

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1400 DEC 26TH '20 י"א טבח תשפ"א

פרשת ויגש

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

ב"ה

40^{Over}
Years
OU
ישראל

Winners of
the OU Israel's
Family Chanukah
Palooza
see page 31



**SIMCHAT
SHMUEL**

Rabbi Sam Shor
Program Director,
OU Israel Center
page 30



**TURNING
LEMONS INTO
MORE THAN
JUST LEMONADE**

Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Dean of Overseas
Students, Yeshivat Hakotel
page 54

אל-תירא
מרדה מצרימה
כי-לגוי גדול
אשימך שם

בראשית פרק מ"ו, פסוק ג'

YERUSHALAYIM IN/OUT TIMES FOR SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIGASH

Candles 4:06PM • Havdala 5:23PM • Rabbeinu Tam 6:00PM



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WEEKLY INSPIRATION

Why waste time and effort unearthing the bad qualities of people around you when their good qualities far outweigh the negative ones? It is much easier to discover the good in man than dig for the evil within him.

Rav Aryeh Levin, the 'Tzaddik of Yerushalayim' ("A Tzaddik for Eternity" p. 429)

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ASARAH BE'TEVET - FAST DAY

The fast of **Asarah Be'Tevet** is observed on Friday December 25

The fast begins at **5:19 am**. The fast ends at **5:02pm**. (Jerusalem)

We wait until we recite kiddush to break the fast. (Please consult a rabbi if one needs to end the fast earlier).

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



CANDLES	VAYIGASH	HAVDALA	VAYECHI	
			Candles	Havdala
4:06	Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	5:23	4:11	5:27
4:24	Aza area (Netivot, S'derot, Et al)	5:26	4:29	5:30
4:25	Beit Shemesh / RBS	5:24	4:30	5:28
4:22	Gush Etzion	5:23	4:26	5:28
4:22	Raanana/ Tel Mond/ Herzliya/ K. Saba	5:23	4:26	5:28
4:22	Modi'in / Chashmona'im	5:23	4:26	5:28
4:21	Netanya	5:23	4:26	5:28
4:24	Be'er Sheva	5:25	4:29	5:30
4:23	Rehovot	5:24	4:27	5:29
4:06	Petach Tikva	5:23	4:11	5:28
4:21	Ginot Shomron	5:22	4:25	5:27
4:10	Haifa / Zichron	5:22	4:14	5:26
4:20	Gush Shiloh	5:22	4:25	5:26
4:22	Tel Aviv / Giv'at Shmuel	5:24	4:27	5:28
4:21	Giv'at Ze'ev	5:23	4:26	5:27
4:22	Chevron / Kiryat Arba	5:24	4:27	5:28
4:24	Ashkelon	5:25	4:29	5:30
4:23	Yad Binyamin	5:24	4:27	5:29
4:13	Tzfat / Bik'at HaYarden	5:19	4:18	5:24
4:18	Golan	5:19	4:22	5:24

Rabbeinu Tam (J'lem) - 6:00 PM • next week - 6:05 pm

Times According to My Zmanim (20 min. before sundown in most cities,
40 min. in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva, 30 min. in Tzfat/Haifa)

OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

**RANGES 11 DAYS WED - SHABBAT
8 - 18 TEVET (DEC. 23 - JAN. 2)**

Earliest Talit and Tefilin	5:41 - 5:44am
Sunrise	6:36 - 6:39am
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema (Magen Avraham: 8:28 - 8:32am)	9:07 - 9:11am
Sof Z'man T'fila (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)	9:57 - 10:02am
Chatzot (Halachic noon)	11:38 - 11:43am
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	12:08 - 12:13pm
Plag Mincha	3:37 - 3:43pm
Sunset (counting elevation)	4:45 - 4:52pm

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Rabbi Avi Berman Executive Director, OU Israel

When we first began discussing our annual Torah Tidbits Appreciation Campaign, we did not know how it would fare this year due to Corona. I am tremendously grateful to share that thanks to the generosity of our readership, we raised more than past years and reached approximately 150,000 NIS. On behalf of myself and the Torah Tidbits staff, I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We were very open about the fact that we needed to raise funds to enable us to continue to publish Torah Tidbits each week, and you heeded the call, helping spread Torah worldwide.

While I feel truly blessed that our readership is so connected that they want to be involved in the Mitzvah of supporting this Torah publication, I can't say I am surprised. Year after year, you have given generously to this campaign, and especially during times of crises we all realize how important Torah is to us in general, and Torah Tidbits in particular.

I am thankful for how much of a greater

appreciation this campaign gave me for Torah Tidbits and for you, our dear readers. As you know, campaign donors of 360 NIS and above were entered into a raffle to win a Silver Menorah from Hazorfim, valued at 21,000 NIS. Imagine my surprise when we called to tell the winner of this grand prize, and she responded, "Thank you but I am not interested. I made a donation to support Torah Tidbits, and the only prize I want is to receive Torah Tidbits every Friday." Wow.

Next, I called the winner of the 2,000 NIS voucher for Polar Air. Imagine my shock when I received a similar response. "I just donated because I want to learn Torah. You should give the prize to someone else." These responses made me realize just how valuable Torah Tidbits is to you - and it is a reminder to me just how valuable you all are to me and the TT staff and volunteers. You encourage us to keep making TT better so we can continue to enhance your Shabbatot. "טוב לי תורת פיך מאלפי זהב וכסף"

On a different note, I wanted to share a beautiful simcha I attended this past Motzei Shabbat. The engagement of Shmuel Hart, a *ben bayit* of our family and a wonderful young man whom I first met when he was three years old in school with my oldest son when my family went to Vancouver for Shelichut to run NCSY there.



He and my son remained friends over the years, and after three and a half years of studying in Israeli Yeshivot and serving in the IDF as a Chayal boded, he made Aliyah on his own this past January. His Kallah, Reut Rappaport is part of the OU family, as her very special parents went on shelichut for the OU as well, as OU-JLIC educators on the Yale campus. Wishing this young couple a hearty Mazel Tov as they set out to establish a Jewish family in Israel was absolutely heartwarming, reminding me of the power of shelichut and the power of staying in touch (I am in awe of the special friendships he and my sons share despite living halfway across the world most of their lives). Mazel Tov to Shmuel and Reut as well as their dear parents Dr. Alexander Hart and Dr. Kathryn Selby and Rabbi Jason and Meira Rappaport. With limited face to face smachot this year, it was truly a blessing to share in this wonderful occasion.



Avi
Executive Director, OU Israel

May the learning in this issue
be dedicated in loving memory
לעילוי נשמת
our dear father
Jack Beer z"l
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on his 31st yearzeit
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VAYIGASH



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



Rabbi Reuven Tradburks Director of RCA Israel Region

The Parsha begins in the middle of the story. Yosef has just told Yehuda and all the brothers that Binyamin, the thief, will become a slave to Yosef. All the others are free to leave. Our Parsha begins with Yehuda's long and impassioned plea to Yosef to allow Binyamin to return home, while Yehuda will assume his place as a slave. Yosef is overcome. He orders all to leave. And tells his brothers, "I am Yosef". He instructs them to bring Yaakov. Paro sends the brothers home with wagons to bring Yaakov and the rest of the family. Yaakov reunites with Yosef. The entire family settles in Goshen. Yaakov meets Paro. The famine gets worse. Yosef acquires all of Egypt for Paro.



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1st Aliya (44:18-30) Yehuda pleads with Yosef: this is our father's dear child. While you asked us to bring him here, we told you that leaving his father would break our father's heart. When we needed to buy food, our father told us that if anything happened to Binyamin, he would descend to the depths. And now, if I return to my father without the boy, and his soul is bound to his....

The aliya ends suspended in air. Yaakov and Binyamin, their souls are bound... There could be no better way to convey the drama; ending the aliya with their bound souls.

Yehuda earns leadership by this dramatic moment. He is assuming responsibility. He hasn't said it yet, but he will in the next aliya – he will do anything to ensure Binyamin's return home. His entire argument is one of concern for his father. His father will die of a broken heart, losing the only 2 sons from his dear wife.

Now, while Yehuda is the only actor in this aliya and while his actions are heroic and of powerful substance, there is a silent actor; Yosef. Let's place ourselves in Yosef's shoes. When **we** hear Yehuda's words it is familiar to us, because **we** know the whole story until here. **We** were there when the brothers returned home, **we** heard the interactions with Yaakov, his anguish at the thought of Binyamin leaving.

Yosef knows nothing of this. What happened when I never returned home? Was my father pained? Did he miss me? **We** know Yaakov was inconsolable when the brothers brought the bloody coat.

But **Yosef** doesn't know. Everything that happened after he was thrown in the pit is a blank to **him**. Is my father alive? What did he know about what happened to me? Why didn't he come seeking me?

Yehuda's speech to Yosef is like drawing the curtain – Yosef is now privy to what his father thought happened to him, how much his father loves Binyamin, who is like a replacement Yosef to Yaakov. Dramatic is the moment when Yosef tells the brothers who he is; this moment for Yosef is equally so. It is a glimpse into the home of his father, a home he has known nothing of for 22 years. This is the first time he hears that his father was heartbroken at what he thought was Yosef's death. He didn't seek me because he thought I was dead.

2nd Aliya (44:31-45:7) Yehuda guaranteed Binyamin's return. He will not be able to bear seeing Yaakov's pain. Yehuda will stay in his stead as a slave. Yosef cannot bear this any longer. He orders all the others out. Alone with his brothers he states: I am Yosef your brother. Is our father still alive? The brothers are dumbstruck. He reassures them that his sale to Egypt was G-d's plan in order to save the family through this famine.

What did Yehuda say that Yosef could no longer bear? The commentators read this in the context of Yosef's intent throughout this story. Why did he accuse the brothers of being spies? And demand they bring Binyamin? And plant his goblet in Binyamin's bag? It would seem he is trying to recreate the scene of the crime. They sold Yosef, their brother as a slave. Would

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they sell Binyamin as a slave again; or have they repented? Yehuda's offer to stay in Binyamin's stead is a victory, teshuva.

It could be understood entirely differently. Binyamin is Yosef's replacement in the family. With Yosef gone, Binyamin assumes his place. When Yehuda relates how much Yaakov loves Binyamin, Yosef is not hearing Binyamin, he is hearing Yosef. Binyamin is a substitute for Yosef to Yaakov. Yaakov's love of Binyamin is really his love of Yosef in Yosef's absence. Yosef, hearing of his father's love for him is overcome. He needs to not only hear, but to see his father. And that is what he tells his brothers.

