

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

I was once present when the great historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, was asked to predict the course of events in the Middle East. He replied, "I'm a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is pass." Predictions are impossible in the affairs of living, breathing human beings because we are free and there is no way of knowing in advance how an individual will react to the great challenges of their life.

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis, it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave (Gen. 37:26-27), whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin, and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, "At that time Judah went down from among his brothers" (Gen. 38:1). The commentators take this to indicate Judah's moral decline. At this point in the story, we may have no doubt who will lead and who will follow.

Yet history turned out otherwise. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe, disappeared from the pages of history after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, while Judah's descendants, starting with David, became kings. The tribe of Judah survived the Babylonian conquest, and it is Judah whose name we bear as a people. We are Yehudim, "Jews." This week's parsha of Vayigash explains why.

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family had reached deadlock. They desperately needed food, but they knew that the Egyptian viceroy had insisted that they

bring their brother Benjamin with them, and Jacob refused to let this happen. His beloved wife Rachel's first son (Joseph) was already lost to him, and he was not about to let the other, Benjamin, be taken on a hazardous journey. Reuben, in keeping with his unstable character, made an absurd suggestion: "Kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safely." (Gen. 42:37) In the end it was Judah, with his quiet authority -- "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him" (Gen. 43:9) -- who persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them.

Now, as the brothers attempt to leave Egypt, and return home, the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. This is the moment when Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other, he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes: "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that it would bring my father." (Gen. 44:33-34)

No sooner has he said these words than Joseph, overcome with emotion, reveals his identity and the whole elaborate drama reaches closure. What is happening here and how does it have a bearing on leadership?

The Sages articulated a principle: "Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand." (Brachot 34b) The Talmud brings a proof-text from Isaiah: "Peace, peace, to those far and near" (Is. 57:19) placing the far (the penitent sinner) before the near (the perfectly righteous). However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as ha-tzaddik, the righteous one. (See Tanchuma (Buber), Noach, 4, s.v. eleh, on the basis of Amos 2:6, "They sold the righteous for silver.")

Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became "second to the king." Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve

perfect repentance (teshuvah gemurah), defined by the Sages as when you find yourself in a situation where it is likely you will be tempted to repeat an earlier sin, but you are able to resist because you are now a changed person. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1)

Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave: "Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed." (Gen. 37:26-27)

Now, faced with the similar prospect of leaving Benjamin as a slave, he has a very different response. He says, "Let me stay as a slave and let my brother go free." (Gen. 44:33) That is perfect repentance, and it is what prompts Joseph to reveal his identity and forgive his brothers.

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah's character in an earlier chapter. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child, and his response is to immediately declare: "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26). This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong. If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar -- mother of Perez from whom King David was descended -- who was ultimately responsible.

Perhaps Judah's future was already implicit in his name, for though the verb le-hodot from which it is derived means "to thank" (Leah called her fourth son Judah saying, "This time I will thank the Lord," Gen. 29:35), it is also related to the verb le-hitvadot, which means "to admit or "to confess" -- and confession is, according to the Rambam, the core of the command to repent.

Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role. Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules. Do you declare a war in which people will die, or do you refrain from doing so at the risk of letting your enemy grow stronger with the result that more will die later? That was the dilemma faced by Chamberlain in 1939, and it was only some time later that it became clear that he was wrong and Churchill right.

But leaders are also human, and their mistakes often have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual misconduct of John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton and many other leaders has undoubtedly been less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David for consorting with another man's wife. But Judaism also takes note of what happens next.

What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent -- you recognize and admit your wrongdoings, and you change as a result. As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a Prophet. Both said chattati, "I have sinned". (I Sam. 15:24 and II Sam. 12:13) But their fates were radically different. Saul lost the throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated and made excuses before admitting his sin. (Kol Dodi Dofek [Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav, 2006], 26)

The stories of Judah, and of his descendant David, tell us that what marks a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the Burning Bush -- stammering, hesitant -- is not the mighty hero we see at the end, "his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated."

