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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"L

Wein Online

So our father Yaakov wishes to spend the rest of his days in peace and serenity, enjoying his grandchildren and pursuing his spiritual growth. Is that not what all of us wish for ourselves as we grow older and we feel that the major battles of life are already behind us? Yet, as Rashi points out, based on difficult tests of Yaakov in his life - Lavan, Eisav, Shechem, etc, Midrash, the Lord, so to speak, is dissatisfied with this plan of Yaakov's.

The great drama of Yosef and his brothers still lies before him. This situation can be seen as one of external enemies and Yaakov is steeled to the task of opposing them for such is the way of the world – certainly of the Jewish world. But Yosef and his brothers is a test of internal rivalries and enmities, a situation at the end of Yaakov's life that threatens to destroy all that he achieved in his lifetime. Yaakov feels that he is entitled to rest on his laurels and savor his accomplishments. He has somehow overcome all of the wiles and aggressions of his external enemies and sees only peace and serenity ahead. He is unprepared for the internal struggle within his own beloved family that, in the words of Rashi and Midrash, "now leaps upon him."

His very longing for the peace and serenity that has eluded him his entire lifetime is his very undoing because he does not choose to see the festering enmities and jealousies that are brewing within his own house and family. Wishes and desires, illusions as to how things should be, often blind us to the realities of how things really are and we are therefore blindsided by events that could have been foreseen had we not indulged so mightily in our fantasies.

I think that is what Rashi and the Midrash had in mind when they quoted God, so to speak, that the righteous should not expect serenity in this world. The Talmud even goes so far to say that even in the World to Come the righteous are not at tranquil rest but rather are bidden "to go from strength to strength."

We all need times of leisure and rest in order to build up a reservoir of physical and mental strength to deal with the problems and vicissitudes of life. Judaism does not know of the concept or value of "retirement" as it is formulated in modern parlance. It certainly allows for changes in circumstances, occupations and interests. But "man was created for toil." One must always be busy with productive matters – Torah study, good deeds, self-education, etc. - even till the end of life.

And one must always be vigilant and realistic about the problems of life – externally caused or internally present in one's own household – in order to make certain that gains made in one's earlier years will not be squandered by illusions and wishful thinking later in life. This is true nationally as well as personally. We all desire peace and serenity but only realism and vigilance can protect us from our own errors and self-made problems.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

The deception has taken place. Joseph has been sold into slavery. His brothers dipped his coat in blood. They bring it back to their father, saying: "Look what we have found. Do you recognise it? Is this your son's robe or not?" Jacob recognises it and replies, "It is my son's robe. A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." We then read: Jacob rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned his son for a long time. His sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "I will go down to the grave mourning for my son." (Gen. 37:34-35)

There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief -- shiva, sheloshim, a year. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. The Talmud says that God admonishes one who weeps beyond the appointed time, "You are not more compassionate than I." (Mo'ed Katan 27b) And yet Jacob refuses to be comforted.

A Midrash gives a remarkable explanation. "One can be comforted for one who is dead, but not for one who is still living," it says. In other words, Jacob refused to be comforted because he had not yet given up hope that Joseph was still alive. That, tragically, is the fate of those who have lost members of their family (the parents of soldiers missing in action, for example), but have as yet no proof that they are dead. They cannot go through the normal stages of mourning because they cannot abandon the possibility that the missing person is still capable of being rescued. Their continuing anguish is a

form of loyalty; to give up, to mourn, to be reconciled to loss is a kind of betrayal. In such cases, grief lacks closure. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

Yet on what basis did Jacob continue to hope? Surely he had recognised Joseph's blood-stained coat -- he said explicitly, "A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." Do these words not mean that he had accepted that Joseph was dead?

