

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Reuvein returned to the pit, and behold Yosef was not in the pit” (Beraishis 37:29). Where was Reuvein when the brothers sold Yosef? He was busy repenting for his previous sin of moving Ya'akov's bed (after Rachel died) from Bilhah's tent to the tent of his mother (Rashi, Yonasan ben Uziel and Beraishis Rabbah 84:19; see also Rashi on 35:22). Reuvein's involvement, or lack thereof, in the sale of Yosef raises several questions.

For one thing, why, at a time like this- when the brothers were plotting to kill Yosef- did Reuvein decide to repent for his earlier sin? Don't get me wrong; any time is a good time to repent, and the sooner the better. But if this was the time Reuvein chose, it must have been triggered by something in particular. What was it about this situation that made Reuvein realize that he was wrong all those years ago?

Additionally, Yonasan ben Uziel adds that Reuvein had hoped that by bringing Yosef back to his father, he would be forgiven for having moved the bed. But what does one thing have to do with the other? Did Reuvein expect to win Ya'akov over by telling him that he had just saved Yosef's life? How would that show Ya'akov that Reuvein had learned from his previous mistake, had fully repented, and was worthy of forgiveness?

Another question that can be asked (and one raised by Rabbeinu Bachya on Beraishis 38:1) is why Reuvein is held accountable for selling Yosef if he wasn't even there for the sale. The ten martyrs recounted in the "Eileh Ezkarah" prayer on Yom Kippur and in the "Arzey Halevanon" lamentation on Tisha B'Av are said to correspond to the brothers, and their punishments for selling Yosef. Rabbeinu Bachya says that these 10 were actually the reincarnated souls of the brothers, who were martyred to atone for this sin. But if Binyamin was still at home with Ya'akov, and Yosef was the victim, the only way there could be 10 perpetrators is if Reuvein was included. Why should he be included if he wasn't even around for the sale?

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in memory of
Menashe ben Yitzchak z"l
by his son.
May his neshomah have an aliya!**

Finally, when Reuvein convinces the brothers not to kill Yosef directly- but to throw him into the pit instead, where he will die anyway- the Torah explains that Reuvein's intention was "to save him from their hands, in order to bring him back to his father" (37:22). Wouldn't it have been enough to just say that his purpose was to save his life? Why does the Torah add that part of his reason for saving him was to "bring him back to his father?"

The Nachalas Ya'akov (37:22, see also Mizrachi) says that Reuvein shared the same feelings for Yosef that his brothers did. He didn't try to save Yosef because he thought it was wrong to kill him, but because (as Rashi there adds) he was afraid that the blame would fall squarely on him (being the oldest; and having lost the status of "firstborn" to Yosef). Although our sages gave accolades to Reuvein for attempting to save Yosef, the Nachalas Ya'akov explains that this applies despite the motive for doing so being less than ideal ("shelo lishmah"). The Sifsei Chachamim says that this is borne out in the blessings that Ya'akov gave the brothers before he died, where he praised Yehuda for convincing the brothers not to kill Yosef (see Rashi on 49:9), but didn't mention Reuvein's attempt to save him completely; Since Reuvein's motivation was to protect himself, Ya'akov didn't praise him for it.

Using this as a starting point, we can retrace the steps of the sale and try to understand what happened. The brothers, including Reuvein, think that Yosef deserves to be put to death. [The Seforno- and others- say that the brothers thought that Yosef's talking about them to their father was intended to cause them to "die" in this world or the next (or both)- in other words, Yosef was a "rodef." Since one being targeted for murder is supposed to kill the attacker first, they decided to kill Yosef before he was successful. The Nesivos says that the brothers thought that Yosef's sharing of his dreams of royalty constituted "false prophecy" (as they knew that Yehuda's descendants were destined to rule), and a false prophet must be put to death. Others explain that claiming royalty for himself was tantamount to rebelling against Yehuda's right to the throne, and the punishment for rebelling against the king's authority was death. There are other explanations given as well.] Reuvein, however, realizes that he will shoulder the bulk of the blame, and devises a plan to save Yosef, in order to save himself.