A leader is one who, though they may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than they were before. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"**A**nd Joseph could not hold himself back in front of all who were standing around him... And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; Is my father still alive?'" (Genesis 45:1-3) Why does Joseph suddenly wake up to his familial ties and reveal himself as the long-lost son and brother? Apparently, he was inspired by Judah's stirring speech which opens our Torah reading of Vayigash. How did Judah strike such a responsive chord in a Joseph whose heart had previously been so impervious to filial and sibling sensitivity? I believe that the crucial phase is, "because your servant guaranteed my father that I would serve as a surety for the youth" (Genesis 44:32); Judah informs Joseph that he is an arev, a co-signer, a stand-in for Benjamin.

This concept is quite radical for these warring siblings and resonates in subsequent Jewish legal and ethical literature in the axiom that "all Israel are co-signers (or sureties) for each other."

Joseph was born into a family of jealousy and hatred.

The six sons of Leah, the "hated" wife who had been forced upon Jacob under false pretenses, refused to recognize the beloved wife Rachel's son as a legitimate brother; hence the 17-year-old Joseph had no recourse but to find his companionship with the younger brothers, and compensated by "shepherding"

his siblings, the sons of Leah, acting the big shot, and reporting all their foibles to his adoring father (Gen. 37:2).

Joseph always refers to his siblings as his brothers, but they never refer to him as “brother”: “And he [Joseph] said, I am seeking my brothers... and Joseph went after his brothers... And they saw him from afar. The men said, each one to his brother, behold, that master of dreams is coming, let us kill him and throw him in one of the pits and say that an evil animal devoured him” (Gen. 37:16-20).

The young Joseph was desperately seeking a brotherly relationship with his siblings – but he was constantly rebuffed. When he tried to overcome their rejection of him by recounting his (perhaps compensatory) dreams of grandeur, it only caused them to hate him even more.

Even Reuben, who attempts to rescue Joseph, never calls him “brother,” only referring to “him” as a pronoun (Gen. 37: 21, 22). It is only Judah who refers to him as a brother, but since he is desirous of making a profit by selling him as a slave, the use of the term may be ironic: “What profit have we in killing our brother? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, for he is our brother, our flesh” (Gen. 37:26-27).

As the story progresses, the lack of brotherliness towards the sons of Rachel is emphasized even more: “And the ten brothers of Joseph [they felt towards each other as brothers] went down to Egypt to purchase grain, but Jacob did not send Benjamin, brother of Joseph” (but not the brother of the other 10).

And when the sons of Jacob stand before the Grand Vizier, the Bible stresses the inequality in their relationship with a ringing declaration, pregnant with a double meaning, “Joseph recognized his brothers [their identity as well as a sibling relationship to them], but they did not recognize him” (Gen. 42:8).

The Hebrew word *ah* (brother) means to be tied together, the verb *ahot* meaning to sew or to stitch, even, if you will, to patch up. It derives from a sense of unity, oneness (*ehad*, *ahdut*) which comes from the understanding of having emanated from one father.

Since the source of their unity is their common father; they should not want to cause pain to each other and certainly not to their father. Apparently, the hatred of the 10 brothers for Joseph even overwhelmed their filial concern for their father’s welfare – and so they seemingly had no difficulty in telling Jacob that his beloved Joseph had been torn apart by a wild animal! When Judah declares to their father Jacob that he will stand as surety for Benjamin, he is expressing his newfound recognition that this youngest son of Rachel is truly an *ah*, a brother, an inextricable part of him, Judah, even though he was born of a different mother. When he tells the Grand Vizier that he is willing to be a slave instead of Benjamin – so that this son of Rachel

may be restored to his loving father in order to save Jacob further pain – he is demonstrating the bond of ultimate unity between siblings, and between them and their father. This is *ahva* (brotherliness) and *ahdut* (unity) which creates an indissoluble bond (*hibur*, *haverut*, profound attachment). It is at this point of Judah’s self-sacrifice for Rachel’s youngest son that Joseph recognizes his brothers’ repentance and is ready to forgive and reunite with them.