The late David Daube made a suggestion that I find convincing. (Studies in Biblical Law, Cambridge: University Press, 1947) The words the sons say to Jacob -- haker na, literally "identify please" -- have a quasi-legal connotation. Daube relates this passage to another, with which it has close linguistic parallels: If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his neighbour for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbour did not lay hands on the other person's property...If it [the animal] was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal. (Exodus 22:10-13)

The issue at stake is the extent of responsibility borne by a guardian (shomer). If the animal is lost through negligence, the guardian is at fault and must make good the loss. If there is no negligence, merely force majeure, an unavoidable, unforeseeable accident, the guardian is exempt from blame. One such case is where the loss has been caused by a wild animal. The wording in the law -- tarof yitaref, "torn to pieces" -- exactly parallels Jacob's judgment in the case of Joseph: tarof toraf Yosef, "Joseph has been torn to pieces."

We know that some such law existed prior to the giving of the Torah. Jacob himself says to Laban, whose flocks and herds had been placed in his charge, "I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself " (Gen. 31:39). This implies that guardians even then were exempt from responsibility for the damage caused by wild animals. We also know that an elder brother carried a similar responsibility for the fate of a younger brother placed in his charge, as, for example, when the two were alone together. That is the significance of Cain's denial when confronted by God as to the fate of Abel: "Am I my brother's guardian [shomer]?" (Gen. 4:9).

We now understand a series of nuances in the encounter between Jacob and his sons upon their return without Joseph. Normally they would be held responsible for their younger brother's disappearance. To avoid this, as in the case of later biblical law, they "bring the remains as evidence." If those remains show signs of an attack by a wild animal, they must -- by virtue of the law then operative -- be held innocent. Their request to Jacob, haker na, must be construed as a legal request, meaning, "Examine the evidence." Jacob has no alternative but to do so, and by virtue of what he has seen, to acquit them. A judge, however, may be forced to acquit someone accused of a crime because the evidence is insufficient to justify a conviction, while still retaining lingering private doubts. So Jacob was forced to find his sons innocent, without necessarily trusting what they said. In fact Jacob did not believe it, and his refusal to be comforted shows that he was unconvinced. He continued to hope that Joseph was still alive. That hope was eventually justified: Joseph was still alive, and father and son were ultimately reunited.

The refusal to be comforted sounded more than once in Jewish history. The prophet Jeremiah heard it in a later age: "This is what the Lord says: / 'A voice is heard in Ramah, / Mourning and great weeping, / Rachel weeping for her children / Refusing to be comforted, / Because her children are no more.' / This is what the Lord says: / 'Restrain your voice from weeping, / And your eyes from tears, / For your work will be rewarded,' says the Lord. / 'They will return from the land of the enemy. / So there is hope for your future,' declares the Lord, / "Your children will return to their own land." (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Why was Jeremiah sure that Jews would return? Because they refused to be comforted -- meaning, they refused to give up hope.

So it was during the Babylonian exile, as articulated in one of the most paradigmatic expressions of the refusal to be comforted: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept, / As we remembered Zion... / How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land? / If I forget you, O Jerusalem, / May my right hand forget [its skill], / May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth / If I do not remember you, / If I do not consider Jerusalem above my highest joy." (Psalms 137:1-6)

It is said that Napoleon, passing a synagogue on the fast day of Tisha B'Av, heard the sounds of lamentation. "What are the Jews crying for?" he asked one of his officers. "For Jerusalem," the soldier replied. "How long ago did they lose it?" "More than 1,700 hundred years." "A people who can mourn for Jerusalem so long, will one day have it restored to them," the Emperor is reputed to have replied.

Jews are the people who refused to be comforted because they never gave up hope. Jacob did eventually see Joseph again. Rachel's children did return to the land. Jerusalem is once again the Jewish home. All the evidence may suggest otherwise: it may seem to signify irretrievable loss, a decree of history that cannot be overturned, a fate that must be accepted. Jews never believed the evidence because they had something else to set against it -- a faith, a trust, an unbreakable hope that proved stronger than historical inevitability. It is not too much to say that Jewish survival was sustained in that hope. And that hope came from a simple -- or perhaps not so simple -- phrase in the life of Jacob. He refused to be comforted. And so -- while we

live in a world still scarred by violence, poverty and injustice -- must we. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"We were binding sheaves in the field, when my sheaf suddenly stood up erect. Your sheaves formed a circle around my sheaf, and they bowed down to it." (Genesis 37:7) The sibling rivalry between the eleven sons of Jacob and their brother Joseph results in their casting him into a pit and selling him to Egypt. What was the source of such bitter hatred and enmity?