3rd Aliya (45:8-18) Yosef continues: G-d has sent me to be a master in Egypt. Quick, go tell our father that Yosef is a ruler in Egypt. And to come. You will settle in Goshen. Tell our father, bring our father. He hugs and kisses Binyamin, hugs and kisses the brothers. Paro hears and is pleased. He helps facilitate Yaakov's journey.

Yosef is called Yosef Hatzadik not just because he withstood Potiphar's wife's advances. He mentions G-d 4 times. He speaks of G-d and he believes all his travails are G-d's plan. He overlooks his personal travails by peering into the Divine. His ascent to rule in Egypt is not him; it is G-d's plan. He does not deny his powerful position, but views himself as

but a pawn in the Divine Hand to help his family survive.

4th Aliya (45:19-27) Paro gives wagons to bring Yaakov. Yosef gives his brothers food and clothing; to his father, animals laden with provisions. The brothers tell Yaakov that Yosef is alive, ruler in Egypt. His heart skips a beat. Yaakov's spirit revives.

Why does Yosef give his brothers clothes? And why, if Yaakov is to come quickly to Egypt, why send him animals laden with food?

The brothers took Yosef's coat; Yosef gives the brothers clothes.

And the dreams. Yosef dreamt of sheaves of wheat bowing to him. And of the stars bowing to him. Agriculture and power. Yosef sends word to Yaakov; I am the ruler. And look at the agricultural bounty. The dreams came true. But not in the land of Israel. In the land of Egypt.

5th Aliya (45:28-46:27) Yaakov offers offerings in Beer Sheva. G-d calls to him; Yaakov, Yaakov. And he says, Hineni. Don't be afraid. I will go down with you and I will bring you back up. The entire family descends. The Torah lists the genealogy of the family; the 70 souls who came to Egypt.

This simple aliya changes everything. The twists and turns of the story of the brothers is now seen in wide angle; the camera moves from close up, to a wide lens. Yaakov is thinking Jewish history. Avraham was told his children will be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. Yaakov, while anxious to see Yosef, is nervous about moving his entire family to Egypt. Will they ever

May the Torah learned in this issue be

לעילוי נשמת

בריינדל ריזל בת נחמן ע"ה

Breindel Reizel bat Nachman a'h

return? Is he complicit in abandoning the promise that the Jews will live in the land of Israel?

G-d calls him with that phrase that rings of drama: Yaakov, Yaakov. Hineni. G-d reassures him; I will bring you back.

And the next paragraph, the genealogy begins and ends with the same phrase: these are the Bnei Yisrael that came to Egypt. Jewish history now leaves the land of Israel. And will not return for the entire rest of the Torah. Yaakov was justified in his fear. This is the moment of exile of the Jewish people from the land of Israel.

6th Aliya (46:28-47:10) Yaakov and Yosef reunite, with hugs and tears. Yosef plans carefully with the brothers. They are to tell Paro they are shepherds. They will settle in Goshen. Paro agrees to what Yosef has planned. Yaakov blesses Paro.

The dramatic reunion is 2 verses. Somewhat anticlimactic. Yosef successfully arranges for his family to be preserved; both materially and by remaining together and away from the Egyptians.

Oh, what a bitter irony. Because we know what comes next. The Torah has moved on from the story of Yosef and his brothers and his father. The Torah is now describing the story of the Exodus from Egypt. You know how the Exodus story began? Yosef moved his whole family to Egypt. He settled them successfully; perhaps too successfully?

7th Aliya (47:11-27) Yosef supports his family. The food in Egypt becomes scarce; all is precarious. Yosef acquires gold, livestock and land for Paro. Save the land

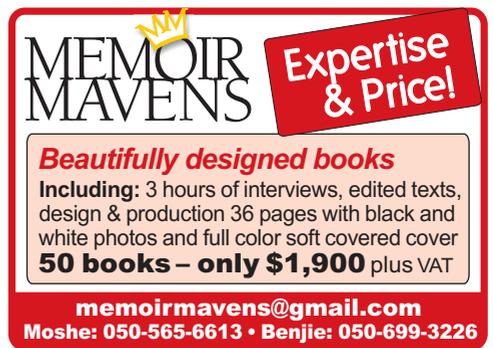


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of the priests. The people become slaves to Paro. Yaakov and the family dwell in Goshen, take root there and prosper.

The irony continues. Yosef creates a hugely powerful Paro; money, livestock, food stores, slaves. Control over all of Egypt. What irony; Yosef has created the first chapter of the Egypt story. A hugely powerful Paro. The entire Jewish people in Egypt. Remember Yosef Hatzadik, so

called because he saw G-d's plan. As he told his brothers, "G-d has placed me here to save you in the time of famine." Well, Yosef was wrong. He only saw chapter 1 of the story. The real story is that G-d has placed me here to bring you all to Egypt, to solidify the power of Paro. That will result in your being slaves. And leaving Egypt amidst signs and wonders. Yosef *is* a pawn. But in a much bigger story than he can imagine. ■

SHIUR SPONSORS

Wednesday, December 16 - Rabbi Manning's shiur was sponsored by **Joakim Isaacs** in memory of **Isaac Rothfield Yitzchok ben Tsvi z"l**

Thursday, December 17 - Rabbi Kahn's shiur was sponsored by **Shimshon Granek** in loving memory of his father **זאב בן יעקב גראניק ז"ל** on his **יארצייט** **טבת ג'**, Dec 18

Tuesday, Dec 22 - Rabbi Breitowitz's shiur was sponsored by **Rivki Rosenberg & Jay Shapiro** in memory of Rivki's father **Ya'acov Menachem ben Yosef z"l** and Jay's grandfather **Eliezer Pinchas Hacohen ben Avraham Hacohen z"l**, their **יארצייט**'s were on **כ"ח כסלו**

Thursday, Dec 24 - Rabbi Ian Pear, Rabbi Avi Herzog, Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, Rabbi Ari Kahn, the 1pm - Special 10 Tevet Shiur by Rabbi Neil Winkler and the 2pm Special Presentation: From Holocaust to Redemption with Mrs. Rena Quint (Commemorating 10 Tevet as the Yom HaKaddish HaKlali) are dedicated in memory of **Joe Polansky - Yisrael Yosef Meir ben Yaakov Shlomo z"l**, on his **יארצייט**, 11 Tevet

Tuesday, December 29 - Rebbetzin Shira Smiles shiur is sponsored by **Yacov and Rina Kaufman** in loving memory of Rina's mother **Bessie Lebor** **באשא בת פסח ע"ה** on her third **יארצייט** **טבת ד'**



STATS

11th of 54 sedras; 11th of 12 in B'reishit
Written on 178.07 lines (ranks 34th)

Vayigash is composed of 3 parshiyot, all closed, one VERY closed. Actually, Vayigash has only 2.89 parshiot; it ends after 34 p'sukim of a 38-pasuk parsha; Vayigash is the only sedra that does not end with a parsha break. (This shows up in a printed Chumash by there not being a PEI-PEI-PEI or SAMACH- SAMACHSAMACH between Vayigash and Vaychi.)

106 p'sukim - ranks 28th; tied with Tol'dot and Bo. It is much smaller than Bo, a bit larger than To'l'dot

1480 words (30th); 5680 letters (29th)

9th (of 12) in B'reishit in all 3 categories



MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Vayigash One of 17 sedras without mitzvot.

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HAFTORAH YEchezkel 37:15-28

This week's haftorah highlights the unification of the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yosef that will ultimately transpire in the Messianic Era.

This theme clearly echoes the beginning of this week's parsha: "And Yehuda approached Yosef."

The great prophet Yechezkel shares a communication he received from God in which he was instructed by the Almighty to take two sticks and write on one, "For Yehuda and the children of Israel his companions" and on the other, "For Yosef, the stick of Ephraim and all the house, his companions." After doing so he was then told to put the two sticks near one another - and the Almighty fused them together into a single stick.

God explains the meaning of the symbolic gesture. These sticks represent the warring kingdoms within the House of Israel. The fusing of the sticks represented the merging of the kingdoms that will transpire during the Messianic Era. The Messiah, a descendant of David, will arrive and lead the unified people of Israel.

The haftorah ends with a promise from the Almighty that "they shall dwell on the land that I have given to My servant, to Yaakov, wherein your father lives; and they shall dwell upon it, they and their children and their children's children, forever and My servant David shall be their prince forever." ■



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THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
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IN THE PARSHA

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 a 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 us 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.

Jonathan Rosenblum, DPM

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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 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

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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 other victims?

I will leave it for you, dear reader, to discover for yourself what Simon Wiesenthal actually did. 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

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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 Hashana* 17a):

“Whose iniquities does God tolerate?

He who forgives the transgressions of another.” ■

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The following dvar Torah was submitted to Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Sacks before his passing.

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The Unexpected Leader

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

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis, it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He

is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave (Gen. 37:26-27), whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin, and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, "At that time Judah *went down* from among his brothers" (Gen. 38:1). The commentators take this to mean moral decline.

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

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family

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

Now, as the brothers attempt to leave Egypt, and return home, the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. At this point Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other, he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes:

"Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father." (Gen. 44:33-34)

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

The Sages articulated a principle: “Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.” (Brachot 34b) The Talmud brings a proof-text from Isaiah: “Peace, peace, to those far and near” (Is. 57:19) placing the far (the penitent sinner) before the near (the perfectly righteous). However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as *ha-tzaddik*, the righteous one.¹ Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became “second to the king.” Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve perfect repentance (*teshuvah*)

1 See *Tanchuma (Buber)*, *Noach*, 4, s.v. *eleh*, on the basis of Amos 2:6, “They sold the righteous for silver.”

gemurah), defined by the Sages as when you find yourself in a situation where it is likely you will be tempted to repeat an earlier sin, but you are able to resist because you are now a changed person.²

Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave:

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. (Gen. 37:26-27)

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

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah’s character in an earlier chapter. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is

2 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:1.

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confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child, and his response is to immediately declare: “She is more righteous than I” (Gen. 38:26). This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong. If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar – mother of Perez from whom King David was descended – who was ultimately responsible.

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

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

But leaders are also human, and their mistakes often have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual misconduct of John F. Kennedy,



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Bill Clinton and many other leaders has undoubtedly been less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David for consorting with another man's wife. But Judaism also takes note of what happens next.

What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent – you recognise and admit your wrongdoings, and you change as a result. As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a Prophet. Both said *chattati*, "I have sinned".³ But their fates were radically different. Saul lost the throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated and made excuses before admitting his sin.⁴

The stories of Judah, and of his descendant David, tell us that what marks a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from

them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the burning bush – stammering, hesitant – is not the mighty hero we see at the end, "his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated." A leader is one who, though he may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than he was before. ■

Questions (Around The Shabbat Table)

- How does Judaism's view of a leader differ from the secular understanding of leadership in your country?
- Do you gauge people by their mistakes or by their responses to these mistakes?
- How can we apply these ideas about *teshuvah* to our lives today?

Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l.

These weekly teachings from Rabbi Sacks are part of the 'Covenant & Conversation' series on the weekly Torah reading. Read more on www.rabbisacks.org.

3 I Sam. 15:24 and II Sam. 12:13.

4 Joseph Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek: Listen – My Beloved Knocks* (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav, 2006), 26.

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THE PROPHETS

Few haftarot connect to their weekly parasha as clearly as this week's selection from Sefer Yechezkel (37; 15 – 28) connects to Parashat Vayigash. The Torah reading begins with the monologue of Yehuda, the spokesman for his brethren, passionately pleading with Yosef to free Binyamin, and even offering to serve as a slave in his place. The parasha continues by relating the emotional reunion of Yosef with his elderly father, as well as the rapprochement between Yosef and his long-separated brothers. Additionally, the parasha includes the efforts made by Yosef to help his family adapt to-and succeed in-the new land they moved to. It is this theme of reunification and reconciliation that is the focus of the Torah reading.

Our haftarah shares that same theme – that of reuniting Yehuda with Yosef – not as individuals but as the two kingdoms that had been exiled from Eretz Yisrael, and the promise of their eventual reconciliation. We have repeatedly heard how the destruction of the second Bet HaMikdash was the result of “sinat

chinam”, baseless hatred between one and another and how the cause of the demolition of the first Bet HaMikdash was the rampant idolatry that filled the land. But I would like to suggest that the division between Yosef and Yehuda, the split of the nation into two separate kingdoms, is what began the downhill spiral that led to the exile of both realms.

Sefer M'lachim relates to us the details of that division and, in doing so, seems to blame both sides: Yehudah-the ruling tribe of King Shlomo, and Yosef – the tribe of Yerov'am, leader of the opposition. It is true that Judea's loss of control over the majority of the tribes was prophesied as a punishment to Shlomo for having permitted idolatrous worship into Eretz Yisrael. And yet, the fact that Shlomo would not live to see that painful event may indicate that it was not simply a punishment for the King alone, but for the nation as a whole. That being the case, it is not unreasonable to believe that the people could have done something to rescind G-d's decree, as happened a number of times throughout the Tanach.

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So what did the people do? We are told that Shlomo HaMelech had taxed the people heavily in order to support the multiple construction projects he undertook. Upon the King's death, Yerov'am, spokes-

man for Yosef (Yerov'am, from the tribe of Efrayim, was originally appointed by Shlomo himself to oversee the labor of the tribes of Yosef), approached Shlomo successor, Rechov'am, together with a contingent from the northern tribes, and requested the new regent to lower the heavy taxes. Rechov'am, showing a lack of understanding or sensitivity to the plight of these tribes, refused to lower the taxes and even pledged to increase that tax burden on the tribes.

Rather than plead their case further, Yerov'am turned his back on the King and broke away from the kingdom, leaving Rechov'am with the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin alone (as well as parts of Shimon and Levi). Soon after, the ten tribes, in their anger, attacked the Judean tax collector and the division was complete. The radical decision to split the kingdom was taken hastily and in anger. But what might have happened had the two sides considered what it meant to divide a kingdom that was united only 75 years earlier. What could have been had they been able to overcome their differences?

Would the breakaway tribes have fashioned golden calves to worship?

Would there have been different "holy cities" created in the North?

Would there not have been a different ending had Yerushalayim remained a city where all would have gathered to worship the one G-d?

Couldn't that have avoided the idolatry that eventually spread from the tribes of Yosef to those of Yehudah?

It was after the exile of the kingdom of Yehudah that the navi Yechezkel delivered Hashem's message to the survivors of both kingdoms in the Diaspora of Bavel. He told them that a bright future awaited them but that future could be secured only when Yosef and Yehuda become one again. Only when each side can talk to each other- as Yehuda spoke to Yosef in the outset of our parasha - and only when Yosef can show sensitivity to the cries of Yehuda - as Yosef did in the parasha - only then will Hashem keep the promise of gathering them to their land "v'asiti otam l'goy echad ba'aretz" (v. 22) and making them into one nation once more.

Couldn't the tribes have done that after the death of Shlomo HaMelech?

Couldn't the nation have done that after they were exiled?

And, as we read this haftarah only one day after observing the fast of Asara B'tevet which marked the beginning of the siege that culminated in the Temple's destruction, is it not essential that we ask ourselves...

Shouldn't we be doing that now???

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G-d is my Shepherd

Towards the end of the *parsha*, when Yaakov finally arrives in *Mitzrayim* and meets Pharaoh, the first question Pharaoh asks Yaakov is: בְּמָה יָמֵי שָׁנֶיךָ חַיִּיךָ (47:8) — *essentially, How old are you?!*

Yaakov replies to Pharaoh that he is 130 years old and that he had a short and difficult life חַיִּי שָׁנֵי חַיִּי קָטַט וְרָעִים, הָיוּ יָמֵי שָׁנֵי חַיִּי קָטַט וְרָעִים.

Why did Pharaoh inquire about Yaakov's age? One does not usually ask an older person their age- especially during their first interaction. In addition, Yaakov was asked only to reveal his age. Why does he respond with a description of his difficult life?

Rav Matisyahu Solomon answers our

questions utilizing the similarity of the words רעה (bad) and רועה (shepherd). In *Tehilim* Hashem is referred to as our shepherd (23:1) ה' רָעָה, לֹא אֶחָדָר.

Yaakov Avinu had a tough life and he was a bit bitter. Why did Pharaoh inquire as to Yaakov's age? The Ramban explains that Yaakov appeared older than his hundred and thirty years because of how he carried himself. Yaakov was punished for Pharaoh's question in addition to his own answer because it was his demeanor that instigated Pharaoh's question in the first place. Pharaoh's question came about because of Yaakov's attitude of חַיִּי שָׁנֵי חַיִּי קָטַט וְרָעִים.

The ultimate in life is for us to place our faith in Hashem and to recognize He is in charge. What we perceive as רעה or misfortune, is being conducted by our רועה – our shepherd. We may not understand why we are being challenged but it is our fate. Rather than sulk in self



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sympathy– we need to recognize that it is the act of God and accept it and do what we can to improve the situation.

In *Parshas Vayechi* – Yaakov refers to Hashem as (48:15) הַאֱלֹקִים הָרַעָה אֹתִי. God who shepherds (guides) me. Yaakov has come to recognize that Hashem is the shepherd who is navigating our destiny. In fact, the word הָרַעָה is written without a vav, perhaps to highlight how these words are interchangeable, and that what appears as evil is in fact an act guided by Hashem as our shepherd.

During the past few months many individuals have experienced difficulty. Some lost loved ones, others suffered financial loss and routines were unraveled. Complaining of the bitterness does not improve the situation. Having a positive attitude may. The pasuk following הַאֱלֹקִים הָרַעָה אֹתִי is the pasuk of התּוֹלָאךְ הַגּוֹאֵל אוֹתִי – *the angel who redeemed me*. Once Yaakov understood God is our shepherd and all that transpires is guided from above, Yaakov was certain his salvation and redemption will be forthcoming as well. Strengthening our emunah, our faith in Hashem during these challenging times and recognizing that throughout this all, He is guiding us, as our shepherd, will enable us to persevere. ■

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Advanced Age

It is known that Hashem treats *tzadikim* with tremendous exactitude. As our *avos* exemplify how one should act and comport oneself with the highest ideals, we look at their speech, action and behavior to determine the standard to become our best selves. Chazal note an interesting exchange in our *parashah* between Paroh and Yaakov Avinu that carries a fundamental lesson for us. Paroh asks Yaakov how old he is, Yaakov responds with his age and adds that his years have been full of challenge and tribulation (*Bereisheet* 47:8-9). We find that Yaakov Avinu is punished for this response, his lifespan was decreased by 33 years, one year for each word he uttered. Why indeed did Yaakov Avinu supply this extra information? Further, the calculation of years for words includes Paroh's question, not only Yaakov Avinu's reply. Why should this be so?

Vayavinu Bamikrah addresses our first question by focusing on Yaakov Avinu's assessment of Paroh's motive. Yaakov was concerned that since he brought blessing to Egypt, Paroh would want to appoint him as an advisor to his court. But that did not interest Yaakov Avinu, he wanted to spend his final years teaching his

children and grandchildren Torah in an unencumbered manner. Thus, he added that his years were full of suffering and heartache and would not be an asset to the royal court.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz in *Sichot Mussar* suggests a different approach that elucidates both our questions. The fact that Paroh even inquired about the age of Yaakov Avinu indicates that "he wore his age on his face." Had Yaakov not looked beleaguered Paroh would not even have inquired as to Yaakov's age. Hence, the question itself is part of the punishment. Rav Yisrael Salanter would often remark how one's heart is private property yet one's face is a public domain. One must be careful what expression is worn on his face since it can evoke powerful, telling responses from those around us.

Rav Ezrachi in *Birkat Mordechai* contends this supposition. Is it not natural for one who has suffered difficulties in life to look like he has had a hard life? Yaakov Avinu faced numerous challenging conditions; the conflict with his brother Eisav, living in Lavan's home for years, the abduction of Dinah, and the sale of Yosef. How can he be faulted for looking old and distressed? Rav Ezrachi explains, when one focuses on all his blessings in life, when he is overwhelmed with appreciation for all

the good, it can erase a life of hardship. Because simcha did not overtake his entire being, on Yaakov Avinu's high level, it indicates that he still felt the challenges, they were not completely forgotten. Rav Ezrachi emphasizes here the importance of always living with the feeling of '*chasdei shamayim*'.

Rav Chasman shares the following *mashal* to help us relate to this attitude. Imagine winning a lottery worth a few million dollars and simultaneously finding out that a treasured precious object of yours had shattered. The loss of the object pales in comparison to the joy of winning the fortune. Although you may be upset, you certainly do not focus on the loss. The gift of life is the greatest joy that one can possibly experience in this world, we must condition ourselves to appreciate and celebrate its reality.

Rav Cohen in *Otzrot HaTorah* reminds us of Chazal's instructive perspective. One should habituate himself to say, '*gam zu letovah*' when things go wrong. This idea means that not only will the situation eventually lead to good rather, the challenge itself, now, is good. Whatever we experience is good and part of our process for growth. Rav Pam cautioned people to say that something may be 'bitter', not to use the word 'bad'. Thus, we have our directive. Let us adjust our focus on the blessings and goodness in our lives which will then be reflected on the face we show to the world. ■

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Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah was revered for his Torah knowledge, respected as *Poseik ha-Dor*, and renowned for his greatness in *midos*, kindness and loving ways. Universally beloved and admired, Rav Shlomo Zalman was a *tzadik* whose holiness drew him close to people.