The prophet Ezekiel provides the ultimate vision of a united Israel when he is told by God to take one stick and write upon it “For Judah and the children of Israel his friends” (*haver*, *hibur*, bond), and to take another stick and write upon it, “for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and the entire house of Israel his friend,” and to join both sticks so that they are united in his hand (Ezekiel 37: 15-20). This is the Jewish goal, learned from Judah, when every Israelite sees themselves as a co-signer (surety) for every other Israelite for the greater glory of our common Father in heaven. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he brothers and Joseph finally meet each other head-on, without pretense and subterfuge. When Joseph reveals himself to the brothers, the veil of secrecy, role-playing, distrust, and enmity is ripped away. The dreams that apparently were the cause of this gripping family drama now reappear in their stark and simple meaning.

The sheaves of grain are the brothers and the constellation of stars in heaven are to be taken literally as the brothers bowing down to Joseph. It is noteworthy that the brothers never asked why Joseph is entitled to such respect and discipline from them. They apparently never search out the merit or qualities that have made Joseph their ruler.

There are many commentators who believe that Joseph never recounted to them the story of his life with Potiphar and how he had risen to such glory and power. For the brothers, as perhaps for Joseph himself, it was sufficient that the dreams had meaning and had come true. All the rest of the story became almost incidental and unimportant. It was the dreams that were the central issue, and when proven to be accurate and effective, that was all that really mattered.

No longer would the brothers, or their descendants, mock dreams, or dreamers. In effect, they now realize that somehow the dreamers were more practical than the pragmatic people of the world. Certainly, as part of Jewish life was to be concerned, it would only survive and prosper based on dreams and not based on data.

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, they are naturally shocked by the turn of events. Until now, they had always believed that they were within

their rights, and that the actions that they had taken against Joseph were not only justified, but necessary. They saw him as a mortal threat to their very survival and to the necessary nation-building process that would create the Jewish people.

Then, in a moment, this entire understanding and assessment of the situation with Joseph was turned on its head. This occurred because they had refused to give credit or to display confidence in the dreams that Joseph had related to them. It is, thus, superfluous to state that the Jewish people have survived only based on dreams.

The return of our people to the land of Israel in our time is perhaps the greatest of dreams. We are taught in the book of Psalms that the return to Zion must be viewed as a dream, for based on pragmatism alone it could never have happened. The same thing is true regarding the revival of Torah in Jewish society in our time. Only dreamers could imagine, that at some level, the long-standing tides of ignorance and hostility towards Judaism and Jewish values could be checked. The great Ponovizher Rav summed up the situation succinctly when he told me: "I sleep little, but I dream all the time." ©2020 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Price Gouging

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**D**uring the famine in Egypt (*Bereishit* chapter 47), Yosef made sure that the price of grain would not become exorbitant. According to Jewish law, the courts have an obligation to supervise merchants and make sure they do not wildly overcharge. The primary concern is when we are dealing with staples such as wine, oil, and flour. In general, profit may not exceed one-sixth (approximately 17%), after the costs for labor and expenses are deducted. Of course, the courts must set price caps for all the merchants equally, without discriminating among them.

What sanctions can be used by the courts against a merchant guilty of price gouging? According to the Rambam, such a merchant is flogged, while according to the *Shulchan Aruch* he is fined. There is an additional weapon available to the people – a consumer boycott. Indeed, we find an example of this in *Responsa Tzemach Tzedek HaYashan*. In a certain town, the fish merchants all raised their prices excessively. In reaction, the *Tzemach Tzedek* instructed the people not to buy fish. The boycott continued for a number of weeks, until the merchants lowered the prices. This was even though the boycott infringed on the mitzva of enjoying and honoring Shabbat. The *Tzemach Tzedek* pointed to a precedent

for his ruling. The mishnah in *Keritut* records that when the prices of a particular bird offering became prohibitive, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel allowed a woman to offer one bird to cover a number of obligations.

