

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

“**W**hat do porcupines do in winter?” asked Schopenhauer. “How can they stay warm?” If they come too close to one another, they will injure each other. If they stay too far apart, they will freeze. Life, for porcupines, is a delicate balance between closeness and distance. It is hard to get it right, and dangerous to get it wrong. And so it is for us.

That is the force of the word that gives our parsha its name: Vayigash. “And he came close.”

“Then Judah came close to him and said: ‘Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.’” (Gen. 44:18)

For perhaps the first time in his life, Judah came close to his brother Joseph. The irony is, of course, that he did not know it was Joseph. But that one act of coming close melted all of Joseph’s reserve, all of his defences, and as if unable to stop himself, he finally disclosed his identity: “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’” (Gen. 45:3)

How can we be sure that Vayigash is the key word? Because it contrasts with another verse, many chapters, and many years, earlier: “But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.” (Gen. 37:18)

Right at the beginning of the story, when Joseph was sent by his father to see how the brothers were doing, tending the sheep, they saw him from far away, from a distance. Imagine the scene. They cannot see his face. All they can see is the richly ornamented cloak, the “coat of many colours,” that so upsets them. This coat acts as a constant reminder that it is he, not they, whom their father loves most.

From far away, we don’t see people as human beings, and when we stop seeing people as human beings, and they become instead symbols, objects of envy or hate, people can do bad things to one another. The whole tragedy of Joseph and his brothers was distance. They were too far apart in every way.

Which is why it was only when Judah came close to Joseph -- vayigash -- that the coldness between them thawed, and they became brothers, not strangers to one another.

Too much distance and we freeze. But if we get too close we can injure one another. That was the story

of Jacob and Esau. Think about it. Jacob bought Esau’s birthright. He stole his blessing. He wore Esau’s clothes. He borrowed his identity. Even when they were born, Jacob was clutching Esau’s heel.

It was only when there was a distance between them -- the 22 years in which Jacob was away from home, with Laban -- that the relationship healed, so that when they met again, despite Jacob’s fears, Esau embraced and kissed him and treated him like a brother and a friend.

Too close and we hurt one another. Too distant and we freeze.

How then do we make and sustain relationships, if the balance is so fine and it is so easy to get it wrong? The Torah’s answer -- already there in the first chapter of the Torah -- is: first separate, then join. The verb *lehavdil*, “to separate,” appears five times in the first chapter of Bereishit. God separates light from darkness, the upper and lower waters, sea and dry land. Separation is at the heart of Jewish law -- between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden.

In Judaism *kadosh*, holy, means separation. To sanctify is to separate. Why? Because when we separate, we create order. We defeat chaos. We give everything and everyone their space. I am I and not you. You are you and not I. Once we respect our difference and distance, then we can join without doing damage to one another.

First separate, then connect. That seems to be the Jewish way.

Heart-wrenching separations also appear at both ends of the Abraham story. At the beginning of his mission, Abraham was told to separate himself from his father, to leave his home and journey to a new land, faraway. Towards the end he was told to separate himself, in different ways, from each of his two sons. These painful episodes represent the agonising birth-pangs of a new way of thinking about humanity. But ultimately, we see his sons standing together again, and he is reconciled with both.

That is how God created the universe, and that is how we create real personal relationships. By separating and leaving space for the other. Parents should not seek to control children. Spouses should not seek to control one another. It is the carefully calibrated distance between us in which relationship allows each party to grow into full individuals. And then to be seen, when we stand back and really look at them -- but not

too far back.

The most beautiful symbol of the problem and its resolution is the ceremony of havdallah at the end of Shabbat and especially the havdallah candle. The wicks are separate but the flame they make is joined. So it is between husband and wife. So it is between parent and child. And so it is, or should be, between siblings. Distance damaged the relationship between Judah and Joseph. Vayigash -- Judah's act of drawing close to his brother -- restored it. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l*
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**A**nd Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his [Joseph's] neck.” [Genesis 45:14] This poignant moment when these two brothers are reunited after a separation of twenty-two years is one of the most tender scenes in the Torah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook taught that if the Temples were destroyed because of causeless hatred, the Temple will only be rebuilt because of causeless love, exemplified by the tears of Joseph and Benjamin. Rashi is providing a prescient lesson for our troubled times. *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 BEREL WEIN**Wein Online**

The opening verses of this week's Torah reading are among the most dramatic and challenging in the entire Torah. Two great, powerful personalities in the house of the children of Yaakov, Yehudah and Yosef, engage in a clash and debate of epic proportions, regarding the release of their brother Binyamin.

