

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYHI

Haftarah: Melachim I 2:1-12

DECEMBER 30, 2017 12 TEBET 5778

In memory of Mazal Bat Sarah

In memory of Esther Bibi whose Yahrzeit is Friday 11 Tebet and in memory of Molly Jemal

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EDITORS NOTES

Today we fasted in commemoration of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem which resulted in the destruction of the First Bet HaMikdash. The fast day is simply called Asara BaTevet. strange thing about the Tenth of Tevet is that when it falls out on a Friday, we don't push it off or push it back, We fast on Friday unlike other fasts. And Avudraham suggests that were it to fall out on Shabbat, we would even fast on Shabbat and we only do that when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat. Why? We commemorate the siege only while on other days we remember the more difficult anniversaries of the breaking of the walls and the destruction itself. What makes the Tenth of Tevet different?

This fast almost always falls during the week we read Vayechi. Vayechi Yaakov which translates as Jacob lived seems to be more about Jacob dying rather than living. (See Rabbi Mansour on Life after Death). We see Jacob demand that Joseph will bury him in Maarat HaMachpelah. We see Jacob blessing Joseph and his sons. And we see Jacob calling his own children and blessing them although to some it doesn't sound like much of a blessing. In fact after the scolding Jacob gives to Reuben, Shimon and Levi, we don't know how Judah has the guts to walk in after them. (See summary of the Perasha below for details).

Another strange fact about this week's portion is that the perasha opens with an interesting anomaly. You'll notice it when we open the Torah on Shabbat and the reader tries to point out the opening words. They will not be easy to find. As we know, there is no punctuation in the Torah; the words are written as a

string of letters, with no separation of any kind. The only exception is a paragraphing system. The Torah leaves spaces in between paragraphs - called parshiot - and in between the five books of the Bible. The weekly portions always are demarcated; they begin either on a new line, or on the same line as the end of the previous portion but after a space large enough to have nine letters written in it. Vayechi is an exception, in that there is no space at all between the end of last week's parsha, Vayigash, and the beginning of Vayechi - the last word of Vayigash is followed immediately by the first word of Vayechi.

Rashi quotes two explanations of this unique phenomenon. "Why is this parsha 'stumah' [closed, or sealed, i.e., written immediately after the end of the preceding parsha with no space in between]? Because once Jacob died, the eyes and hearts of the Israelites were closed by the oppression of their subjugation, for it was then that they [the Egyptians] began to subjugate them. Another explanation is that Jacob wanted to reveal the "end" to his sons, but it was closed to him."

I think the second explanation is not difficult to understand. If Jacob wanted to reveal the future and the end, perhaps he would have needed to explain the road to get there. The end doesn't end with the Exodus after 210 years, nor does it end with the conquering of the land. The end doesn't end with Solomon building the Temple or with the Babylonian and Persian Exiles and Ezra's return to the Land. Getting to the end continues through the Purim story, The Hanukah Story the destruction of the second Temple, through Rome, the middle east, North Africa, Babylonia, Spain, Poland, Russia, Germany, America and even an eventual return in our times. The end still hasn't come. So perhaps telling someone you'll need to go through 3600 years of trouble, toil, persecution and more wasn't the best thing to do. But the bigger question is, whats taking so long?

Rabbi Abittan explained that the end cannot come until we fix the mistakes of Adam in the Garden. 5778 years later and we still have not fixed them?

Going back to our first question, I think part of the problem is that we fast and we think that fasting alone solves the problem. But it doesn't.

Lets take Reuben and Jacob's scolding of him and see what we can learn. The related story is that as long as Rachel was alive, Jacob kept his bed in her tent and visited the other wives in theirs. When Rachel died, Jacob moved his bed into the tent of Bilhah, who had been mentored by Rachel. However, Reuben, Leah's eldest, felt that this move slighted his mother and moved the bed to his mother's tent. But messing with Jacob's bed in reality messed with the future of the Jewish people. The Midrash tells us that Reuben was aware of his mistake and for the next fifty years or so fasted regularly and wore sack cloth as an act of penance. So why is Jacob still angry with him.

Shimon and Levi destroyed the city of Shechem almost a half century before they too are scolded. Why now?

I heard an explanation quoted in the name of the Arizal. Fasting without acknowledging one's sin to the one we hurt and asking how we can make up for it is not worth much. For fifty years, Reuben never came to his father to apologize and ask what he could do. Shimon and Levi never came to their father to apologize and ask what they could do. And too many of us fast without doing what the fast was meant to have us do; take a moment to look at ourselves, acknowledge our own mistakes and see what we can do to make them up.