However, the *Chatam Sofer* rejected this proof for the boycott. He argued that in the case of the woman who was permitted to offer one bird, she had the possibility of offering the additional sacrifices at a later time. In contrast, one who did not eat fish on Shabbat could not make it up. Additionally, a poor person who cannot afford fish is not required to eat it on Shabbat, while a poor person is not completely exempt from sacrifices. Thus we see that the two cases are different. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

### Overcoming the Fear

**W**hen Ya'akov heard that his favorite son, Yosef, was still alive, he immediately set out to rejoin him in Egypt. The Torah tells us, "And Yisrael said, 'It is too much, Yosef my son still lives, I will go and see him before I die. And Yisrael traveled with all that was his to Be'er Sheva and he sacrificed sacrifices to the Elokim of his father, Yitzchak. And Elokim said to Yisrael in a vision of the night, and He said, 'Ya'akov, Ya'akov', and he said, 'I am here.' And He said, 'I am Keil the Elokim of your father, do not be afraid of going down to Egypt because I will make you a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you and I will also surely bring you up (out of Egypt), and Yosef will lay his hand upon your eyes.'" Yet even with this declaration, we see that Ya'akov exhibits trepidation and fear.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch makes notice of the change in name from Ya'akov to Yisrael. We remember that Ya'akov was renamed Yisrael when he fought with the angel. Unlike the name change given to Avram to become Avraham or Hoshua to become Yehoshua, Ya'akov never stopped being called Ya'akov, even though he is sometimes called Yisrael. Hirsch points out that "up till now, with one single exception when he pulled himself together to make a decision and mastered his doubts, he was always referred to as Ya'akov." At this point, however, he regains his strength and courage upon hearing that his son is still alive.

According to HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, Ya'akov's statement, "my son Yosef still lives", is a reflection on the words of the other sons who returned to tell their father the news. "And they told him (Ya'akov) saying, Yosef is still alive." Sorotzkin explains that this sentence had a dual meaning. Yosef was sold into a den of filth and licentious behavior. One of the brothers' concerns was the effect of that environment on their brother. As much as they wished to harm Yosef, they did not wish to harm his soul. Thus, their report meant that not only was he literally

alive but that his soul was also alive, undamaged by negative influences. They told their father how Yosef had withstood the advances of Potifar's wife and also pointed to the message of the ten wagons, which was reminiscent of the last Torah lesson that Yosef and his father had learned.

There are several reasons given why Ya'akov offered sacrifices in his father's name and not also his grandfather's. Rashi tells us that the mitzvah to honor one's parents supersedes honoring one's grandparents. The Ramban is critical and says that he could have brought the sacrifices to the Elokim of his forefathers without specifying either by name. Later Ya'akov says, "the Elokim who caused my fathers to go before him, Avraham and Yitzchak." The Ramban suggests a second explanation: Ya'akov understood that his going down to Egypt was the beginning of the exile which was prophesized to Avraham. He was reluctant at first to bring his children along, but he realized that he should not interfere with the prophecy. Thus, he had first eliminated Avraham's name from the sacrifice but later included it in his comments.

HaRav Sorotzkin reminds us that Be'er Sheva already has a history with the Jewish people. Avraham had planted cedar trees in Be'er Sheva after he asked Hashem, "in what way will I know that they (my children) will inherit (the land)." Hashem told him by means of the sacrifices which they will bring in the Temple. Avraham immediately planted an orchard of cedar trees to supply the wood for the sacrifices. Ya'akov went to Be'er Sheva to cut down those trees so that the B'nei Yisrael would have wood for the Mishkan, the portable Temple in the desert.

The Torah tells us that Hashem promised to go into exile with the B'nei Yisrael. The Or HaChaim says that the Shechinah, the quality of Hashem that resides with the people, went down to Egypt as promised. He asks how this was possible as many sources say that Moshe later had to exit the city-state of Mitzrayim in order to speak with Hashem. Egypt was so corrupt that Hashem could not have dwelled there. Yet the Or HaChaim says that the Shechinah was in Mitzrayim. He indicates that there are many levels of dwelling in which the Shechinah participates. The greatest level was the Shechinah's presence over the Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark of the Temple. The lowest level was the one that Hashem permitted in Mitzrayim and then only because the B'nei Yisrael were promised that the Shechinah would accompany them. The Kli Yakar explains that the Shechinah went into Egypt even before Ya'akov entered, so that there would be no moment that the B'nei Yisrael were in Egypt in which the Shechinah was not already there protecting them. This was an added assurance to Ya'akov.

