

Likutei Divrei Torah

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Shabbat Parashat Vayigash

5782 B"H

Covenant and Conversation Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Future of the Past

In our parsha, Joseph does something unusual. Revealing himself to his brothers, fully aware that they will suffer shock and then guilt as they remember how it is that their brother is in Egypt, he reinterprets the past: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." (Gen. 45:4-8)

This is markedly different to the way Joseph described these events when he spoke to the chief butler in prison: "I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to

deserve being put in a dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). Then, it was a story of kidnap and injustice.

Now, it has become a story of Divine providence and redemption. It wasn't you, he tells his brothers, it was God. You didn't realise that you were part of a larger plan. And though it began badly, it has ended well. So don't hold yourselves guilty. And do not be afraid of any desire for revenge on my part. There is no such desire. I realise that we were all being directed by a force greater than ourselves, greater than we can fully understand.

Joseph does the same in next week's parsha, when the brothers fear that he may take revenge after their father's death: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen. 50:19-20)

Joseph is helping his brothers to revise their memory of the past. In doing so, he is challenging one of our most fundamental assumptions about time, namely its asymmetry. We can change the future. We cannot change the

past. But is that entirely true? What Joseph is doing for his brothers is what he has clearly done for himself: events have changed his and their understanding of the past.

Which means: we cannot fully understand what is happening to us now until we can look back in retrospect and see how it all turned out. This means that we are not held captive by the past. Things can happen to us, not as dramatically as to Joseph perhaps, but nonetheless benign, that can completely alter the way we look back and remember. By action in the future, we can redeem the past.

A classic example of this is the late Steve Jobs' 2005 commencement address at Stanford University, that has now been seen by more than 40 million people on YouTube. In it, he described three crushing blows in his life: dropping out of college, being fired by the company he had founded – Apple, and being diagnosed with cancer. Each one, he said, had led to something important and positive.

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Dropping out of college, Jobs was able to audit any course he wished. He attended one on calligraphy and this inspired him to build into his first computers a range of proportionally spaced fonts, thus giving computer scripts an elegance that had previously been available only to professional printers. Getting fired from Apple led him to start a new computer company, NeXT, that developed capabilities he would eventually bring back to Apple, as well as acquiring Pixar Animation, the most creative of computer-animated film studios. The diagnosis of cancer led him to a new focus in life. It made him realise: “Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.”

Jobs’ ability to construct these stories – what he called “connecting the dots” – was surely not unrelated to his ability to survive the blows he suffered in life.[1] Few could have recovered from the setback of being dismissed from his own company, and fewer still could have achieved the transformation he did at Apple when he returned, creating the iPod, iPhone and iPad. He did not believe in tragic inevitabilities. Though he would not have put it in these terms, he

knew that by action in the future we can redeem the past.

Professor Mordechai Rotenberg of the Hebrew University has argued that this kind of technique, of reinterpreting the past, could be used as a therapeutic technique in rehabilitating patients suffering from a crippling sense of guilt. [2] If we cannot change the past, then it is always there holding us back like a ball and chain around our legs. We cannot change the past, but we can reinterpret it by integrating it into a new and larger narrative. That is what Joseph was doing, and having used this technique to help him survive a personal life of unparalleled ups and downs, he now uses it to help his brothers live without overpowering guilt.

We find this in Judaism throughout its history. The Prophets reinterpreted biblical narrative for their day. Then came Midrash, which reinterpreted it more radically because the situation of Jews had changed more radically. Then came the great biblical commentators and mystics and philosophers. There has hardly been a generation in all of Jewish history when Jews did not reinterpret their texts in the light of the present tense experience. We are the people who tell stories, and then retell

Likutei Divrei Torah

them repeatedly, each time with a slightly different emphasis, establishing a connection between then and now, rereading the past in the light of the present as best we can.

It is by telling stories that we make sense of our lives and the life of our people. And it is by allowing the present to reshape our understanding of the past that we redeem history and make it live as a positive force in our lives.

I gave one example when I spoke at the Kinus Shluchim of Chabad, the great gathering of some 5000 Chabad emissaries from around the world. I told them of how, in 1978, I visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask his advice on which career I should follow. I did the usual thing: I sent him a note with the options, A, B or C, expecting him to indicate which one I should follow. The options were to become a barrister, or an economist, or an academic philosopher, either as a fellow of my college in Cambridge or as a professor somewhere else.

The Rebbe read out the list and said “No” to all three. My mission, he said, was to train Rabbis at Jews’ College (now the London School of Jewish Studies) and to become a congregational Rabbi myself. So, overnight, I found myself

saying goodbye to all my aspirations, to everything for which I had been trained.

The strange thing is that ultimately I fulfilled all those ambitions despite walking in the opposite direction. I became an honorary barrister (Bencher) of the Inner Temple and delivered a law lecture in front of 600 barristers and the Lord Chief Justice. I delivered Britain's two leading economics lectures, the Mais Lecture and the Hayek Lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs. I became a fellow of my Cambridge college and a philosophy professor at several universities. I identified with the biblical Joseph because, so often, what I had dreamed of came to be at the very moment that I had given up hope. Only in retrospect did I discover that the Rebbe was not telling me to give up my career plans. He was simply charting a different route and a more beneficial one.

