will do merciful deeds.' Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood.' Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will do righteous deeds.' Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he will never cease quarrelling.' What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground. The angels said, 'Sovereign of the universe, why do You do thus to Your own seal, truth? Let truth arise from the ground.'

"Thus it is written, 'Let truth spring up from the earth.'" (Psalms 85:12)

This is a challenging text. What exactly were the angels saying? What does it mean to say that "God took truth and threw it to the ground?" And what happened to the claim made by the angel of Peace that humans "will never cease quarrelling"?

I interpret it as meaning that humans are destined to conflict so long as contending groups each claim to have a monopoly of the truth. The only way they will learn to live at peace is by realising that they, finite as all humans are, will never in this life achieve truth as it is in Heaven. For us, truth is always partial, fragmentary, the view from somewhere and not, as philosophers sometimes say, "the view from nowhere".

(Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. The only person to have achieved a non-anthropocentric, God's-eye-view of creation, was Job in chs. 38-41 of the book that bears his name.)

This deep insight is, I believe, the reason why the Torah is multi-perspectival, why Tanach contains so many different kinds of voices, why Mishnah and Gemara are structured around argument, and why Midrash is built on the premise that there are "seventy faces" to Torah. No other civilisation I know has had so subtle and complex an understanding of the nature of truth.

Nor has any other so valued peace. Judaism is not and never was pacifist. National self-defence sometimes requires war. But Isaiah and Micah were the first visionaries of a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3) Isaiah is the poet laureate of peace.

Given the choice, when it came to interpersonal relations the Sages valued peace over truth, not least because truth can flourish in peace while it is often the first casualty in war. So the brothers were not wrong to tell Joseph a lie for the sake of peace within the family. It reminded them all of the deeper truth that not only their human father, now dead, but also their heavenly Father, eternally alive, wants the people of the covenant to be at peace, for how can Jews be at peace with the world if they are not at peace with themselves? *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 5775 Rabbi Lord J.*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Judah, to you shall your brothers give homage" (Genesis 49:8) The climax of our Biblical portion of Vayechi – and indeed of the entire Book of Genesis – comes in the death-bed scene in which Jacob–Israel bestows blessings upon each of his sons, the future twelve tribes of our nation. The deepest Biblical conflicts arose in the competition for the birthright-blessings. Now we face the question, which son of this last Patriarch will receive the Abrahamic mission- covenant, and why?

God promised Abraham that "through him all the families of the earth would be blessed". To achieve this, Abraham needed to ensure that the bearer of the birthright would have "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Genesis 18:19) as well as profound God consciousness, and a commitment to the land and the mission of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). When our story reaches the third generation, and Jacob is blessed with twelve sons, it seems that another qualification for leadership is added: the ability to unite the family.

Jacob thought that beautiful, brilliant Joseph, first-born son of his beloved Rachel was the perfect candidate. However, Jacob's favoritism began a process of familial dissolution which accelerated when Joseph reported dreams in which the whole family bowed down to him, as though he were their king (Gen 37:3-9). When Joseph brought back tales of his brothers' transgressions to their father, he bred even more resentment in his siblings, alienating them from him and fatefully fracturing the family of Israel.

Joseph is now sold into slavery. Jacob is suspicious of the role the brothers may have played in his beloved son's "disappearance", but he is wary of causing even more familial dissension by voicing his thoughts. The patriarch remains a disconsolate mourner in famine-stricken Canaan-Israel.

When the brothers come to Egypt to purchase food, the siblings are reunited. Joseph is hidden behind the mask of the Grand Vizier, so his brothers are unaware of his presence. But we, the readers, are aware – and we see the potential for family reconciliation. Now Joseph faces Judah, the other candidate for the birthright. Each protagonist has come a long way in developing the traits necessary for leadership. The incident with Tamar has taught Judah the importance of taking responsibility for one's siblings and for familial future, and it has established his credentials as a paragon of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Joseph too, has proven his moral rectitude by escaping the advances of Mrs. Potiphar and developing greater modesty. But will Joseph or Judah succeed in repairing their broken family?