At first glance it seems obvious that Yosef has the upper hand in his struggle. After all, he is the viceroy of Egypt, the commander of the palace guard who are armed and ready to do his bidding. On the other hand, Yehudah has very limited options as to what to say and what to do in order to obtain the release of Binyamin. Yosef's position of power appears to prevail but the impassioned plea and tone and contents of the words of Yehudah are not to be easily ignored.

So in a sense one could say that Yehudah will himself prevail over Yosef. But in a clear analysis one should come to the conclusion that neither of the two great antagonists, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, is the victor in this clash of ideas and worldview.

The true champion that will emerge from this entire baffling and fascinating story is the old hoary Yaakov, seemingly isolated back there in the land of Canaan, morning and despondent as to what has happened to his family. In anguish, he shouts: "Yosef is no more, Shimon is no more; both of them will be lost to me!"

It is that image of their father that haunts both Yehudah and Yosef. And each, in his own way, wishes to do justice to their father and to everything that he represents. And it is this image of Yaakov that brings Yosef to the climax of the story and to his ability, nay, necessity to reveal and reconcile himself with his brothers.

Jewish rabbinic thought over the ages has always attempted to make the story of Yosef and Yehudah relevant to each individual generation of Jews. I think that the most relevant message that all of us can gain from this great narrative is that it is the image of our ancient father Yaakov that truly hovers over all of our current struggles.

It is our task, not merely to win the debate with our other brothers or even with outside powers that are seemingly stronger and greater than we are, but rather to somehow remain faithful to the old man that we can no longer see but who is somehow always with us. What gives both Yehudah and Yosef troubling pause in the midst of their impassioned debate is the question as to what their father thinks of their words and their actions.

It is this unseen presence of Yaakov that drives the brothers to reconciliation and to restoring a common purpose in their lives and those of their families. In effect they are thinking: "What would our father think of this conversation and of this confrontation?" Father Yaakov

has looked down at all of the generations of the Jewish people and in one way or another, every generation has been forced to ask itself what would Yaakov think of us, our words and our behavior.

It is that ever-present idea in Jewish life that has been an aid and a boon to our seemingly miraculous survival as a people and as a faith. We may not see him but we can be certain that he is there with us today as well. ©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 products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS**Shabbat Forshpeis**

What makes Joseph so keen on settling his family in a suburb of Egypt, in a place called Goshen (Genesis 46:31–34)? Isaac Arama suggests that Goshen was not a special place. As with many attractive areas, its import lies in its location – far from the capital of Egypt. In the center of the politics of the Egyptian empire, one could easily fall prey to the intrigues and contradictions inherent in the Egyptian political system. Joseph and Jacob understood the appeal of remaining far from such a place.

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, sees this choice differently. For him, living in Goshen was a way in which Jacob's family could have the opportunity to build a life of holiness.

The fundamental difference between these approaches is the following: Arama sees Goshen as a way to distance oneself from a negative (in this case, the Egyptian political scene). Goshen in and of itself had nothing positive to offer. Its only attraction was what it was not: that is, it was not the center of Egyptian life.

But the Netziv disagrees. Goshen had something positive to offer. There, Jacob's family could preserve their sanctity.

Nehama Leibowitz notes that, as is often the case, the background of these commentators contributes to the differing views presented here. Arama lived in fifteenth-century Spain and was painfully aware of the Spanish political system. He knew the possible corruption of political office and understood how Jacob would have wanted to keep his family far from the center of political life.

The Netziv, on the other hand, who lived in nineteenth-century Europe and whose life was interwoven with a hope for the return to Zion, saw Goshen as a move toward realizing this dream.