When the siege of Jerusalem began, there were still years where the people could have reversed the process and prevented the destruction. They needed to acknowledge and admit their sin and see what they could do to fix it. They didn't and the result was calamity. The tenth of Tevet was perhaps the worst tragedy because it came before a greater tragedy we could have prevented.

Did the slavery begin at Jacob's death? No, Joseph still ruled for 55 years and slavery did not begin until levi died twenty years later. So what does Rashi mean? Perhaps the slavery aspect could have been prevented. True we would be in exile, but perhaps we could have used Jacob's death to focus on fixing and minimized or eliminated the oppression in Egypt. The tragedy is that we didn't.

So why does Jacob criticize his first three children, but Judah receives praise?

When Adam sinned, perhaps the tragedy wasn't so much in the sin as it was in his failure to admit, to ask forgiveness and to see what he could do to make up for it. Instead of responding with sorrow and a

confession, he throws the sin back at Hashem stating, "It was the wife you gave me."

When confronted with an error of tremendous proportion, Judah could have hid his sin. Instead he admitted it in public, apologized to Tamar and sought to correct what he had done. As a reward his child would be King David.

And what separated Saul the first king from David who would father the Mashiach? Again when confronted by Samuel, Saul blamed everyone except himself. On the other hand when David was confronted by Nathan, he admitted his sin.

And what do we need to do to bring the Ketz, the days of Mashiach. We can fast and we can wear sack cloth, but without going back to those we harmed, without admitting the sin and without seeking to compensate, we accomplish nothing.

Perhaps this is the lesson of the fast day coinciding with this portion. As we read each Shabbat. Mizmor Shir LeYom HaShaabat. Tov LeHodot LaHashem ... It's good to admit to G-d!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Va'yechi- Yaacov blesses his children before his death

1- Yaacov, feeling his days are near an end, asks Yosef to bury him in Eretz Israel

2- Yaacov blesses Efrayim and Menashe - hamalach ha'goel oti...

3- Yaacov blesses Efrayim and Menashe - yesimcha Elokim ke'efraim oomenashe...

4- Yaacov blesses / rebukes Reuben, Shimon and Levi. Yaacov blesses Yehuda w/ kingship, Zebulun w/ business success, Yisachar w/ Torah, and Dan w/ strength in battle.

5- Yaacov blesses Gad w/ victory in war, Asher with good land, Naftali w/ quickness and Yosef w/ grace

6- Yaacov blesses Binyamin w/ strength in battle and the beit ha'mikdash in his land. Yaacov dies. Benei Israel goes to bury Yaacov in Kenaan

7- Yosef tells his brothers that Hashem will redeem them. Yosef dies

Overview

Parashat Va'yechi largely discusses the blessings Yaacov gives to his children before his death. The blessings are difficult to understand from a simple reading of the pesookim and thus we sought to explain the blessings based on the commentary of Rashi. Below is a short summary of each blessing followed below by a more in-depth word for word explanation.

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Reuben – | Rebuke for moving the bed, not getting the kehuna or malchoot |
| Shimon & Levi – | Rebuke for Yosef and for destroying Shechem, You will be separated |
| Yehuda – | Kingship (David Ha'melech) |
| Zevulun – | Wealth (success in import /export business) and good land |
| Yissachar – | Yoke (Ol) Torah (you will teach Torah to others) |
| Dan – | Strength in Battle (Shimshon) |
| Gad – | Victory in war without casualties |
| Asher – | Good Land/Wealth (Olives) |
| Naftali – | Quickness (3 explanations) |
| Yosef - | Chen or a double inheritance |
| Binyamin – | Strength in Battle (Shaul) or Beit Ha'mikdash |

Reuben – Rebuke for moving the bed, Not getting the kehuna or malchoot

Reuben bechori ata, you are my bechor, kochi ve'reshit oni, you came from my first drop of seed, yete se'et ve'yeter oz, you were supposed to have the kehuna (which is called se'et) and you were supposed to have oz, the kingship (but since you sinned, the kehuna was given to Levi and the malchoot was given to Yehuda).

Pachaz ka'mayim al totar, you are like the rushing of water, kiy alita mishkebey abicha, in that you rushed to move my bed, az hilalta yesooiy alah, then you desecrated the shechina that was on my bed.

