

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

From Vayeshev to the end of the book of Bereishit we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. From the very beginning we are plunged into a drama of sibling rivalry that seems destined to end in tragedy. All the elements are there. There is favouritism. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. The Torah says this was because "he had been born to him in his old age." But we also know it was because Joseph was the son, the first son, of his beloved Rachel who had been infertile for many years.

Jacob gave this favouritism a visible symbol, the richly ornamented robe or coat of many colours that he had made for him. The sight of this acted as a constant provocation to the brothers. In addition there were the bad reports Joseph brought to his father about his half-brothers, the children of the handmaids. And by the fourth verse of the parashah we read the following: "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him, velo yachlu dabro le-shalom." (37:4)

What is the meaning of this last phrase? Here are some of the standard translations:

"They could not speak a kind word to him."

"They could not speak peacefully to him."

"They could not speak to him on friendly terms."

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz, however, recognised that the Hebrew construction is strange. Literally it means, "they could not speak him to peace." What might this mean? Rabbi Eybeschutz refers us to the command in Vayikra 19:17: You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprimand your neighbour and not bear sin because of him.

This is how Maimonides interprets this command as it relates to interpersonal relations: "When a person sins against another, the injured party should not hate the offender and keep silent... it is his duty to inform the offender and say to him, why did you do this to me? Why did you sin against me in this matter?... if the offender repents and pleads for forgiveness, he should be forgiven." (Hilchot Deot 6:6)

Rabbi Eybeschutz's point is simple. Had the brothers been able to speak to Joseph they might have told him of their anger at his talebearing, and of their distress at seeing the many-coloured coat. They might have spoken frankly about their sense of humiliation at

the way their father favoured Rachel over their mother Leah, a favouritism that was now being carried through into a second generation. Joseph might have come to understand their feelings. It might have made him more modest or at least more thoughtful. But lo yachlu dabro le-shalom. They simply couldn't bring themselves to speak. As Nachmanides writes, on the command: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart": "Those who hate tend to hide their hate in their heart."

We have here an instance of one of the Torah's great insights, that conversation is a form of conflict resolution, whereas the breakdown of speech is often a prelude to violent revenge.

The classic case is that of Absalom and Amnon, two half brothers who were sons of King David. In a shocking episode, Amnon rapes Absalom's sister Tamar: "Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

"Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.' And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.

"When King David heard all this, he was furious. And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar." (2 Samuel 13:19-22)

Absalom maintained his silence for two years. Then he invited all of David's sons for a feast at the time of sheep-shearing, and ordered his servants to wait until Amnon was drunk, and then kill him, which they did. Hate grows in silence. It did with Absalom. It did with Joseph's brothers. Before the chapter ends, we see them plot to kill Joseph, then throw him in to a pit, and then sell him into slavery. It is a terrible story and led directly to the Israelites' exile and slavery in Egypt.

The Talmud (Berakhot 26a) uses the phrase, Ein sichah ela tefillah, which literally means, "Conversation is a form of prayer," because in opening ourselves up to the human other, we prepare ourselves for the act of opening ourselves up with the Divine Other, which is what prayer is: a conversation with God.

Conversation does not, in and of itself, resolve conflict. Two people who are open with one another may still have clashing desires or competing claims. They may simply not like one another. There is no law of predetermined harmony in the human domain. But

conversation means that we recognise one another's humanity. At its best it allows us to engage in role reversal, seeing the world from the other's point of view. Think of how many real and intractable conflicts, whether in the personal or political domain, might be transformed if we could do that.

In the end Joseph and his brothers had to live through real trauma before they were able to recognise one another's humanity, and much of the rest of their story—the longest single narrative in the Torah—is about just that.

Judaism is about the God who cannot be seen, who can only be heard; about the God who created the universe with words and whose first act of kindness to the first human being was to teach him how to use words. Jews, even highly secular Jews, have often been preoccupied with language. Wittgenstein understood that philosophy is about language. Levi Strauss saw cultures as forms of language. Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker pioneered study of the language instinct. George Steiner has written about translation and the limits of language.

The sages were eloquent in speaking about the dangers of lashon hara, "evil speech," the power of language to fracture relationships and destroy trust and goodwill. But there is evil silence as well as evil speech. It is no accident that at the very beginning of the most fateful tale of sibling rivalry in Bereishit, the role-specific failure-of language is alluded to, in a way missed by virtually all translations. Joseph's brothers might have "spoken him to peace" had they been open, candid and willing to communicate. Speech broke down at the very point where it was needed most.