He also realizes that this situation is eerily similar to one that happened 9 years earlier. Then, he

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thought he had a valid reason to move his father's bed in order to protect his mother's honor. However, Ya'akov was the one who had moved his bed to Bilhah's tent, and Reuvein should have trusted his father's judgment, or at least consulted with him before doing anything. Because he acted impulsively (see 49:4), he lost the birthright (and the priesthood and the status of royalty). Now, the brothers were about to do a similar thing, deciding that Yosef deserved to die even though Ya'akov knew what Yosef had been saying (and dreaming) about them. This may have been what brought Reuvein to realize, with 20/20 hindsight, that he was wrong back then (and perhaps mistaken now too). He therefore repented for his earlier mistake, and planned on proving to his father that he had fully repented- by presenting the issue of Yosef to him. He specifically wanted to "bring him back to his father" to exonerate himself from any blame from this situation, and to show that from now on, even when he thinks something should be done a certain way, he will first consult with his father. Rather than just sparing Yosef's life because it deserved to be spared, Reuvein may have intended to bring Yosef back, explain why he- and his brothers- think he deserves to be put to death, and ask Ya'akov for his (binding) opinion. This way, he not only avoids being held responsible for Yosef's death, but also (hopefully) convinces his father to forgive him for having moved his bed without permission.

Since Reuvein (initially) agreed that Yosef should be killed (saving him only for self-serving reasons), and- after it was too late to bring Yosef back to his father- kept quiet about the sale (even joining the "cherem" on anyone revealing that Yosef was still alive, see Rashi on 37:33), and accepted his share of the money from the sale (see Tanchuma Vayaishev 2 and Yerushami Shekalim 2:3, that each brother received 2 shekalim; since the total sale was for 20, there must have been 10 brothers splitting it, not just 9), he was

considered a full partner in the sale, and therefore received full punishment. (Even if his sin was slightly less severe than the others, combining his share of culpability for it with his sin of moving Ya'akov's bed put it on the same level- see Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachya on Devarim 33:6.)

In any case, using this approach, we can understand why Reuvein was considered part of the group that tried to eliminate Yosef, despite his attempt to bring him back to Ya'akov and atone for his previous mistake. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

What will we gain if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (Breishis 37:26)

This rhetorical question is asked by Yehuda as an appeal to lift Yosef from the pit. What was his point? Amongst the many approaches the Kotzker Rebbe offers a penetrating insight which may weigh in and impact many daily things we do. He explains Yehuda's words as standing alone, "If we must conceal his death and hide our actions then this means our actions are not honest. If a deed needs to be kept secret, then it is not based on truth!"

A young Rabbi living in Israel told me of a personal encounter he had with the revered Steipler Gaon ztl. It was well known that in his later years he was capable of giving frighteningly deep readings of people and their peculiarities. Still they would come from around the world to visit for a few moments at a time. While continuing to study, he would offer, with the mere reading of a piece of a paper, blessings, advice, and rebukes; some subtle and some less so.

This young man and his wife stayed for Shabbos in Bnei Brak with the special intent of visiting the Steipler on Sunday. They were granted use of an apartment by a couple that was going away for Shabbos. Before leaving they were shown around the house pointing out where the things they would need for Shabbos could be found. "Make your selves at home!" was the generous and general offer with one minor exception. They requested that since all their meals would be eaten out the dining room area should be considered "off limits". They agreed and thanked for all in advance.

In the middle of Shabbos afternoon after a hearty nap this young man awoke and strode into the living room and started to study but some spirit of folly lead him from the chair to the dining room. He parted the pocket doors and entered the room. There he saw family photos and pictures of some current sages including the Steipler. After a few minutes and afraid his wife would awake, he quickly and quietly backed out without a visible trace. He closed the doors and resumed his learning.

The next day he waited on line for hours with hundreds of others. When he presented the Rebbe his piece of paper, the Steipler shuddered and then thundered in his direction, "Ganav! (Thief) Ganav!" Instantly he flashed back to the moments he stood in that forbidden zone and how he had snuck out like a thief. He knew immediately and exactly what the Rebbe had meant. He was not told that day what he wanted to hear but certainly what he needed to hear.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch opens with the following words: "It's a general principle in Torah and the distinguishing quality of the righteous that they walk before G-d. Because the way a person sits, moves and acts when he is alone in his house is not like his sitting, his movement, and his activity when he is before a great king. And so is his choice of words and style of speech when he is with his family and relatives not like when he sits before the king, because then he will certainly pay closer attention to his movements and his speech that they should be appropriate. How much more so when a person is conscious that The Great King, The Holy One Blessed be He, Who fills the whole world with His glory stands over him and watches his deeds."