Perhaps, too, one could further suggest, that in Goshen, Jacob's family could develop an infrastructure of an autonomous, sovereign people. It was there – much as would unfold in the post First Temple Babylonian era – that a state within a state could be built, marking a hopeful step toward returning to Israel and

developing our national homeland.

But, as Nehama remarks, “In spite of all of Yosef’s endeavors to prevent them settling down permanently in the land and becoming enmeshed in the attractions of the surrounding society, they forgot the temporary nature of their sojourn in Egypt. The last verse alludes to the dangers of assimilation when it states, ‘and Israel settled in the land of Egypt and in the land of Goshen; they acquired holdings therein and were fruitful and increased greatly in numbers [Genesis 47:27].’”

This is an important message for Diaspora Jewry today: no matter how developed and sophisticated we are, the dangers of assimilation exist when we live in a non-Jewish society. To be sure, individuals may maintain their Jewish identity in exile, but our national destiny lies not in the Goshens of this world, not in Egypt, but in a place where Judaism is the main compass: in the land of Israel. ©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

"And Yisrael said, “It is a lot that my son Yosef is still alive; I will go and see him before I soon die.” (Beraishis 45:28) Having not seen Yosef in twenty-two years, Yaakov had spent this time in sackcloth and mourning for his son. It is not the Jewish way to remain in such extreme pain over the death of a loved one, and in fact there is a prohibition to do things like cutting one’s self over such a loss. However, as the Kli Yakar here points out, Yaakov had been promised by Hashem that if none of his children died in his lifetime, he would not see purgatory, but would instead merit full reward in Olam Haba. Thinking he lost his son was a cause for eternal sorrow.

Now, hearing that Yosef was alive, Yaakov wished to see Yosef for himself, to be sure that Yosef was indeed still “his” son, one who kept the Torah and was loyal to the teachings of Hashem. He would be able to see it on Yosef’s face and know whether it was just an act or not. The question is, though, why Yaakov mentioned dying, and seemingly soon.

He was only 130 years old. As the Midrash (quoted by Rashi, Beraishis 27:2) tells us, a person should worry about dying within a five-year span of his parents’ ages of death. Thus, Yitzchak blessed his sons when he was 123, because his mother had died at 127. However, Yitzchak lived to 180 so what was Yaakov worried about? To be fair, there is a Midrash that states that Rivka died at 133, though other calculations show her age to be closer to 122.

So, while it may be that he was worried about dying because his mother died within five years of the age he was now, it is still curious that later, when Yaakov meets Yosef, he repeats, “Now I can die, for I have seen

your face, that you are still alive.” It would seem his comments about death were not based on the calculations of his parents’ ages when they died.

However, since Yaakov had a promise that if all his sons remained alive he would see only goodness in the next world, it actually makes sense that Yaakov was aware of his own mortality. There are numerous reasons a person dies at a given time. He may have been allotted a certain number of years, and he’s used them up. If he’s righteous, he may have been given the extra years of someone who was punished by losing some of their years.

It’s also possible that someone’s life comes to an end simply because they have done all they were sent here to do. It makes sense, then, that Yaakov felt his time was coming. He knew he had a job to produce the children who would form the basis of Klal Yisrael. His twelve children would be the building blocks of the twelve Tribes, and now that Yosef was alive, Yaakov knew he’d completed his mission. He therefore assumed he would soon die.

But it was not the case. Yaakov spent the next seventeen years in Egypt learning with his grandson Ephraim, and being an elder statesman for his family in this foreign land. He was beacon of light for a nation which would soon be engulfed in darkness. His “second act” had just as much purpose as raising the twelve shvatim, and his mission was not yet over.

The Chofetz Chaim wanted to live out his final days in Eretz Yisroel, but R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzenski told him he was not permitted to leave Europe. R’ Chaim Ozer asked, “What will happen to all the Jews in Europe without you?”