On one level, Jacob's favoritism expressed towards the elder son of his beloved wife Rachel was the obvious cause, exacerbated by the young Joseph's dreams. Predictably, the brothers are aghast at the dream's grandiose message: Does Joseph desire to be king and rule over them?

He then divulges a second dream, populating it with the sun, the moon, and eleven stars all bowing down to him. Even Jacob, whose own life was transformed by the dream of the ladder, scolds his son. "Do you want me, your mother, and your brothers to come and prostrate our- selves on the ground to you?" (Gen. 37:10).

From this perspective, it is more than obvious that the dreams served as an incendiary device, and biblical language affirms this position. After all, what follows the account of the second dream is Jacob sending Joseph to where his brothers have gone to graze their flocks near Shekhem. When Joseph is spotted from the distance, a plot against him unfolds: "Here comes the dreamer…Let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits…" (Gen. 37:19–20).

On the fundamental level (p'shat), the arrogant dreams catapult the plot forward. But Joseph's dreams should not be regarded exclusively, or even primarily, as manifestations of sibling rivalry. On a deeper level, the dreamer may have generated the sibling rivalry not only because of their message of superiority, but also and perhaps even primarily because of their inherent ideology. Indeed, the argument between the brothers may well have been far deeper than familial jealousy; it may well have been a profound conflict between two different philosophies and two antithetical ways of life. The key to understanding the difference in Weltanschauung between Joseph and his brothers may lie in a more sophisticated interpretation of his dreams.

The brothers are shepherds, their lives are their flocks. This was true of their forebears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But Joseph dreams of sheaves of corn, the symbol of agricultural society. His dream may well allude to an ideological rivalry between the new world of the farmer and the old world of the herdsman, the nomad, the shepherd.

The very first instance of sibling rivalry in the Bible, a rivalry which results in the first murder, emerges from the struggle between these two different ways of life. "…and Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground" (Gen. 4:3). Both bring offerings to God, Cain the fruit of the earth and Abel the first-born of his sheep. But only Abel's offering is pleasing to God, enraging Cain, and the result is the murder of Abel.

The worlds of shepherding and of farming are fundamentally different. The shepherd preserves and maintains the status quo. He shears the wool and extracts the milk, providing himself with food (cheese, butter) and clothing without destroying or essentially changing the livestock in his charge. The shepherd has time to rest, pray, meditate, compose poetry. He weaves an inner harmony with nature.

Farming is the opposite. In the evolution of civilization, it is a major step forward. The farmer's job is to transform nature. Nature does its share, but that is not enough to make whole wheat toast. The Mishna specifies eleven stages in the manufacture of bread, all of which are forbidden on the Sabbath because they create a basic change in the natural world as it is: sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering, threshing, winnowing, sorting, grinding, sifting, kneading and baking (Mishna Shabbat 7:2). Indeed, there is a time-honored custom to place our ten fingers on the challot right before making the blessing over bread at the Sabbath meals, explained by most commentaries as reminding us of the ten words in the 'Hamotzi' blessing.

The Zohar, however, the mystical interpretation of the Bible, provides another explanation. Bread is the symbol of the partnership between humans and God, and the challa is the result of divine beneficence plus human effort and change. It should not be surprising that bread, not meat or fish or wine, is called the staff of life, and that the blessing over bread obviates the necessity of making blessings over other foods consumed during the meal. Bread does not grow on trees, and never will; the transformation from seed to pumpernickel is up to the human being to effectuate.

What Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik defines as Adam ii, "reflective person," the individual who fits in with the natural order of the universe, finds its counterpart in the contemplative existence of the shepherd. The shepherd is conservative; he wants things to remain as they are. Adam ii is placed into the garden of Eden to save, protect and conserve it. The shepherd is perfectly content to leave the world as it is, seeing his major task in continuity and preservation.