Words create; words reveal; words command; words redeem. Judaism is a religion of holy words. For words are the narrow bridge across the abyss between soul and soul, between two human beings, and between humanity and God. Language is the redemption of solitude, and the mender of broken relationships. However painful it is to speak about our hurt, it is more dangerous not to do so. Joseph and his brothers might have been reconciled early on in their lives, and thus spared themselves, their father, and their descendants, much grief. Revealing pain is the first step to healing pain. Speech is a path to peace. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

Yaakov Avinu is described as a "tent dweller" (Bereishis 25:27), which Rashi tells us refers to the tent of Shem and the tent of Eiver. But he didn't only study with Shem and Eiver growing up, he spent another 14 years studying in the house of Eiver (see Rashi on

28:9) before going to Charan to find a wife (Shem had passed away by then). Where was the "tent," "house," and/or "Yeshiva" of Shem and Eiver located?

Some Tosafists (e.g. Paanayach Raza) assume that "the land of the people of the East" (29:1), where Yaakov went after his ladder vision, is not Charan. Instead, it refers to "בית שם ועבר" which was in the "east," since Shem's descendants lived at "the Eastern Mountain" (10:30). Although "the land of the Eastern People" refers to ארם (see Bamidbar 23:7 and Y'shaya 9:11), of which Charan is a part of (so it could be describing Charan), because it is referred to it as something other than Charan, these Tosafists understand it to mean a different place. (Radak explains why Charan is referred to as "the land of the Eastern People" here; I'm still trying to figure out why sometimes it's referred to as פדן ארם, sometimes as ארם נהרים, and sometimes as חרן, although see Sifsay Cohen on Bereishis 27:10.) In any case, according to these Tosafists the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver (notice how "Shem" is included, even though he was no longer alive) was outside ארץ ישראל, to its east.

Turay Even (Megilah 16b) also says that Yaakov must have gone outside ארץ ישראל to learn; otherwise the Gemara couldn't have proven that learning Torah is greater than taking care of parents from Yaakov not being punished for the 14 years he spent away from them. It would prove that it's at least as important, but not that it's more important. However, if he learned outside ארץ ישראל and still wasn't punished, learning Torah must be at least as important as taking care of parents and living in ארץ ישראל combined, making it more important than either of them individually. And since Eiver came from "the other side of the river" (the Euphrates), that was likely where his house of study was. Others (e.g. Maharaha on Megilah 16b and Chasam Sofer on K'subos 17a) suggest different approaches to answer Turay Even's question.] That Shem and Eiver were originally from "the east" is indisputable. Whether they stayed there is not.

Rokayach and Rabbeinu Yoel point out hints to the names "שם" and "עבר" in the words "מבאר שבע," implying that this was where they were based. Maharsha (Megila 17a) says explicitly that בית עבר was in באר שבע. Sifsay Cohen (Bereishis 27:10) says Yaakov spent 7 years in מדרשו של שם and 7 years in מדרשו של עבר, both of which were in באר שבע. [That they had separate Yeshivos is implicit in the fact that Yaakov dwelt in "tents" (plural), i.e. the tent of Shem and the tent of Eiver. Since Shem had already died, his Yeshiva must have continued – independent of Eiver's – through his children and students; see Rashi on Makos 23b regarding Shem's court.]

Maharsha says בית עבר had to be in באר שבע because Yaakov went from there to Charan, and if it were elsewhere, that's where he would have left from, not from באר שבע. However, Netziv argues just the

opposite: saying that Yaakov left **באר שבע** and that he went to Charan (as opposed to leaving “to go to Charan”) implies that he went somewhere else in between. Rather, he left **באר שבע**, went to **בית שם ועבר**, and then went to Charan. Alshich says he left **באר שבע** and went elsewhere in **ארץ ישראל**, without indicating where in **ארץ ישראל** it was. (Any connection between Shem and Eiver and the cave in **צפת** bearing their names is fairly recent.) Kesef Mishna (A”Z 1:3) also says Shem and Eiver were in **ארץ נגון**. Anaf Yosef (Bereishis Raba 68:5) says **באר לחי ראי** was in **בית מדרשו של שם**, where Yitzchok lived after Avraham died (Bereishis 25:11), since Rivka went there to consult with Shem (see Rashi on 25:22). Chasam Sofer (K’subos 17a) assumes that the **בתי מדרשות** of Shem and Eiver were next to each other (see Rashi on 25:22), and says they must have been in **ירושלים**, since that’s where Malki-Tzedek (Shem) was king (see Rashi on Bereishis 14:18).