One final promise was made to Ya'akov to allay his fears in going down to Mitzrayim. Ya'akov was concerned with two aspects of his family going into

exile in Egypt: (1) he did not wish to be buried in Egypt and (2) he was concerned that his children would become so evil there that his children would not return to inherit the land. Hashem tells Ya'akov "do not be afraid" and ends with the words "and I will also surely bring you up." This answered Ya'akov's first concern but did not answer his second concern about his children. The Kli Yakar implies that the answer to the second question is given by the method in which the message was given to Ya'akov. He received this message in a vision in the night much as the original message was given to Avraham at the Brit Bein HaB'tarim, the Covenant Between the Halves. This is when Avraham was given the first prophecy about the exile but also about told of the redemption from Egypt. This also guaranteed that the children would remain pure.

It is easy to understand Ya'akov's fear concerning his future and that of his family. Going into exile was difficult enough. Going into an environment that was replete with ideas and practices that were the antithesis of Hashem's ideals, had to make Ya'akov tremble in fear for his children. Ya'akov's faith in Hashem's promises enabled him to have the courage to follow the path which Hashem placed before him.

We are all in fear of something in our lives or our future. The fear sometimes becomes overwhelming unless we are able to realize that Hashem only acts for our good. We know that we have each gone through hard times and yet we appear, in most instances, to end up better in some way than we would have had we not gone through that ordeal. It often takes a great deal of time before we realize how much stronger both physically and spiritually we have become as a result of this ordeal. The ordeal also increases our ability to cope with future difficulties. May we realize that even our roughest times are truly gifts from Hashem. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he role of Yehuda (Judah) in the Yosef (Joseph) narrative reveals the story of a man who sinks to the lowest depths, and with strength, overcomes, rising to great ethical heights.

Yehuda lost standing with his siblings as he bears the primary responsibility for the loss of Yosef, having suggested that Yosef be sold. (Genesis 37:27)

He sinks to even lower depths after his wife dies. His daughter-in-law Tamar, who had been widowed from two of Yehuda's sons and was blocked by Yehuda from marrying the third, dresses as a harlot and has relations with Yehuda. While Yehuda's intentions were impure, Tamar's were pure, as she seeks to have a child from Yehuda's family. (Genesis 38)

Yehuda promises Tamar payment later, but

Tamar insists on a guarantee, an eiravon. Yehuda gives Tamar his seal, string and staff. (Genesis 38:18) The items given may have deeper meaning. Eiravon relates to areivut, feeling a sense of responsibility for the other. Assuming responsibility is the foundation of leadership. Yet, Yehuda gives this away.

Not coincidentally, the objects he gives Tamar are all related to different leadership roles:

- The seal was used by the high priest to indicate the purity of a ritual object.
- The string is associated with a coat from which it flows. The coat is the symbol of executive or royal leadership. If one wears the coat, one leads. Without it, his leadership is in jeopardy.
- The staff was carried by the prophet wherever he went.

Yehuda gives it all away as he has abandoned his leadership role. He has hit rock bottom.

Yehuda begins his ascent when he admits fathering the children Tamar is bearing – declaring tzadkah mi'meni – “she is right; it is from me.” (Genesis 38:26) He continues to ascend when he takes the lead role in bringing the larger family of Ya'akov (Jacob) together. This occurs when Yosef, as viceroy of Egypt, declares that if the brothers wish to come for more food, they must bring Binyamin (Benjamin). Ya'akov is hesitant to allow Binyamin to go. Yehuda rises and declares, “I will be the guarantor (e'ervenu)” (Genesis 43:9).