I believe that the way we write the next chapter in our lives affects all the others that have come before. By action in the future, we can redeem much of the pain of the past.

[1] However, he did delay surgery for his cancer, believing that he could achieve an alternative cure. In this, he was mistaken.

[2] Mordechai Rotenberg, *Re-biographing and Deviance*, Praeger, 1987.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“And Joseph went up to greet Israel his father; he fell on his neck and he wept on his neck exceedingly” (Gen. 46:29) In these few words, our Torah describes a dramatic meeting between an aged father and his beloved son who had been separated for twenty-two years. Indeed, the father, who had given the coat of many colors to this favored son as a sign that he would bear the mantle of the Abrahamic legacy, had been led to believe that his beloved Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast, in consequence of which he had been engulfed by inconsolable mourning for more than two decades. The son, who had basked in the glory of paternal favoritism, had been consumed with the agonizing possibility that his father had been so angered by his dreams that he had sent him on a suicide mission “to seek after the welfare of his brothers....”

And so they stand together now, father and son, each still with unanswered questions, but nevertheless each with unfathomable joy at their reunion.

Likutei Divrei Torah

But which one of the two wept on the other's neck? Our most classical commentary, Rashi, maintains that it was Joseph who wept on his father Jacob's neck but Jacob did not fall on Joseph's neck. Our Sages say that Jacob was reciting the Shema prayer at that time. The Shema? Was it then early in the morning or late evening that, specifically at that emotionally poignant moment, father Jacob had to recite the Shema? Moreover, Ramban (Nahmanides) maintains that if indeed only one of them was weeping, logic dictates that it most likely was the aged Jacob who wept, rather than the much younger and more calculating Joseph.

And if indeed Ramban is correct and not Rashi, then it was Joseph who was reciting the Shema, while father Jacob was weeping. But this interpretation still begs the question, why the Shema at this particular moment? Let us return to Joseph's initial dreams (Gen. 37:5-11), which ignited jealous hatred unto death against the “dreamer.” How can we justify the sons of Jacob, progenitors of the tribal children of Israel, being overwhelmed with such base emotions? First he dreams that he and his brothers are binding sheaves of grain, and that the brothers' sheaves are all bowing down to his sheaves.

What upsets the brothers is not merely Joseph's vision of his economic and political superiority over them; it is rather Joseph's hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt in all of Egypt's cultural ramifications. Remember that the Abrahamic traditional profession was shepherding, a nurturing pursuit which left much time for spiritual meditation and which was especially conducive to Israel's climatic condition and terrain. Egypt, "the gift of the Nile," specialized in back-breaking agriculture and the slave labor and dissolute lifestyle of the overlords which went with it.

Joseph then dreamt of the sun, the moon and the stars bowing down to him. From the brothers' perspective, this was nothing short of megalomania.

How different were those dreams from that of grandfather Jacob's dream of uniting heaven and earth with God at the center stage (not Joseph), promising to bring Jacob home to Israel (not to Egypt). They felt that they had to prevent this recipient of the coat of many colors from ever receiving the firstborn's legacy. He was a "turncoat" to the Abrahamic tradition.

The Bible, however, concludes Joseph's dream sequence with "his brothers were jealous of

him, but Jacob observed the matter and anxiously anticipated its coming to pass." Jacob as well as Joseph understood that Abraham's mandate was a universal one, to spread "compassionate righteousness and moral justice to all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3, 18:18-19), allegorically speaking to the sun, the moon and the stars.

To be sure, Joseph was still an arrogant youth, who identified the Abrahamic legacy with his own eventual leadership; when a more mature Joseph stands before Pharaoh, ready to interpret his dreams, he declares, "This has nothing to do with me; God will answer in accordance with the welfare of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:16).

And at the end of his life, with his very last breath, Joseph makes his brothers take an oath that when the Hebrews leave Egypt, they will take Joseph's remains to be buried in Israel. Egypt is merely a way-station on the road to world redemption; the great powers must learn the importance of vanquishing terror and depravity if divine peace and morality are to reign supreme.

Ultimately, all the nations will come to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to learn the word of God from Zion; but along the

Likutei Divrei Torah

way, unless there is an America to act as the world's policeman on behalf of democracy and freedom, the dark forces of suicide bombers will control the global village.

Hence, when Joseph meets his father—who twenty-two years before seemed to have been vexed at him for the arrogance of his dreams—he responds to his father's tears with the fundamental purpose of Jewish being; "Hear, Israel my father, the God who is now our God, the God of love and peace who is now accepted by the family of Israel, will one day be the one God of the entire universe." In effect, his recitation of the Shma is telling his father that Egypt was a necessary way-station in bringing our God of redemption to the world.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Forgiveness: A Jewish Value

This has got to be one of the oldest "rabbi" jokes in the entire repertoire of American Jewish humor.

It tells us of the young rabbi, fresh from rabbinical school, who addresses his first several sermons to his new congregation on the varied subjects of meticulous Sabbath observance, refraining from malicious gossip, honesty in business, and the avoidance of

inappropriately familiar behavior with other men's wives.