Any act requires a cost benefit analysis, and responsible people are presumed to have made that calculation. However, to avoid self-deception about the goodness of a given choice, it must pass a screen of critical criteria. Amongst the evaluations to determine if our next move is truly noble or not is to honestly ask ourselves, "Why should we need to sneak about?" And: "Who are we trying to fool?" © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & www.torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the Hasmonean victory over the Syrian Greeks. What is forgotten is that their dynasty did not last. Why not?

Ramban suggests that the disintegration of Hasmonean rule was due to their usurping too much power. (See Kiddushim 66a) By birth, the Hasmoneans came from the tribe of Levi, and could become priests. In the end, however, Judah Aristobulus, the grandson of Judah Maccabee assumed a second role; that of king. Here the Hasmoneans overstepped their bounds as kingship is confined to the tribe of Judah. (Genesis 49:10)

There is much logic to the idea that priest and king remain separate. Kingship deals with the politics of running the state, taking into account aspects of civil administration and international relations. Priesthood on the other hand, focuses on spirituality; on how to connect to God. Of course, the teachings of the priest give shape and direction to the state. Still, it can be

suggested that kingship and priesthood should remain apart, in order to separate religion and politics.

The distinct responsibility of king and priest is part of a larger system of Jewish checks and balances. The prophet for example, served as the teacher of ethical consciousness rooted in God's word; and the Sanhedrin was the judicial/legislative branch of government.

Not coincidentally, in the same week in which we begin celebrating Chanukah, we begin reading the Biblical narrative of Yosef (Joseph) and his brothers. Yosef dreams that he will rule over the family. Yehuda leads the brothers in removing this threat by selling Yosef. In this sense, each seek to become the sole heir of Yaacov (Jacob). (See Sforno, Genesis 37:18)

Indeed, up to this point in the book of Genesis, the Torah deals with the message of choice—that is, individuals were picked and others were excluded. For example, of the children of Adam, only Seth, from whom Noah came, survived. Of the children of Noah, Shem is singled out, as Avraham (Abraham) the first patriarch, comes from him. Yitzhak (Isaac) is chosen over Yishmael, and it is Yaacov, and not Esau, who continued the covenantal mission.

The Joseph story breaks this pattern in that, in the end, all of Yaacov's children were included. No wonder, Yosef and Yehudah and for that matter, all of the brothers are blessed by Yaacov. Indeed, their descendents form the tribes of Israel, each included in the community of Israel while having distinct roles to fulfill.

One of the challenges of Chanukah is to learn from the mistake made by the Hasmoneans; to understand that attempts to usurp the roles of others are counter productive. Crucial to the continuity of Judaism is for each of us to make space for the other and recognize the respective roles every individual plays—as reflected by Yaacov's sons and ultimately the tribes of Israel. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTIEN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Dov Karoll

“**A**nd it was at that time that Yehuda went down from his brothers, and turned to an Adullamite by the name of Chira...” (chapter 38)

Why did the Torah place this episode right in the middle of the story of Yosef? The Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 85:1), commenting on the opening phrase, describes the activities of several characters at that time:

"And it was at that time.' Rabbi Shemu'el bar Nachmani opened [his interpretation of this chapter]: 'For I [God alone] know the thoughts that I think toward

you...' (Yirmiyahu 29:11). At that time, the brothers were involved in the sale of Yosef, Yosef was involved in sackcloth and fasting [over his sad state], Reuven was involved in sackcloth and fasting [over his role in the sale and his father's mourning], Ya'akov was involved in sackcloth and fasting [over the loss of Yosef], while Yehuda was involved in taking a wife; meanwhile, the Almighty was involved in the creating the light of the King Messiah [who would come from the children of Yehuda and Tamar]."

According to the Midrash's understanding, while other family members mourned, Yehuda was involved in productive pursuits, getting married and establishing a family.

The episode of Yehuda and Tamar opens with the words, "Yehuda went down from his brothers." Rashi (s.v. vayehi) explains that the brothers lowered Yehuda from his position of leadership. They had looked to him as a leader, and therefore blamed him for the sale of Yosef. "You told us to sell him [rather than kill him]; had you told us to take him back, we would have listened to you." While in a certain sense this argument is a means for the brothers to absolve themselves of blame, nevertheless the claim they make remains valid.