He does so in our parasha when standing before Yosef, the viceroy of Egypt, he (Yehuda) declares, “Now your servant has pledged himself (arav) for the lad.” (Genesis 44:32)

Yehuda has come full circle. The same Yehuda who had relinquished leadership when giving away his eiravon to Tamar assumes leadership by declaring his readiness to be the arev, becoming the worthy forerunner of Israel's kingship. ©2020 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### **RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

**"**And he kissed all his brothers and cried upon them, and after this his brothers spoke to him.” (Beraishis 45:15) From the very beginning, Yosef loved his brothers and wanted to be close to them. But he was different. He was smarter than the rest, had more potential than they did, and their father Yaakov recognized that Yosef from head and shoulders above his brothers. This brought out the worst in them and they grew to hate him.

For his part, Yosef never hated them. When he went to find them as they were grazing the sheep in Shechem, a man asked him, “What do you seek?” His

answer was, “I seek my brothers.” The man replied cryptically, “If you seek your brothers, (meaning brotherliness,) they have left this place.” But Yosef was undeterred.

When they sold him into slavery, he still didn't hate them. He still wanted the closeness he'd craved from his youth. But he was far from home and his wishes seemed to be dashed. It would take twenty-two years for his dreams to come true, and then, his brothers appeared before him in Egypt and bowed to him. They were at his mercy, and yet, he still wanted their love. He risked his life to reveal himself privately, so they would not be embarrassed. They could have killed him before he told them who he was, but that was a risk he was willing to take for them. He never grew to hate them.

Now, when Yosef let them know that he harbored no ill will towards them, it was not enough for him to say it and leave it to them to reconcile with it. He saw how terrified they were when he revealed himself, and when they were sure he would retaliate and take out his wrath on them. Yosef could not let them remain that way.

He therefore went out of his way to hug and kiss each one; to cry genuine tears for the time they'd lost, until the brothers realized that he was still the same Yosef he always was, who wanted to be close to them. Only when they were able to speak to him without fear, and ask him what had happened after they sold him, was Yosef able to feel comfortable that he had achieved his goal.

True victory is not silencing your foe, but bringing him to love you. That understanding is what set Yosef apart and is something we would all do well to learn.

*Shmuel HaNagid was a vizier to the Caliph of Granada and leader of the Spanish-Jewish community. A Jewish man once bad-mouthed him and the Caliph, following accepted Muslim protocol, instructed R' Shmuel to personally “cut out that man's evil tongue.”*

*R' Shmuel took the trembling man to his home and made him comfortable. He treated him as an honored guest and never mentioned the issue of his being insulted, nor did he take the opportunity to belittle the man for his affront. Some time later, the Caliph called for the man to see that his order had been carried out. The man could not stop lavishing praise on Shmuel HaNagid for his wisdom, kindness and generosity.*

*The Caliph was incensed at R' Shmuel. “How dare you disobey me? I told you to cut out his tongue, yet he still speaks!”*

*R' Shmuel responded with typical insight, “Your eminence, you told me to cut out his “evil” tongue, and that's exactly what I have done. Don't you see how this tongue only speaks with sweetness and love?” ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Age Old Questions

It was the ultimate encounter. Yaakov, the consummate theologian, meets Pharoh, the king of the powerful land of Egypt. What could they have discussed? The meaning of life? The geopolitics of famine? They don't. Instead, the Torah records that meeting as having to do with something quite mundane. Age. Yet that trite discussion had severe ramifications for our forefather Yaakov.

The Torah relates how Yoseph presents his father to Pharoh. Genesis 47: 9-10: "Pharoh asked Yaakov, 'How old are you?' Jacob answered, 'the years of my sojourns are one hundred thirty; few and bad ones; they have not reached the days of my forefathers in their sojourns.'"

There is a Midrash that notes the bitterness of Yaakov's response and makes an amazing calculation. Yaakov lived to the age of 147. His father lived 'till 180. There is a difference of 33 years. Yaakov, explains the Midrash, lost 33 years of his life due to the 33 words that were used as he cursed his life's struggles.

The Midrash needs explanation. In the Torah's version of the story (and even in my loose translation), Yaakov did not use 33 words to curse his fate. That number is only arrived at if the original question "How old are you," including the words "and Pharoh asked Yaakov," are also counted. I can understand that Yaakov was punished for the words that he spoke: after all, he was saved from his brother Esau, his daughter Deenah was returned to him, and he did leave Lavan's home a wealthy man. But why should Yaakov be punished for a question posed to him, even if the response was improper? Why count the words that Pharoh used, and even more difficult, why count the words, "Pharoh asked Yaakov," which are obviously the Torah's addition? At most, Yaakov should only be punished for the 25 words that he actually used.