There are other indications that Shem and Eiver were in **ארץ ישראל**. They were at the party Avraham made when Yitzchok was weaned (Rashi, 21:8), which seems to have been in **גור**. [It should be noted that **באר שבע** and **גור** are both near **באר לחי ראי**.] They helped bury Avraham and Sarah (Bereishis Raba 62:3) in **חברון**. Aruch Hashulchan (C”M 222:3) says Sarah was punished for asking G-d to judge Avraham rather than bringing him to the court of Shem and Eiver; they were living in **באר שבע** at the time, so Shem and Eiver must have been in the vicinity. Eisav wanted to wait until Shem and Eiver died before killing Yaakov so that they couldn’t prosecute him (Midrash Seichel Tov 27:41), so he must have been within jurisdiction of their court. On the other hand, if Yaakov was trying to escape from Eisav, how could he stay nearby?

Although everyone seems to put both **בתי מדרשות** in the same place, that might have only been true while Shem was still alive. I would suggest that after Shem passed away, and his (other) students kept his Yeshiva (and court) going, Eiver decided to move back to his hometown, “to the east,” to try to bring people there closer to the Creator. Yitzchok had a Yeshiva in **ארץ ישראל** (Yoma 28b). Shem’s Yeshiva was still going strong (his court was still active when **תמר** was accused of not waiting for her brother-in-law). So Eiver moved back east. It’s also possible that Yaakov having to leave was the impetus (or final straw) for Eiver deciding to move his **בית מדרש** to a different location.

Shem and Eiver were in **ארץ ישראל**, near Avraham and Yitzchok, for all those events. But when Yaakov spent 14 years in Eiver’s **בית מדרש** before going to Lavan in Charan, it might have been in (or closer to) **ארם** than it was to **באר שבע**. © 2023 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah parsha begins with the simple narrative statement that Yaakov settled and “dwelled in the

land of the sojourn of his forefathers, the Land of Canaan.” That last clause in that sentence – the Land of Canaan – seems to be superfluous. We are already well aware from the previous parshiyot of Bereshith that Avraham and Yitzchak dwelt in the Land of Canaan. Since every word and phrase in the Torah demands our attention and study, the commentators to Torah throughout the ages examined this issue and proposed a number of different lessons and insights.

I believe that the lessons for our time from these words that open our parsha are eerily relevant. Yaakov is forced to live in a hostile environment. The story of the assault on Dina and the subsequent violence and bloodshed between Yaakov’s family and the Canaanites serves as the backdrop to this type of life that living in the Land of Canaan entails. Yaakov is living in a bad neighborhood, amongst many who wish him and his family ill. He is forced to rely on the sword of Shimon and Levi to survive but that is not to his liking or ultimate life purpose. The Land of Canaan is not hospitable to him and his worldview.

The Philistine kings who wished to kidnap and enslave his mother and grandmother are still around or at least their cloned successors are. At the funeral of his father at the Cave of Machpela he must have ruefully mused as to how his grandfather was forced to pay such an exorbitant price for a burial plot.

The Land of Canaan had many unpleasant associations connected to it for Yaakov to contemplate: a king’s ransom to Eisav, a rock for a pillow, and crippling encounters with an anonymous foe. All of this and more was his lot in the Land of Canaan.

So what is Yaakov’s stubborn attachment to living in the Land of Canaan? Why does he believe that he will be able to eventually dwell there in serenity and security? The answer to these issues is that he realized that this was the land of his ancestors and that the Lord had entered into a covenant with them to grant them that land. Now it could be that it is called the Land of Canaan but eternally it would be called after his name, the Land of Israel. The land would know many populations and rulers but that would never change its eternal nature of being the Land of Israel. The land is home for Yaakov – the land of his past and his future. It is what binds him to his great ancestral heritage and mission - and he will demand to be buried there as well. Yaakov overlooks the difficulties and challenges inherent in the Land of Canaan because he lives not only in its geographic confines but rather in the ideal land of his forefathers – in a land of Godly revelation and holy purpose. Yaakov will undergo much more pain and suffering in the Land of Canaan before he returns there in final tranquility. But his descendants, the Jewish people, will always know it to be the land of their fathers, the Land of Israel. © 2023 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

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**A**nd there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver, and they brought Joseph down to Egypt.” [Genesis 37:28] Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed? An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

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

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

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

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

Undoubtedly, the moment Joseph is sold into

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

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it’s hard to figure out who actually sold the hapless brother.