Furthermore, Yehuda underwent further "going down" in the course of this episode, first taking a Canaanite wife, and then descending further through his behavior toward Tamar. The Gemara (Megilla 25a-b) lists certain sections of the Torah that are to be read but not translated, such as the story of Reuven (Bereishit 35:22). Chazal felt that since these passages contain material that would degrade our forefathers or would create theological problems for people, it was better to read them in Hebrew and omit the translation into the vernacular.

Notwithstanding this factor, the Mishna mentions that the incident of Yehuda and Tamar is both read and translated. The Gemara (25b) asks, "Is this not obvious?" The Gemara explains that we might have thought that this incident should not be translated out of concern for Yehuda's honor. Yet it concludes that we learn from the mishna that, overall, this incident gives us a positive impression of Yehuda, since he admitted his wrongdoing.

Generally speaking, people have a natural tendency to cover up a wrongdoing, often adding further wrongdoing in the process. It is much easier for people to deny than to face up to the harsh reality of things they have done wrong. In many contemporary scandals, such as Watergate, the cover-up is more damaging than the original misdeed. While Tamar's message made quite clear to Yehuda what he had done and what had transpired, he still could have let her be killed. Had she brought her claim to court, what chance would she have had if he denied it? He was a man of stature, and she was a woman without any special status.

Yehuda took responsibility for his actions. He faced up to the harsh reality of what he had done, and admitted his wrongdoing. This recognition, "She has been more righteous than I" (38:26), certainly warrants both a reading in the original and a translation. It is a cornerstone of repentance and personal growth, and should be a model for all of us. [*This sicha was delivered at se'uda shelishit, Parashat Vayeshev, 5762 (2001).*]

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**L**isten now to this dream which I have dreamed." (Genesis 37:6) Joseph dreams two dreams: in the first his brother's eleven sheaves of grain bow down to his sheaf of grain, and in the second the sun, moon and eleven stars bow down to him. The format of these dreams and how they unfold in actuality is different however from the format of the other dream sequences in the Joseph stories; in the case of the dreams of the baker, butler and Pharaoh, the elements of the dreams are symbolically interpreted and the content of the dreams come to pass fairly quickly; in the case of Joseph's own dreams, on the other hand, the elements are never actually interpreted and one can argue that the dreams are never truly realized; the sun and the moon, probably Jacob and Rachel, actually never bow down to their son! And in the final blessings of Genesis, it is Judah - not Joseph - about whom father Jacob says, "To you shall your brothers give homage...the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:8,10).

And why does the Bible need two dreams, each with different symbols, to tell the similar story of Joseph's domination over his family? And - in a similar vein - why need the Festival of Hannukah, which always falls out calendrically around the time of the readings of these Torah portions, celebrate two miracles surrounding the same Hasmonean victory, the military victory of the few against the many and the small cruse of oil, sufficient for only one day, which lasted for eight days?! What need was there for this second miracle?

Rav Elhanan Samet explains that the Hebrew "histahavaya", usually translated as "bowing down," does not connote obeisance or acceptance of another's domination as much as it connotes dependency; this is the Biblical meaning of Abraham's "histahavaya" before the Hittites, upon whom he was dependent to procure a burial place for his beloved Sarah (Genesis 23:7), as well as Father Israel's "histahavaya" at the head of the bed, expressing his dependency upon Joseph for his burial in Canaan (Genesis 47:31).

From this perspective, explains Rav Samet, the brothers were certainly dependent upon Joseph for their physical survival in the face of the world-wide famine which they suffered (hence, the "histahavaya" of their sheaves to his sheaf); and they were also dependent

upon him for their spiritual survival once they arrived in Egypt. Had they not been enabled to live in a distinct "Jewish" community in Goshen - replete with a Yeshiva established by Judah in advance of their coming (Genesis 46:28, Rashi ad loc) - free to pursue their ancestral occupation of shepherding which left much time for meditation, prayer and the transmission of the tradition from parent to child - they may well have quickly assimilated into the idolatrous life-style of the Egyptian society. Indeed, the continuation of Jacob and Rachel's covenant into the following generations was directly dependent upon the cultural milieu Joseph would establish for his family in Egypt!