Shimon and Levi – Rebuke for Yosef and destroying Shechem, You will be separated

Shimon ve'levi achim, Shimon and Levi, you are brothers (brothers in the aspect that you acted together to fight Shechem and that you acted together to sell Yosef, as one told the other "Here comes the dreamer, let us go and kill him") keley hamas mechoretehem, a stolen craft are your weapons (stolen in the aspect that weapons and killing are a craft of Esav and they used it to fight Shechem). Or alternatively, mecherotehem is referring to the place where they lived and the pasook is saying they conducted themselves with stolen weapons in the place where they lived (Onkelos).

Be'sodam al tabo nafshiy be'kahalam al tached kevodi, in your conspiracy, don't include my name (by the sins of Zimri from the tribe of Shimon and Korach from the tribe of Levi, Yaacov is saying not to include his name. As we see there, the pesookim do not refer to Zimri and Korach as descendants of Yaacov and rather the Torah only traces their lineage back to their respective tribes. And the reason Yaacov doesn't want to be associated with them is, ki be'apam hargoo ish, because in their rage they killed the people of Shechem, oobirsonam ikroo shor, and their desire was to uproot the shor which is Yosef. Aroor apam kiy oz ve'evratam kiy kashata, cursed is your anger because it is strong. Achalakam be'yaacov ve'afisam be'Yisrael, I will separate and disperse Shimon and Levi from each other (i.e., Shimon will be counted among the tribes, but the Leviim will be counted separately). Or alternatively, achalakam be'yaacov is referring to Shimon, saying that the people of Shimon will be divided throughout the tribes of Yaacov (they will be dispersed among klal Israel), and ve'afisam be'Yisrael, is referring to Levi who will also be spread out among klal Israel. The tribe of Shimon will be scribes and teachers, and the Leviim will get teruma and maaser so, as a result of the business each is in, both will be forced to spread their tribes throughout klal Israel to get their parnasa. So either Shimon and Levi will be separated from each other or they will be separated in general, spread among the rest of Benei Israel.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"Jacob lived in the land of Egypt." (Bereshheet 47:28)

One day, Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky zt"l was riding in a taxi cab in Israel. The driver wanted to ask the Rabbi a question. The Rabbi agreed and began listening. He said that both he and his wife work full time and they have a small family. However, they never have enough money to finish the month. But, by you, you have large families with many mouths to feed and the father is in Kollel and they manage!

Rabbi Galinsky said that the answer is found in Rashi. The pasuk says that Ya'akov lived in Egypt. You might ask, is it possible to live in Egypt? So Rashi says the parashah is closed (satum). In truth, it's hard to understand how one can live in Egypt, but it works! The Rabbi explains the idea to the cabbie with a story.

A young family was learning in Kollel. He got a certain amount of income from the family. However, his family grew and other children had to get married, so his income could not increase. So, he went to Rav Shach zt"l to explain his problem. It's getting nearly impossible to get along; it started to upset the tranquility of the house. He wants to know if he could leave the Kollel part of the day and get a certificate

as an accountant to make some money on the side. The Rabbi answered he doesn't hold by it.

The family continued to grow, and he went back to the Rav. The situation is worse, what to do? The Rabbi answered that he understands his situation, but he is not for it. So he asked, "Is it forbidden?" "No, no, of course not, but you ask my opinion, I think not." The young man answered that if it's not prohibited, he has no other choice.

The Kollel man studied Torah by day, earned his degree at night, and started working and made good money. However, something strange happened. His expenses went through the roof, major repairs, doctors, etc. Bottom line he was just as tight as before. He thought maybe he offended the Rav so he went back to ask forgiveness. The Rabbi turned him down, there is nothing to forgive. Now the Rabbi explained that it wasn't forbidden but he didn't recommend it. The reason is that for someone in Kollel, Hashem has a special system. It's more like miraculous. A tiny amount of food goes a long way. A small amount of money goes a long way. However, when you went out to work, even though you were still setting aside time to learn, a lot of time, the miraculous system stopped. You entered the regular world, and that world has many pitfalls. Therefore I said I wasn't in favor of it.