Though Rebbitzin Chana Levin the wife of Reb Aryeh, the Tzadik of Jerusalem, endured a difficult life she never let her own misfortunes dampen the cheer of friends or neighbors. During the terrible years of famine in Palestine during World War I, tragedy struck. After an epidemic induced illness, on a Shabbos morning, her beautiful 18 month-old son, succumbed. She and Reb Aryeh were devastated.

However, until Shabbos was over, there were no noticeable cries coming from the Levin home. The Shabbos meal was accompanied by the regular z'miros (songs) recited with the weekly enthusiasm. The children discussed the Torah portion at the table, and the Rav and his Rebitzen greeted their neighbors as if nothing had occurred. Reb Aryeh's own sister had visited on Shabbos and left with no inkling of the catastrophe. When news of the tragedy was revealed after sunset, her neighbors were shocked. "How is it,"

they asked, "that you didn't diminish your normal Shabbos cheer in the face of striking tragedy?"

The Rebitzen tearfully explained. "On Shabbos one is not allowed to mourn. Had we not continued our Shabbos in the usual manner, everyone would have realized the end had come. We would have destroyed the Shabbos of everyone in the courtyard, as you all would have shared our terrible pain."

In order to understand the Midrash one must understand diplomacy. Ramban (Nachmanides) notes: World leaders do not normally greet each other with mundane questions such as, "how old are you?" Yet those are the only recorded words of the conversation that ensued between Yaakov and Pharoh. "Obviously," explains the Ramban, "Yaakov looked so terrible and so aged that Pharoh could not comprehend. He therefore dispensed with diplomatic etiquette and asked the discourteous query. Yaakov's response explained why his appearance overbore his numeric age.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, (1902-1978) the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, explains why the Midrash is upset with Yaakov. Had Yaakov worn his suffering with more cheer, on the inside, he would not have looked as old as he did. Pharoh would not have been astonished and would never have asked the undiplomatic question, "how old are you?" Yaakov was punished for prompting a query that resulted in open discontent of the fate he endured. And for that unfortunate repartee, an entire portion of the Torah was added and Yaakov lost 33 years of his life.

The Torah teaches us a great lesson. No matter what life serves you, do not let the experience wrinkle your spirit. One must never let his pain get to him in a way that it gets to someone else. Especially when you represent Hashem's word. ©2020 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftorah

This week's haftorah is devoted to the Jewish nation's future unification. It opens with Hashem instructing the Prophet Yechezkel to take two pieces of wood and inscribe them with names of the Jewish kingdoms, Yehuda and Yosef. Hashem then said, "Bring them near one another to appear as one and they shall unite in your hands." Radak interprets this to mean that Yechezkel should hold the pieces alongside each other and they will miraculously unite into one solid piece of wood. He explains that this refers to the future miraculous unification of the Jewish kingdom. The individual pieces of wood represent the individual kingdoms of Israel. Although Hashem unconditionally granted Dovid Hamelech's dynasty the kingdom of Israel this did not preclude fragmentation. In fact, soon after Shlomo Hamelech's passing the kingdom suffered a severe split. Yeravam ben Nvat, a descendent of the tribe of Yosef led a powerful rebellion

against the Judean dynasty and gained control over most of the Jewish nation. The split was so intense that the seceding camp of Yosef totally severed ties with its brothers never to return to them. Yechezkel prophesied that these kingdoms will eventually reunite and form one inseparable unit. The unification will be so perfect that it will leave no trace of any previous dissension. The entire nation's sense of kinship will be so pronounced that it will be likened to one solid piece of wood, void of all factions and fragmentation.