The revolutionary is the farmer. He is the experimenter, the transformer. Placed into the world to subdue it, he makes it yield its secrets, whether they be technological, biological or atomic. He is the prototype of Rabbi Soloveitchik's Adam i, functioning as a partner

with God, creating and aggressively producing a world very different from the one he was given by the Creator. His major task is to improve and change.

Joseph's brothers, being shepherds, are for the old way of life. They stand for the conservative way, and are suspicious of change. The land of Israel is also a perfect place for shepherding, with its mixture of desert and oases providing areas for leading the sheep without having to be constantly concerned about their destroying the crops. Egypt, on the other hand, as 'the gift of the Nile' is the land – and sophisticated center – of agriculture, and seems to be the foreign focus of Joseph's distant and even heretical dream.

Joseph, unlike his brothers, is symbolic of a psychology of advancement, the transformation of the nomadic existence of the tribes into an agricultural and eventually industrial nation, which must deal with new societies and challenges. And if it takes the family to foreign places, so be it. After all, it is the Abrahamic mission to be a blessing for all the families of the earth.

The imagery of the second dream not only expands this theme, but takes it to a higher level. The sun, moon and stars are not just familial symbols of mother, father and children, but should also be understood literally. The heavens are the zenith of Joseph's aspirations. He desires to conquer the cosmos. It is not only the sheep of Canaan but the entire universe which he sees as his sphere of concern. In neither dream is there any veneration of, or even consideration for, past traditions and a former way of life.

The rebuke mingled with respect which Jacob expresses upon hearing of Joseph's dreams foreshadows the blessing he eventually gives his sons. He gives the blessing but not the birthright to Joseph because he is sensitive to the intrinsic danger of his dream. One may reach for the stars, but one dare not forget one's foundation, the matrix that bore us. Joseph gets the berakha, the material part of the blessing, the freedom to fly jets, to build laboratories and turbo engines and spaceships. Judah is the devoutly religious son whose very name expresses divine praise and who publicly admits transgression with his daughter-in-law Tamar. The Midrash teaches that he established an academy of Torah learning in Goshen prior to Jacob's arrival in Egypt (Gen. 46:28, Rashi ad loc). It is Judah who gets the bekhorah – the spiritual leadership which will eventually inspire the ingathering of the nations to Jerusalem.

But neither Judah nor Joseph can prevail alone. Our tradition speaks of two messiahs, Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David (who emerges from the seed of Judah). Judah guards the traditions of the past, protecting what is holy and good and worth holding on to. Judah is the Torah scholar, the master of Jewish law. Joseph will apply that law to new situations and conditions, confronting technology, philosophy and psychology, to achieve the biblical dream of uniting heaven and earth. These two brothers need each other, for one without the other is incomplete.

A world of only Josephs could lose sight of the old in the adoption of the new, and a world of only Judahs could strap Judaism into a web of irrelevancies. Ultimately it is Judah, and not Joseph, who is the progenitor of the Messiah; Joseph must utilize his skills to provide the necessary universal and scientific infrastructure for Judah's spiritual vision.

Chanuka, which always falls out during these Torah readings, also represents the struggle between two forces: a Hellenistic Jewish mind- set, which found in Greek culture and philosophy the more progressive direction for Judea and which would have transformed Jerusalem into a Greek city-state (polis); and the Hasmoneans, who would rather have given up their lives than give up the traditional Torah's commandments, and were against any change whatsoever. In many ways, this struggle has resurfaced today between modern-day 'secularist' Hellenists who define progress in terms of the norms of a permissive Western society, and Maccabean religionists who are suspicious of every idea which emanates from a source other than the Torah.