“And they [the brothers] sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming. And Judah said, Come, let us sell [Joseph] to the Ishmaelites. And there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they brought Joseph down to Egypt.” [Gen. 37:27–28]

Although the brothers spotted Ishmaelites, it seems that it was the Midianite traders who actually passed by and captured Joseph in order to sell him. After all, the phrase, ‘they drew up and lifted him out’ seems to refer to the Midianites.

So, who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him? Rashi [ad loc] suggests that it is the brothers of Joseph, ‘*bnei Yaakov*,’ and not the Midianites. Rashi draws on Joseph’s comment twenty-two years later when he reveals himself to his brothers: ‘I am Joseph whom you sold into Egypt.’ Rashi argues that the initial biblical verse describing the sale seems ambiguous precisely in order to inform us that Joseph was sold many times before ending up in Egypt: the brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites, the Ishmaelites to the Midianites, and the Midianites to the Egyptians.

Nahmanides agrees that it was the brothers who did the selling, but suggests that the Midianite traders hired the Ishmaelite caravan drivers, thus explaining the usage of both nations interchangeably.

In contrast, Rashbam maintains that the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit, and therefore not the ones that sold him. Yes, the brothers put him into the pit, abandoned him and certainly would have sold him had the opportunity arisen. However, before the brothers had a chance to sell him, Midianite traders came by, pulled Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites. The twenty silver shekels lined the pockets of the Midianites, not the pockets of the brothers. According to Rashbam, the brothers had nothing to do with the actual sale. However, this leaves us with the problem: how do we understand Joseph’s declaration to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt’? [Gen. 45:4].

I think that this difference between interpretations may be understood as conflicting views regarding the nature of responsibility. Rashi understands the initial verse to mean that the brothers themselves lifted Joseph from the pit and personally sold him, because otherwise it contradicts Joseph’s words later

on, 'I am Joseph whom you sold.' For Rashi, the words are facts, not metaphors, and although responsibility can have all kinds of shades and meanings, ultimate responsibility can only fall upon the person who actually carries out the deed. According to Rashi's logic, since Joseph held the brothers responsible, they must have executed the actual act.

Rashbam's concept of responsibility differs. He argues that although the brothers did not actually pull him out of the pit and sell him, nevertheless they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil, even those whose hands remain clean while others do the actual dirty work.

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

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, sub specie aeternitatis, under an eternal gaze. From his vantage point, twenty-two years later, he continues 'But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you...to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God...' [Gen. 45:5–8]. Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because he wishes to implicate them in guilt, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime, concluded – owing to divine guidance and Joseph's own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and to look upon the sale from a divine perspective.

The brothers are responsible both for the crime, as well as for the good that resulted from the crime. Although Jewish tradition never forgave the brothers for their cruelty to their brother (witness the *Eleh Ezkera dirge* which traces the Hadrianic persecution which cruelly took the lives of ten great rabbis back to the sale of Joseph), Joseph praises God for having extracted

salvation from sin; triumph from transgression. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Robert Alter parallels the twins Peretz and Zerach with the better known twins Jacob and Esau. In his words, "the name Zerach means 'shining' as in the dawning of the sun, and so is linked with the scarlet thread on his hand. The scarlet in turn associates Zerach with Esau – the Red – another twin displaced from his initial position as firstborn" (Genesis 25:25; 38:28).

An intersection also exists between Peretz and Jacob. As Jacob runs from Esau, God appears to him and says, "And your seed will be like the dust of the earth, and you will burst forth [u'faratzta] to the west and east, the north and south" (28:14). The term peretz, an unusual word for the covenantal blessing of many children, is applied only to Jacob.

But there are differences as well. Jacob and Esau vie for the birthright. When they struggle in Rebecca's womb, the oracle tells Rebecca that "one people shall be mightier than the other" (25:23). In other words, they will remain in unresolved conflict. Through the ages, Jacob, father of our people, and Esau, father of Edom, struggle. In the words of Rashi: "They will not be equal in greatness; when one rises, the other will fall" (Megillah 6a).