One day, as Rav Shlomo Zalman, zt'l, was walking down the street in the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood of Yerushalayim where he lived, he crossed paths with an older woman, an *almana*, widow, who was coming out of the local *makolet*. Rav Shlomo Zalman stopped to speak with the woman, and proceeded to walk her slowly to her home as they conversed.

A neighbor watched the entire exchange from an apartment window. Overcome with curiosity, the neighbor later approached the woman to ask what she had discussed with the *Poseik haDor*?

“Nothing important,” she replied. “He asked me about my health and disposition, my daily routine and chores — how I’m

handling the shopping, cooking, and laundry. He asked about my medications, where I spend Shabbos, and if my children and grandchildren come to visit.

“He showed interest in my life, in *me*. That’s all.”

.....

“Then Yosef said to his brothers, ‘*G’shu na eilai*, please come closer to me.’ *Vayigashu* and they drew closer. And he said, ‘I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Egypt.’ (Bereishis, 44:4).

Our sedra details the dramatic revelation of Yosef to his brothers and the subsequent reunion and relocating of the whole family to Egypt. In advance of moving the family, Yaakov Avinu “sent Yehuda ahead of him *l’horos l’fanav Goshna*, to direct him to Goshen, and they came to the Land of Goshen” (46:28).

According to Rashi, Yehuda’s mission in preceding the rest of the family was to establish a *beis medrash*, a house of study. Many commentaries focus on Yaakov Avinu’s effort as a step toward ensuring Jewish continuity and the family’s value system on foreign soil. Having a *beis medrash* as the cornerstone of their life in Egypt sent a powerful message to the children and grandchildren: this is our priority, this is who we are.

Beyond being a spiritual anchor and the gathering place for their communal worship and learning, the beis midrash would also be a place for them to simply *be together*, as Yosef tells them: “And you shall dwell in the land of *Goshen*, *v’hayisa karov eilai*, and you shall be near to me, you and your children and your grandchildren, and your flocks and your cattle and all that is yours” (Bereishis, 45:10).

Davening is not supposed to be primarily about wish fulfillment

It is no mistake that the word *Goshen*, where the family gathered, shares its etymological root with the name of our Parsha, *Vayigash*, “He drew close.” *Goshen* thus describes Yosef’s very goal: to bring the community close to each other.

It was the sale of Yosef which had triggered the gradual descent to exile. After decades of painful separation and alienation, the family craved *tikun*, a mending of relationships, and a cultivation of lasting closeness. This was a priority.

The *beis medrash* established in Goshen is the first ‘Jewish institution’ founded by our Avos, and the emphasis of this institution was on means, not ends: *V’hayisa karov eilai*, “And you shall be near to me.” However, we often seem to value ends, information and content over simple, human contact. So much of our communication is goal-oriented and results-driven. The bottom line, in our curricula, learning and

even Tefilah, seems to be achievement; we frequently point to the length of davening, the amount of shiurim, or the tremendous amount of knowledge of advanced students of Torah.

Yosef haTzadik’s guidance is a reminder for our shuls, schools, yeshivos and institutions of learning. It is vitally important to create an environment that enables *kesh-er*, closeness to each other and to Hashem.

This lesson is relevant to our relationships with our families and friends alike. *Kesher*, *chibur*, closeness and connection, are much greater than goal-accomplishment. Gathering Jews together is not supposed to be primarily about ‘networking’, nor even ‘outreach’ or education. Davening is not supposed to be primarily about wish fulfillment or even spiritual progress. Bonding with our Creator, and simply being together with others and asking them about their lives, are in themselves of primary value.

This *Parshas Vayigash*, may we renew our commitment to drawing closer and connect-with each other and with Hashem; to be interested in one another, “that’s all.” ■



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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

Parshat VaYigash contains the dramatic conclusion of the saga of Yosef and his brothers, and the long awaited reunion of Yosef and his father Yaakov. As Yaakov Avinu is made aware that Yosef is alive and well in Egypt, the Torah tells us that Hashem appears to Yaakov in a dream:

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד-יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי חַי אֱלֹהִים וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּעָרָם אֲמוֹת: וַיֹּסֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל-אֲשֵׁר-לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶץ שֶׁבַע וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיו יִצְחָק: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים | לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב | יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי הִקַּל אֶלְעִי אֲבִיךָ אֶל-תִּירְאָה מִרְדֵּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי-לִגְוִי גְדוֹל אֲשִׁימְךָ שָׁם: (ד) אֲנֹכִי אֵרַד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֲעַלְךָ גַּם-עִלָּה וַיֹּסֵף יִשְׂרָאֵל יָדָו עַל-עֵינָיו:

And Yisrael said. "My son Yosef is still alive! I must go and see him before I die." So Yisrael set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer-sheva, where he offered sacrifices to Hashem, G-d of his father, Yitzchak. Hashem called to Yisrael in a vision by night: Yaakov, Yaakov!" He answered, "Here I am." (3) And He said, "I am Hashem, the G-d of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there into a great nation. I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

How are we to understand the words that Hashem utters to Yaakov in his dream, not to fear going to Egypt? After all these

years he is about to be reunited with his beloved son Yosef, what possible reason could there be for Yaakov to hesitate to make the journey to reunite with Yosef?

Rashi, based on the Midrash explains that Yaakov was pained at the prospect of leaving Eretz Yisrael, so Hashem promises him that He will be with him in Egypt, and will see to it that that Yaakov will indeed return and find his final resting place in Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Yisrael Elazar Hopstein, the *Avodat Yisrael of Kozhnitz zy'a*, sees even further significance in the promise that Hakadosh Baruch Hu reveals to Yaakov Avinu- *Anochi Eireid Imcha Mitzrayma, V'Anochi Aalcha Gam Alo...I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also bring you up...*

The Rebbe explains that these words are actually an eternal promise to Yaakov and to each of us as his descendants; that even when we stumble, make mistakes and experience some sort of descent, Hashem will be there with us during those trying times, and help us to climb back up and elevate ourselves once again.

Yehi Ratzon, may each of us be empowered by the Rebbe's beautiful words, and be blessed to feel Hashem's presence and love for each and everyone of us in all circumstances..... ■

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Rabbi Aharon Adler

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11:30 AM

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

Mishlei: Wisdom for Life
(L'Ayla) <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82280847618>

2:00 PM

Rabbi Jeffrey Bienenfeld

Men's Gemara Chabura S,T,TH
<https://zoom.us/j/887981820>

4:30 PM

Rabbi Hillel Ruvell

Men's Gemara B'yun
S,M,W,Th
<https://zoom.us/j/86466998217>

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10:30 AM

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

Rav Soloveitchik on the Parsha
<https://zoom.us/j/700303855>

11:45 AM

Rabbi Shmuel Herschler

Ethics, family and society in the writings of Rav irsch, Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik <https://zoom.us/j/81925157325>

4:30PM

Rabbi Hillel Ruvell

7:00 PM

Rabbi Baruch Taub

Parshat HaShavua
<https://zoom.us/j/888974573>

9:00 PM

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9:15 AM

Mrs. Shira Smiles

Torah Tapestries (L'Ayla)
<https://zoom.us/j/98629920642>

10:30 AM

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

Parshat HaShavua
<https://zoom.us/j/195174554>

2:00 PM

Rabbi Jeffrey Bienenfeld

5:00 PM

Mrs. Sylvie Schatz

Chazal: Insights Into Our Times (L'Ayla)
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10:15 AM

Rabbi Anthony Manning

Contemporary Issues in Halacha and Hashkafa <https://zoom.us/j/460662359>

11:30 AM

Rabbi Alan Kimche Great

Jewish Thinkers <https://zoom.us/j/772450422>

4:30PM

Rabbi Hillel Ruvell [https://](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/709706986?pwd=bDN2aW1uT0xyRWZwaGw0OXhlc0NiQT09)

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7:00 PM

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8:30 PM

Rabbi Ezra Friedman

Practical Kashrut <https://zoom.us/j/698124792>

8:30 PM

Rav Meir Goldwicht (Hebrew)

Parshat Hashavua [https:// zoom.us/j/2244321902](https://zoom.us/j/2244321902)

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THURS, DEC 31

9:00 AM

Rabbi Ian Pear

Meaning in Mitzvot <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83538640996>

10:15 AM

Rabbi Baruch Taub

Parshat HaShavua <https://zoom.us/j/615813416>

11:30 AM

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein

Unlocking the Messages of Chazal <https://zoom.us/j/488542635>

2:00 PM

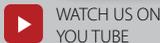
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4:30PM **Rabbi Hillel Ruvell**

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Guidance Statements & Policies

December 15, 2020



OU/RCA COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance

The following is shared based on the guidance of our poskim, Harav Hershel Schachter שליט"א and Harav Mordechai Willig שליט"א, with the support of Harav Dovid Cohen שליט"א.

We are grateful for the progress that has been made in vaccine development for COVID-19. הודו לך' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.

Halacha obligates us to care for our own health and to protect others from harm and illness. In addition, Halacha directs us to defer to the consensus of medical experts in determining and prescribing appropriate medical responses to both treating and preventing illness.

There has long been an almost uniform consensus among leading medical experts that vaccines are an effective and responsible manner of protecting life and advancing health. For over two hundred years vaccinations have been responsible for the dramatic reduction of many terrible diseases and have significantly improved public health in our country and around the world. For this reason, the consensus of our major poskim (halachic decisors) is to encourage us to use vaccinations to protect ourselves and others from disease.

While this guidance of our poskim has addressed vaccine usage generally, the introduction of the novel COVID-19 vaccines required specific reconsideration. The poskim recognize that the COVID-19 vaccines have been developed with unprecedented speed and are expected to be made available under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). In addition, the two currently leading COVID-19 vaccine candidates are mRNA vaccines which employ a new vaccine technology.

Notwithstanding these factors, the conclusion of our poskim is that, pursuant to the advice of your personal health care provider, the Torah obligation to preserve our lives and the lives of others requires us to vaccinate for COVID-19 as soon as a vaccine becomes available.

Our medical and scientific advisors have clarified that efforts to speed vaccine development to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have not sacrificed scientific standards, the integrity of the vaccine review process, or safety. Rather than cutting corners, the acceleration has been achieved by marshalling unprecedented financial resources, creating multiple partnerships, and removing virtually all non-scientific bureaucratic hurdles. These efforts have not, however, involved a reduction in the appropriate safety standards or a decrease in the standard, multiple levels of scientific review.

These efforts appear to have been successful beyond all expectations and have produced more than one vaccine with an unusually high rate of effectiveness with no indications of any significant risk. While no medical intervention can be considered risk-free, expert opinion is clear that the enormous benefits presented by these vaccines far outweigh their risks.