The truth lies in a synthesis between the two – in the ability of Josephs and Judahs to work together to take the best of Western culture and incorporate it under the rubric of Torah Judaism. It is the beauty of Japheth (Greece), in the Tent (Torah) of Shem. In Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's words, "the old must be made new, and the new must be sanctified." *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 and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinBereshit.*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Embarrassing Someone

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

Others disagree, explaining that the three cardinal sins are limited to those mentioned explicitly in the Torah. The prohibition to embarrass someone is not explicit. Furthermore, the Meiri explains that the principle of "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person in public" is not meant to be taken literally. It is stated dramatically to ensure that people will take it seriously, making efforts to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

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

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

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Sale of Yosef

Parashat Vayeishev contains the sin of Yosef's brothers in kidnapping him and selling him into Egypt. This single act has been labeled by the Rabbis as the act for which the Jewish people have continually been punished throughout the ages. Sometimes a single action to which we succumb can have a lasting effect on our lives that cannot be totally reversed even with teshuvah gemurah, complete atonement. We see that Hashem continues to hold the brothers responsible for this deed in spite of their atonement when they are rejoined with their brother many years later. The horrible account of the deaths of the asarah harugei malchut, the ten great Rabbis who were tortured and murdered by the hand of the Emperor, is recited each Yom Kippur and is clearly a punishment for the sale of Yosef. Some have even said that every sin which we perform has a portion of the sin of that sale within it.

The immediate effects of that sin are found directly at the end of the story of that sale and the false report of Yosef's surmise presented to Ya'akov. The Torah brings us the sad story of Yehudah and his sons. "And it came to pass at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers and turned away until he came to an Adulamite man whose name was Chira. And Yehudah saw there the daughter of a Canaanite man whose name was Shu'a and he married her and he went into her. And she became pregnant and she gave birth to a son and he called his name Eir. And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son and she called his name Onan. And she gave birth yet again to a son and she called his name Sheilah and he was at K'ziv when she gave birth to him. And Yehudah took a wife for Eir his firstborn and her name was Tamar. And it was that Eir the firstborn of Yehudah was evil in the eyes of Hashem and Hashem killed him. And Yehudah said to Onan, go in unto the wife of your brother and perform a levirate marriage with her and establish a child for your brother. And Onan knew that the child would not be his and it was that whenever he had relations with his brother's wife that he spilled the seed into the ground in order that he not give a child to his brother's wife. And that which he did was evil in the eyes of Hashem and he was killed also."

There are several questions which arise from the words that we see in this passage. The Torah tells us, "at that time", a time when the brothers had reached a low by kidnapping and selling Yosef, and Yehudah had reached an even lower level as their leader. The Rabbis argue over the significance of the word vayeired, and he went down. Some wish to emphasize that this is merely pointing out direction. The land of Israel is considered to be higher, both geographically and spiritually than the lands which surround it. Rashi implies that the word is to be understood in its description of leadership. Yehudah had been at a higher level than his brothers in light of the prophecy that the leadership of the people would arise from Yehudah. The brothers, however, blamed the kidnapping of Yosef on Yehudah, "you said to sell him, had you said to return him we would have listened to you." The Aznayim L'Torah, Harav Zalman Sorotzkin, explains that the brothers not only took away his leadership but they also took away his money and possessions. This triggered his separation from them.

Yehudah married a Canaanite woman and she gave birth to his first son, his b'chor, Eir, and later to his brothers Onan and Sheilah. Our Rabbis ask why Yehudah named his first son Eir which they explain is the reverse of the letters, ayin and resh, which spell out ra or evil. Our Rabbis tell us that Eir married Tamar but sinned by spilling his seed on the ground. Eir did not want Tamar to become pregnant and damage her beauty. Onan did not want to impregnate Tamar because the child would not be considered his but his brother's. Yet this was exactly the command of his father: "…go in unto the wife of your brother and perform a levirate marriage with her and establish a child for your brother." When

Hashem killed Onan also, Yehudah postponed Tamar's levirate marriage to Sheilah out of fear that Sheilah would die.