The Chofetz Chaim responded that he was already an old man who could not go around and speak to people and have an impact. “I can no longer do any good for anybody in Europe.” R’ Chaim Ozer answered with a parable from R’ Yisroel Salanter who said, “when the grandfather sits at the head of the table, everyone at the table acts and behaves differently.”

“The grandfather does not need to raise his voice or threaten “I’m going to send you to your room.” The mere presence of the grandfather at the head of the table has an effect on everyone.” R’ Chaim Ozer continued: “We need you in Europe — not to speak, not to write, not to give classes, but we need you to sit at the head of the table.” The Chofetz Chaim stayed put.
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RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Conflict between Judah and Joseph

The prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars

and the moon- of a time where he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

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

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems to work out for him. He presents his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph after he is willing to give his life to save the life of his brother Benjamin, only to be embarrassed to own up to his mistake of initiating and carrying out the sale of his brother Joseph-and realizing that he is standing before his long lost brother, the dreamer-and that his dreams have come true.

To make things more difficult, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that the future king of Israel the forecaster of the Messiah would come from Joseph!

One reason that our sages explain this phenomenon is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to Jacob that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as "yhudim", Jews...

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

ability to own up to responsibility and to admit wrong and then start anew.

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

The strength of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet aspires to great heights. ©2020 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI DOV LERNER

Worth Fighting For

In the first verses of this week's Parsha we confront a scene striking for its subtlety. Last week, Joseph, with his identity still masked from his brothers, decrees Benjamin's eternal servitude; the remaining siblings can return home, but Benjamin must stay. Our scene opens with Judah stepping forward and saying as follows:

בִּי אֲדֹנָי, יְדִבֶּר-נָא עֲבָדְךָ דְבַר בְּאֲזְנֵי אֲדֹנָי, וְאֶל-יְחִיר אֶפְרָיִם
בְּעֵבְדְּךָ, כִּי כְמוֹדְךָ, כִּפְרָעָה.

Please my Lord, let your servant say a word in my Lord's ears, do not flare your anger against your servant, for you are like a Pharaoh.

Judah, calm and composed, asks to whisper into the ear of Egypt's Viceroy. Let us imagine for a moment Judah's mental state: the man who, years ago, rid himself of that unrelenting dreamer, having organized Joseph's sale, must have spent the past two decades drowning in remorse. Joseph's absence meant less irritation and less aggravation, but a lead weight must have pulled hard on his conscience. Each day, Judah had to witness his father's grief, see the soul drained from him, the sparkle in his eye absent, as Jacob sat as a shell of his former self. The man who had grown up with a murderous twin, had his daughter abducted and abused, tricked in love, attacked at night, limped his way through life with only one joy, Joseph; and Judah had taken that from him. For over twenty long years, Judah

had to watch Jacob wither under heartache, he had to watch his spirit shrivel into shadow.

And now, Benjamin—the child who has restored a fraction of Jacob’s joy—is threatened by the Egyptian Empire. Can we not imagine the sudden panic and fear, the waves of dread washing over Judah’s now fragile mind—How can this be? What can I tell my father? What can I do? At last, Judah can redeem his blunder; he has a chance to spare his father grief, to stand up to injustice and oppression, to the ruthlessness of cruel power. Yet, as we read, Judah is calm and composed; he simply whispers. With his pulse rushing, his mind racing, Judah’s diplomacy stands for us as a model of self-control and restraint.

But is that it? What if the viceroy had dismissed him? Would Judah have simply meandered home, giving Jacob the bad report?

If we turn to the pages of our Sages, we see that they saw beneath the text an underworld of passion.

מיד כעס יהודה ושאג בקול גדול והלך קולו ד' מאות פרסה... שני שילטונין זולגות דם... וחמשה לבושים היה לובש, נימה אחת היתה לו בלבו כיון שהיה כועס קורע את כולם (ב"ר צג: ז)

In the *Midrashic* imagination there was far more than a mere whisper; there was sound and fury. Judah’s essence is exposed and raw; he lets out a resounding shriek, his eyes bleed, his hair bursts through his clothing—he cannot contain the intensity of feeling. Judah is driven by his fervour to protect his family.