After these first several homiletic salvos, the president of the congregation approaches him with the suggestion that these topics are much too sensitive and have upset many of the synagogue's members. The president urges the rookie rabbi to try to find some more acceptable topics to speak about.

The rabbi objects, and asks, "But what, then, do you suggest that I speak about in my sermons?"

To which the president replies, "Judaism! Why not just talk about Judaism?"

Those of us with experience in the pulpit rabbinate typically do not find this story very funny. Each of us has, on more than one occasion, taken on causes in our sermons that our audiences have felt were not in our rabbinic purview, and indeed were somehow "not Jewish".

One of my favorite examples of this phenomenon in my own career has been my attempts, in sermons to the entire congregation, and in more intimate counseling sessions, to encourage forgiveness. I will never forget the first time I

made "forgiveness" the theme of one of my sermons, only to be accused by one of the more prominent members of my congregation of preaching Christianity. I urged people to forgive those who have offended them, only to find that, for many Jews, forgiveness is a Christian, not a Jewish, virtue.

Of course, this is not true. Forgiveness is a major teaching of our own faith. We are encouraged to forgive others who may have sinned against us, and we must seek forgiveness of those against whom we have sinned.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayigash, we have an outstanding biblical example of forgiveness. Joseph, after putting his brothers through tests and trials, finally cannot contain himself. He exclaims, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt." And immediately after identifying himself, he unequivocally forgives them: "Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither... it was not you who sent me here, but God..."

It is true that the brothers were "blown away" by this unanticipated revelation of the true identity of their tormentor, and even more astounded by

Likutei Divrei Torah

this assertion of total forgiveness. But this is not the first example of human forgiveness that we find in the Bible. Joseph may have learned about this value from his great-grandfather Abraham's precedent. Abraham, back in Genesis 20:17, not only forgives his adversary, Avimelech, but offers prayers on his behalf.

What, then, can be the basis for the misconception that forgiveness is a Christian virtue and is not preached by Judaism? I think that the answer can be found in a precious book called *The Sunflower*, by Simon Wiesenthal.

Wiesenthal relates his personal experience of when he was brought to the bedside of a dying Nazi officer by the officer's own mother, who pleaded with him to forgive her son for killing Jews. Wiesenthal had been an eyewitness to this officer's murderous brutality. He found himself confronted with a moral dilemma. Could he deny a mother's tearful entreaties? On the other hand, could he possibly forgive such unspeakable cruelty? And could he forgive on behalf of the victims, of others?

I will leave it for you, dear reader, to discover for yourself what Simon Wiesenthal actually did. [*Compiler's Note: He left*

without saying a word. SG] But long after the event, he submitted this excruciating dilemma to several dozen philosophers, writers, and political leaders, asking them what they would do. Some of his respondents were Christians, some were Jews, and I believe one was a Buddhist.

The results were astounding. By and large, the non-Jews were able to find justification for forgiveness. On the other hand, most of the Jews could not express forgiveness for this soldier's heinous crimes, convinced that certain crimes were not subject to forgiveness.

For me, the lesson here is one that Judaism teaches well. Forgiveness must be earned, it must be deserved, it must be requested, and above all, it can only be granted by the person who was offended. I cannot forgive you for a sin you've committed against my brother.

In a sense, Joseph goes beyond the call of duty in expressing forgiveness to his brothers. They did not even know who he was, let alone beg forgiveness from him. But he knew from close observation of their concern for each other that they had long transcended their previous petty jealousies and rivalries. He was convinced that forgiveness was in order.

Joseph is an exemplar of how important it is for each of us to forgive those who have offended us. Forgiveness is a practice for all year long, and not just for the season of Yom Kippur. After all, it is not just on that one sacred day that each of us stands in need of the Almighty's forgiveness. His forgiveness is something we need at every moment of our lives.

The prophet Micah (7:18) says: "Who is God like You, tolerating iniquity and forgiving transgression..."

Upon which the Talmud comments (Rosh Hashanah 17a): "Whose iniquities does God tolerate? He who forgives the transgressions of another."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Analysis of the Opening Pesukim of Vayigash

At the end of last week's parsha (Miketz), Binyomin is "caught red handed with stolen goods."

Of course, it was a ruse, but the brothers did not realize this at the time. The pasuk says, "And Yehudah said, 'What can we say to my master? How can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? G-d has found the sin of your servants. Here we are: We are ready to be slaves to my master – both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was

Likutei Divrei Torah

found." [Bereshis 44:16]. Yosef responds: "It would be unseemly for me to do this; the man in whose possession the goblet was found, he shall be my slave, and as for you – go up in peace to your father" [Bereshis 44:17].