Similarly, the first miracle of the Hasmonean victory established the physical survival of the Judean Commonwealth in Israel; the second miracle of the menorah reflected the spiritual victory of Judaism over Hellenism in the form of the symbolism, "For the candle is commandment, and the Torah is light," the very message of the Hannukah menorah. Hence both dreams were necessary and were realized, and the two Hannukah miracles complemented each other in a similar manner to the two dreams.

I would venture to add an additional dimension to this interpretation. Joseph's two dreams represent the two most dominant aspects of Joseph's personality: his ability to be successful materially and professionally - his sheaves dominate those of his siblings and his success, as Grand-Vizier, overshadows theirs - as well as his expansion of "the family" - of Abraham from the land of Canaan into the international universe of the world-power Egypt. This came about as a result of his G-d given charisma, his quite considerable intellectual and political acumen, and his moral probity. This is also a necessary stage in the fulfillment of the Divine promise to Abraham, "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth," and the ultimate accomplishment of our mission to "perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine."

But the brother who will succeed in eventually bringing about the universal acceptance of the spiritual mission of Israel, who will disseminate the Torah of Zion which will teach the world the message of a G-d of justice, compassion and peace, will be Judah and not Joseph. Joseph will succeed materially and will bring Israel to a position of respect in the most exalted halls of the community of nations; but Judah, the brother who represents Torah, will be the progenitor of King Messiah of world peace and redemption.

I believe that Joseph's dreams are incomplete - indeed, they have everyone bowing to him rather than to G-d - and therefore they are never Biblically explained or truly realized outside of the Egyptian experience, where Joseph does achieve dominion. The ultimate achievement of the vision of Israel awaits a descendant of Judah. Similarly, the successful battle of Judea against Greek - Syrians remains incomplete unless they kindle the light of the menorah, and even the victory of

lights is ultimately incomplete unless the menorah illuminates not only the Temple in Jerusalem but also the civilization of the world!

Shabbat Shalom and Hannukah Sameah.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The story of Yosef and his brothers always raises questions. Righteous people become involved in a dispute that tears apart the family and leads to great pain and near tragedy. The rabbis in discussing this parsha portray for us two stories unfolding at once. One concerns the will of God - that Jacob and his family descend into Egypt thereby fulfilling the covenant made with Yakov's grandfather, Avraham. The entire story of Joseph and his brothers is only a description of the mechanism, so to speak, used by the Lord to affect the descent of Israel into Egypt. The second explanation is the human one. The Talmud points out to us that it was Jacob's overt acts of favoritism to Joseph that enraged the brothers and caused them to look askance at every action of this precocious teenager. Thus the Talmud taught us "because of two measures of silk (the multicolored tunic that Jacob bestowed upon Joseph) our forefathers were forced to descend into Egypt [and eventual bondage.]" These two approaches to the story - of the rabbis and commentators, are not meant to be mutuality exclusive. Both are correct. Heaven works through human beings, their accomplishments and weaknesses. God's will is expressed through human behavior and actions. Though freedom of choice and action is always reserved for humans, at the very same time God guides the world in His unseen and unfathomable fashion. That is the lesson here of the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph is a person who lives by his dreams. His dreams and ambitions dominate his life and those of the entire family. To him, his dreams are reality. The brothers treat his dreams as fantasies. They deal in the real world where dreams do not often translate into reality and fulfillment. Here too both views are correct. A Jewish world without dreams would long ago have perished and been consigned to the ash heap of history. The entire story of the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel over the last century is nothing but a dream; but it is a dream come true. Yet, without looking reality in the face, dealing with the world as it is and not as we would wish it to be, all of our dreams will crash about us in failure and frustration. Thus the balance between reality and dreams is the heart of the Jewish experience. Both Joseph and his brothers will emerge from the matter vindicated but yet bruised by the experience. We cannot live without dreams. But we cannot survive if we have only dreams and no realistic sense of events, actions and possible consequences. This lesson of two different views,

represented in the story of Joseph and his brothers, which are both correct and yet seemingly antithetical to one another, provides the key to our understanding of Jewish history and destiny. ©2004 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/jewishhistory.

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Around the Shabbos Table

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

The Torah tells us three things about Yoseph that irritated his ten older brothers: (1) He reported to his father that his brothers committed certain sins, (2) He told them his dreams in which he saw himself as king and his family subservient to him, (3) His decision to tell them his dreams, revealed that he intended to actualize the message of the dreams, i.e., to ultimately rule over them.