The text continues: "V'rav ya'avod tza'ir." While this is normatively translated "And the older will serve the younger," that is, Esau will serve Jacob, it could also mean the younger will serve greatly. In other words, Jacob will serve Esau. The diction is purposely ambiguous because the conflict will forever continue.

Concerning Peretz and Zerach, the ambiguity as to who is first and who is second is resolved. Consider the scene: Zerach puts out his hand, but that doesn't make him first. Life begins when the head – or, in a breech birth, the majority of the body – emerges (Mishnah, Ohalot 7:6). Not coincidentally, in wanting to designate Zerach as the firstborn, the midwife ties a shani (red string) on his hand, which, as the Or Hachayim argues, has a clear association with the word sheini, implying that this child will in the end be second.

Herein lies the difference between the two sets of twins. Jacob and Esau are in constant conflict; only one is chosen to be the next patriarch.

Peretz and Zerach, on the other hand, have their conflict resolved; both are included. Whereas Jacob and not Esau inherits the covenant, both Peretz and Zerach are counted among the children of Judah, as the Torah states, "The children of Judah...of Peretz the family of Peretzites, of Zerach the family of Zerachites" (Numbers

26:20).

From this perspective, Peretz and Zerach represent a repair of the filial rupture of Jacob and Esau. Jacob and Esau struggle, and only one will be a covenantal heir. Peretz and Zerach are both embraced, each playing an important part in Judah's family. ©2023 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

"We dreamed a dream but there is none who can interpret it," and Yosef said to them, "Interpretations are for G-d, tell me please [the dreams.]" (Ber. 40:8) Even in prison, Yosef was a kind and concerned person. He saw two men, servants of the King, who were incarcerated, but looked even more upset than normal, so he asked about it. They replied by saying they'd had a dream that was impossible to interpret because it was so confounding. Undeterred, Yosef asked them to tell him the dream.

Upon hearing what the butler had to say, Yosef explained with tremendous clarity and insight exactly what the dream meant. The baker heard this and happily told Yosef his dream, expecting the same interpretation. He was disappointed, however, for Yosef's interpretation, just as divinely-inspired as the first, did not bode well for the baker. Both of Yosef's interpretations were borne out in the coming days, with the butler restored to service and the baker hanged.

There is a small nuance here which is easy to miss. The butler and baker each had a dream. There were numerous similarities, so they assumed it was a single dream. However, they could not reconcile the meanings even when they consulted with local soothsayers and occultists. It was Yosef who first suggested they might not be a single dream by saying that interpretations (plural) belong to G-d.

Perhaps because they were so sure about their impression of it being a single dream, they were unable to grasp the messages because they could not see it any other way. Later, Pharaoh would have two dreams, but Yosef would tell him they were actually one.

The lesson here is that when we are so sure of something that we fail to consider any other possibility, we are hindering ourselves and preventing anyone from helping us. We will wind up depressed, hopeless, and lost, because the world won't make any sense to us.

Yosef said, "G-d is in control of the interpretations." That is, not only of dreams, but of every event in our lives. If we want to get the messages He's sending, we need to be open to the possibility we don't see things clearly, and consider we might be wrong in our perception.

He said to them, "Tell me the dreams without

your commentary or opinion. Just relay to me what you experienced, and let me see if Hashem will guide me to the truth." Because Yosef was a person who trusted in Hashem, not in his own wisdom or might, he was entrusted with the correct meanings of the dreams.

On Chanuka, the Maccabees fought a war. By all logical arguments, it didn't make sense. It was a suicide mission, but they fought anyway, relying not on their own tactics and smarts, but knowing that Hashem would be the arbiter of the outcome. That trust was the source of their salvation, and they merited to see things in an entirely new light.

When R' Chaim Volozhiner z"l had the idea to found his famous yeshiva in Volozhin, which came to be the paradigm for the modern-day Yeshiva, he excitedly approached his Rebbi, R' Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna. He was surprised and more than a little disappointed when the Gaon did not share his enthusiasm. He shelved the project.

A few years later, he still thought it was a good idea, so he approached the Vilna Gaon again. This time his Rebbi wished him well and told him it was a wonderful idea. He was confused. Previously, the Gaon had not thought highly of the concept. What changed?