At the end of the portion of Miketz which we read two weeks ago, Joseph seemed to have made a decision. He had given up on the brothers who cast him into the pit, and even on his father whose favoritism had set in motion some of the family struggles. Recalling how Jacob had rebuked him for his dreams and then sent him to find his brothers, Joseph may have even wondered whether the patriarch was part of the plot to get rid of him. Now, he wishes to spend the rest of his life in Egypt with his only true brother, Benjamin, child of the same mother Rachel, who was too young to have had any hand in the near fratricide. To blazes with my family! he thinks. I now have a new Egyptian family!

Initially, Judah thought that God was sending all the trials and tribulations to the brothers coming to purchase food in Egypt because they sinned in having sold their brother Joseph into slavery. But when Joseph rejects Judah's proposal that all the brothers become his slaves on account of the stolen goblet, he wonders why they had been singled out in such a punitive fashion by the Grand Vizier. Who in Egypt might be out to get them? Unless, the Grand Vizier himself is actually Joseph!

Now that Judah thinks that he has uncovered the true identity of the vizier, he understands that he must find a way to bring Joseph back into the bosom of the family. He must effect a rapprochement between Father Jacob and all of his sons, in such a way that everyone will understand the futility of dredging up history which would only exacerbate personal recriminations.

And so Judah faces Joseph, the Grand Vizier, ostensibly pleading for Benjamin's freedom, but using the opportunity to describe their old father who deeply loved the two sons of Rachel, and still mourns for Joseph who he believes has been killed by a wild beast (44:28). Not only does he disabuse Joseph of any suspicion that Jacob had been linked to the plot, but he also subtly tries to impute guilt upon Joseph for not contacting his old, grieving father. How can Joseph now inflict further pain on the patriarch by keeping him from Benjamin?

By offering himself as a slave in place of Benjamin, Judah is also proving that he, who had initially proposed the sale, had finally learned the lesson of brotherly love. Judah succeeds. Joseph reveals himself and rejoins the family. Jacob-Israel and his children are reunited – by Judah, who has now proven that he is the most worthy recipient of the coveted birthright. © 2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The last seventeen years of the life of our father Jacob are ones of apparent tranquility and comfort.

Even though he is already in Egypt and is aware that this is the beginning of the long and brutal exile, foreseen by his grandfather Abraham in his vision of the covenant that will bind the Jewish people to its creator and destiny, he nevertheless enjoys the temporary comfort, care and familial tranquility that now surrounds him.

Jacob wished to have such a life, decades earlier. In the words of Rashi, he wanted to dwell with a sense of security and well-being – before the situation with Joseph and his brothers erupted and subjected him and them the trauma that is recorded for us in the previous Torah chapters. Yet, it is obvious from the tone and wordings of his final blessings to his children, that Jacob is looking far ahead, well past Egyptian exile and even towards the end of days.

Rashi points out that the Holy Spirit had departed from Jacob during his years of grief over the disappearance of his beloved son Joseph. When one is tragically affected by grief and sadness, it is almost impossible to have a vision or a sense of the future and better times.

The rabbis, in their sensitive wisdom, cautioned against providing comfort when a wound is open and the pain fresh and severe. There is little room for the Holy Spirit to enter a person whose heart is broken and is in an emotional state of grief and depression. But now when his family is restored and his spirits have been raised, he is once again blessed with farsighted vision and words of prophecy and eternity.

Judaism and the Jewish people always look toward the future even when their current circumstances are bitter and sad. Jacob himself appraised it when he said he would receive his reward tomorrow. Our reward is always tomorrow, for we realize that temporary situations, both good and better, are transitory and in the long run of human existence, the experience of one generation or even a few generations may not be as vital and important as we think them to be.

Looking back at the 18th and 19th centuries, I am struck by the fact that, with the exception of study, all of the other ideas and social streams of those times have practically disappeared from Jewish life. There are no more enlightened Jews – only Jews with different degrees of observance present in their lives. The idols that once were worshipped have either been smashed by events of history or have collapsed of their own ineptitude and distortion.