This statement of Yehudah, "What can we say? How can we speak? How can we justify ourselves?" is an act of great contrition on his part. "We are your slaves. You caught us red-handed!" He could not have been more contrite. That is the end of Parshas Miketz. Then, at the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Yehudah suddenly seems to be a different person. "...May your anger not flare up at your servant..." [Bereshis 44:18]. Rashi says: "From here we see that Yehudah spoke harshly to Yosef." Two pesukim ago, this same Yehudah expressed such contrition. Now he changes his tune and is letting Yosef have it! What happened to cause this metamorphosis?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains what happened. Until now, the brothers felt that all of this was happening to them as a result of Divine punishment. The Almighty was paying them back for the way they treated Yosef. "Aval asheimim anachnu" ("indeed we are guilty!") [Bereshis 42:21]. They

sensed that this was all a case of “From the L-rd this has happened” (may’ais Hashem hayesa zos) [Tehillim 118:23]. Now suddenly Yosef says “No. You can go free. It is the youngest brother, Binyomin, who will be my prisoner.” As a result, their previous explanation of the events they were experiencing had to be rethought.

Yehudah said, “Wait a minute! This is not from the Ribono shel Olam. This could not be a punishment for what we did, because Binyomin was not involved in that incident at all. So why is this happening? It must be happening strictly because of the perverseness of this Egyptian ruler. I am going to give him a piece of my mind!” This is the great change that happened.

The Vilna Gaon shares a very interesting insight on the pasuk “Vayigash eilav Yehudah...” [Bereshis 44:18] Rashi explains regarding the words “Ki avdecha arav es hana’ar” [Bereshis 44:32] that Yehuda promised his father “If I do not bring Binyamin back to you, I am going to be excommunicated both in this world and in the world to come.”

Yehudah stood to lose the most over here. The Gaon comments: The trop (cantillation notes) for

the expression “Vayigash elav Yehudah va’yomer bi Adonee...” is as follows: Vayigash elav has the cantillation notes Kadma v’azla. Yehudah has the note reviyee. Va’Yomer bi Adonee has the notes zarka munach segol.

The Gaon interprets the trop as providing a hidden message: Vayigash elav – Kadma v’azla, meaning “Yehudah came forth.” Yehudah says – You might ask why I am acting as the spokesperson for the family – after all I am only the fourth son (reviyee). The reason the fourth son (reviyee) is coming forth (kadma v’azla) is that zarka munach segol – meaning I will be thrown away (zarka) from resting (being munach) in the World-to-Come among the Am Segulah (the Chosen People). Therefore, it is my life that is on the line – both here and in Olam HaBah. That is why I put protocol aside and came forward to speak, even though I am only the fourth son.

Do Not Waste the Precious Years of Youth

As part of Yehudah’s plea to the Egyptian ruler (who he did not yet know was his brother Yosef) Yehudah said, “For how will I be able to go back to my father if the youth is not with me.” [Bereshis 44:34]. To appreciate the thought that I am about to express, it may be necessary to

Likutei Divrei Torah

have a bit of an inclination for Chassidishhe Torah. Also, please remember that Chazal say “one does not ask questions on Drush.” This may not be the true interpretation of this pasuk, but the message it delivers is certainly true.

One day, each of us will go up to the Yeshiva on High after we leave this world. The above cited pasuk can be read; “How am I going to go to my Father (in Heaven) when the na’ar is not with me.” — Meaning, if I wasted my youth, the easiest years of my life, on matters of nonsense – how will I be able to answer for myself before the Master of the Universe in that Final Judgement?

If there is one message my students at Ner Yisroel have heard from me over and over again throughout my entire teaching career it is: Do not waste these precious years. They are not repeatable. This is not to say, of course, that life ends at age 22 or 23. However, the care-free life that a typical yeshiva bochur lives today—from the age of say 18 until he gets married—is blissful. Baruch Hashem, most bochrin have parents. Their tuition is paid. Their cell phone bills are paid. Their car insurance is paid. Their health insurance is paid. They typically do not have to worry about earning a living or

about chronic illness. These are the carefree years.

“How will I be able to ascend to my Father and the (years of my) youth will not be with me?”

I know that the demographic of the crowd I am speaking to tonight is well past the years of na'arus. But as I always say: The job of raising your children never stops, and the job of raising your grandchildren never stops. If there is one message that we should impart to our children and grandchildren and, IY”H, our great-grandchildren, it is: Do not waste these years. They are not going to repeat themselves!

The Kotzker Rebbe cited a pasuk from Tehillim: “Like the arrow in the hand of the mighty archer, such is youth” [Tehillim 127:4]. The Rebbe taught: When an archer pulls back his bow and is about to shoot his arrow, he still is in control of what is going to happen with that arrow. He can shoot it up, he can shoot it down, he can shoot it right, or he can shoot it left. Once the arrow leaves the bow, it is on its own. He cannot take it back. He cannot guide it. It is not like a ‘smart bomb’ that can be redirected mid-course. The Rebbe said, “So too it is with youth.” When a person is young, he is in control. He does not have illness, he does not have

all the worries that come with older age, and that frustrate his ability to accomplish what he wants to accomplish with the talents and strengths the Almighty has granted him.

There is a famous quip – Youth is wasted on the young. When a person reaches a certain stage in life, that youth-like freedom is there no more. I knew an older Jew who was in a retirement home. He used to get up in the morning and his fellow residents would ask him “What hurts today?” A person loses all kinds of powers and capabilities that he one once had when he reaches old age. Ah, for the days of youth – bnei ha’neurim!

This is a message that we need to impart to our children, and even if our children are grown, we need to impart it to their children. “You must not waste the precious years of youth.”