Where did our Sages see this energy and anger? What clue or hint lies in the text toward such a dramatic depiction? Perhaps it lies in a particular repetition; the short speech that Judah whispers to the Egyptian Viceroy contains the word ‘אב’—‘father’ 14 times. It is clear that Judah suspects Joseph’s identity and uses linguistic lunges at his soft spot, alluding to the man he missed most; father, father, father, father, father... Judah knew what the Russian Jewish writer Isaac Babel taught us not 80 years ago when he wrote, “No iron spike pierces a human heart as icily as a period in the right place.” Beneath Judah’s whisper lay a whirlwind of conviction; beneath his perfect calm, his complete equanimity, lay a fiery passion and fervour to protect his family.

Perhaps the text leaves this ambiguity for our sages to unveil precisely because it means to teach us the necessity of both layers. We need calm; to communicate and to convey we need equanimity, but buttressing that composure must be a heartfelt passion, and energetic and enthusiastic conviction. It is this nuance that John Stuart Mill promotes when he said that “War is an ugly thing, but uglier still is thinking there is nothing worth fighting for.”

At RIETS we are trained in both these spheres. As a student, I see myself and my peers tutored in public speaking, pulpit politics, professional development; we are polished by the best in the profession. At the same

time we are instilled with a conviction and confidence in our cause—to make synagogues and study halls islands of hope—we are driven by models of excellence to embody passion for our spiritual inheritance.

We know that war is an ugly thing, that we must navigate the waters of the Rabbinate with care, with caution, and with compassion. And at the same time we know that what we have is worth fighting for. ©2012 Rabbi D. Lerner



RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Yosef Reveals Himself to His Brothers

In the past few parshiot, we have witnessed the tragic story of the brothers and Yosef unfold. At the end of Parashat Miketz, Yosef told his brothers to return to their father without Binyamin, who would now become Yosef’s slave for stealing his goblet that was used for magic. Yehudah gave an impassioned speech, offering himself in exchange for his younger brother, at which point, Yosef could no longer hide his identity from his brothers.

The Torah tells us the final argument of Yehudah and continues with Yosef’s response: “(Yehudah spoke) ‘For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father?’ Now Yosef could not endure in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, ‘Remove everyone from before me!’ Thus no one stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers. He gave forth his voice in weeping, and Egypt heard, and Pharaoh’s household heard. And Yosef said to his brothers, ‘I am Yosef, is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him. Then Yosef said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me, if you please,’ and they came close. And he said, “I am Yosef, your brother – me, whom you sold to Egypt. And now, be not distressed, do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was as a supporter of life that Elokim sent me ahead of you. For these two years, the hunger year is in the midst of the land, and there are yet five years in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. And Elokim sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a great deliverance. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but Elokim, He has set me as a father to Par’oh, and as a master of his entire household, and as a ruler in the entire land of Egypt.”

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Yehudah had undergone a change in perception. His concern for his father should he have returned without Binyamin was much different than his concern when he

returned without Yosef so many years before. Several things had happened to change this perception. Yehudah had been able to witness the change that the loss of Yosef had on his father, he had heard the words in last week's parasha, in which Ya'akov had said, 'You have bereaved me! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? Upon me has it all fallen,' and he, himself, had suffered the loss of his two elder sons. HaRav Hirsch explains that Yehudah believed that, "as soon as he (Ya'akov) sees that the lad is not there, he will die on the spot, we shall not have even time to explain the matter to him and try to make him see it in a less serious light."

Rashi explains "Yosef could not endure," as Yosef could not find the strength to continue in his test of the brothers, for he could not survive any longer without demonstrating to them that he understood that they had done teshuvah. They had corrected their mistake, not of their misjudgment of the dreams and the trial which they conducted, sentencing him to death, but of their lack of compassion and disregard to his cries when in the pit. Yosef understood that they now feared the consequences of their actions since real power was in the hands of Yosef. Yosef had to choose his words carefully to assure them that he was not interested in punishing them, but in helping them during the famine.