The cabbie understood. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Fear not, for am I instead of G-d?" (Beresheet 50:19)

After Ya'akob Abinu passed away and was buried, the brothers were worried that Yosef would now punish them for selling him as a slave. To ease their concern, Yosef told them that he held no grudge and that they shouldn't be afraid. It was clear to him that everything was in the Hands of Hashem, and he did not intend to take revenge against them for their actions. In fact, in last week's parashah, when Yosef told the brothers, "I am Yosef whom you sold to Egypt," the Ohr Hahayim says something amazing. He says that Yosef told the brothers that even while they were selling him, he still felt feelings of brotherhood towards them, and never felt any animosity towards them!

This is a very high level of trust in Hashem and in His hashgahah, which we can all learn from. We should understand and internalize the concept that nobody can do any harm to us unless it was decreed by Hashem. If someone does something to hurt us, either physically, financially or emotionally, he is only acting as the messenger of Hashem to inflict that exact discomfort. If we can remember this idea, like Yosef did, when someone seems to be acting against us, it will help us to cope with the problem, and we won't feel the need to strike back.

Let's try to internalize this idea, and through this we will merit to always see Hashem's Hand in our lives and get closer to Him. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR **Life After Death**

Parashat Vayehi begins with Yaakob Abinu summoning Yosef and asking, "Please do not bury me in Egypt." Yaakob had Yosef promise on oath that he would bring his remains back to the Land of Israel, rather than bury him in Egypt.

Yaakob introduces his request by asking Yosef, "Do for me kindness and truth" (47:29). Rashi explains that when we perform an act of kindness for a deceased person, by fulfilling his wishes expressed before his passing or by showing him honor, it is considered "true kindness," wholehearted and sincere, because it is done without any anticipation of reward. When we do a favor for a living person, even if we act sincerely, in the back of our minds we think that the favor will one day be reciprocated. Even the noblest act of kindness is accompanied by a tinge of self-interest, as we expect the beneficiary to someday repay his debt of gratitude. But when we act kindly to a deceased person, who cannot repay the kindness, we perform "Hesed Ve'emet"— true and genuine kindness, which is purely altruistic without ulterior motives.

Several questions have been asked regarding Rashi's comment. First, the phrase "Hesed Ve'emet" appears earlier in the Torah (24:49), in reference to kindness performed for a living person. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, tells Ribka's family that they would be performing "Hesed Ve'emet" to Abraham by allowing their daughter to marry his son. How can Rashi claim that the term "Hesed Ve'emet" refers exclusively to kindness performed for a deceased person, if Eliezer used it in reference to kindness performed for Abraham while he was alive?

Secondly, is it really true that all kindness performed for a living person is partially insincere? When a wealthy person gives money to a destitute pauper, does he really expect any sort of payback?

To answer this question, we might explain Rashi's comment differently. When Rashi writes that kindness for the dead is "true kindness" because "he does not anticipate reward," he means not that the one doing the favor does not anticipate reward, but rather that the deceased does not anticipate reward.

Before a person leaves his world, he recognizes that his time for performing Misvot and earning eternal

reward is coming to an end. It is told that the Vilna Gaon wept bitterly as he lay on his deathbed, and he explained that he wept because soon he would be no longer capable of earning reward in the next world. Misvot can be performed and merits can be earned only in this world, during a person's lifetime. However, there is one way a person's soul can experience elevation and have his share of the next world increased even after death – through the Misvot performed by his progeny. When a deceased person's children or grandchildren perform Misvot as a result of the education and inspiration they received from the deceased, his soul is elevated. Although he can no longer earn merits by performing Misvot, he can earn merits through the Misvot performed by his offspring.

This concept is expressed by the Sages of the Talmud when they taught, "Bera Kar'a De'abu" – "A son is the father's leg." After a person passes on, he has no "legs," he is no longer capable of advancing, of achieving, of moving forward and elevating himself spiritually. A son, however, has the ability to advance his deceased father by performing Misvot. And thus, the child is the deceased father's "leg." He is the one who moves the father forward and elevates him in the next world, when the father is no longer capable of advancing himself.

This is Rashi's intent in explaining the phrase "Hesed Ve'emet." When a person prepares to leave this world, he expects that his time for earning reward is now ending. And therefore, the greatest kindness we can do for a person is to enable him to earn reward even after his death by performing Misvot as he taught us to do. Yaakov requested of his son, "Do not bury me in Egypt" – as if to say, "Do not allow my progress and advancement to end when I die in Egypt." He wanted Yosef to continue living the way Yaakov taught him, and this would ensure Yaakov's continued elevation long after his death. Yaakov did not want to be "buried" in Egypt. He wanted to continue living even after his physical death through the power of the Misvot performed by his offspring. This is "Hesed Ve'emet" – the greatest kindness one can perform, facilitating a deceased person's elevation in the next world.