Nevertheless, despite the mistakes that Yoseph made in dealing with his brothers, the Torah does not blame him for the deterioration of their relationship that eventually led to the brothers selling him to slave traders. Our Sages explain the Yoseph's impetuous behavior was due to his youth. Therefore, the accountability for the disintegration of the family harmony cannot be attributed to him.

Rather, the Talmud (Shabbos 10b) states: "A parent should not favor one child over the others. For it was the special coat that Yaacov made for exclusively for Yoseph—and not his other sons—that caused them to hate Yoseph, as the Torah says (Bereishis 37:3-4): 'Now Yisrael loved Yoseph more than all his sons and he made for him a special coat. His brothers saw that it was he [i.e., Yoseph] whom his father loved most of all his brothers so they hated him; and they could not speak peaceably with him.'"

Hence, it was the special love, honor, and attention that Yaacov showed Yoseph that provoked the hatred of his brothers. Even though Yaacov honored Yoseph in order to reward and encourage him for his wisdom, it proved to be a destructive catalyst. Yoseph's arrogance over his brothers is reflected in his slandering them, as well as his dreams. Nevertheless, his father's favoritism was the impetus of his improper conduct.

Yaacov Avinu was a man of truth. He built his sons into spiritual giants—worthy of being the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet, his indiscretion unintentionally tore the family apart. Indeed, the hatred that was released nearly destroyed the entire family. May we learn the obvious lesson from this tragic miscalculation and treat all of our children with an equal amount of love and respect.

Implement: Take a few moments and reflect on how to distribute your love equally amongst all of your children.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Out of all the people in Bereishit, Yosef is the only one that the sages call "the righteous one." This is mainly due to the way he withstood the temptation by Potiphar's wife. The sages went into great detail about the test that Yosef endured. "This is what they said about Yosef the Righteous:

Every day Potiphar's wife would tempt him with her words. The clothing that she wore in the morning she did not wear at night, and the clothing she wore at night she did not wear in the morning. She would say to him: give in to me! And he would answer: No! She said, I will have you thrown into prison, and he replied, G-d releases the prisoners. She said, I will make you bend down, and he replied, G-d straightens the twisted ones. She said, I will blind you, and he replied, G-d opens the eyes of the blind. She offered him one thousand bars of gold to lie with her and he refused to listen to her." [Yoma 35b].

The Torah also took note of Yosef's greatness by hinting at a similarity to the greatest test of any man—the affair of the binding of Yitzchak. The description of the binding begins with the words, "It happened, after these events" [Bereishit 22:1,20]. The same phrase is used at the beginning and at the end of the affair of Potiphar's wife (39:7,40:1). This reference to time appears in the Torah only in relation to these two events. In the binding, G-d commands Avraham, "Do not do anything to him, for now I know that you fear G-d, and you did not withhold your only son from me" [22:12]. This includes phrases similar to what Yosef says to Potiphar's wife, "He did not withhold anything from me except for you, since you are his wife. How can I do this great evil and sin to G-d?" [39:9]. This comparison also brings us to another similarity: Just as the binding showed that Avraham "fears G-d," so Yosef's test showed the fear of G-d in his heart, as he declared further on, "It is G-d whom I fear" [42:18]. As the sages wrote, "You shall fear your G-d [Devarim 6:13] -- You shall be like those who fear G-d: Avraham, Iyov, and Yosef." [Bamidbar Rabba 22:1]. The phrase "Avraham raised his eyes" [Bereishit 22:4,13] is echoed in the story of Yosef, "And his master's wife raised her eyes" [39:7]. In both cases, the Torah emphasizes that the person being tested stood together with only one other person: "Remain here with the donkey, and the boy and I will go to there" [22:5]; "Nobody from the people of the house was there in the house" [39:11].

Clearly, the two tests were different in nature. Avraham was given a command by the Almighty, and the test demonstrated his absolute faithfulness to the

word of G-d, while Yosef was given a command by a human being, and his test consisted of refusing to obey. What the two tests have in common is the ability to overcome natural tendencies and to remain attached to the Almighty with great strength in spite of being alone, away from other people who might have provided support.