Yechezkel continues and states in Hashem's name, "And I will purify them and they shall be a nation to Me and I will be G-d to them...My Divine Presence will rest upon them... forever." (37:23,28) These verses predict the final phase of unity -- Hashem's unification with His people. In the Messianic era all aspects of unity will be achieved. The entire Jewish nation will become one inseparable entity and Hashem will reunite with His people. This unification will resemble that of the Jewish people, an everlasting and inseparable one.

It is important to note the order of this unity. The first phase will be our nation's unification and after this is achieved Hashem will return to His people. Sefer Charedim sensitizes us to the order of this development. He reflects upon Hashem's distinct quality of oneness and explains that it can only be appreciated and revealed through His people's harmonious interaction. Hashem's favor and kindness emanates from His perfect oneness and reveals this quality in full. When the Jewish people function as a harmonious body they deserve Hashem's favor and kindness. They project and reflect Hashem's goodness and express His oneness and bring true glory to His name. However, if the Jewish people are fragmented and divided they display -- Heaven forbid -- division in Hashem's interactive system. Their divisive behavior gives the impression that Hashem's influence is disjointed and fragmented and not achieving its ultimate purpose. At that point Hashem removes His presence from His people and disassociates Himself from their inappropriate ways. The Jewish people's lack of success and accomplishment is then attributed to Hashem's unwillingness to remain involved in their lives.

We now understand that the Jewish people's unity is a prerequisite to Hashem's return to His people. Sefer Charedim explains with this the introductory words of the Shabbos afternoon Amida service. We state therein, "You are one, Your identity is one and who can is likened to Your people Israel one nation in the land." He interprets these words to refer to the glorious Messianic era. During that period Hashem's oneness will be recognized through His harmonious interactive system reflected in the oneness of His people. Their perfect unity will provide the perfect setting for Hashem's revelation to the world. During that time Hashem's master plan will be expressed through

the perfect interaction of His people. Every detail of Hashem's kindness will serve its intended purpose and reveal His absolute oneness and control over every aspect of this world. Undoubtedly, this will require the Jewish people's total cooperation and perfect harmonious interaction with one another. Indeed, it can be said that when Hashem's people unite as an inseparable entity His identity and perfect quality of oneness will be recognized throughout the world. (adapted from Sefer Charedim chap. 7)

In truth, the foundation for this unity was laid in this week's sedra. Yosef developed an ingenious scheme to silence all his brothers' suspicions and convince them of their grave misjudgement of his actions. He successfully removed their deep seeded jealousy and hatred and brought about a sincere unification to the household of Yaakov. Yosef and Yehuda, the two powers to be, embraced one another and displayed a true sense of kinship. Unfortunately, irrevocable damage already occurred that would ultimately yield a severe split in the Jewish kingdom. Yosef's descendant, Yeravam would eventually sever relations with Yehuda's descendant Rechavam and establish his own leadership. (see Gur Aryeh to Breishis 48:7) However, groundwork was already established to reunite these kingdoms and return the Jewish nation to its original perfect unity.

This week's sedra records the immediate result of the unity of the household of Yaakov. After Yaakov Avinu discovered Yosef's existence and salvation the Torah states, "And their father, Yaakov's spirit was restored to life." (Breishis 45:27) Rashi quotes the Sages who explain these words to refer to the return of Hashem's Divine Spirit to Yaakov. (ad loc) Yosef's absence from Yaakov's household indirectly prevented Hashem's Divine Spirit from resting upon Yaakov. Now, after twenty-two dark years Yaakov Avinu's household was reunited and Hashem returned His Divine Presence to Yaakov. This development is indicative of the Jewish people's future experience. The ten lost tribes representing the kingdom of Yosef will be divided from the Judean kingdom for over two thousand years. This will result in Hashem's removing His Divine Presence from amidst His people and throughout their long dark exile they will have no direct contact with Him. However, the time will eventually arrive for the Jewish people to reunite and become one inseparable entity. This miraculous unity will immediately lead to a second unity, that of Hashem and His people. In response to their total unification Hashem will return His Divine Presence and rest amongst His people us and "The spirit of Israel will be restored to life".

This lesson is apropos for our times where so much potential diversity exists. We pray to Hashem that we merit total unification thereby yielding Hashem's return to us resting His Divine Presence amongst us.  
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