

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

At almost every stage of fraught encounter between Joseph and his family in Egypt, Joseph weeps. There are seven scenes of tears:

1. When the brothers came before him in Egypt for the first time: "They said to one another, 'Surely we are being punished 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 on us'... They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again." [42:21-24]

2. On the second occasion, when they brought Benjamin with them: "Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there." [43:29-30]

3. When, after Judah's impassioned speech, Joseph is about to disclose his identity: "Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it." [45:1-2]

4. Immediately after he discloses his identity: "Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them." [45:14-15]

5. When he meets his father again after their long separation: "Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time." [46:29]

6. On the death of his father: "Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him." [50:1]

7. Some time after his father's death: "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: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.' When their message came to him, Joseph wept." [50:15-17]

No one weeps as much as Joseph. Esau wept when he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing (Gen. 27:38). Jacob wept when he saw the love of his life, Rachel, for the first time (29:11). Both brothers, Jacob and Esau, wept when they met again after their long estrangement (33:4). Jacob wept when told that his beloved son Joseph was dead (37:35). But the seven acts of Joseph's weeping have no parallel. They span the full spectrum of emotion, from painful memory to the joy of being reunited, first with his brother Benjamin, then with his father Jacob. There are the complex tears immediately before and after he discloses his identity to his brothers, and there are the tears of bereavement at Jacob's deathbed. But the most intriguing are the last, the tears he sheds when he hears that his brothers fear that he will take revenge on them now that their father is no longer alive.

In a fine essay, "Yosef's tears," Rav Aharon Lichtenstein suggests that this last act of weeping is an expression of the price Joseph pays for the realisation of his dreams and his elevation to a position of power. Joseph has done everything he could for his brothers. He has sustained them at a time of famine. He has given them not just refuge but a place of honour in Egyptian society. And he has made it as clear as he possibly can that he does not harbour a grudge against them for what they did to him all those many years before. As he said when he disclosed his identity to them: "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... God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:5-8). What more could he say? Yet still, all these years later, his brothers do not trust him and fear that he may still seek their harm.

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Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg
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This is Rav Lichtenstein's comment: "At this moment, Yosef discovers the limits of raw power. He discovers the extent to which the human connection, the personal connection, the family connection, hold far more value and importance than does power—both for the person himself and for all those around him." Joseph "weeps over the weakness inherent in power, over the terrible price that he has paid for it. His dreams have indeed been realised, on some level, but the tragedy remains just as real. The torn shreds of the family have not been made completely whole." ("Yosef's Tears" was published in *Alei Tziyon* (Vol. 16, Iyar 5769): Special edition in honour of HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, 109-128. Also available online: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/alei/16-04yosef-final.rtf>)

On the surface, Joseph holds all the power. His family are entirely dependent on him. But at a deeper level it is the other way round. He still yearns for their acceptance, their recognition, their closeness. And ultimately he has to depend on them to bring his bones up from Egypt when the time comes for redemption and return (50:25).

Rav Lichtenstein's analysis reminds us of Rashi and Ibn Ezra's commentary to the last verse in the book of Esther. It says that "Mordechai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by most of his brethren" (Est. 10:3) -- "most" but not all. Rashi (quoting Megillah 16b) says that some members of the Sanhedrin were critical of him because his political involvement (his "closeness to the king") distracted from the time he spent studying Torah. Ibn Ezra says, simply: "It is impossible to satisfy everyone, because people are envious [of other people's success]." Joseph and Mordechai/Esther are supreme examples of Jews who reached positions of influence and power in non-Jewish circles. In modern times they were called Hofjuden, "court Jews," and other Jews were often held deeply ambivalent feelings about them.

But at a deeper level, Rav Lichtenstein's remarks recall Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic, an idea that had huge influence on nineteenth century, especially Marxist, thought. Hegel argued that the early history of humanity was marked by a struggle for power in which some became masters, others slaves. On the face of it, masters rule while slaves obey. But in fact the master is dependent on his slaves—he has leisure only because they do the work, and he is the master only because he is recognised as such by his slaves.