It is often difficult to judge present circumstances because we ourselves are only temporary residents here. We tend to give greater weight to events which again, in the long run of history, may not count for much.

Our father Jacob looks forward to the future and sees the sojourn of the Jewish people in Egypt, important and necessary as it may have been, to be

only a blip on the radar screen of the eternity of Israel and the Jewish faith. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Sick Person

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When our forefather Yaakov became sick and bed-ridden (*choleh she-nafal le-mishkav*), he became the first such person mentioned in the Torah. What are the various laws dealing with such a *choleh*, and when is he exempt from certain *mitzvot* because of illness and its accompanying weakness?

A *choleh* is exempt from the mitzva of living in a *sukkah*, as are his caretakers. This is true not only for someone who is dangerously ill, but even for someone who merely has a headache or sore eyes. (This exemption is specific to the mitzva of *sukkah*, and one should not extrapolate from it to other *mitzvot*.) A *choleh* is also exempt from traveling to Jerusalem for the three major festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot (*aliyah le-regel*). Those who can travel are obligated, while those who cannot are exempt. There are *mitzvot* from which a *choleh* is exempt because it is assumed he will not be able to summon the requisite levels of concentration, such as the mitzva of *tefillin*. Additionally, a person wearing *tefillin* must be able to control his bodily functions (*guf naki*). Somebody sick is likely to be unable to do so.

Normally, people are required to stand out of respect for a king or prince, an elderly person, or a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar). Sick people are exempt from doing so. This is either because they are understandably preoccupied with their pain, and thus cannot show the proper respect, or because when sick people stand, it is not seen as showing honor. The difference between these two reasons comes into play in a case where a sick person chooses to stand. If the reason that sick people are exempt is because they are preoccupied with their pain, one choosing to stand would indicate he has overcome this difficulty. However, if the reason is that the rising of someone in a weakened state does not show honor, then perhaps he should be asked to sit.

The Talmud (*Moed Katan* 27b) states that if a sick person stands up for a king, we do not tell him to sit. Some understand this to mean that a sick person may stand up if he wishes. This fits with the behavior of our forefather Yaakov, who exerted himself and sat up in bed (*Bereishit* 47:31).

However, others explain that the reason we do not tell a sick person to sit down is that it might sound as if we are saying, "Sit in your illness," meaning "Stay sick," which would be insulting. According to this

approach, the Talmud does not permit a sick person to stand. As we said above, it is even possible that such standing does not show respect. If this is the case, why did Yaakov act as he did? A close reading of the verse indicates that Yaakov did not stand, but rather sat up in bed. Out of respect for the king he sat up, but went no further than that. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Lessons about Diaspora Life and Parenting

Diaspora. After Jacob tells Joseph, “Place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt.” Joseph responds, “I will do as you have spoken.” It is then that Jacob declares, “Swear to me” (Genesis 47:29–31).

One wonders why the oath is needed after Joseph had already committed himself to following his father’s wishes. Perhaps Jacob sensed that Joseph had lost some of his political power in Egypt. Only by telling Pharaoh that he had made an iron-clad oath to his father would Joseph persuade Pharaoh to approve the burial request (50:5).

Joseph’s loss of power becomes clear when, as Rabbi David Silber notes, Joseph makes the burial request of *beit Pharaoh* (Pharaoh’s court). Clearly, Joseph’s access had been cut, otherwise he would have spoken directly to Pharaoh. Note also that Joseph punctuates the request using the word *na* (please) three times. Joseph seems to be pleading his case (50:4, 5).

Could it be that once Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams and managed the difficult famine years in Egypt, his work lost its importance? The more success Joseph had, the more expendable he became. Such is the history of Jews living in the Diaspora: Jews have worked hard to benefit their host countries, but this loyalty and sense of patriotic belonging is often forgotten and not reciprocated.

Parenting. Another lesson can be gleaned when Jacob asks his sons to gather for the final blessing before his death: “Assemble and hear, o sons of Jacob” (49:2). While Jacob continues, “and listen to Israel your father,” one wonders why he first identifies them as sons of Jacob.