In consideration of the guidance of our poskim, we strongly encourage all those eligible to access the COVID-19 vaccination to do so. We hope and pray that such steps will help bring to an end the tragic toll that the pandemic has taken on our community and beyond.

Per the guidance of our medical and scientific advisors, for those who have had the virus and an already demonstrated sustained antibody response the vaccine remains safe and potentially helpful but appears to be less necessary.

We note that the availability and use of the COVID-19 vaccine will not immediately allow us to reduce adherence to current mitigation strategies, including social distancing, masking, and diligent hand hygiene. These practices must continue to be followed until official public health recommendations advise otherwise. As long as these practices remain in place it remains unnecessary to consider institutional policies or additional restrictions regarding the non-vaccinated.

This guidance is intended as general guidelines and should not be construed by any individual as, or be substituted for, medical or other professional advice. Personal decisions regarding the vaccine should be discussed with your healthcare provider. Moreover, this guidance is formulated based solely on currently available information. Events and information continue to evolve and may impact the applicability of this guidance.

We hope and pray that we will soon be blessed by Hashem to be able to come together comfortably and safely.



What Is Considered “Sharp Foods”

Sharp foods have a unique status in the laws of kashrut. The *Gemara (Chulin 111:a)* brings the example of radishes as being sharp. Early halachic authorities discuss a larger range of sharp foods. The *Maharam (Teshuvot V'Psakim 2:22)* states that onions and garlic are considered sharp foods, while the *Orchot Chaim (60)* rules that fruits that become bitter are included in the sharp-food category. The common factor which determines the status of sharp food is a strong flavor that is difficult to eat, either because it is too spicy, bitter or very salty (see *Bein Yisrael L'amim 22*, footnote 16).

Later halachic authorities bring numerous examples of sharp foods and attempt to categorize which factors determine its status. The *Da'at Kedoshim* and other authorities (*Panim Meiros, Beit Hillel*) rule that the determining factor of a sharp food is if the food is never eaten on its own. Rather, a sharp food is eaten as a mixture or as added flavor to other foods because of its sharp nature. This would include onions, lemons, jalapeno peppers, horseradish,

garlic and other strong spices. This list is universally accepted in halachic status (*Sefer Hakashrut 10:101*). Later *poskim* (see *Da'at Torah YD 96:2*) debate about the status of certain foods in regards to food that is eaten on its own and therefore not considered sharp. Bitter or very tart fruits are eaten on their own regardless of their sharpness. As such, according to the above rule, they would not be considered sharp foods. Nevertheless, certain *poskim (Taz YD 96:9)* hold that one should ideally be stringent even for bitter or very tart fruit. It would seem that certain foods are exceptions to the “eaten alone” rule, especially if they are very strong in flavor (*Bein Yisrael L'amim 22*, footnote 8).

Liquids can also be considered sharp. This includes vinegar, olive oil and lemon juice. Whisky or liqueurs that have high alcohol levels are considered sharp even though they are consumed without any additional food. They are generally consumed in small doses because of their sharpness (*Pri Megadim YD 96:9, Aruch Hashulchan YD 96:13*). Most *poskim* do not consider wine as sharp, since it is normally consumed in the fashion of other beverages (see *Bein Yisrael L'amim 22:7*).

Non-sharp foods that are mixed with sharp foods are considered sharp foods if the flavor is strong. Foods that fall under this category include herring salad, spicy



matbucha salad, and extremely spicy fish. Pickles and pickled olives are not considered sharp since they are normally eaten on their own and their flavor is not exceptionally sharp (*Aruch Hashulchan* 96:13).

The *Rema* mentions in two different places (YD 95:2, 122:2) that food that include sharp ingredients are only considered sharp if those ingredients are the majority. For example, based on the *Rema*, a fish dish with onions and spices is only considered sharp if the onions and spices are the majority. This idea seems quite difficult to understand, since many spicy or bitter dishes are sharp even if they are the minority in the dish. The *Darhei Teshuva* (95:41) clarifies that it depends on flavor. If as a result of a small amount of spice the flavor is strong, it is considered a sharp food regardless of amount. In short, sharpness is based more on flavor than quantity.

When kashrut questions arise the subject

of sharp foods should always be taken into consideration.

To summarize:

- Common sharp foods include onions, garlic, radishes, vinegar, some olive oil, pickled herring, very spicy *matbucha* and others.
- Extremely bitter fruit is considered sharp, according to some *poskim*.
- Whisky, liqueur and other high alcohol drinks are considered sharp; wine is not.
- According to the *Rema*, sharpness is based on relative quantity. The accepted practice, however, is to assess sharpness based on strength of flavor. ■

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RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

The First Jewish Great-Grandfather

Just after concluding the holiday of Chanukah many of us may relate to the following feeling: We are experiencing a tinge of sadness. A gloomy sentiment sets in knowing that a long winter season lies ahead and we must now wait months until the next celebration in the Jewish calendar.

A Childhood Memory

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt”l touched on this post-Chanukah emotion when he shared the following memory from his youth. He remembered one particular frosty morning in which he and his classmates in the small *cheder* were feeling lazy and listless. The holiday of Chanukah had just concluded. The cold days and long frigid nights of winter were in full force in his White Russian village of Chaslovitz.

That morning the young boys were chanting the first verses of *Parshat Vayigash* in a dull monotone, in Hebrew and in the Yiddish vernacular.

They read the opening verses of Parshat Vayigash: “Then Yehudah approached him and said, If you please my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ear, and let not your anger flare up against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants saying: Have you a father or brother? We said to my lord: We have an elderly father and a young child of his old age.”

The *melamed* was determined to break the drab mood of the boys that morning. He suddenly turned to the young Yosef Ber and asked him, “What does the Torah mean, “Do you have a father?” *Ha’yesh Lachem Av?* It goes without saying that every person has a father. Yosef had something else in mind when he posed this question. Yosef was eager to know whether the brothers were committed to their origin: “*Ha’yesh lachem Av?*” Are you rooted in your father as a foundation of your existence? Or are you insolent and arrogant and deny your dependence on your father?”

Adding to His Melamed’s Teaching

Years later, speaking at the simcha of a dear student, Rabbi Soloveitchik built on this idea of his childhood Chabad *melamed*. He suggested that this notion can be applied to interpret the second phrase in the same verse. “Have you a brother?” Yosef was not

interested in knowing whether they had another biological brother. Yosef wanted to know: 'Do you consider future generations as well? How will you effectively transmit your father's message to the next generation? We have a bright, vivacious, talented young child, our younger brother, who represents the words of tomorrow - how will we ensure that the continuity of our faith is transferred forward?'

The Rav maintained that this message is not only spotlighted here but is a theme that is broadcasted consistently throughout the book of *B'reishit*. The Rav expressed it this way: "What does Judaism demand of a Jew? A rendezvous between the *av zaken* and the *yeled zekunim*. That is our tradition: a merger between past tradition and a vision of the future" (*Darosh Darash Yosef* pp. 104-106).

We will see that as the book of B'reishit comes to a close, the theme of '*shalshet hadorot*', often referred to today as 'Jewish continuity', becomes even more pronounced.

Yaakov Surpassed the Other Avot

Rabbi Soloveitchik suggested the intriguing notion that there was one distinct way in which Yaakov surpassed Avraham and Yitzchak. Yaakov emerges as the supreme *Ba'al Hamesorah*. He symbolizes *mesorah*, sustaining and setting in motion the chain of tradition, most powerfully. He bridges the generation gap and triumphantly transmits Torah to his children and grandchildren after him.

Rabbi Soloveitchik exquisitely identifies

the following five examples spotlighting Yaakov's success in this sphere.

1. **17 and 17:** The story of Yaakov and his sons in *Parshat Vayeishev* begins by stating that Yosef was seventeen years old. The story then concludes in *Parshat Vayechi* by stating that for seventeen years Yaakov lived in Egypt before leaving this world. This is not a coincidence. The Rav suggested that the seventeen years of teachings when Yosef was a young man was responsible for Yosef's tenacity and persistence in times of distress as well as times of success. Not only was Yaakov successful in inculcating his core values in the heart of his young son, Yaakov now recognized the need to fortify Yosef, the middle-aged viceroy of Egypt, against all temptations associated with the exercise of power. This took Yaakov seventeen additional years of continuous teaching; the same number originally required to fashion Yosef's personality as a lad (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav*, p.350).

2. **Grandchildren:** Yaakov's relationship with Menashe and Ephraim, his grandchildren, was so powerful that he made a startling declaration: "Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon" (48:5). He converted them into his own children and declared that they would receive two portions in the Land of Israel. Thus, Yaakov transmitted the *mesorah* fully not only to one generation, but to two generations. (*Man of Faith in the Modern World*, Besdin, p. 18).

3. **Why 'Bnei Yisrael'?:** Rabbi Solovetichik provided a beautiful interpretation as to

why we, the Jewish people, are called *Bnei Yisrael* and *Beit Yaakov* as opposed to *Bnei Avraham* or *Bnei Yitzchak*. Yaakov most mightily symbolizes the *mesorah*. We carry the name of the forefather who represents this characteristic in order that future generations absorb this message. We have the same job: to receive, then guard, and pass the Torah teachings down to the next generations. That is the essence of Judaism (*The March of Centuries*, Ginsburg, p.xxii).

The following story told by Rabbi Soloveitchik about his eminent grandfather Reb Chaim of Brisk captures this splendid theme which was so dear to the Rav:

“In Brisk there was a *melamed* who could only take on one additional student, and the choice fell between a father and his son, both of whom were in need of the *melamed*. The parties involved turned to Reb Chaim for guidance. The Brisker Rav ruled that the *melamed* should teach the son even though the father was also an intelligent man. This ruling seemed to contradict the talmudic statement “If he has himself to teach and his son to teach, he takes precedence over his son (*Kiddushin* 29b). However, Reb Chaim knew the personalities of this father and his son. Reb Chaim felt that the father was only capable of learning but not of passing it on to the next generation. The son, however, would not only be able to learn but would also be able to transmit the Torah to the generation after him. Therefore the son took precedence over the father. This is in accordance with another dictum: “He who teaches his

grandson Torah, the Scripture regards the grandson as though he received it directly from Mount Sinai” (*Kiddushin* 30a). In other words, the transmitting of the Torah from generation to generation is the ultimate goal of the study of Torah” (*The Rav*, Vol. 1, p.228).

4. **Zaken:** Yaakov is distinguished in that he is frequently called “the old one” (*zaken*) or “old Israel (*Yisrael Sava*) in the Torah and the Midrash. This is despite the fact that Avraham and Yitzchak lived longer. He never achieved their longevity. Moreover, the appellation *zaken* is sometimes used without even mentioning his name, it being understood that the reference is to Yaakov. This unique title, said the Rav, is a reflection of the fact that he was the first patriarch to establish direct communication with his grandchildren (*Man of Faith in the Modern World*, Besdin, p.18).