Meanwhile the slave, through his work, acquires his own dignity as a producer. Thus the slave has "inner freedom" while the master has "inner bondage." This tension creates a dialectic—a conflict worked out through history—reaching equilibrium only when there are neither masters nor slaves, but merely human beings who treat one another not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. Thus understood,

Joseph's tears are a prelude to the master-slave drama about to be enacted in the book of Exodus between Pharaoh and the Israelites.

Rav Lichtenstein's profound insight into the text reminds us of the extent to which Torah, Tanakh and Judaism as a whole are a sustained critique of power. Prior to the Messianic age we cannot do without it—consider the tragedies Jews suffered in the centuries in which they lacked it. But power alienates. It breeds suspicion and distrust. It diminishes those it is used against, and thus diminishes those who use it.

Even Joseph "the righteous" weeps when he sees the extent to which power sets him apart from his brothers. Judaism is about an alternative social order which depends not on power but on love, loyalty and the mutual responsibility created by covenant. That is why Nietzsche, who based his philosophy on "the will to power," correctly saw Judaism as the antithesis of all he believed in.

Power may be a necessary evil, but it is an evil, and the less we have need of it, the better. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Israel saw the children of Joseph, and he said, 'Who are these?'" (Genesis 48:8) Jacob's death, which occurs towards the end of the book of Genesis, brings the era of the patriarchs to an end. He will be the last person to be buried in Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron. He will be the forefather whose name, Israel, given to him after defeating the angel in an all-night wrestling bout, is the same name the Jewish people will carry forever. He will be the one patriarch whose twelve sons are transformed into the chiefs of their respective tribes, paving the way for a disparate family to emerge as a nation.

In the lead-up to his death, Vayechi opens with Jacob in his old age asking Joseph not to leave his dead body in Egypt, but to transport his bones back to the burial-place of his fathers. When he takes sick, Joseph arrives with his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. At the deathbed scene, Jacob narrates his whole history: how he was blessed by God in Luz that he would be fruitful, that his descendants would inherit the land, and that there would eventually be an ingathering of all nations to the land and faith of Israel (the Messianic promise).

But don't we know this already? And if this story is so important, why doesn't he repeat it to all the brothers who will soon be arriving for their blessings, instead of keeping this moment as a private encounter between himself and Joseph and his sons?

Stranger still, in his very next breath the aged

patriarch tells Joseph that he wants Ephraim and Menashe to be considered his and not Joseph's, '...just as Reuven and Shimon are mine.' (Although Jacob does allow for any sons that Joseph may have afterwards to be regarded as his own.) Jacob then concludes his own history, recounting the sudden death and burial of Rachel. And suddenly, almost as an afterthought, he turns to Ephraim and Menashe asking, 'Who are these?'

Given that Jacob has just been talking about Menashe and Ephraim, his question doesn't make sense. Doesn't he know who they are? After all, they are the focus of the scene. It sounds as if words spoken one moment are forgotten only moments later, a state of mind that could be seen as bordering on senility. Is Jacob losing his wits?

On the contrary! Of all the profound questions that Genesis raises, I think that these two words – 'Mi eleh?' (Who are these?) – contain a library of existential philosophy constricted into one line of dialogue. It is a question that could have implications not only for Genesis, but for the entire destiny of the Jewish people. It could well be the question that Grandfather Israel (Jacob) is asking each and every one of us, his descendants.

Jacob knows that his death is the bridge into the next stage of Jewish history. We have reached the point in the evolution of his family where the seventy souls who came down to Egypt are going to become a fully-fledged nation. They are about to embark on a 210-year period of expansion that will see them emerge from slavery into nationhood. Many of them will suffer, many will assimilate, and some will wander across a desert under the leadership of Moses and ultimately return, as Israelites, to the very place where the family had its origins.

Dying, Jacob clearly understands how the pattern of his life will mirror the subsequent experience of the Jewish people throughout their history. Born in Israel, Jacob goes into exile for twenty years, and returns to the land of his forefathers in an attempt to live out his remaining years in peace. But circumstances don't allow the peace to prevail. Through the mitigating circumstance of hunger, he is forced to leave Canaan for Egypt, where ironically the family of Israel will emerge into a nation. What happens to them among the Egyptians – seventy pioneering souls increasing and multiplying and thriving – is the essential experience of Jews scattered across the Diaspora from Casablanca to Krakow, from Toledo to Texas. They arrive few in number and thrive until either the Pharaohs of each community rise in protest and expel them, or until assimilation takes over. While the majority of the Jewish community will dissolve in the great melting pot, there will still be a chosen minority who will endure as children of Israel, who will survive as committed Jews.