Sensitive News Must Be Delivered with Sensitivity

“They told him that Yosef was still alive and that he ruled the entire land of Egypt...” [Bereshis 45:26] The Sefer HaYashar says that the brothers were afraid that if they would suddenly break the news to Yaakov that his beloved and presumed-dead son Yosef was still alive, he would die on the spot. The news would be too

Likutei Divrei Torah

shocking. An older person can die from sudden shock.

So, what did they do? Serach, daughter of Asher, knew how to play violin. She played her violin and kept on singing “Od Yosef Chai; Od Yosef Chai.” Yaakov Avinu thus already had put into his consciousness these words stating that Yosef was still alive.

Consequently, when the brothers came in and they said “Od Yosef Chai!” it was not the same shock as it would have otherwise been. Yaakov had been inoculated, so to speak, to the concept that Yosef was still alive.

This is all well and good. But what is the lesson we learn from this Medrash? Rav Pam writes in his sefer that the lesson we learn is how sensitive we need to be about how we say certain things. We need to anticipate how our words will be taken by the intended recipient. Sometimes news needs to be broken softly. In all cases, we must speak sensitive words with sensitivity!

Rav Pam writes that Rav Yaakov Bender (Rosh Yeshiva of Darkei Torah in the Five Towns) has two rules whenever he calls a parent on the phone. The first thing he says is, “Hello. This is Rabbi Yaakov

Bender. Your child is fine.” Why? Because whenever a parent gets a call from the principal the parent braces himself: “Okay. What did my kid do now? What did he break? What happened to him?” Therefore, the first thing out of the principal’s mouth is “Your child is fine” thus relieving the parent.

The second policy Rabbi Bender has is that whatever a child has done, he never suspends a child on Erev Shabbos. That is all that is needed to ruin a Shabbos. The kid gets thrown out of school; the kid is suspended; the kid flunked.... The kid will sit there at the Shabbos table with this just having happened to him. It will put a pall over the entire Shabbos for the whole family.

Maybe the child will be suspended... but that can always wait until Sunday morning. On Friday afternoon, he does not suspend students. That is a lesson learned from the Medrash about Serach bas Asher. “Od Yosef Chai.” We must always break news gently, softly, — even good news. This is the sensitivity we must have when dealing with people.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Is Judaism more a nation-culture or religion?

The opening three words in our Parsha could simply be understood as a confrontation of two brothers, where one brother does not even know he is related to the other (the viceroy of Egypt): *Vayigash Eilav Yehuda-Judah approach him (Joseph)*". On a deeper level, the Rabbis explain that this introduces the philosophical question about the essence of Judaism, which is still debated today by Jews. For most secular Jews in Israel, Judaism is predominantly a culture, with its own language, history, customs, etc. To most observant Jews in Brooklyn, Judaism is predominantly a religion. Yosef, as we will see, represents Judaism as a culture, while Judah represents Judaism as a religion. This essay will attempt to understand the implications of this essential difference in the way people view Judaism, which is more important, and attempt to discover the true basis of Judaism, according to the traditional understanding through the sources.

As noted above, these two concepts have always vied with each other from the very beginning. The battle for leadership among the Jewish people began in our Parsha

Likutei Divrei Torah

between Joseph and Judah, each of whom had different visions of what Judaism should be. Joseph was the economic provider of food and other physical needs (Genesis 47:12), the ruler of Egypt who represented nationhood, government, and the economy. He believed in a Judaism that was dominated by the physical needs of the people, the cultural and historic components. Judah, on the other hand, was the man sent by Jacob to establish the House of Study in Egypt (Genesis 46:28 with Rashi commentary), representing the spiritual side of Judaism. And this battle continued throughout history through the descendants of these two leaders. Joseph was given the city of Shechem as an inheritance (Genesis 48:22), and it was the descendants of Joseph who broke away from Jerusalem to form the monarchy of Israel, and they stressed the nationalistic aspects of Judaism. Where did Jeroboam establish his capital? It was in the city of Shechem, the place of his ancestor Joseph (I Kings 12:25). The descendants of Judah continued to rule from Jerusalem, thus continuing the split between these two factions and two different philosophies of what Judaism should be. And this division and argument did not stop then. Even in the future, this split will continue, as there will be the first Messiah, the

10

descendant of Joseph, before the Messiah, descendant of Judah will emerge and bring the final redemption (Sukkah 52a, b).

Both Components Have Always Been Present in Judaism

These two elements have always been both intrinsic and necessary to Judaism, although this concept is often misunderstood by non-Jews and even Jews. For many years, other faiths and other peoples have used the phrase pronounced by God – “Let me people go” – when speaking about national aspirations. But the people uttering these words who yearned for peoplehood always forgot to look up the original text in the Torah. The words “Let me people go” in the Torah are always followed by the words “so that they can serve Me” (Exodus 7:16, 7:26, 9:1, 9:13) Therefore, God is clearly saying that nationalism is indeed important in Judaism, if it is followed by service to God, the core religious component of Judaism. Similarly, when God chose the Jewish people to be “His” people right before the Torah was given, he clearly defined what Judaism must become: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Normally, priests are associated exclusively with the religious realm, and a kingdom is part of

the political or nationalistic realm. Yet here, God says that Judaism must combine the political concept of kingdom with the spiritual concept of priests. The very next phrase in the verse projects the same idea. Holiness usually is left to the realm of the religious, while nationhood is usually left to the physical, non-holy aspects of life. Yet God said that Judaism must combine the two and become a holy nation. When Ruth, the ultimate convert to Judaism and great-grandmother of King David, described the essence Judaism, she uttered just four Hebrew words: “*Ameich Ami Vailokayich Elokai*,” your nation is my nation, and your God is my God (Ruth 1:16). This encapsulates the essence of Judaism, and one aspect without the other is not truly Jewish.