"When you first came to me," explained R' Eliyahu, "you were so passionate and sure this was a great idea that I was afraid the Yetzer Hara was involved. But now that you have let your passion cool, and you still think it's a good idea, I know your intentions are pure and your efforts will be blessed." ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

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Embarrassing Someone

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our Sages derive from Parshat Vayeshev the principle of "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person in public." For we see that Tamar refused to announce that Yehudah was the one who got her pregnant, for fear of embarrassing him, even though as a result of her silence she was taking the risk of being put to death.

It would seem that this is an example of a case in which a person should give up his life rather than transgress. True, we normally assume that there are only three sins in this category: sexual immorality, murder, and idol worship. However, it is possible that the prohibition of humiliating someone is a subset of the prohibition of murder. This is because when a person is mortified, his face turns white when the blood drains from it, just as in death.

Others disagree, explaining that the three cardinal sins are limited to those mentioned explicitly in the Torah. The prohibition to embarrass someone is not explicit. Furthermore, the Meiri explains that the principle of "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery

furnace than to embarrass another person in public” is not meant to be taken literally. It is stated dramatically to ensure that people will take it seriously, making efforts to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

May people embarrass themselves? If we take literally the comparison between embarrassing and murdering, then just as people may not harm themselves intentionally, so too they should be forbidden to embarrass themselves intentionally. This would mean that a person would not be allowed to wear torn clothes that expose a deformed part of his body, even if he is doing so in order to make money. However, the Meiri allows a person to embarrass himself, consistent with his understanding the comparison as ethical and not literal.

In order to avoid embarrassing people, our Sages ordained that all first fruits (*bikurim*) that are brought to Jerusalem should be in baskets of reeds. This was to prevent the rich from using gold and silver baskets, which would make the poor feel embarrassed of their more humble baskets. There is also a custom in many congregations that a designated Torah reader (*ba'al korei*) does all the reading from the Torah. This ensures that someone who is unable to read from the Torah will not be embarrassed by being expected to do so. However, there are other congregations that do not share this concern. On the contrary, they believe that the fear of embarrassment will motivate all the men in the congregation to learn to read the Torah for themselves.
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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Vayeshev relates a seemingly disturbing series of events. After telling us that Yosef snatched on his brothers, it says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all the other brothers and that's why he made him a striped shirt. Then it says of the brothers could no longer tolerate Yosef, and didn't believe his dreams of them bowing to him. First, why did Yaakov love one son more than the others? Second, why couldn't the brothers tolerate Yosef only after his father made him the striped shirt? Lastly, why did Yosef insist on telling his brothers his dreams, when he must have sensed that they didn't want to hear them? Rav Kaminetsky explains that Yaakov had taught Yosef all that he'd learned in the Yeshiva (school) of Shem and Eiver where he studied, and where Yitzchok and Avraham studied as well. The main strength of that school was that they taught Torah that could survive in negative environments. Avraham used it to deal with the rest of the world, Yitzchok used it to deal with Yishmael, and Yaakov used it to deal with Lavan and Esav. Now Yaakov was teaching it to Yosef, and the brothers were worried. Were they as bad as Esav or Lavan? Why would Yaakov have to teach Yosef that Torah? Little did they know that Yosef would need it to deal with Egypt, and all the trials he would face there.

Yaakov loved Yosef more because he learned

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

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

The Dreamers

Dreams are an important part of Parshat Vayeshev. The dreams of Yosef end with his kidnapping by his brothers and his being sold into Egypt. There, in Egypt, in the House of Potiphar, Yosef rises to an important position based on the blessings that Hashem sent Potiphar's household while Yosef was there. Yosef was framed by Potiphar's wife and was thrown into the prison which was part of Potiphar's house. This prison was for those awaiting a death sentence. HaEmek Davar learns this from a play on the Aramaic word “katolyah”, meaning a death penalty and “katlozah”, meaning a butcher's chopping counter, thus associating it with Potiphar who was the head of the kitchen. In that prison, Yosef met with the wine-steward and baker of Par'oh, who had both been sentenced to death for their carelessness with Par'oh's food and drink. In the prison, they both dreamed on the same night. Yosef's ability to interpret their dreams eventually led to his freedom (in next week's parasha) to interpret Par'oh's dreams.

The Torah states, “And it happened that after these things, that the wine-steward of the king of Egypt and the baker transgressed against their master, against the king of Egypt. Par'oh was enraged at his two courtiers, the chamberlain (sar, prince) of the wine-stewards (cup-bearers) and the chamberlain of the bakers. And he placed them in the ward of the house of the chamberlain (sar) of the butchers (Potiphar), into the prison, the place where Yosef was confined. The chamberlain of the butchers appointed Yosef with them, and he attended them and they were in the ward for a period of days. The two of them dreamt a dream, each

one had his dream on the same night, each one according to the interpretation of his dream – the wine-steward and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison.”