The name Israel relates to the broader duties of the third patriarch – to “seed” the Jewish People. The name Jacob speaks to his more personal, private, familial obligations. Often, leaders become so preoccupied with everything they must accomplish that they forget those who are closest – even their children.

Calling his children sons of Jacob was Jacob’s way of saying: Often in life, I placed community before family. This time, however, even as I bless you as respective heads of your tribes, I do so while remembering I am your father, loving each of you

unconditionally.

A personal anecdote speaks to the struggle leaders face fulfilling their family responsibilities. Driving my daughter, Dena, to her elementary school many years ago, I was focused on a myriad of issues facing our community. I heard Dena mumbling something in the background, but it all seemed muffled to me. Then she blurted out one word: “Rabbi.” I pulled the car over. “Dena, I’m your father,” I said. “Why did you call me rabbi?” Her response is one I’ll never forget. “I’ve been calling out Abba [Father] over and over and got no answer. The minute I said ‘Rabbi,’ I got your attention.”

Notwithstanding their public responsibilities, leaders must draw boundaries, making room for what counts most – their inner family.

Learning from our children. It is not coincidental, as Dr. Yeshayahu Leibowitz notes, that Joseph lived his first seventeen years in Jacob’s home (37:2) while Jacob’s last seventeen years were lived with Joseph in Egypt (47:28).

Such is the arc of life. At the outset, parents care for children; as life moves on, the pendulum swings and children care for parents. While youngsters often wish to emulate their parents, the reverse is also true. Blessed are the parents who, as time passes, wish to emulate their children. Kahlil Gibran in his poem “On Children” said it well: “You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.” ©2021 *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

Emergence of Yehudah

Parashat Vay’chi is the last parasha in Sefer Bereishit. This parasha solidifies the exile of all of Ya’akov’s children in the Land of Egypt. It is important to note that our parasha contains the final blessings from Ya’akov to his sons, in which he demonstrates a unique knowledge of each son’s strengths and weaknesses. It is clear that the blessings given to Yehudah and to Yosef stand apart from the others. The amount of time devoted to these two sons far exceeds that devoted to the others. When the nation returns to Canaan, the leadership will eventually fall under these two rival tribes, Yehudah and Yosef.

Because of the limitation of space, we will deal only with the blessing given to Yehudah at this time: “Yehudah, you, your brothers shall acknowledge, your hand will be at your enemies’ nape, your father’s sons will prostrate themselves to you. A lion cub is Yehudah, from prey, my son, you ascended, he crouched, lied down like a lion; and like an awesome lion, who dares rouse him? The rod shall not depart from Yehudah nor a lawgiver from between his feet

until Shiloh arrives, and his will be an assemblage of nations. He ties his he-donkey to the vine, to the branch his she-donkey's foal, he launders his garment in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes. Red-eyed from wine and white-toothed from milk."

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Ya'akov was searching through his sons "to find one who was qualified to be the leader, and had found R'uvein, Shim'on, and Levi unfit for that leadership." R'uvein was disqualified for moving Bilhah's bed. Shimon and Levi proved themselves to be too hot-headed and impulsive. Next in line was Yehudah, and here Ya'akov found the leader for whom he had searched. Yehudah did not need to attack others in order to subdue his enemies. "The development of [Yehudah's] power will bring about such respect, that [his] enemies will turn their backs to [him] and not dare attack [him] and will be pleased if [he] leaves them alone." HaEmek Davar brings this same idea in conjunction with the name Gur Aryeh. According to them, there are many animals which can cause great destruction – an eagle, a bear, etc. The Lion is a unique animal because it can sense the holiness of a person by his actions. When man acts as justly as one who is made in the image of Hashem, then the Lion will become calm and allow the person to proceed. Just as the other animals have chosen the Lion to be the King of the animals because of this ability to discern man's nature, you, too, Yehudah will be chosen as the King for your ability to project your image, not by might but by understanding that you are made in the image of Hashem. The Kli Yakar quotes Rabbeinu Bachyai that the blessing of Yehudah contains all of the letters of the aleph-bet except for the letter zayin. The Hebrew word "zayin" can be translated as a weapon of war. Yehudah, because of his stature, could control his enemies without weapons. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Yehudah always exhibited kingship even when he acted in a subservient manner. When Yehudah bowed before Yosef, he bowed not as a dog but as a lion, not as a servant but as a king.