5. **The Shema’s Meaning:**

Finally, Yaakov in the last days of his life was most concerned with the continuity of *Yahadut*. He gathers all of the children around him before leaving this world. We relive that moment and absorb this lesson with each reading of the *Shema* daily. In the words of the Rav: “In prayer, we experience the presence of God, we stand near and commune with Him. In reading the Shema, by contrast, we enter the presence of those persons who walked with Him, we stand in their shadow...” (*Mesorat HaRav Siddur*, p. 272)

In our daily practice of reciting the opening verse of *Shema*, we immediately

add the words “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom.” This practice goes back to Yaakov and his sons at their last encounter (Pesachim 56a):

Yaakov wished to reveal to his sons the end of days, but the Holy Spirit withdrew from him. He said, “Perhaps, Heaven forbid, there is a defect in my bed...His sons said to him: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Just as there is only One in your heart, so there is only One in our hearts.” Then did our father Yaakov recite, “Blessed be the name of His Glorious kingdom for ever and ever.”

Yosef, A Great-Grandfather

Stunningly, Yaakov’s achievement of being the *Ba’al Hamesorah* par excellence is emulated by his son Yosef. In the concluding verses of the book of B’reishit we find the following verse, that perhaps is overlooked: “Yosef saw the children of a third generation born to Ephriam” (*B’reishit* 50:23). Yosef, said the Rav, understood the secret of the *mesorah* and tried to emulate Yaakov. Yosef actually attained a higher measure than his father in this regard. The Rav cited the comment of Ibn Ezra who underscored that Yosef in his role as a great-grandfather helped raise his precious great-grandchildren (See Rashi on the verse who makes the same point). The first book of the Torah concludes by teaching that Yosef reached out one generation further than Yaakov did (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Bereishis*, p. 372).

The Rav life’s mission was to transmit the Torah of his forebearers to a post-

Holocaust generation in the new world of America. The Rav would often humbly remark that his role in life was to be a *melamed*, to impart Torah wisdom to his students. Like Yaakov and Yosef before him, he reached out and ‘bridged the generations’ to countless individuals, families and communities. Indeed, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik was one of the 20th centuries most remarkable and illustrious *ba’alei hamesorah*. Undoubtedly, he advocated that each of us passionately pursue this most noble mission. ■

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Where Do We Fit In?

Parshat Vayigash richly teaches us lessons in psychology and diplomacy and imparts messages regarding *Hashkafah* and educational technique. For example, when Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, he is faced with a critical challenge of communication. On the one hand, he can castigate the brothers, blame them for all his misfortunes, throw them into jail, and forget about them as they had (up to a point) forgotten about him.

On the other hand, Yosef could appease the sullen siblings who were guilt-ridden and on the defensive. Yehuda had just eloquently and forcefully stepped up to the plate and, representing the others, presented his plea to the Egyptian master. He was ready to offer himself as a slave to Yosef in place of Binyamin.

Yosef had now seen the remorse of his brothers. But how could he fashion a rapprochement with them such that the all the brothers could remain united and yet reconcile themselves to the turn of events?

Here is where we see Yosef's diplomatic skills surface; here, we discern his keen sensitivity and powerful use of language.

First, without any unnecessary ado, Yosef states the facts: *"I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Egypt."* Then, as the brothers are still in shock and probably pondering their immediate punishment, Yosef deflates the emotional charge by telling the pained brothers not to be distressed, not to reproach themselves *"for selling me here."* Yosef allowed their high blood pressure to abate so that they could imbibe the next line. It was time to interpret the facts.

"So that I might be a provider, God sent me here ahead of you."

Nechama Leibowitz discerned three aspects of this statement that stand out:

This statement is a simple explanation appealing to the family's existential state. The only reason for the brothers' original presence in Egypt was the famine in Canaan, and their hungry need to acquire food. The brothers could assimilate that information immediately. But now, Yosef takes the narrative to a new level.

Yosef introduces the concept of *Hashgachah*, namely, Hashem's intervention in daily affairs.

Yosef then interweaves the actions of Man and the Divine: You *sold* me, but Hashem *sent* me! The events were

not coincidental – I am but Hashem’s *shaliach*, His messenger. I am part of a bigger plan.

And now it was time for Yosef to reveal the bigger picture. In addition to ensuring the family’s survival in the land, the brothers were to learn that their sustenance had a greater purpose: You (the family) will be sustained “*for a momentous deliverance.*” For this reason, Yosef continues, “*It was not you who sent me here, but God.*”

Yosef would be an instrument in the unfolding divine plan

How serene, how artful, how sublime! The brothers’ self-image is momentarily built up, for suddenly, they were instruments in Hashem’s plan. Nevertheless, before they could get carried away by Yosef’s revelation, they would have noted (as we should) that he did not forgive them for their earlier actions towards him. The iniquity stands in place; their original dastardly intentions to destroy Yosef could not be wiped out.

Hashem had announced to Avraham that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land. Most likely, Yaakov understood that when he sent his favorite son to seek his brothers, Yosef would be an instrument in the unfolding divine plan. (No wonder, following the Midrash, Yaakov recited the *Shema* when he was reconciled with Yosef. He knew that suffering was coming down.)

In truth, besides possibly learning

from Yosef how to get messages across sensitively to the wayward amongst us, we might also ask ourselves where *we* fit into the bigger picture and what role we could take (however small) to be partners with Hashem in our unfolding destiny. ■

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RAV DANIEL MANN



Finding Out Late about the Presence of a *Kohen* or *Levi*

Question: As a *gabbai*, sometimes I do not realize either that a *kohen* is present and I give the first *aliya* to a non-*kohen*, or that a *levi* is present and I give the second *aliya* to the *kohen*. What do we do when this is discovered?

Answer: It depends. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 135:6-7) generally discusses your two cases, when the mistake was discovered after the *oleh* began the opening *beracha*. Both when a *yisrael* began the *beracha* for the first *aliya* before the *kohen* entered the shul (ibid. 6) and when a *kohen* began his second *aliya* when it turned out a *levi* was present, the mistaken *oleh* finishes the *aliya*. The clear implication is that when they had not started, we switch to the correct person even though the wrong one was called up.

The logic of switching is two-fold in the

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respective cases. Giving a second *aliya* is an exceptional act (needed to protect the reputation of the *kohen* –Shulchan Aruch ibid. 8), as is giving a first *aliya* to a non-*kohen* (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 4). Therefore, we do this only when there is an important reason. We are not depriving the person who is being asked to step aside of something he deserves: The *yisrael* never had claims to the first *aliya*, and we keep him at the *bima* until we can give him the third *aliya* (Shulchan Aruch, ibid. 6). The *kohen* already had his *aliya*, he is just being held back from an unusual *aliya* (and according to some, a *b'di'eved* one – see discussion in Maharam Shick, OC 61), and the *levi* getting the *aliya* after him raises no questions about his standing as a *kohen*.

In the case that a *yisrael* started the first *aliya's beracha*, we stick with the “wrong person” to avoid the serious problem of *beracha l'vatala* (Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 135, citing the Avudraham). The concern that not switching then will make it look as if the *kohen* is not a *kohen* is not severe. People can understand that he was not present or noticed (ibid. citing the Rashba). We do not call up the *kohen* for the next *aliya* because that would actively make him look like a non-*kohen*, as he follows a *yisrael* who received the first *aliya* (Mishna Berura 135:20).

A not simple point becomes evident from the case of the *kohen* not being replaced after starting his second *aliya*. That is that even in the case that he really should not have received this exceptional second *aliya*, that second *aliya* still counts toward the number of required *aliyot*.

What is considered having started the *aliya* is noteworthy. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 6) rules that *Barchu* is not considered the beginning, so that the correct person can switch with him after *Barchu*. That is because commanding the *tzibbur* to bless Hashem (which is *Barchu's* role) and their doing so ("*Baruch Hashem Hamevorach...*") has an independent value (Mishna Berura 135:21). According to most, the correct person who takes over repeats *Barchu* before his *aliya* (ibid.). Although some say this is unnecessary (Aruch Hashulchan, OC 135:15), it is not a problem to do an arguably extra *Barchu* (Kaf Hachayim, OC 135:39).

One point that is not agreed upon is whether the first *aliya* of a non-*kohen* was valid when the *kohen* was present and just was not noticed, as the Shulchan Aruch (OC 135:6) addresses the case when he had not yet arrived. The Pri Chadash (135:6) infers from the *gemara* (Gittin 59b) that passing on the *takana* to have

the *kohen* go first renders the *berachot* and the *aliya* invalid even *b'di'eved*. The Magen Avraham 135:11 disagrees, reasoning that since regarding the *kohen* who took the *levi's aliya*, the Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 7) says that the *aliya* is valid even if the *levi* was present, the same is true of the skipped *kohen*. One can argue on behalf of the Pri Chadash that the *takana* to give the first *aliya* only to the sanctified *kohen* is stronger than the *halacha* that a *levi* gets the second *aliya* before allowing the *kohen* to get another one. However, the Noda B'yehuda cites an interesting proof against the Pri Chadash, and this is what is accepted (Mishna Berura 135:20). ■

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WEITZMAN

Corona Challenges

Over the past few months, the world has faced together a horrific epidemic; millions were ill and over one and half million people died worldwide. Even those who were not ill were still affected since our entire lives have been upended and changed almost beyond recognition. Simple routines, such as going to work, travelling and celebrating joyous occasions, have been altered to fit the new reality. The norm and the known have been all but forgotten amidst the disruption and disorientation brought on by Covid 19.

The world of the halacha has been affected no less than any other area of

our lives. There have been new realities that required creative halachic decisions, ranging from questions of life and death to the new order of synagogue and communal service. We have been blessed with some extremely active Poskim around the world who have stepped forward to answer the myriad queries and provide guidance through this pandemic.

PUAH has also been working tirelessly throughout this period. Not only have we answered many questions from concerned couples and individuals, but we have been active in continuing to provide services and enable life to proceed as much as possible.

I would like to share with you some of the areas of practical halacha that we have faced throughout these months and how we were able to reach satisfactory solutions.



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From the beginning of the pandemic, it was clear that whatever happened the mikvah must remain open and be accessible for the women who needed to use it. While there were some lone voices who suggested that all women cease attending the mikvah, the overwhelming opinion among the Rabbis and concerned doctors was that it is possible to keep a mikvah functioning during this pandemic.