The Repentance of Yosef and Yehuda

by Mrs. Shani Taragin, a teacher in Midreshet Lindenbaum and Matan, and a Halachic Counselor, Nishmat

There are two central figures in this week's Torah portion, and they both serve as arch-types of leadership in later generations. They are Yosef, the "dreamer," and Yehuda, the man of action. The Torah tells us at length about their failures, their rise to greatness, their personal tragedies, and how they were able to admit their failings and overcome them. By taking note of the processes of repentance and mending their ways, the Torah raises them in our eyes to the status of "true heroes" (to quote Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik), who are able to conquer their inclinations. They are indeed fully repentant!

Yosef, "a shepherd with his brothers" [Bereishit 37:2], concentrates on himself. Even in his dreams, he remains at the center: "Behold, my sheaf rose and stood up, and behold, your sheaves turned and bowed down to my sheaf" [37:7]. He is self centered, "fixing his hair and touching his eyes" [Rashi, 37:2], oblivious to his brothers' hate and jealousy. His great egoism brings about his downfall, being thrown into a pit, and then being sold into slavery in Egypt.

Yehuda, the leader of the brothers, who is able to rescue Yosef, is not ashamed to ask, "What profit will there be in killing our brother?" [37:26]. As Onkeles explains, this means, "What money will be available?" How can we profit from Yosef? Yehuda wants material gain, in his self interest, and he even leaves his brothers later on.

In Egypt too, Yosef continues with his pride. Here is what he says to Potiphar's wife: "There is nobody greater than me in this house" [39:9]. According to Rashi, he was indeed "punished" for his personal pride by the affair with Potiphar's wife. "Since he saw himself as the ruler, he began to eat and drink, and to curl his hair. So the Almighty said:

Do you curl your hair while your father is in mourning? I will provide a challenge for you!" Only in prison does Yosef come to the recognition that "G-d is the master of interpretation" [40:8], and this is the beginning of his transformation. He appears before Pharaoh, admits that "it is not up to me, G-d will give Pharaoh peace" [41:16], and is appointed viceroy to the king. In this way, he develops from an egocentric youth to a righteous man, realizing that his skills are in reality powers given to him by G-d.

Meanwhile, Yehuda, who has also shown that he is selfish, continues to try to profit from others. When his two sons die without children, he refuses to give his son Shelah to Tamar, and in reaction she hints at his selfishness:

"What will you give me for coming to me?" [38:16], and she demands, "You shall give me a deposit until you send it" [38:17]. But Yehuda does not understand the hint, and he sends his friend "to retrieve the deposit from the woman" [38:20]. Then he tells the man, "take it [38:23] -- leave her and take the deposit" [Ibn Ezra]. Only at the end of the story does Tamar succeed in forcing Yehuda to recognize his weakness. "And Yehuda understood, and he said, she is more righteous than me, for that is the reason I did not give her to my son Shelah" [38:26]. By the process of recognizing his failing and his repentance, Yehuda achieves the status of leadership and bequeaths his good traits to his offspring. The first action that his son Zerach does is that "he put out his hand" [38:28].

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha tells of the trials and tribulations of the sons of Jacob and how their anger towards Joseph brought them to sell him into slavery in Egypt. This was the beginning step leading towards the first exile of the people of Israel.

After selling Joseph, the sons lead their father Jacob to believe that Joseph was accidentally torn apart by a wild animal. Jacob mourns his son inconsolably. We read: "Jacob rent his garments and placed sackcloth on his loins. He mourned his son for many days." (Genesis 37:34)

"Many days"—Rashi: "There were twenty two years from the time he (Joseph) left him (Jacob) until Jacob went down to Egypt (and saw Joseph again). [Rashi then makes the calculation of years.] These correspond to the twenty two years that Jacob did not fulfill the mitzvah of 'honoring your father and your mother.'" [Rashi then shows that Jacob also had remained away from his parents twenty two years, when he fled to Laban's house].

Rashi shows the eerie correspondence between the number of years that Joseph was away from Jacob his father (which caused Jacob so much distress) and the number of years that Jacob himself had absented himself from his parents, Isaac and Rebecca. The 22 years of Joseph's absence were Jacob's punishment for his 22 year absence from his own parents.

What would you ask on Rashi? Do you see what is bothering him?

An Answer: It seems that Rashi feels that the words "many days" are superfluous. Anyone could make the same calculation that Rashi made and figure out that Jacob was not to be reunited with his beloved

son Joseph for another twenty two years. The number of years are all derived from verses in the Torah. So why does the Torah have to add the words "many days"? How does his comment deal with this?