The ibn Ezra reminds us that the leadership position was given to Yehudah during the travels of the B'nei Yisrael in the desert. Yehudah's tribe always led the march in the desert. The ibn Ezra also associates Shilo with King David, who was a descendant of Yehudah. The Ramban felt that once the scepter rested with King David, then the kingship would never leave Yehudah. When the B'nei Yisrael established kings who were from other tribes, they went against their father's prophecy, and these kings were never accepted by Hashem.

The Torah now gives us a hint of the coming of the Mashi'ach, the Savior of all mankind. "He ties his he-donkey to the vine, to the branch his she-donkey's foal, he launders his garment in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes." The Rabbis connect this to the

prophecy that the Mashi'ach will come from the tribe of Yehudah as a descendant of King David. Rashi sees this pasuk as a prophecy about the land; a man will tie his he-donkey to a branch of a vine and load it with grapes while another man ties his foal of an ass to a vine and loads it with grapes."

The final pasuk in our section deals with the abundant reward that will be given to Yehudah: "Red-eyed from wine and white-toothed from milk." Rashi explains that his harvest will produce so much wine that Yehudah will become red-eyed from drinking the wine. Israel is called a land flowing with Milk and Honey and the milk will be so abundant that his teeth will become strong and white. The ibn Ezra clarifies this whiteness to say that it is not only talking about the teeth but also about the purity of the words that come out of the mouths of Jews.

HaRav J.B. Soloveichik poses a difficult question: "What bothers me most is why Yehudah got away with murder, while R'uvein was disqualified [from his leadership role]. R'uvein is the one who saved Yosef from his brothers, whereas Yehudah is the one who recommended selling him which should have resulted in murder. The Rav felt that Yehudah knew what he was doing. He knew that it would be impossible to free Yosef from the other brothers so he intended to at least save his life. He was planning all along to chase after the caravan and pay a ransom for Yosef in order to free him. Hashem's intervention stopped any hope of success of Yehudah's plan, but there is no doubt that he tried to save Yosef in a more complete way than did R'uvein.

It is clear from this blessing that Yehudah deserved to lead the people as their King. He exhibited a more thought-out approach to his dealings with others. He was not impulsive, brash, or emotional; he was decisive and active in the entire sequence of events. He was willing to take responsibility for everything he did. We see that his descendants exhibited these same qualities even though there was corruption and failure on their part after King David. We too must also learn to emulate Yehudah and not act impulsively. We must also be prepared to make the difficult decisions and have the conviction of our decisions. May we emulate Yehudah, the Lion. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**D**an will judge his nation; like the prime one of the Tribes of Israel." (Beraishis 49:16) Most commentaries explain these verses to be a reference to Shimshon, the mighty hero from the Tribe of Dan who became the Shofet, the Judge for his nation. Famous for his supernatural strength, Shimshon meted out Hashem's vengeance against the Plishtim, the Philistines (not Palestinians, who did not exist

historically), and eventually ended his own life by pulling down the pillars of an auditorium, killing 3,000 Plishtim with him.

He is compared to the “one” of the Tribes, Yehuda, the acknowledged leader, and Shimshon himself is said to have judged the Jews of his time like King David did in his. The Rashbam, however, disagrees. “One who believes that Yaakov’s entire message to this Tribe was to highlight one individual, has missed the basic understanding.”

Rather, he explains, the entire Tribe of Dan possessed qualities enabling them to rise to greatness, much as Shimshon did. This tribe was called, “Hame’aseif,” the ingatherer. When the Jews traveled through the desert, Yehuda took the lead, and Dan took the rear. Far from being the lowliest position, this was a crucial one. The rearguard protected the weaker Jews from attackers who would approach from behind, hoping to harm those who could not keep up with the others. They fought with fierce determination to protect and defend their brothers.