Indeed, the Talmud teaches that "Yaakov Abinu Lo Met" – Yaakov never died. Since he left behind twelve children committed to Misvot, he continues to "live" even after death, through the good deeds performed by his descendants, all Am Yisrael.

This insight conveys a very important lesson to parents regarding the decisions they make for their children's education and upbringing. Investing in our

children's Torah education is an investment that will continue paying dividends for eternity, even long after we have departed from this world. By inspiring, teaching and directing our children to live a life of

Torah and Misvot, we ensure our everlasting growth and elevation, in both this world and the next. The key to immortality is properly educating and training our children to live in a way that will continue bringing us reward for all eternity.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
O! JERUSALEM**

The Jewish people and the world generally were witness this past week to yet another fulfillment of a biblical prophecy. The prophet said that a day will come when all of the nations – or at least a sizable portion of them – will attack Jerusalem and attempt to dislodge the Jewish people from their capital city and its holy environs. 128 nations voted for a UN General Assembly resolution denying the right of Israel and the Jewish people to claim Jerusalem as its capital.

Among the nations that voted for this resolution were the usual culprits – dictators, slaveholders, warmongers and many others of this ilk. And naturally the hypocritical democracies of Europe never have been able to overcome their anti-Jewish bias, developed over centuries of persecution and discrimination against Jews also supported this nefarious resolution.

There were countries, led by the United States of America, who voted against the resolution and spoke up about its bias and impracticality. In the long view of history those nations who defended Jewish rights eventually were blessed for their wisdom and kindness. The United States of America is the world's leading democracy and with all of its warts and faults remains a shining beacon of fairness and opportunity for individuals all over the world.

Supporting Israel's claim to Jerusalem is just simply choosing right over wrong and realistic history over illusory plans and policies. The United States committed its error in supporting an anti-Israel resolution last year under the Obama administration. And it made good on its policy of long-standing to protect Israel from these continued efforts by the

United Nations to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

There is no use arguing this matter logically or even realistically. It matters little to the world that Jerusalem, for the first time in many centuries, is free for worship to all faiths and peoples. It also matters little that Israel has all of its government offices located in Jerusalem and that Israel as a sovereign nation has long chosen Jerusalem to be its capital. None of this matters because it is not so much that the world wants Jerusalem – after all it was a wasteland and backwater location for many centuries whether under Christian or Moslem rule – it is simply that the world does not want the Jews to have Jerusalem.

There is absolutely no logical explanation for this position but there it is anyway. The terrible virus of anti-Semitism affects all attitudes and positions regarding the state of Israel and certainly regarding Jerusalem. I certainly agree that there are religious difficulties for both the Christian and Moslem worlds regarding the status of Jerusalem as being a Jewish city and the capital of the state of Israel. However just as portions of the Christian clergy and Moslem nations have learned to live with the reality of the existence of the state of Israel – itself a religious difficulty to the theology of these faiths – so too I am confident that they will be able to adjust to the fact that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish state. Reality eventually affects beliefs and previously held opinions, even those that were once represented as being sacred and immutable.

The city of Jerusalem itself is thriving as perhaps never before in its long and turbulent history. The population is at an all-time high and every neighborhood in the city is experiencing new construction and refurbishment. The light rail system has proven to be a success and the good old green Egged buses are still plying their routes more or less in an orderly fashion and on a scheduled timeline.

The city has enjoyed an economic upturn and its government has improved many of the services, quietly and without boastful fanfare. The Arab citizens of Jerusalem – they are a little more than 30% of the population here - enjoy a standard of living and opportunity unmatched anywhere else in the Middle East. Yet, this means nothing regarding the attitude of much of the world as far as Israel and Jerusalem is concerned.

The United Nations resolution, shameful as it is, is nevertheless nonbinding and non-enforceable. It is another one of the paper propaganda victories that

the Palestinian Authority revels in, which brings them no closer to a state of their own, which by now most of us suspect they really don't want anyway. Jerusalem was supposed to be a bargaining chip to extract greater concessions from Israel on any final agreement. Somehow that chip may now be lost and no longer in play.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

Joseph forgives. That, as I have argued before, was a turning point in history. For this was the first recorded act of forgiveness in literature.