What exactly was the sin of Eir and Onan and what was its connection to the sale of Yosef? The first mitzvah given to Adam Harishon was "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." The mitzvah to try to have children is an essential part of Man's purpose on earth. HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch defines the moral basis of marriage as the striving to produce a family. Eir wished to postpone or even eliminate that aspect of his marriage which essentially deprived that marriage of its moral purpose. This is what was "evil in the eyes of Hashem". Hirsch explains that yibum, levirate marriage, is a way to make the loss of a husband "good by the marriage of the childless widow to one of the nearest members of that family." This is the essential act of yibum, the marriage of this childless widow for the purpose of continuing the name of the deceased husband. "Although a widow of the deceased, Tamar appears as being still engaged to the remaining members of the family zikah (bound), indeed, to such a degree, that her supposed unfaithfulness (v. 24) is considered to be adulterous." Both Eir and Onan did not think about the halachic aspects of their decisions. They chose their own selfish paths rather than the path of Hashem.

This was essentially the sin of the brothers in their sale of Yosef. When the sons of Leah heard Yosef describe the dreams, they saw these dreams as prophecy. They accepted what they believed these dreams to say that Yosef was to rule over them. Had they dismissed the dreams as total nonsense or the silly thoughts of a foolish, young boy, they would not have been angry and upset. Yet they believed these dreams as prophecy, and that they were foretelling the "plan" of Hashem for the world. Their problem was that although they believed the dreams, this prophecy was not the future that they saw in their own selfish desires. By throwing Yosef into the pit and selling him into Egypt at the suggestion of Yehudah, the brothers were placing their own selfish agenda ahead of the "plan" of Hashem. Though there are other aspects of their sin, the issue here is one of placing themselves above Hashem.

This is the essential sin of the brothers which the Rabbis say is found in every sin since that sale. Every sin that we do (assuming pre-knowledge of the law) carries this same unwillingness to subject our desires to the plans of Hashem. May we learn from their mistake and examine our own desires in order to bring them closer to the wishes of Hashem.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Israel loved Yosef from all his sons, for he was the child of his age, and he made him a coat of fine wool." (Beraishis 37:3) Having grown up in a home where Esav was his father's favorite, one would imagine that Yaakov would be careful to treat his sons equally, and avoid favoritism. And yet, the Torah tells us he made no secret of his affinity for Yosef, to the point where his favor was known to all when he gave Yosef a special garment he didn't give the others.

This led to jealousy and hurt feelings among the brothers, and they were unable to speak peaceably to Yosef. The fact that he seemed to tattle on them to their father, finding any excuse to condemn them, didn't help, and they grew to hate their brother. This led to their selling him into slavery, the entire exile in Egypt with its harsh slavery and torture, and years later, the killing of ten sages by Roman officials as a "penance" for their act.

With all this on the line, how, indeed, could Yaakov have loved Yosef more than the others, and shown him overt favoritism? Why was he not concerned with creating jealousy?

The answer might surprise you, but it is also a great lesson for us to learn for life. When the Torah says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all his brothers (combined, according to some commentaries), it is not in the way we imagine. R' Dessler famously explains the word ahava, love, to have the root of 'hav,' which is Aramaic for give. He says that when we give to others, and truly invest in them, we grow to love them more. That's why a groom gives gifts to his bride, so that his love for her grows.

When the Torah tells us that Yaakov "loved" Yosef more than his brothers, or for that matter, that Yitzchak "loved" Esav while Rivka "loved" Yaakov, what it really refers to is the amount of effort they invested in the child, based on the potential they each saw in him. Yitzchak saw Esav's raw power, and wanted to harness it for good. Rivka felt she could not do anything with that, but she saw promise in Yaakov's delicate nature and dedication to Torah. That is where she focused her efforts, and the "love" in the form of investing in his growth as R' Dessler expresses.

Yaakov saw the tremendous potential in Yosef, both in his ability to lead a nation and to refrain from sin, and sought to capitalize on it. He gave Yosef what he needed to maximize and bring his potential to reality. He did the same for each of his sons, but because they needed less attention or effort than Yosef, he gave them less. They perceived this as a lack of love and caring on Yaakov's part.

Hashem, too, gives us each what we need to maximize our potential. We all have different skills, abilities, challenges, and circumstances. We can't look at someone and feel Hashem is favoring them over us, for He gives every person the ingredients for their own success in fulfilling their mission on earth; because He loves us all so much.

R' Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l, the great Rosh Yeshiva and sage, was on his way to deliver a lecture in Yeshiva when he was stopped by a beggar asking for

alms. R' Isser Zalman gave him a generous amount but the fellow complained that it wasn't enough.

The rabbi gave him more, but the man still had the audacity to ask for more. Once again, R' Isser Zalman gave him another coin. The student walking with R' Isser Zalman was aghast at how the beggar treated the great man, and stunned at the sage's response.

"Why are you shocked?" asked R' Isser Zalman. "Do you think I'm better than him because I've learned a lot of Torah and I give shiurim? The circumstances of life have led me to be a Rosh Yeshiva and him to be a beggar. I do not feel superior to him, so I felt obligated to grant his request, regardless of how he made it."

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In one of my classes last week we discussed the importance of incorporating Jewish practices into everyday life. A student asked, "Rabbi, which of the mitzvot (commandments) do you see as being most important?"

After prefacing my answer with the concept that all mitzvot are important and in many ways have equal weight, I explained that observant Jews are generally considered to be those who observe Shabbat, the laws of kosher, and the laws of "family purity." Personally, I would add to this mix a commitment to daily prayers.

The reasons these mitzvot were the ones I chose to share with my class can be explained by the laws of nature.

The second law of thermodynamics deals with the concept of entropy and states that the total entropy of an isolated system never decreases. Entropy, in simple terms, is the natural process of everything in the universe tending to become disordered.

Some examples of this would be ice melting (water is easily subdivided into "micro states," ice is not), putting cream into coffee (the mixture has infinitely more "micro states" than coffee or cream individually), and, of course, your child's bedroom constantly devolving into "micro states" – otherwise known as chaotically messy.

The natural process of the universe moves everything toward states of higher entropy. Systems do not spontaneously become more ordered without external energy – your child's room does not spontaneously become orderly without an exertion of effort.

In the body this is accomplished through metabolism – taking in nutrients (by breaking down foods) to provide energy to repair natural devolvement in cells, and eliminate toxins and waste from the body, etc. As we age this process continually degrades and results in the ultimate expression of entropy – death.

Because systems do not spontaneously become more ordered without external energy, everything tends to continually devolve. In other words, if we aren't moving forward then we are being pushed backward. If we don't exert energy to maintain our health it naturally deteriorates; the same is true of our relationships, our finances, and every other aspect of our lives.

Maintaining a superstructure guards against the natural process of entropy and prevents our lives from becoming disordered. This concept, I believe, is the secret to the survival of the Jewish people.

The Torah, which the Almighty gifted to the Jewish nation, is the ultimate superstructure. Almost every element of Jewish life is highly organized and structured: our daily prayers, what we eat, key elements of our marriages, etc.

Why is it that the Jewish population since 1960 has only increased by 19% while the rest of the world's population has increased by 160%? Because Jews, en masse, have abandoned this superstructure. When critical elements of the structural construct of the Jewish people are discarded or even slightly altered it leads to assimilation, disconnection, and eventual dissolution. It doesn't take many threads to be pulled from a beautiful tapestry for it to totally unravel.

This message is highly relevant to secular, modern society as well. From the insane ignorance of basic science by debating how many genders there are, to pushing for normalization of every element of society's ever-increasing confusion and depravity, the very foundations of a healthy society are slowly but surely being eroded. Not every misguided (and often twisted) opinion should be taken into account: Just because I choose to believe that I am doing something for the right reasons doesn't make it so, and it certainly does not justify the act.

We find this very message exemplified in several places in this week's Torah portion.

Some forty years ago I heard Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, one of the pre-eminent sages of the late 20th century (and a renowned expert on Jewish philosophy), make a curious statement. He said that the ultimate proof of the Divine authorship of the Torah is that it includes episodes of such horrific lapses in moral judgement by our revered ancestors that it seems the Torah could only have been authored by a rabid antisemite.

The word history has been termed "his-story." Meaning, histories are written by the victors, and their slant always leans heavily toward their "impressive actions," while completely ignoring and omitting any negative details, wrongdoings, or unimpressive elements. This is not so in the Torah; it faithfully includes all the failings of our ancestors and leadership class – it recounts the stories in their entirety, warts and all. This week's Torah portion contains at least three such occurrences.