At this point in time, Jacob stands at the midpoint of five generations. Gazing back, he sees his grandfather Abraham; gazing ahead, he sees his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe. Each generation is characterized by a unique relationship with the land of Israel. Abraham, born in another land, reveals the One God to the world, and arrives in the land towards which God has directed him, the land of Israel. His son, Isaac is the first native son, a true citizen in that he never leaves the land in which he is born. Jacob, in contrast, becomes a modern Jew because his exile and wanderings parallel the exile and wanderings of the Jews in Diaspora. Joseph, born in Israel, will leave, never to return while he is alive – the experience of many Jews who find their success in business ventures and opportunities across the major capitals of the globe.

And finally, we have Menashe and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph, for whom the land of Israel is only a legend. They weren't born there, and they will not die there. Their entire lives are spent in the exile of Egypt. These sons of Joseph represent the longest period of our history, where for 2,000 years – until the early part of the twentieth century – Israel was also only a legend. Until 1948, most Jews in the world could identify with Ephraim and Menashe because for them, Israel was also unattainable. How did we survive? How did the dream and vision of Abraham cling to generation after generation of Jews who never lived in the land, and whose great-great-grandchildren would not live there? Would they retain the dream of their great-grandfather Israel, or would they disappear into the rainbow of nations?

When Jacob asks Joseph to give him his sons, his true intention can be deduced from the very fact that Jacob asks for them in the midst of recounting his own history, the blessings that God gave him at Luz and the promise that his descendants will inherit the land. Jacob sees a successful Joseph, acculturating within the Egyptian milieu. He places a claim on Menashe and Ephraim. He wants them to be his, and not Joseph's; he wants their first allegiance to be to the Abrahamic culture and not to the Egyptian culture; he wants them to at least yearn to live in Israel, not to be content with remaining in Egypt.

Hence Jacob insists on his question, the question that must plague every single Jew in every generation: 'Who are these?' Do these sons belong to Joseph, Grand Vizier of Egypt, or do they belong to Jacob, the old bearded Jew? Do they belong to the civilization of the pyramids or do they identify with the 'Covenant between the Pieces'? Are they content in Egypt or do they long for Israel?

The answer is clear. Not only does Joseph receive a double blessing, but his sons become tribal heads, equal to Reuven and Shimon, Jacob's eldest sons. Later in the portion Jacob will inform Joseph that

all future generations will use Ephraim and Menashe as a paradigmatic blessing: They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe,' which is how parents bless their sons on Friday night. Menashe and Ephraim were children of Egypt who were nevertheless claimed by and chose to adopt Jacob-Israel as their true father. It is only those children who make a similar choice who remain part of the eternal Jewish people. ©2025 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Sick Person

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When our forefather Yaakov became sick and bed-ridden (*choleh she-nafal le-mishkav*), he became the first such person mentioned in the Torah. What are the various laws dealing with such a *choleh*, and when is he exempt from certain *mitzvot* because of illness and its accompanying weakness?

A *choleh* is exempt from the mitzva of living in a *sukkah*, as are his caretakers. This is true not only for someone who is dangerously ill, but even for someone who merely has a headache or sore eyes. (This exemption is specific to the mitzva of *sukkah*, and one should not extrapolate from it to other *mitzvot*.) A *choleh* is also exempt from traveling to Jerusalem for the three major festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot (*aliyah le-regel*). Those who can travel are obligated, while those who cannot are exempt. There are *mitzvot* from which a *choleh* is exempt because it is assumed he will not be able to summon the requisite levels of concentration, such as the mitzva of *tefillin*. Additionally, a person wearing *tefillin* must be able to control his bodily functions (*guf naki*). Somebody sick is likely to be unable to do so.