It is important here to make a key distinction between forgiveness, which is characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and the appeasement of anger, which is a human universal. People are constantly harming others, who then become angry, indignant and “disrespected.” If the offender does nothing to turn away their wrath, they will take revenge.

Revenge is one way of restoring the social order, but it is a very costly and dangerous one because it can lead to a circle of retaliation that has no natural stopping point.[1] One of my family offends one of your family (think of Montagues and Capulets, or Corleones and Tattaglias), so one of your family takes revenge, which one of my family must retaliate for the sake of family honour, and so it goes, sometimes for generations. The cost is often so great that it is in everyone's interest to find a way of stopping the cycle. That is universal. It exists in every human group, and some non-human ones as well.[2]

The general way of bringing this kind of conflict to an end is what the ancient Greeks called *sungnome*, often translated as “forgiveness,” but which actually – as David Konstan shows in his masterly study, *Before Forgiveness* [3] – means something like pardon, appeasement, a willingness to make allowances, or accept an excuse, or grant an indulgence. The end result is that the victim forgoes revenge. The offender does not atone. Instead he or she makes some kind of plea in mitigation: I couldn't help it; it wasn't that bad; it's human nature; I was carried away. In addition the offender must show, in words or body language, some form of humility or submission.

One classic example in the Torah is Jacob's conduct toward Esau when they meet again after more than twenty years, during which time Jacob had been away in the home of Laban. He knew that Esau felt wronged by him and had declared his intention to take revenge after their father Isaac had died. That is why Jacob fled in the first place. When they meet

again, Jacob does not mention the earlier incident. But he does attempt to appease^[4] Esau by sending him an enormous gift of livestock, and by abasing himself, bowing down to him seven times, and calling him "my lord," and himself "your servant." For his part, Esau does not mention the earlier episode, whether because he had forgotten it, or it no longer rankled with him, or because he was mollified by Jacob's self-abasement. This was not remorse and forgiveness, but submission and appeasement.

What Joseph does toward his brothers is different. When he first reveals himself to them, he says, "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Gen. 45:5). This sounds like forgiveness, but, as this week's parsha makes clear, it is not necessarily so. The word "forgiveness" is not used. And the brothers may well have assumed that, as in the case of Esau, Joseph intended to take revenge but not during the lifetime of their father. That is what provokes the drama at the end of this week's parsha:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: Please forgive [sa] your brothers' wrong and the sin they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." (Gen. 50:15-17)

This was Joseph's response:

Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:19-21)

This is forgiveness. Joseph does not use the word, but he makes it clear that he foregoes all thought of revenge. What is happening here and why did it not happen in other cultures? This is one of the most fascinating features of Judaism, and why it eventually made such a difference to the world.

Note what has to happen for forgiveness to be born. First, Joseph engages in an elaborate plan, hiding his identity, to make sure the brothers were capable of remorse and atonement. This happens on their first encounter in Egypt, when he accuses them of being spies, and they say in his presence – not knowing that he could understand them – "Surely we are guilty

because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us" (Gen. 42:21). They know they have done wrong. They acknowledge their guilt.

Second, Joseph arranges a trial that will test whether Judah, the brother who proposed selling him into slavery in the first place, is indeed a changed person. He has Benjamin brought before him on a false charge, and is about to take him as his slave when Judah intervenes and offers to become a slave in his place so that Benjamin can go free. This is what the sages and Maimonides defined as complete repentance, that is, you have so changed that you are now a different person. These two elements tell us what has changed in the brothers so that they, the wrongdoers, can be forgiven.

There is a change in Joseph too, as we noted in last week's Covenant and Conversation. He has reframed his life, so that the entire story of his relationship with his brothers has now become utterly secondary to the drama of Divine providence that is still unfolding. As he explains: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." This is what allows the victim, Joseph, to forgive.

These, though, are details. What is absolutely fundamental is that Judaism represents, for the first time in history, a morality of guilt rather than shame. In the past we've explored some of the elements that made it possible. Earlier this year we spoke of the difference between tradition-directed cultures and – what the call to Abraham initiates – inner-directed ones. Tradition-directed individuals, when they break the rules, feel shame. Inner-directed personalities feel guilt.

We also spoke about the difference between cultures of the eye and of the ear. Visual cultures are almost always shame cultures. Shame is what you feel when you imagine other people seeing what you are doing. The first instinct when you feel shame is to try to hide or to wish you were invisible.^[5] In cultures of hearing, however, morality is represented by an inner voice, the voice of guilt that you cannot hide from even if you are invisible to the world.