Clearly, both components exist within Judaism – both the religious aspects and national aspects. Logically, we might explain Pesach as the holiday where the Jewish people became free politically as a people, the symbol of national or peoplehood aspect of Judaism. The holiday of Shavuot, on the other hand, occurred when the Jewish people receive the Torah, and symbolizes the religious or spiritual aspect of Judaism. But further investigation shows that these symbols are not so clear

Likutei Divrei Torah

cut. In fact, both the national and religious components exist within each of these holidays.

It is true that on the surface it indeed seems that Pesach is the ideal holiday to represent the nationalistic aspiration of Judaism. The Jews were freed from bondage and became a people politically, culturally, and historically. They experienced independence for the first time in defying the Egyptians by taking the Paschal lamb. They walked out of Egypt on their own terms. And yet, Pesach also symbolized the religious aspect of Judaism. It was God’s specific religious commandments that the Jews observed in taking the Paschal sacrifice. And it was God who destroyed the Egyptian first-born sons, which allowed the Jews to achieve that freedom. But even from the very beginning, freedom from Egyptian bondage was not only about nationalistic aspirations. In his initial meeting with Moses, God explains the purpose of achieving freedom from Egypt: to serve God on this mountain, Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:12). Therefore, the nationalistic freedom achieved on Passover was always directed toward devotion to God and the religious aspect of Judaism. Similarly, on Shavuot, which should symbolize the unique religious aspect of Judaism

11

through the giving of the Torah, God tells the Jewish people right before He pronounced the Ten Commandments: you, the Jewish people, will be My nation among all nations (Exodus 19:5). Thus, at the moment of highest spirituality, when Judaism became a religion, God speaks about the unique nationhood of the Jewish people. In fact, the two holidays are intertwined in the words of Ezekiel. When he refers to Passover, he calls it the holiday of Shavuot. Rashi explains that since the countdown to Shavuot begins on Pesach (with the counting of the Omer), Ezekiel depicts Passover as the beginning of the holiday of Shavuot (Ezekiel 45:21 with Rashi commentary).

In trying to discover the dominant component of Judaism, we shall see that both peoplehood and religion are equally necessary, and that Judaism itself cannot exist with only one and not the other. There are certain subtle aspects of Pesach and, more specifically, the Passover Seder, which demonstrate that both the religious and national aspects of Judaism are crucial, and both are needed to form what we today call Judaism. Ultimately, Judaism must be an amalgam of both nationhood and religion.

When trying to formulate the Hagaddah that is read on Passover night, the Rabbis debated the structure and content. In order for each Jew to “experience” both slavery and freedom and see himself as if he personally went out of Egypt, which is one of the requirements of the Hagaddah (Text of the Passover Haggadah right before the drinking of the Second Cup of wine), the Rabbis agreed that the first part of the Hagaddah must describe the disgrace and defamation of the Jewish people, and only later describe the glory, the praise (Pesachim 116a). While they also agreed about the text of the latter part of the Hagaddah describing the praise, there was a disagreement about what was considered the shame, the defamation of the Jewish people. Rav said it was that the origins of the Jewish people, before Abraham, when they were idol worshippers. Shmuel said that the defamation of the Jewish people was that they were slaves to Pharaoh. What is the underlying argument between Rav and Shmuel? It is possible to understand that these two Torah giants were arguing about the definition of the essence of Judaism, our very discussion. Rav saw Judaism at its core to be a religion, and, therefore, the defamation had to be religious in nature: the Jews were descended from idol worshippers. Shmuel, on the other hand, believed that

Likutei Divrei Torah

Judaism at its core was its peoplehood, the nationalistic component. Thus, the height of the nation’s defamation was to become a slave people to another country, Egypt.

These two positions and differences are clear. But what is interesting is that the later Rabbis, when finalizing the text of the Haggadah, did not choose one view over the other. They insisted that both components, which are both defamations of the Jewish people, should be included in Seder night. They wanted to teach us that both components are necessary in Judaism – the religious aspect espoused by Rav, and the nationhood aspect espoused by Shmuel.

There are many other examples in the sources which debate the primacy of the peoplehood or religion in Judaism. But clearly, one without the other is something else, but not Judaism. Our Parsha merely begins the debate that ultimately proves that both components are needed equally.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

God is Within Me

by Rabbi Noam Sendor

The scene is incredible. Eleven brothers standing in front of the Egyptian viceroy, the most powerful man on Earth, who at any moment could enslave all of them, or worse, for an apparent theft. When things seemingly reach the height of absurdity, Yehuda stands up and challenges the despot—“And Yehuda approached,” putting his own life at risk. At that moment, Yehuda had no idea that this seemingly cruel man was in fact his long-lost brother Yosef. And so we must ask, what was it that gave him this inner-strength to stand up against injustice and falsehood?