Normally, people are required to stand out of respect for a king or prince, an elderly person, or a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar). Sick people are exempt from doing so. This is either because they are understandably preoccupied with their pain, and thus cannot show the proper respect, or because when sick people stand, it is not seen as showing honor. The difference between these two reasons comes into play in a case where a sick person chooses to stand. If the reason that sick people are exempt is because they are preoccupied with their pain, one choosing to stand would indicate he has overcome this difficulty. However, if the reason is that the rising of someone in a weakened state does not show honor, then perhaps he should be asked to sit.

The Talmud (*Moed Katan 27b*) states that if a sick person stands up for a king, we do not tell him to sit. Some understand this to mean that a sick person may stand up if he wishes. This fits with the behavior of our forefather Yaakov, who exerted himself and sat up in bed (*Bereishit 47:31*).

However, others explain that the reason we do not tell a sick person to sit down is that it might sound as if we are saying, "Sit in your illness," meaning "Stay sick," which would be insulting. According to this approach, the Talmud does not permit a sick person to stand. As we said above, it is even possible that such standing does not show respect. If this is the case, why did Yaakov act as he did? A close reading of the verse indicates that Yaakov did not stand, but rather sat up in bed. Out of respect for the king he sat up, but went no further than that. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This book of Bereshith, which comprises a substantial part of the entire written Torah, contains within it almost no commandments and is basically a book of narrative tracing the development of one family – eventually seventy in number – and of the difficulties that this family encountered over generations. So what therefore is its main message to us living in a far different world, millennia later? I think that the message of Bereshith is the obvious one of family and its importance. The Torah purposely and in minute detail describes for us how difficult it is to create and maintain a cohesive family structure. Every one of these generations described in Bereshith from Kayin and Hevel till Yosef and his brothers engaged in the difficult and often heartbreaking task of family building. There are no smooth and trouble-free familial relationships described in the book of Bereshith. Sibling rivalry, violence, different traits of personality, and marital and domestic strife are the stuff of the biblical narrative of this book. The Torah does not sanitize any of its stories nor does it avoid confronting the foibles and errors of human beings.

The greatest of our people, our patriarchs and matriarchs, encountered severe difficulties in attempting to create cohesive, moral and cooperative families. Yet they persevered in the attempt because without this strong sense of family there can be no basis for eternal Jewish survival. There is tragic fall-out in each of the families described in Bereshith and yet somehow the thread of family continuity is maintained and strengthened until the family grows into a numerous and influential nation. This perseverance of family building, in spite of all of the disappointments inherent in that task, is the reason for the book of Bereshith. It is the template of the behavior of our ancestors that now remains as the guidepost for their descendants. The task of family building remains the only sure method of ensuring Jewish survival. ©2025 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Kindness and Truth

When Ya'akov was dying, he called for Yosef and spoke with him: "Please – if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh and do kindness and truth with me – please do not bury me in Egypt. And I will lie down with my fathers, and you shall transport me out of Egypt and bury me in their grave." He (Yosef) said, 'I will do in accordance with your words.' He (Ya'akov) said, 'Swear to me,' and he (Yosef) swore to him, and Yisrael (Ya'akov) prostrated himself toward the head of the bed."

The beginning of Ya'akov's request of Yosef is unusual. The phrase "if I have found favor in your eyes" appears many times in the Torah. It is an appropriate way for a son to request something from his father, but more so a subject to request from a King, or a servant to request from Hashem. It can also be found between two people of equal status. What makes this different is an elder requesting assistance from his son. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin suggests that Ya'akov was remembering that when he sent Yosef to ask about the peace of his brothers, he sent him like a father commanding his son. Now, Ya'akov changed his tone and spoke more gently, not because he saw Yosef as someone who thought himself to be superior, but because the psychology of a dying person is reflected in the concept from our Rabbis that "ayn shilton b'yom hamavet, there is no important status (government) on the day of death." Ya'akov no longer could see himself as a greater status than his son, as would be appropriate for any father-son relationship. Approaching death made Ya'akov see himself at best as Yosef's equal but more likely as subservient to him. If Ya'akov saw Yosef as representing Par'ao in this request, he would certainly have spoken as a subservient only out of honor to Par'ao.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that "no father speaks thus to his son, not even a son to his father, least of all did Ya'akov have to speak in such terms to Yosef." Hirsch explains that the inclusion of the word "please" enables us to understand Ya'akov's statement. For the years that Ya'akov lived together with his son in Egypt, Yosef had offered Ya'akov all the "privileges which his exalted position would have allowed him to, but Ya'akov was never willing to accept them." Ya'akov refused because he did not wish to be treated like the Prime Minister's father. Yet, finally he did need to draw on that special privilege. Ya'akov's statement to Yosef could be understood as if he had said, "If you really wish to do me a favor based on your privilege, please do not bury me in Egypt."