The key difference between the two is that in shame cultures, wrongdoing is like a stain on the person. Hence the only way to be rehabilitated is to have the stain covered up somehow (the meaning, as we noted, of the verb *k-p-r*). You do this by placating the victim of your wrong so that in effect he "turns a blind eye" to what you did. His resentment, indignation and desire for revenge have been appeased.

In guilt cultures, however, there is a fundamental distinction between the person and his or her acts. It was the act that was wrong, not the person. That is what makes forgiveness possible. I forgive you because, when you admit you did wrong, express remorse and do all you can to make amends, especially when I see that, given the opportunity (as was Judah) to repeat the crime you do not do so because you have changed, then I see that you have distanced yourself from your deed. Forgiveness means I fundamentally reaffirm your worth as a person, despite the fact that we both know your act was wrong.[6]

Forgiveness exists in righteousness-and-guilt cultures. It does not exist in honour-and-shame cultures like those of ancient Greece and pre-Christian Rome.

Contemporary culture in the West, often thought by secularists to be morally superior to the ethics of the Hebrew Bible, is in fact – for good or bad – a regression to pre-Christian Greece and Rome. That is why, nowadays, people who are found to have done wrong are publicly shamed. Examples are not necessary: they abound in every day's news. In a shame culture, the main thing to do is not to be found out, because once you are, there is no way back. There is no place in such a culture for forgiveness. At best you seek to appease. As in ancient Greece, the culprit argues, "I couldn't help it; it wasn't that bad; it's human nature; I was carried away." They undergo some ritual of self-abasement. Eventually they hope, not that people will forgive but that they will forget. This is an ugly kind of culture.

Which is why Judaism remains the eternal alternative. What matters is not outward appearances but the inner voice. And when we do wrong, as we all do, there is a way forward: to confess, express remorse, atone, make amends, and, like Judah, change. To know that however wrong our deeds, "the soul You gave me is pure," and that if we work hard enough on ourselves, we can be forgiven, is to inhabit a culture of grace and hope. And that is a life-changing idea.

[1] Rene Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*, argues that religion was born in the attempt to find a way to stop cycles of retaliation and revenge.

[2] See Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among primates*, Harvard University Press, 1989.

[3] David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: the origins of a moral idea*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[4] Note that the word Jacob uses to himself (Gen. 32:21) comes from the verb k-p-r which will later be used in Leviticus to mean

atonement, and is the source of the phrase Yom Kippur. It means literally to "cover over." It is what Noah does when he covers the ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). It also means a ransom (Num. 35:32) such as might be paid to compensate a family for the murder of one of its members, something forbidden in Jewish law.

[5] That is what, I suggest, was at stake in the Garden of Eden, which is all about shame and hiding. Adam and Eve followed their eyes rather than their ears.

[6] Note that in certain cultures, forgiveness is not held to require remorse, atonement and the like. Maimonides himself says (Hilkhot Deot 6:9) that if you regard the person who wronged you as incapable of handling criticism, then you may forgive him unilaterally. Note however that this kind of forgiveness does not signal that you reaffirm the moral worth of the person you forgive. To the contrary, you regard him as beneath contempt. Judaism seems always to have known this. The Christian theologian who understood it best was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who called it, "cheap grace."

Rabbi Meyer Laniado Yoseph's Greatest Success: Ephraim and Menashe

Do you bless your sons on Friday night? Were you blessed by your father on Friday nights? For the past few hundred years, Jewish fathers have blessed their sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe, "Yesimekha Elokim keEphraim vekhiMnashe." The practice may be recent [1], but the fact that we bless ourselves through Ephraim and Menashe goes back to Ya'aqob's original blessing: "And he blessed them that day, saying: 'By thee shall Israel bless, saying: God make thee as Ephraim and as Menashe....[2]" What is unique about Ephraim and Menashe that we would want our children to be like them?

Ephraim and Menashe grew up away from Ya'aqob's home, steeped in Egyptian culture, yet were considered to be as connected with the legacy of Abraham as Reuben and Shimon. Ephraim and Menashe's father, Yoseph, had an Egyptian name, dressed Egyptian, spoke Egyptian, was engaged in Egyptian politics, and was the high priest of Pharaoh [3]. Their mother, Asenat, was the daughter of one of the prominent pagan priests [4]. How were these boys able to continue the family heritage as if they grew up with Ya'aqob?