Additionally, the Tribe of Dan would pick up items left behind and dropped by others in order to return these items to their owners. The role Dan played was of great importance and required not only strength and bravery, but extreme care for others.

This is what enabled them to spawn a Judge who was accepted by all. In order to judge others, we must love them and care about them. One interpretation of “the One” who judges the tribes of Israel is that Shimshon (and by extension, Shevet Dan) was likened to Hashem, Himself, who judges us. Not coincidentally, it is Hashem who provides everything we have and need, and who cares about and protects every one of His creations.

Just as we know that any person who dedicates himself to Torah can attain the mantle of “Yissachar,” and one who seeks to provide sustenance to enable others to learn Torah can become a “Zevulun,” it is quite possible that one can become a member of “Dan,” by seeking the welfare of others and putting himself on the line for them.

The brachos Yaakov gave to his sons were shared blessings. Not only because each tribe benefited from each other tribe utilizing its strengths, but because each member of Klal Yisrael can access these traits and grow closer to Hashem through them.

The blessing for Dan ends with, “I hope for Your salvation, Hashem.” For a man like Shimshon who possessed incredible strength, we might expect that he take some of the credit. But he did not. He always remembered that his strength came from Hashem and he was expected to use it for the sake of his nation. Each of us has it within ourselves to be a ‘gibor,’ a mighty warrior, fighting for what is right and protecting others. Shimshon was just the paradigm, but as the Rashbam says, if you think Yaakov was only speaking

to him, you’re missing the point.

In 1945, Arabs ran through the streets of Jerusalem throwing grenades indiscriminately. The morgue of the local hospital was filled with bodies draped in sheets. R’ Aryeh Levin z”l, arrived with a photographer and went from corpse to corpse, detailing the grisly carnage.

The Rabbanim were aghast. “R’ Aryeh,” they said, “you may want to show the world the atrocities of the Arabs, but where is your sensitivity for the families of these men?”

“You misunderstand me,” said R’ Aryeh. “In a few days, relative peace will resume and these bodies will have been buried. Men will be missing and widows may become agunos, forbidden to remarry. It is compassion which moves me to act in a seemingly callous way. I am taking these pictures to aid these women in being permitted to remarry and carry on with their lives. It’s not enough to sympathize and empathize, we must take action to prevent greater sorrow.” © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

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In reference to the blessings that Yaakov gave his sons, the pasuk says: “Yehudah, you your brothers will praise (ata yoducha achecha) Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down before you...” [Bereshis 49:8]. There are many interpretations for the phrase “Yehudah, ata yoducha achecha”. Both the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel as well as a Medrash we will quote shortly say this expression refers specifically to the incident of Tamar. The expression is translated (at least homiletically) as “Yehudah, you admitted in the incident with Tamar.”

Yehudah had a daughter-in-law named Tamar. His previous two sons had died. Tamar was not supposed to marry outside of the family. Tamar disguised herself and tricked Yehudah into performing a form of levirate marriage with her. She became pregnant. Yehudah, who did not realize that she had been impregnated by him, suspected her of being like the daughter of a priest who committed adultery and sentenced her to death. As she was about to be burned alive, she picked up the deposit Yehudah had left her when he visited her thinking she was a harlot and showed it to him. He admitted “she is more righteous than I”.

This pasuk in Vayechi referring to Yehudah’s admission relates back to that incident. The Medrash generalizes that this pasuk is referring to righteous people who conquer their evil inclinations and they admit when they are wrong. “For everyone who confesses his (improper) deeds merits the world to

come." The Medrash describes the Almighty telling Yehudah: "You saved Tamar and her two sons (she was pregnant with twins) from being burnt by fire, by My Life I will save your sons as well."

Let's recast this scenario. Everyone thinks Tamar is guilty. Yehudah, who occupied a position of power announced, "This woman has to be put to death". She is taken out to the stake and the fires are lit. Yehudah is standing there in front of everybody. Tamar announces she is pregnant from the person who gave her the tokens she presents. Yehudah admits that she is more righteous than he. The Medrash says for this he merits the world to come and a great many blessings.