Rashi explains that the sin of the wine-steward involved a fly which had landed in the King’s cup just before he went to drink from it. The sin of the baker was that a small pebble got mixed up in the dough that was used to bake Par’oh’s bread. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why the beginning of the sentence separates the wine-steward and the baker with the phrase, “of the king of Egypt.” He explains that this was done to show that their sins were different. The sin of the wine-steward involved a fly that accidentally flew into the cup just before it was served. The sin of the baker involved a preventable sin had he been more careful in sifting the flour and preparing the dough

The Kli Yakar asks why the first statement in the sentence refers to the two “sinners” as the wine-steward and the baker, yet later calls them the sar of the wine-stewards and the sar of the bakers. He explains that the wine-steward and the baker wsho sinned had supervisors (chamberlains) above them who served the King on special occasions. Since this was the king’s birthday (a fact which we learn from the time they were in prison until the time Par’oh called for them a second time on his next birthday was a year in length), it was appropriate that the ones who served Par’oh were the chamberlains. These chamberlains were the ones who were incarcerated and sentenced to death for not being diligent in their work and embarrassing the King on his birthday.

The Kli Yakar explains the difference of opinion in Bereishit Rabah between the Rabbis and Rabbi Evyatar. The Rabbis supported the opinion that we already found in Rashi, namely, that the sin of the wine-steward was a fly in Par’oh’s cup and the sin of the baker was a stone that was found in the dough or bread being served Par’oh. Rabbi Evyatar explains that these two chamberlains sought to marry the daughter of Par’oh, and they believed that their status as chamberlains afforded them the necessary honor and position to approach Par’oh. Rabbi Evyatar goes on to explain that the reason why the Torah leaves off the identification of these two men as chamberlains was to indicate that the sin had nothing to do with their status, but instead with their carelessness. That is why, when the two men had sinned and when they dreamed, they were not mentioned together with their status.

The Kli Yakar returns to the same question that we found in HaRav Sorotzkin, the division in the first part of our sentence between the wine-steward and the baker, namely, the wine-steward is referred as “of the king of Egypt,” yet the baker does not include that phrase. The wine-steward’s actions, if they were done to a regular citizen of Egypt, would be considered accidental and unpunishable. The baker’s actions, no

matter whether done to an individual or a king, were considered negligent and punishable. That is why there is a separation with the words “of the king of Egypt.” The wine-steward is the only one of the two who would not have been punished had he worked for someone other than the king.

There is another significant difference of opinion concerning these two servants. There is a term that is used to describe them, “sirisei Par’oh,” which can mean the eunuchs of Par’oh or officers of Par’oh. According to the Ramban, “these two lords were castrates, for as they also acted as the chiefs of the butlers and bakers in the women’s quarters in the royal apartments, the kings would customarily castrate them.” This would obviously contradict Rabbi Evyatar, who suggests that they wished to marry Par’oh’s daughter. The Ramban, however, also brings the opinion of Onkelos, a translator of the Torah into Aramaic, who says that this word could also mean an officer. This would coincide with the opinion of Rabbi Evyatar. Potiphar is also called “sirir Par’oh,” which Onkelos translates as an officer of Par’oh. This also follows the opinion of Targum Yonatan, another accepted translation of the Torah.

Knowing the nature and position of these two servants of Par’oh, one must be curious why they were chosen to have a “true” dream, one that is an accurate, complete foretelling of a future time. In some ways this is akin to prophecy, in that many prophetic visions of our later prophets were presented in dream form. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that, “in the dreams themselves there was nothing extraordinary. That the (wine-steward) dreamt he was preparing wine and offering it to the King, which he had probably been doing for the last thirty years, and similarly the baker, what was there in that that it should require interpretation? But the definiteness of the dreams and the similarity of them both in one night, struck them.” It was also that the two servants would need Yosef’s help to interpret those dreams.

There is a statement of the Rabbis that Hashem always prepares the cure before the illness. There was no reason that these two servants should have made a mistake on the same day yet in different levels of responsibility. Their incarceration and the dreams they had were only necessary to free Yosef. Hashem prepared them to free Yosef. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