Some suggested that going to the mikvah may be dangerous and therefore women should prefer to go to the sea instead. However, there are several problems with using the sea as a mikvah. Not everyone has access to a sea or river. Not all rivers or bodies of natural water can be used as a mikvah, and the associated laws are quite complicated. We cannot rely on every

person understanding which river and lake is a kosher mikvah. There is a fear that a person will be discovered by other people immersing in the sea. As such, sometimes a person is inclined to seek out a hidden beach, without any lifeguard. There is a danger of drowning in the sea, and this danger is increased in such undesignated swimming areas. Therefore, the sea or lakes and rivers do not offer a viable alternative to the mikvah.

More on this next week. ■

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TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



Az Yashir

After the introduction of *ויברך דוד*, we dive right into *אז ישיר*, the song of praise sung by Moshe and the entire Jewish people after they witness the Kriyat Yam Suf. It is a beautifully organized song, consisting of 4 stanzas with a chorus in between each stanza.

Stanza #1 – General Praise

The first stanza consists of general praise to Hashem as a mighty savior who fights wars against His enemies. *אשירה לה' כי גאה* - *I will sing to Hashem for He is mighty exalted... Hashem is my strength and song, He is my salvation.* We describe Hashem as an *איש מלחמה*, a man of war. Finally we conclude with a chorus. Each chorus in this song uses repetition to praise Hashem. *ימינך ה' נאדרת בכח / ימינך ה' תרעץ אויב* *Your right hand Hashem is glorious in power. Your right hand Hashem dashes in pieces the enemy.*

Stanza #2 – Specific Praise

After the general introduction in stanza 1, we can move on to specifically describe Hashem's miraculous forces at Kriyat Yam Suf. *וברוח אפיך נערמו מים נצבו כמו יד נזלים* - *With the blast of Your nostrils, the water*

was piled up, the liquids stood upright like a heap. We describe the overconfidence of the Egyptians - *אמר אויב ארדף אשיג אחלק שאל...* - *The enemy said, "I will chase and I will catch up, I will divide the spoils, I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them"*. But despite their determination, Hashem proved them wrong. *נשפת ברוחך כסמו ים צללו בעופרת במים* - *He blew with His wind and the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.* We conclude with another repetitive chorus of praise - *מי כמכה באלם ה' / מי כמכה נאדר בקדש* - *Who is like You Hashem among the mighty, Who is like You glorious in Kedusha?*

Stanza #3 – Impact on the World

Beyond the immediate result of saving Bnei Yisrael, the miracle of Kriyat Yam Suf had an impact on the entire world. *שקעו עמים ירנזון חיל אחז ישבי פלשת...* *The people heard and they trembled, shivering has overtaken the inhabitants of Plishti...the inhabitants of Canaan were melted away.* A great fear fell over the entire world, an understanding that it would not be wise to mess with Bnei Yisrael because their G-d is all-powerful. We conclude this section with yet another repetitive chorus, in which we explain that the people were so scared that they could not even move *עד יעבר עמך ה' / עד יעבר עם זון קניח* - *until Your nation passed Hashem,*

until the nation that Your acquired passed.

Stanza #4 – Impact on the Future

Here we discuss how this great miracle will impact on the future. As a result of Kriyat Yam Suf and the fear that was instilled into the entire world, we will be able enter into Eretz Yisrael and conquer it, and eventually build the Beit Hamikdash. תְּבָאֵמוּ וְתִשְׁעֵמוּ... מִקֶּדֶשׁ ה' פִּנְנֵנוּ יְדִיךָ. – *You will bring them in and plant them... Your hand will establish the mikdash.* In addition, this event paves the way for the entire world to recognize Hashem and proclaim ה' יִקְלֶךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד - *Hashem will rule forever and ever!*

Finally, we conclude with a summary paragraph, in which we repeat the details of the miracle in brief.

This is indeed a beautiful song but the obvious question is - why does it specifically belong in our daily Tefilla? I think the answer might not relate so much to the specific miracle itself. After all, Hashem performed many amazing miracles. Why should we single this one out? But here we can learn more from the reaction of the people. How does one respond when experiencing Hashem's greatness? Az Yashir serves as the prototype for how to view and react to the events around us.

Let's see how.

The Mechilta (15:1) lists 10 songs from the beginning of creation until the end of Tanach. Az Yashir is one of them. How does the midrash define what is considered to be a שירה? When a person reaches a certain

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level of understanding of the world, when they have a flash of insight that makes them realize how all the pieces of life fall into place, then they are able to sing שירה. After Kriyat Yam Suf, Bnei Yisrael finally understood their situation. The Mechilta writes that at this point, even a maid had a higher level of nevu'a than the prophet Yechezkel. In a burst of clarity, everyone finally understood Hashem's plan – their suffering, the tricking of Paroh in order to cause him to chase them, the helplessness they felt when they were stuck. They realized that Hashem has a master plan. He orchestrates all of the events in the world with clarity and precision. When they sang Az Yashir, Bnei Yisrael used each stanza to go a little further in explaining Hashem's ingenuity. They began with overall praise for Hashem's strength, continued to the specifics of this unbelievable miracle, went on to discuss how Hashem's actions impacted on the world at large, and how those same actions will guide the course of history in the future.

By including אַז יִשִּׁיר in our davening, we are reminding ourselves daily of the correct perspective of looking out at the world. When we watch events unfold before our eyes, we need to firstly take note of Hashem's hand behind the scenes. We then need to try and recognize the depth of the impact of these events, to think about how every incident that Hashem orchestrates has a ripple effect in so many different ways on so many different people. We can't always understand Hashem's actions right away but if we look at Kriyat Yam Suf as a prototype, we can be confident that every single event in the past and future are all meticulously crafted as part of Hashem's masterplan. In this way, we can look at everything that happens to us on a daily basis and every thing that occurs in current events with a sense of clarity and awe, and be able to praise Hashem with the same type of heartfelt שירה. This is indeed a valuable message to embed into our daily Tefilla.

— *Cut and paste into your siddur* — — — — —



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Real Life Rescues

A Complex Plan Undertaken For Free



Two weeks ago, on Wednesday afternoon, United Hatzalah volunteer EMT Chani Vaknin and Director of Medical Services Avi Marcus, drove to Ben Gurion airport to pick up an elderly woman. The woman had suffered an asthma attack the previous week in Chicago and called the local Hatzolah for help. Upon the arrival of the EMTs, the woman collapsed, lost consciousness and was saved by the efforts of the Chicago Hatzolah first responders. However, when she recovered, she was in a vegetative state.

The woman's family requested that she be transported to Israel, as she was an Israeli citizen living in the city of Chicago. Having spent what little savings they had on arranging a flight for the woman to come home, the family was left with no financial means to arrange for transport once she landed on the ground in Israel. The family turned to United Hatzalah for assistance. Without hesitation, arrangements for ambulance transport from the airport to Shaare Zedek hospital were agreed upon, with no expense being charged to the family.

David Sofer, a paramedic living in New York City, received a call from a friend in Chicago explaining the situation, knowing that David was a frequent provider of medical service flights. David, being familiar with United Hatzalah's work, knew that they were the proper address and should be the organization contacted in order to handle the transport of the woman once she arrived in Israel.

Together with a physician who had been monitoring the woman in Chicago, David flew with the woman to Israel, providing her with constant oxygen and other necessary medical treatments to ensure her state of health while en route to her home country.

Upon landing on the tarmac, David, the physician, and the woman, were met by Chani, and Avi who brought with them one of United Hatzalah's fully equipped mobile intensive care ambulances, and the ground team was ready to transport the woman to Shaare Zedek hospital. At the hospital, the family members eagerly awaited the arrival of their relative. When the ambulance pulled up, the family members of the woman profusely thanked the United Hatzalah volunteers for their incredible service.

"The woman in question was in a vegetative state," said Avi. "There wasn't much we could do to improve her situation. Despite that, we still offered her the best service we could. It is instances such as these that accurately represent the values and the meaning of United Hatzalah. We provide a service, free of charge, in the hopes that we can help people in need. Pulling together an elaborate plan all for the safe transport of one elderly woman is typical behavior for the organization, whose mission statement includes the idea that every person deserves the highest level of medical care and assistance, and that they should receive it free of charge."



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Led by the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Baruch Wieder, Yeshivat Hakotel offers talmidim a beautiful spacious campus under one roof built on top of the Kohanim's homes from Bayit Sheini. The location and breathtaking view of the Har Habayit helps talmidim develop a deep connection to Hashem and the past and future of our people.

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**Rabbi Reuven
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Dean of Overseas
Students

Vayigash- Turning Lemons Into More Than Just Lemonade

Vayigash- Drawing Close

Vayigash means to draw closer to something or someone. In our parsha it refers to Yehuda, Yosef, and the brothers approaching one another (In 44:18 the word describes Yehuda approaching Yosef

and in 45:4 Yosef uses the term twice to invite his brothers to approach him.)

The distance they needed to traverse has been made clear in the last two parshiyot. In Parshat Vayeshev, Yosef separated himself from the brothers who, then, in turn, sold him into slavery. In Parshat Miketz Yosef disguised as Egyptian viceroy treated the brothers harshly and

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threatened the family's future. How does Vayigash bring the brothers and the family together?

Reversing Direction to Mitzrayim

The answer lies in Yosef's response to Yehuda's impassioned plea for mercy. The thrust of Yehuda's speech is that Yosef needs to allow Binyamin to return with the rest of the family to Yaakov and their familial home in Canaan. After revealing his true identity to the brothers, Yosef tells them that they and Yaakov need to come down together to Mitzraim.

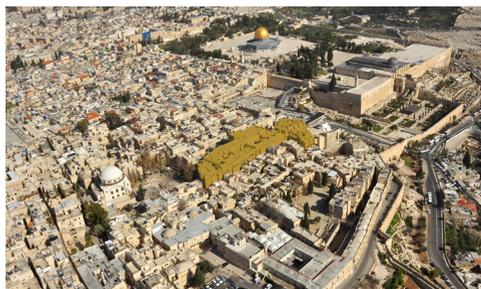
Yosef bases this reversal on his understanding of Hashem's Hashgacha (Divine Providence). Though it was the brothers who initiated his sale to Mitzrayim, Hashem decided to use the sale as an opportunity to fulfill the promise made to Avraham to develop the family into a great nation. The famine is what forced the family to come to Mitzrayim for food and the fact that the famine was meant to continue for five more years¹ indicated that the family was meant to move to Mitzrayim so that Yosef could sustain and support their growth into a great nation.²

1 *The fact that the famine ended (early) when Yaakov and family arrives in Mitzrayim (Tosefta Sotah 10) reinforces Yosef's claim that the famine's goal was to get his family to move to Mitzrayim.*

2 *Hashem confirms Yosef's understanding of His Will in his words to Yaakov on his way down to Mitzrayim. Yaakov plans to visit Yosef and return to Canaan. Hashem explains to him that the descent*

Yosef links his claim that the family needs to move to Mitzrayim to his bold assertion that **'you (the brothers) did not send me here.** Rather, it was G-d who appointed me patron for Paroh, the master over his house, and the ruler over all of Mitzrayim (45:8).'