Even with Yosef's concern for his words, his emotions were impossible to control. The Ohr HaChaim explains that Yosef ordered all his attendants to leave, but could not control himself and began weeping loudly and emotionally before they all had exited. Yosef knew that as part of his verification of his identity, he would need to remind his brothers how he had been sold into Egypt, and he did not wish to embarrass them in front of the Egyptians. HaEmek Davar explains that Yosef said the first words of his statement to his brothers ("I am Yosef, is my father still alive?") in a loud voice. This was to notify the Egyptians that his brothers had come to Egypt. But the rest of Yosef's declaration to his brothers was said almost silently, so as not to embarrass them. According to Rashi, Yosef also spoke in a lower tone to his brothers as he understood that he would need to show his brothers that he was circumcised, a clear indication that he was not Egyptian.

Our Rabbis deal with Yosef's declaration, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" The Kli Yakar explains that up until now, the brothers had told him that their father lived, yet they might have said that he lived to elicit mercy from Yosef towards their old father. Once he revealed his identity, it was necessary to ascertain if his father truly still lived. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin indicates that up until this time, Yehudah had referred to "your servant, our father." During his reveal, Yosef wanted to speak of his father with respect. He purposefully changed Yehudah's statement, and said, "my father."

The brothers were notably shocked upon his revelation and were frightened that Yosef would seek

revenge. Yosef told his brothers to come near; to show them his circumcision and to reassure them that he was bound by the commandments of Hashem. Yosef also explained to his brothers that their understanding of his dreams was mistaken. Their sheaves of grain which appeared to bow down to his sheaf should not have been interpreted as serving him, but instead, that their supply of grain would falter during the famine, yet his would remain strong to sustain them: "for it was as a supporter of life that Elokim sent me ahead of you." Even the dream of the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him should have been interpreted differently: the celestial orbs were above him (greater), yet they acknowledged his greatness and his fulfillment of the special task which Hashem had given him. The brothers had been an unwitting part of his story, but Hashem used them to force Yosef into the position which would enable his brothers and their families to live.

Yosef ended his revelation with the most important message to his brothers: "And now, it was not you who sent me here, but Elokim, He has set me as a father to Par'oh, and as a master of his entire household, and as a ruler in the entire land of Egypt." Yosef explained to his brothers that Hashem, Elokim is in charge of history, not them. Yosef's dreams were prophetic, and all the actions that the brothers took were not successful in changing the prophecy. We also have dreams and plans, yet Hashem has a Master Plan which cannot be thwarted. We must also keep in mind that Hashem only brought Yosef to the right place at the right time. Yosef still had to use his effort and skill to do Hashem's Will. May we also use our efforts accordingly.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

“**A**nd [Yosef] went up to greet his father, to Goshen” (Bereishis 46:32). So, when traveling from the Egyptian capital (where Yosef and Pharaoh were based) to Goshen, apparently one must go “up.” Yet, when Yosef tells his family he will go tell Pharaoh that they have arrived, he says he will “go up” (46:31) to tell him. [Reminds me of when older generations are quoted telling younger generations how difficult it was for them to get to school – they had to walk, uphill, both ways!] Which one was it? Did Yosef go “up” when he went from the capital to Goshen, or did he go “up” when he returned from Goshen to the capital?

Reasons given for Yosef having to go “up” when going to Goshen include Goshen being on higher ground than the rest of Egypt (Daas Zekaynim, Rabboseinu Baalay HaTosfos and Tur [HaAruch]) and that it was an uplifting experience for Yosef to greet his father and honor him (Daas Zekaynim and Rabboseinu Baalay HaTosfos).

Goshen is also mentioned in Yehuda's portion of Eretz Yisroel (Yehoshua 15:51). Radak (on 11:16) says

this isn't the same Goshen as the one in Egypt, but adds that there is a Midrash that says it is the same Goshen, with Yehuda meriting to have it included in his portion because he fulfilled his father's wishes and prepared Goshen for his arrival (Bereishis 46:28). Tur seems to be referencing this Midrash when he quotes others saying that Yosef had to go "up" when he went to Goshen because it's in Eretz Yisroel, which is higher than all other lands.