But let us remember that three people's lives were on the line here. Would we not have expected any moral person to do exactly what Yehudah did? What is so noble about his confession, which saved him from having the unjust killing of three individuals on his conscience? Wouldn't any of us have done the same thing?

The answer to this question is a resounding 'NO!' We would not have done the same thing. Let us examine the other side of the coin. Look at all the rationalizations that Yehudah could have gone through. "If I admit that I was the one who did this, it could be a catastrophic desecration of G-d's Name!" For Yehudah, the pride of the Tribes, to admit that he had promiscuous relations with this apparent prostitute would be a tremendous Chilul Hashem. Not only that, but "If I admit that I did this, it will be so devastating to my father that he is not going to survive. My father has suffered so much already. If I cause a Chilul Hashem now, who knows what this could do to him! Therefore it is 'Pikuach Nefoshos' (a matter involving saving of life) NOT TO ADMIT! It is a Chilul Hashem TO ADMIT. Everything argues in favor of "DON'T ADMIT!" All of these rationalizations went through Yehudah's mind.

But were these really moral options? Would he allow 3 people die? Did he have no decency or conscience?

The answer is that Yehudah really had another option: He could have suddenly announced "New evidence has been uncovered. We need to halt the execution and start a new investigation." He could have dragged out the investigation for six months or a year. In the meantime, Tamar and her children would be saved, and ultimately people would forget about the tumult and he would never need to incriminate himself. This is what most of us, if not all of us would have done.

To have the strength of character to admit the truth and let the chips fall where they may, took rare moral courage. This is what Yehudah did. About this Yaakov said in his blessing:



Yehudah ata yoducha achecha.

But this is only part of the greatness of Yehudah, because Chazal say another thing: "Yehudah admitted and he was not ashamed." Let us continue the scenario. Yehudah admits: "I did it." What would happen to most people? For most people, such an experience would break them. They would never recover from it. They would be so humiliated they would crawl into a hole and live out the rest of their life in anonymity. "How can I ever show my face again?"

But what did Yehudah do? He did not crawl into a hole. He dusted himself off, got up, and went on with his life. He became the patriarch of the King of Israel. The Sefas Emes writes a beautiful comment. The pasuk refers to Yehudah as a lion who lies down and crouches. The Sefas Emes writes that the greatness of Yehudah is that even in his moments of "lowness" -- when he is crouching down as it were, even when he has suffered defeat, even when he is humiliated, he still retains the dignity of a lion.

The pasuk refers to Yehudah not as a "lion who roars" but as a "lion who crouches", the lion who is sitting down. Yehudah remains a lion despite the terrible fall and humiliation he suffered. He remains strong and majestic. Anyone who has ever seen a picture of a lion knows that when a lion sits, it still looks like a lion. It still has the majesty of a lion. It is still the king of the jungle even when at rest.

This is a lesson that all of us need to learn. In the course of a lifetime, we all have our setbacks, whether they are financial or personal or family related. There is an inclination to say "I can never recover from this. I can't show my face. How can I go on?" This is not the attitude of Yehudah and this should not be the attitude of any Jew.

The Sefas Emes concludes by explaining that all the Children of Israel are called Yehudim (tracing themselves to their ancestor Yehudah), because this attribute is the strength of the Jewish people. No matter what defeats they have suffered, they go on. If one thinks of the defeats that we have experienced as a nation on the national level, they are staggering. Nevertheless, we have persevered. This is not only a quality that applies to us as a people; it applies to each of us as individuals as well. Each and every one of us is called Yehudah. Each of us has this capacity of Yehudah that despite the terrible, terrible incident, he survived and remained a lion. He was crouching, he was in a state of lowness, he was down -- but he remained a lion.

These were the two strengths of Yehudah: The ability to recognize and admit the unvarnished unadulterated truth, rather than rationalize and fabricate self-serving justifications and excuses; and the capacity that no matter how devastating the setback one has suffered, the ability to brush oneself off and go on with life. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org