Yosef is more than someone who turns lemons into lemonade; he sees lemons as Hashem's Hand.



Hashem's Will Brings Reconciliation

Yosef uses his view of the situation as a result of hashgacha to encourage the brothers to avoid sadness or anger over past events. He hopes that his view will help foster conciliation between him and his brothers.

Selfish thinking can often bring people and even/especially family to clash. Seeing ourselves and each other in the light of Hashem's Will can help us transcend our differences and competitive jealousy and unify in Hashem's service.

He repeats his view at the end of Sefer Bereishit in response to his brothers'

to Mitzrayim is in order to enable Yosef to facilitate his family's growth into a great nation (46:3-4). See also Kli Yakar et al.

fear that he will seek revenge after their father Yaakov's death- 'You (the brothers) intended to harm, but Hashem intended good- so that the family could develop into a great nation (50:20).'

Yosef's remarkable ability to see Hashem's Will even in his brothers' harmful intentions helps him bridge the gap with his brothers and draw them closer to him.

We all face situations that are disappointing and frustrating. Often these difficulties are caused by other people and often by people we would expect to treat us otherwise. We can choose to see these situations as nothing more than the bad intentions of others or we can look for the message and opportunity Hashem intends for us to see.

This is how Dovid Hamelech responded

to those who wanted to kill Shimi Ben Geira for cursing him- Let him curse for Hashem has told him to do so (Shmuel II 16:11).³ Based on this story the Sefer Hachinuch (241) presents the following as the principle behind the prohibition of taking revenge- 'A person should know and internalize that everything that happens to him- even things perpetrated by others- happens because Hashem wills it.'

May we learn from Yosef and Dovid Hamelech how to see Hashem's hand and seek to learn Hashem's message from all of our life's experiences. ■

3 See also *Melachim I 2:8* where Dovid refers to this again in his words to Shlomo before his death.

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BY RABBI MOSHE BLOOM

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Shemita: Do Leaves Have Shemita Sanctity?

Question

During the normal gardening season, I collect fallen pine needles, leaves, twigs and branches from the wooded areas and walkways around my community. I use the pine needles for mulch, which I place on top of my raised vegetable beds. I shred fallen leaves and store them in a composter bin or plastic bags for six months to two years; they then become leaf mold, which I use as a soil amendment. I turn branches and twigs into woodchips (with a wood chipper) and place them on pathways between the raised beds.

May I continue collecting these items, provided I only store them during *shemita*? May I continue applying woodchips to the pathways during *shemita*, as I am not growing food there?

Answer

Shemita sanctity applies only to crops intended for human food or animal fodder

and certain specific needs (ex. herbs, cosmetics, and paint). Wood for heating is not sacred. For most fruit trees, their leaves, branches, and needles are not earmarked for any particular use—so they do not have *shemita* sanctity (seeds and peels may be sacred, though). This is similar to *orlah*, where the fruit is forbidden but other tree parts (leaves, branches, flowers) may be benefited from throughout the first three years.

For this reason, needles, leaves, and branches are not sacred and may be used for any purpose, including compost. Moreover, since non-agricultural activities are permitted during *shemita*, you may place woodchips on your garden pathways. It is possible to create compost during the *shemita* year, but it should not be used as fertilizer during *shemita*. Thus, the soil should be adequately fertilized prior to *shemita*.

Yishar ko'ach—continue recycling and making Israel clean and beautiful!

A book on the laws of *shemita* will come out soon in English, published by Torah VeHa'aretz Institute. ■



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Leaders

The United States is getting used to the idea of a new president in the White House, the Arab countries are getting used to leaders that are willing to work with Israel and we here in Israel will most probably have to vote for a new set of Knesset members very soon.

With all these changes in governments and with all the elected officials making decisions related to the handling of COVID19, it's a good time for us all to think about what characteristics we really should be looking for in the leaders who will govern and have responsibility for our safety and wellbeing. We definitely can find good leadership qualities in this week's portion when we see how Yosef led Egypt as Paro's viceroy.

Yosef was extremely capable and successful in all areas; economics, agriculture, and psychology. In last week's sedra we saw how he used his God given ability to interpret dreams. This week we see how caring and considerate he was towards his

brother's feelings, sending everyone out of the room when he reveals himself to his brothers so they will not be embarrassed, (45:1) and transferring all the Egyptian population so his brothers wouldn't feel like refugees – everyone was in the same situation as they were. We also see how he was able to tell his brother's story to Paro in such a way that Paro would decide that the brothers should settle in Goshen, the first Jewish ghetto, in a place of Egypt that was best for them (46:32).

Yosef developed an elaborate conservation and rationing system during the years of plenty in order to preserve food for the years of famine. He himself meticulously observed his regulations during the famine. He did not increase the rations of his brothers' families, which would have been favoritism. Instead, he distributed food strictly in accordance with the number of children in each family (47:12).

Yosef also did not exploit his position

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for personal enrichment, rather did everything with honesty and justice. During the years of famine in payment for grain Yosef collected the money from all the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan. The Torah tells us that he handed over all the wealth that he collected to the house of Paro (47:14).

May we all be worthy of having leaders like Yosef. ■



RECIPE

The verse says that Yosef sent his brothers back to Israel to bring their father to Egypt. He sent for his father 10 donkeys carrying “tuv haaretz – the best of the land” (45:23). Rashi quotes the Talmud (Meg. 16b) that this was aged wine because elderly people find contentment with it. (I.e., the fact that wine improves with age gives older people a positive feeling). Rashi also quotes a Midrash Aggadah (Gen. Rabbah 94:2), this refers to *grisim shel ful* (fava beans) [which are supposed to have a soothing effect on a troubled spirit]. These beans are a staple food in the Egyptian diet even today eaten by rich and poor alike. So this week’s recipe is for Egyptian fava beans. People with favaism, a G6PDD, deficiency should avoid fava beans.

These beans have a higher chance of being infested so be sure to check them well*



FUL MEDAMES – FAVA BEANS HAMIN

2 cups fava beans, soaked overnight in cold water, and drained

3 litres water

1 tsp salt

6-8 large eggs in shell, washed

1/3 cup chopped parsley

1/3 c. olive oil

Pepper, to taste

4–6 cloves garlic, crushed

3 lemons, quartered

Chili-pepper flakes

Cumin

Place the beans and water in a pot, bring to a boil, add salt, pepper and eggs, cover, and cook overnight over very low heat. Serve Shabbat morning in bowls sprinkled with chopped parsley. Put the dressing ingredients (olive oil, salt and pepper, crushed garlic, chili-pepper flakes, cumin, the peeled and sliced eggs and quartered lemons) each in a separate small serving bowl on the table. Pass them around then everyone can choose what they want to add as seasonings to their own bowl of ful. Eat with pita, technia and Israeli salad for a nice warm Shabbat vegetarian *hamin* breakfast. The beans are eaten gently crushed with the fork, so that they absorb the dressing.

***To check the fava beans:** Its very hard to notice the bugs just by looking on the outside. So after soaking the beans, open each bean, remove the skin and check on the inside of each bean separately.



TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS

NCSU ISRAEL



Julianna Tobin Raanana Chapter Director

Who is the Canaanite Woman?

It says in this week's Parsha (Genesis 46, 10) "Shimon's sons: ... and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman". On this pasuk there is a very strange Rashi that quotes the Midrash: "The son of a Canaanite woman is the son of Dinah, who had been associated with a Canaanite (Shechem). When they (her brothers Shimon and Levi) had killed Shechem, Dinah refused to leave the city until Shimon swore to her that he would marry her and regard the child she was about to bear as his own".

We see that Shimon married Dinah. But how can a brother marry his sister?

Rabbi Ovadya Bartenura attempts to answer this question and says that according to Chazal with each of the 12 kids of Yaakov there was born a twin sister. A few of the twins married the other of the 12 brothers but only married a brother from another mother. Still, Dinah marrying Shimon is very strange since they are from the same mother. So how did they marry each other?

An interesting answer to this is found

in the Shut Kaneh. According to Chazal Leah was going to have a boy (Yosef) and Rachel a girl (Dinah) but Leah davened to switch the babies from their stomach. That's how Rachel had Yosef, and Leah had Dinah. Therefore, because Dinah was originally conceived in Rachel's stomach (which is the important part of the pregnancy), she has ties to being the daughter of Rachel and not Leah and now can marry Shimon.

May we continue to place our faith in Chazal to help us discover answers to our most difficult queries. Shabbat shalom. ■



Rosie Dauber 10th Grade, Raanana

Parshat Vayigash concludes the story of Yosef and his brothers. Yosef reveals himself to the brothers and is reunited with his father after twenty-two years. Twenty-two years is a long time to go with absolutely no contact with a parent, so you may ask the question; why didn't Yosef try to reach out to Yaakov during that time? Parshat Vayeshev tells us the last time Yaakov and Yosef had seen each other. We learn that Yosef shared the dreams he was having with Yaakov and how in each dream Yosef's whole family bowed down to him. Yaakov became

angry with Yosef for thinking so highly of himself, and immediately rebuked him and sent him to go check on his brothers - alone. Yaakov fully understood his sons' harsh feelings toward Yosef; certainly he may have known that they might try to harm him, so why would he send Yosef to them knowing this danger? What else could Yosef have thought other than that his father wanted to hurt him? We can infer from this episode that perhaps Yosef decided not to be in touch with his father during those years because he assumed his father was at a minimum angry with him, if not worse.

When Yosef named his first son Menasheh, Yosef did so because he believed Hashem made Yosef "forget" all his troubles at his father's house. The word father is obviously placed there because Yosef believed that it wasn't just his brothers who had sold him, but his father too. There was no way for Yosef to have known that Yaakov had mourned his death, so Yosef had always assumed his father was still angry with him. In the beginning of Vayigash, Yehudah tells Yosef that after Yaakov's "perceived" loss of Yosef, Yaakov was emotionally torn to pieces; there could be no way that Yaakov could possibly endure another loss in the form Binyamin. If Binyamin were to die, Yaakov would perish as well. When Yosef heard and understood this point, he began to cry and immediately revealed himself to his brothers. Finally, after 22 years of struggle and self-search, Yosef realized that his father had forgiven and loved

him, as Yaakov had always loved him for Yosef's whole life.

Family relationships are complicated, emotional and not always fair as seen through the lens of our forefathers and mothers. But I think it's safe to say that parents love their children, even when children don't always see or even appreciate that love. ■

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