When Yehuda begins to talk to Yosef, he opens by saying “בִּי אֲדוֹנָי” which is some form of supplication, meaning, “Please my master.” However, Rav Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl (1730-1787) in his masterful Me-or Eynayim explains that this simple remark actually has a much deeper meaning. He says that the word בִּי אֲדוֹנָי should really be read as the holy Name of God, and not as “my master.” Yehuda is saying, בִּי הַשֵּׁם – WITHIN ME, IS GOD. Yehuda had a profound moment of contact with his soul, an experience of self-realization that he is a revelation of

Hashem’s Will. With the strength of this awareness, Yehuda could look into reality and say, “this is not right! I know and experience the truth of Hashem within me, and I know Him to be kind and just, and THIS is not Kindness and Justice!”

Although these words are simple to write, they are in some ways quite frightening to contemplate. Spiritual teacher and author Marianne Williamson, in her bestseller Return to Love wrote, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us the most.” Yehuda had to overcome his fear—not of the evil viceroy—but of the fact that he is truly powerful, and when he did so, he could step up and confront the evil that stood before him.

What does the individual who senses the presence of Hashem within them look like? How do they engage reality? An enlightened person of course carries themselves with patience, tranquillity, wisdom and peace. But there is something else to it.

Rav Yehuda Shaviv, in his book “MiSinai Ba,” based upon the Abravanel’s insight that it would be impossible for a commoner to actually approach someone of

Likutei Divrei Torah

Yosef’s stature, explains that when it states that “Yehuda approached”—he was actually approaching Binyamin, not Yosef. At the end of the previous parsha, Binyamin had been sentenced by the viceroy to jail on account of theft. As we open our parsha, as the seriousness of the situation became frighteningly real to Yehuda, he realised he had to stand up for his innocent, scared and oppressed younger brother. In this moment, as Yehuda puts his own life on the line and stands up for his vulnerable brother, Yosef understands that his brothers had repented from their earlier sin of callousness and cruelty towards him and he reveals himself in dramatic fashion.

As we emerge out of a challenging year, we must still recognise the past year’s events as a wake-up call. A wake-up call for us all to step more deeply into ourselves, to use our precious days and moments meaningfully, and commit ourselves to the path of seeking a deeper connection to Hashem; to know that Hashem is truly within all of us and that we are more powerful than anything we can possibly imagine. But when we know that Hashem is within us, we must also know that He is within everyone else, as well, and as such, we are obligated to stand up and support those

around us, especially the most vulnerable. We must always remember that the greatest expression of how close one is to God is how one treats God's Creation.

In the merit of Yehuda who fixed that which was broken, may we sense Hashem's Presence within all of us and use our inner-strength, power and courage to help those around us, bringing us all one step closer to the redemption, may it come speedily and in our days.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

**Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Halacha Without Anger**

[Excerpted]

I. Yosef told his brothers, "Al tirgezu baderech - Do not become angry on the way" (Bereishis 45:24). Rashi offers three interpretations: 1) Do not become involved in a matter of halacha, so that the trip should not become a source of anger for you 2) Do not take quick steps 3) He was worried lest they quarrel on the way over the matter of his sale, by disputing with one another saying, "Through you he was sold," "You spoke lashon hara about him and caused us to hate him."

Why not become involved in a matter of halacha? The Sifsei Chachamim, quoting Rashi (Ta'anis 10b), explains that

excessive involvement in halacha can lead to a dangerous failure to "watch the road" and thereby stray from the proper path. On the road, one should learn Torah which does not require deep concentration.

The Otzar Chaim suggests that Yosef said do not become involved in the halachic issue which led you to sell me (see Seforno 37:18,25, who describes a halachic decision that Yosef was a rodeif).

Why not take quick steps? The Sifsei Chachamim quotes the Gemara (Ta'anis 10b) that quick steps dim one's eyesight. The Iturei Torah, quoting the Dubna Magid, interprets: when one decides quickly, without yishuv hada'as (calm deliberation), he does not see properly. He can err terribly, as the brothers did when they sold Yosef.

In confirming Rashi's final interpretation, the Netziv adds that it is not wise to get angry about what has already happened. Yosef warned the brothers to avoid recriminations that are pointless and counterproductive.

The Kli Yakar states that anger leads to mistakes in halacha. Yosef warns, do not become involved in matters of halacha when you are angry, lest you err, as anger leads to mistakes

Likutei Divrei Torah

(Rashi, Bamidbar 31:21). The Midrash (Koheles Raba 2:9) understands "Af chochamsi amda li" to mean "The Torah that I learned be'af stayed with me." In a remarkable twist, Kli Yakar explains that Torah learned in anger is mistaken. One does not master (omed) a halacha unless he firsts stumbles (nichshal) over it (Gittin 43a). Thus, Torah learned in anger, when the ensuing mistake is corrected, stays with the person forever. To avoid an initial mistake in halacha, Yosef told his brothers not to discuss halacha when they were angry. Chazal extend this instruction to all situations.