An Answer: Rashi shows us that the words "many days" are intended to draw our attention to the significance of these "many days." They weren't just "a long time." These "many days" were to spark an association and a contrast in our mind with the similar but opposite words that we find in the Torah when Jacob left his parents. His mother told him to flee to Laban her brother for a "few days" (Genesis 27:44). And Jacob himself felt the years he worked for Laban were but a "few days" (Genesis 29:20). These "few days" were paid back as "many days" because of his not fulfilling the mitzvah of "honoring his father and his mother."

But a deeper look should lead to a deeper question. When you compare Jacob's absence from his parents with Joseph's absence from his father, do see anything strange about the comparison?

A Question: Jacob's parents told him to leave them. And they knew where he was—with Laban, their relative. On the other hand, Joseph's absence was a complete shock to Jacob and furthermore he had no idea whether he was alive or dead. How can these painful years of mourning be a punishment for Jacob's obedient absence from his parents?

A difficult question. Can you think of an answer?

An Answer: We must remember what led to Jacob's need to flee his brother, Esau, in the first place. He had taken his blessing, had he not? Now let us remember how that came about. Rebecca heard of Isaac's intention to bless Esau. Then she convinced Jacob to deceive his blind father, Isaac, and receive the blessing in place of Esau (Genesis 27:6-8). Jacob was clearly torn between listening to his mother and deceiving his father or not listening to her and not deceiving his father. A real dilemma in how to best fulfill the mitzvah of "honoring your father and your mother." Jacob chose to listen to his mother and deceive his father. A difficult and fateful decision.

The Torah commands us to listen to both our parents. But what if they command two different things? Then what is one to do? The Rabbis have taught that in such a case, both the mother and the child are commanded to honor the father (see Talmud Kiddushin 31a). So in this case Jacob should have honored his father and not his mother and not gone through with Rebecca's plan of deceiving Isaac.

This is what Rashi means when he says "He did not fulfill the mitzvah of 'honoring your father and your mother'." Meaning, had Jacob refused Rebecca he would have been honoring both of them, since the mother too is obligated to honor the child's father. Had Jacob done that, then he never would have had to flee

his brother Esau and stay away from his parents those twenty two years.

We would point another "measure for measure" aspect of this punishment. Not only were there twenty two years of Joseph's absence for twenty two years of Jacob's absence; there was also deception for deception. Jacob had deceived his father, and his sons, in turn, had deceived him, by letting him think a wild animal had ripped Joseph apart.

And so it goes. One cannot escape the consequences of one's actions. © 2004 aish.org & Dr. A. Bonchek

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This week's parashah relates how Yaakov favored Yosef over his brothers and gave him a special shirt, the "ketonet pasim." The midrash Bereishit Rabbah states: "Why did the brothers hate Yosef?"

So that the sea would be torn open before them. 'Pasim' equals 'Pas yam'/'The sea split'." [Until here from the midrash]

Rav Dr. Salomon Breuer z"l (son-in-law of Rav Samson R. Hirsch) explains as follows: The splitting of the Yam Suf/Red Sea was the key event, even more so than the plagues or the Exodus, in instilling emunah/belief in G-d in the Jewish people. Emunah means, in particular, trusting that everything that happens in G-d's world is for the good. Thus, on the verse (Bereishit 1:31), "And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good," our sages say, "'Very good' refers to death." Even tragedy is ultimately good.

At the Yam Suf/Red Sea, every single Jew experienced prophecy and came to understand the above lesson. This is why the Torah introduces the "Shirat Hayam"/'Song at the Sea' with the phrase in the future tense: "Az yashir"/'Then he will sing.' This means, "Now, we sometimes sing and sometimes cry, but in the future, when we see how all of our troubles were only stepping stones to the ultimate good, then we will only sing."

Similarly, the above midrash teaches, Yosef's receiving the ketonet pasim was part of the Divine plan. In retrospect, it led to the splitting of the sea, and thus was part of the process of education and redemption (in Rav Breuer's words) through which G-d built His people. (Divrei Shlomo: Chochmah U'mussar)

One should never show favoritism among his children, for due to the two coins worth of wool (i.e., the ketonet pasim) which Yaakov gave Yosef, his children descended to Egypt. (Shabbat 10b) © 1996 Rabbi S. Katz & www.torah.org