We find Jacob's sons being jealous of their brother Joseph and hating him for the preferential treatment he received from their father. They plan to kill him, but decide to "just" sell him instead. Even though,

as the sages explain, they convened a court and convicted Joseph of being a danger to them all, they themselves admit that they behaved improperly (see Genesis 42:21-22). According to the Midrash, ten great sages in Israel were later murdered by the Romans due to their actions.

The brothers then orchestrated a ruse to fool their father into thinking that Joseph had been mauled and killed by a wild animal. They dipped the special multicolored coat that Jacob had given Joseph in goat's blood and presented it to him. Jacob recognized the bloody coat: "And he recognized it and said, it is my son's coat; an evil beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn in pieces" (37:32-33). Jacob was devastated by the loss of his favored son and went into mourning.

Later, when the brothers were faced with their father's grief, they turned on Judah whose idea it was to sell Joseph in the first place. They blamed his leadership for the pain caused to their father and they basically ousted him from the brotherhood. Judah left his ancestral home, married, and had children. After some time, his wife died and on his next business trip he found comfort in the arms of a prostitute (whom he impregnated and whose children become the forebears of the Davidic royal dynasty). For space considerations I have left out many of the details and the full context of what took place, but the facts are what they are.

Meanwhile, as slave in Egypt Joseph is propositioned by his master's – Potiphar's – wife. While he consistently turns down her advances, she is relentless and eventually resorts to force. According to the sages, this is what Jacob alluded to when he said, "an evil beast has devoured him." The issue is that the sages classify her as "acting for the sake of heaven" (see Rashi 39:1) – meaning she actually thought she was doing the right thing! How can it be that she thought she was doing the right thing and yet the Torah characterizes her as "a wild animal"?!

The answer is that we can delude ourselves and try to justify actions that are totally immoral, and then act as if they are the right thing to do. Sadly, we see examples of this all the time. But the key is to admit that what we did was wrong and ultimately take responsibility for our mistakes. In fact, in this week's portion both the brothers and Judah take responsibility for their wrongdoings.

Potiphar's wife was trying to do something "for the sake of heaven" (a misguided attempt to fulfill a prophecy), but she neglected to ask the most important question; is this what God really wants? Am I supposed to act in an adulterous manner and force Joseph into something that he feels is wrong? If she had honestly asked herself those questions she would have known that while her intentions were good, the act was absolutely wrong and abusive. She is therefore likened to a "wild animal."

Analogous to this are the movements that decided to "improve" and "modernize" traditional Judaism. When they decided to bring "innovation" to synagogues and abrogate certain Shabbat observances their intentions were, undoubtedly, "for the sake of heaven." Clearly, they felt that these "improvements" would enhance the synagogue experience and attendance. After all, if they simply wanted music then they could go to a concert, and if they wanted to just be with their families then they could have stayed home. Their "innovations" were implemented because they really thought they were improving the synagogue experience by adding instruments, microphones, and mixed seating.

But they forgot the critical question; is this really what Judaism is supposed to be? More importantly, what will happen if we dismantle the superstructure put in place by God in the Torah?

Unfortunately, the result has become clear; you fall victim to the universal law of entropy. This lack of properly forecasting what may come if we dismantle the binding structure of Judaism has led to the disappearance of many Jewish communities and to the assimilation of many millions of Jews. It is the very definition of entropy and a roadmap of how we got to where we are.

The only answer to the challenges of what the future of the Jewish people holds lies in resisting the forces of entropy by adding to our lives, bit-by-bit, the daily observances and laws found in the Torah. It is this expenditure of energy that will fulfill the second law of thermodynamics and allow for the continual survival – and thriving – of the Jewish nation. Each of us can participate – and you already are by currently reading this weekly bit of Torah! I encourage you to share with your friends and family and work with me to build a stronger Jewish nation. New subscribers can sign up at: www.shabbatshalom.org/subscribe.