II. The Ramban (Bereshis 19:8) analyzes the tragic civil war between the tribes in Shoftim chapter 20, which pitted Shevet Binyamin against the others and which cost 40,000 lives. Neither side was blameless. Both deserved punishment, Binyamin for taking no action against the perpetrators of Pilegsh B'Giva, and the other tribes for launching an illegitimate war. It was up to Binyamin to judge its own members and not the responsibility of the other tribes.

Rav S.Z. Broyda (Sam Derech, Parshas Vayeshev p. 308) explains that each shevet is a nation unto itself (Rashi Devarim 33:19: "The nations of the tribes of Yisroel"). In his

view, this began with the sale of Yosef. Although their hatred was based on an erroneous and hasty halachic decision that Yosef was a rodef, it was rewarded by twelve separate paths through Yam Suf (Bereshis Raba 84:8). Each shevet has its own place and path, and its own gate and custom (Mishnah Berurah 68:4). Each shevet's uniqueness merges into a unified Klal Yisroel.

III. How should the Torah community, relate to other groups who respond differently? The eternal message of the Torah is: do not get angry over matters of halacha. In most cases, do not even discuss these matters with members of other groups. Instead of convincing others, these discussions are usually a source of anger. Sometimes they degenerate into pointless quarreling and recriminations.

Decisions and statements by doctors and Torah leaders require calm deliberation and consultation, and should not be made hastily. Explaining and defending one's position should not descend into polarizing rhetoric or ad hominem attacks. Anger leads to mistakes. If one errs because of haste, anger or simply by being misinformed, the corrected decision is more

likely to be accurate and accepted.

Calls to demean and vilify other groups and some of their Torah leaders must be forcefully rejected. It is not the responsibility of one group to address the faults of another. An illegitimate war of words is counterproductive and endangers the unity of Torah Jewry. Notwithstanding fundamental disagreements on matters of life and death, each group should strive to respect others, as is the case with other ideological and religious disputes.

May we emerge healthy in body and spirit, with the unity that we merit the ultimate redemption.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Win the War

And G-d said to Israel in visions of the night, and He said, "Yaakov, Yaakov!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I am G-d, the G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Joseph will place his hand on your eyes." (Breishis 46:3-5)

Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'So said your son, Yosef: "G-d has made me a

Likutei Divrei Torah

lord over all the Egyptians. Come down to me, do not delay. (Breishis 45:9)

And he said, "Behold I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; get down there, and buy us from there, that we may live and not die. (Breishis 42:2)

Now Yosef had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain, chief of the slaughterers, an Egyptian man, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. (Breishis 40:1)

This may sound like a hyper technical point, but this is a large part of the task of the Talmud, to test and define boundaries. If someone accidentally kills another person then he is sent to a city of refuge. Which action is considered accidental is a matter of great discussion. One dimension is that the person should have been aware and more cautious when making a downward movement. Here the Talmud in Makos wants to make a distinction between a motion, of let's say swinging an ax, that is just going downward, and a motion that is first going down but only in order to go up, "Yerida L'Tzorech Aliya".

This phrase, "Yerida L'Tzorech Aliya", has standalone value. Yosef is described as going

down to Egypt. He instructs his brother to bring his father down to Egypt. HASHEM tells Yaakov not to be afraid because HASHEM is going down with him to Egypt and will also bring him up. This is not just a Yerida—a move downward, it’s a Yerida L’Tzorech Aliya – a move downward in order to go up!

There are even greater implications for this phrase. The Meor Einayim describes Yosef’s entire descent to Egypt as a representing the journey of the soul which is sent into this world to complete a mission. The soul is made to descend from its close proximity to the Creator of Souls to this dizzying and distracting physical world. There is no real food here for the soul. It cannot find true satisfaction. However, there are diamonds of Torah and Mitzvos and qualities of generosity that the soul can relate to, develop, and acquire only here.

Like Yosef who went down deep into the pit of Egypt alone and rose to become the Viceroy in meteoric fashion, the Nashama of the Yid seeks to rise to the top, like oil separates itself from water and floats to the top. Eventually the soul weans itself from the charm of this world as it longs only for and cleaves exclusively to its ultimate destination.

Perhaps that’s what the Mishna in Avos intends when it writes, “Very – very humble because the hope of man is worms.” How is that a hope? At some point the soul happily relieves itself of the burden of a physical body.

During our journey in this world we experience many movements downward on our way up. It’s never a straight line. One of my teachers told us “Life is like a cardiograph, with peaks and valleys. If it’s straight, then it’s over.” King Solomon said, “The Tzadik falls seven times and gets up.” The fall is in order to get back up.

My wife had an uncle who went through seven concentration camps and I heard him speak at his great grandson’s Bar Mitzvah. He said about the Jewish People during WWII, “We lost all the battles but we won the war!” Yosef lost many battle in his lifetime. The Neshama faces many and constant challenges throughout its journey in this world.

It helps to know that we have come here from a higher station, and that even if we lose some battles along the way, like Yosef HaTzadik and the Nation of Israel, that HASHEM is with us, and yes we must win the war.