This is a question which numerous papers and international conferences have addressed. The topic essentially is Jewish continuity--how do we ensure that our children remain committed to Judaism? For the answer we should look to Yoseph's success with his children and let that be our paradigm for how we bring up our own children.

Yoseph could have forgotten about God, about his father's legacy, and anything concerning his upbringing. He was alone, away from home, with no

connection to his family. There was no one forcing him or watching his behavior. Moreover, his brothers rejected him and literally 'sold him down the river.' Finally, one should note all of the troubles he encountered, and that during each of his tribulations he referenced God as either his reason for not transgressing, as when he said during the incident with his slave masters wife: "how can I do this evil thing and sin before God?!" [5] or as the source of his ability to interpret dreams [6].

Yoseph's experiences at home with his father Ya'aqob were unshakable. Yoseph grew up as a caretaker for his elderly father, spending many hours each day with him [7]. What he learned from these experiences changed him, developed him into a person who expressed his father's values [8]. His children saw their father dressed in Egyptian clothing, but experienced their father as someone with a different mindset and values. Yoseph would consistently mention God and his family tradition, and would show his children that although they were externally Egyptian, they were internally Benei Yisrael.

When we are blessed or bless our children on Friday nights to be like Ephraim uMnashe, we are praying that our children will continue the legacy of their forefathers even when they are away from home, just like Ephraim uMnashe. The secret is simple--spend time with the previous generation. Honor, respect, and take care of them as Yoseph did for his father. The only way to ensure that our youth continue in our path is if we ourselves deeply embody the values of our forefathers and express these values to our children: "Yesimekha Elokim keEphraim uMenashe."

[1] Daniel Sperber points to Daniel Rabinowitz of Silver Spring, Maryland, which appeared in Or ha- Mizrah 54, 3-4 (2006), pp. 180-185 sourcing the custom to R. Yaaqob Emden's siddur (18th century)

[2] Rashi

[3] See A.S. Yahuda. Also note the brothers did not recognize him. He did not look or speak like them.

[4] Beresheit 41:45

[5] Beresheit 39:9

[6] Beresheit 40:8, 41:25, 28, 32

[7] See Rabbenu Abraham Ben Harambam on 'ben zequnim hu lo' Beresheit 37:3.

[8] Even Pharaoh recognized the connection between Yoseph and God Beresheit 41:38

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

“And Israel said unto Joseph: I had not thought to see thy face” (48:11)

The word “Pillalty” means “To Think” (Rashi 48:11).

We can now appreciate the true significance of “L’hitpallel”, which is usually understood as “To Pray”. “L’hitpallel is a reflexive verb which literally means: to cause oneself to Think.

Thinking is the key factor in praying. Thinking about Hashem!

The first thing that the Rabbis want us to think about is to state the fact that I could not even praise Hashem if He did not give my lips the ability to do so. So we ask Hashem for this ability in order to proceed with the Amidah.

"Baruch Atah" means "To You our knees are bent." We bend our knees to Hashem because we owe Him everything. When you owe something to someone and you can't pay him, what do you do? You bend over to him. "Atah" - our knees are bent to You, Hashem. "All the Blessings & Kindnesses I receive are on my back weighing me down. I am Humbled in Gratitude to You alone and to no one else".

The next thing to Think about is that we have been given the privilege to address the King of the Universe as “You” (“Atah”) throughout the Amidah, instead of “Your Majesty” (the third person which is a sign of respect). Think! You have been given the status of Children of the King (“Banim atem L’Hashem Elokechem”). And you are speaking to your Father who loves you and has unlimited power/kindness to do everything you ask Him for.

In order to get maximum benefit from our Prayers try the following strategy.

Before we reach the “Modim” (Gratitude) prayer, prepare your mind with a different Thought each day and thank Hashem with joy for what He is giving you. Such as: sight, ability to walk, parents, money, sanity

...

When we bow in this prayer, Think and Thank Hashem.

The Tefillot were composed for the purpose of elevating our minds.

Now we are Thinking and demonstrating to ourselves Emunah which is filling us with happiness and confidence and bitachon/trust. When we Think in this manner three times daily and we teach our families to practice this as well, then we will be connected to the Source of life, blessings and successful living in this world and forever.

Adapted from "Rabbi Avigdor Miller speaks Vol. 2"