Although it's generally accepted that Yehuda's Goshen is not the Goshen the Children of Israel lived in when they were in Egypt, considering it part of Eretz Yisroel fits with another non-consensus opinion, that "Nachal Mitzrayim," which is the southwestern border of Eretz Yisroel, is the Nile (see Rashi on Bamidbar 34:3 and Radak on Yehoshua 13:3). After all, the Egyptian Goshen is east of the easternmost branch of the Nile Delta (and therefore on the Eretz Yisroel side of the border). [As I have previously discussed, the general consensus is that "Nachal Mitzrayim" is Wadi el-Arish, in the northern Sinai Peninsula.]

Daas Zekaynim and Rabboseinu Baalay HaTosfos also seem to say that the Egyptian Goshen was on higher ground because it was in Eretz Yisroel. However, based on Hadar Zekaynim, this is likely a typo. Rather than saying Goshen was "בגבו לארץ ישראל," they are saying it was "בגבול ארץ ישראל" (with the "ל" of "לארץ" really being the last letter of the previous word). In other words, since Goshen was next to (on the border of) Eretz Yisroel, and Eretz Yisroel is higher than everywhere else, Goshen was higher than the rest of Egypt. There is no doubt that they agree it eventually became part of Eretz Yisroel (as they reference Yehoshua 15:51), but that didn't happen until later; when Yosef went "up" to Goshen, it was still part of Egypt.

These Tosafists reference another Midrash (Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer 26), where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha says that Pharaoh gave Goshen to Sara as part of her dowry when he wanted to marry her (and told Avraham she can keep it after he found out she was his wife), which is why the Children of Israel chose to live there. Since Yosef had to get Pharaoh's approval before Yaakov and his sons could live there, it must not have really belonged to them yet. [With the general consensus being that the Egyptian Goshen is not Yehuda's Goshen, my guess is that when the latter was conquered it was named Goshen to harken back to the area in Egypt where they had lived.]

In order to explain why Yosef had to go "up" when he went back too, Radak says it refers to Yosef climbing back onto his chariot. Daas Zekaynim, Rabboseinu Baalay HaTosfos, Hadar Zekaynim and Tur add that Yosef had come down off his chariot to honor his father. Tur suggests two additional possibilities: the palace was on higher ground than the surrounding area, or the rest of Egypt was on higher ground than Goshen. (If the latter, Tur suggests that when Yosef went "up" to

Goshen, it refers to him climbing onto his chariot without any help when he went to see his father.) Netziv says that Yosef had planned to speak to Pharaoh privately, which could only be done on an upper story of the palace.

There is a blatant difference between Yosef going "up" to Goshen and his saying he would go "up" to Pharaoh: the Torah itself says Yosef went "up" to see his father, while it was Yosef who said "I will go up" to speak to Pharaoh. Perhaps it isn't a geographical "up and down" being referred to; The Torah says Yosef went "up" to Yaakov because not only was Yaakov his father, but he was also on a higher spiritual level. When Yosef said he would "go up" to Pharaoh, he may have been telling his family that he doesn't have the final authority to authorize their moving to Goshen; only Pharaoh can do that (i.e. Pharaoh is above me). [When Yosef did go to Pharaoh, the Torah doesn't say he "went up," just that he went (47:1).] But there's another possibility.

The capital of ancient Egypt was not always the same city. What was constant was the southern part being known as "Upper Egypt" while the northern part was known as "Lower Egypt." (The Nile flows from south to north, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea at the Nile Delta, so "upstream" is south and "downstream" is north.) Goshen was located in the eastern Nile Delta (although it did not necessarily reach all the way to the Mediterranean) – and the Nile Delta is the northernmost part of Egypt. Therefore, Egypt's capital was usually south of Goshen. I am not ruling out the possibility that when Yosef was the Viceroy, the capital was in the northern part of the Nile Delta – and if it was, it fits with Yosef saying that his father and brothers would be close to him (45:10) – but if the capital was south of Goshen, then the Torah would describe going north – and getting closer to Eretz Yisroel – as "going up," while those living in Egypt would describe going south as "going up."

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