It is obvious that Ya'akov was extremely concerned that he should not be buried in Egypt. Rashi lists three reasons for his concern: (1) the soil of Egypt

was destined to become kinim, lice, during the Ten Plagues, and Ya'akov did not want the lice to crawl under his body, (2) a person buried outside of the Land of Israel would not be resurrected (body and soul together) without the body rolling through tunnels and emerging in the land, and (3) Ya'akov did not wish to be worshipped as a deity.

Ya'akov told Yosef to "do kindness and truth with me (chessed v'emet)." The preparation of the body for burial, which involves washing the body and dressing the body in funeral shrouds, is normally called "kindness of truth (chessed shel emet)." As Rashi explains, "Kindness that people do for the dead is 'kindness of truth', i.e., genuine kindness, because one does not look forward to reciprocation." The Ohr HaChaim questions whether Yosef had fulfilled "kindness of truth" because there was reciprocation. As part of the blessings that Ya'akov bestowed on his sons and their families, he gave the city of Shechem to Yosef alone. The Ohr HaChaim answers that the gift of Shechem was not contingent on the burial of Ya'akov but in anticipation that Yosef would fulfill his responsibility, even at great risk, because of the special relationship he had with his father. Another explanation tells us that Yosef was required to do two things: (1) "Please do not bury me in Egypt," namely, take me out from the cities of Egypt, and (2) "And I will lie down with my fathers, and you shall transport me out of Egypt and bury me in their grave." According to the Ohr HaChaim, the "kindness of truth" only applied to the burial, but the "kindness and truth" applied to leaving Egypt for the Holy Land.

HaRav Hirsch explains the concept of "kindness and truth." "Kindness is to pour oneself out, hence to devote oneself entirely. The addition of Truth to the conception of guarding true Kindness is characteristic. Thus, all the ways of Hashem are Kindness and Truth." Hirsch uses Avraham as an example. Avraham wanted to marry off his son, Yitzchak, but he was insistent that the proper bride be chosen for him. She would have to be worthy of both Yitzchak, as she would have to be "spiritually and morally suitable for the 'seed of Avraham.'" Had Avraham allowed a different bride for Yitzchak, "it would have been an act of loving kindness but not an act of kindness and truth. Truth is always a stipulating reservation when added to Kindness."

Even after Yosef replied to his father that he would do what his father asked, Ya'akov insisted, "Swear to me' and he swore to him." The Ramban explains that, "Ya'akov did not suspect that his righteous and beloved son would disobey his father's command and renege on the matter which he had promised, saying, 'I will do in accordance with your words.' But Ya'akov did so to strengthen the matter in the eyes of Par'ao, as perhaps he might not give permission for Yosef to leave him, and he would

instead say to him, 'Send your brothers and your servants, and they will bring him up there.'" The Ramban understood two things: (1) that Par'aoah might insist that Ya'akov be buried in Egypt, and (2) Par'aoah would not insist if Yosef had sworn this oath to his father. HaRav Sorotzkin understood these words differently. Ya'akov was concerned that Yosef would not wish to leave Egypt because he might lose respect from Par'aoah for choosing a different land over Egypt. When Yosef answered, "I will do in accordance with your words," Yosef was saying that he would give the same instructions to the B'nei Yisrael concerning his burial when he died. Thus, the oath was not a question of doubting Yosef's promise to bury Ya'akov outside of Egypt, but instead was proof that Yosef loved Israel.

We are fortunate today to be able to return to Ya'akov's burial place in Chevron, where we can see for ourselves the chessed v'emet done for him by Yosef. May we also be worthy to be buried in the Holy Land after we have completed our one hundred twenty years. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

Yehuda, your brothers shall praise you, your hand on the nape of your enemy, the children of your father shall bow to you." (Beraishis 49:8) After the stern words Yaakov had for Reuven, Shimon and Levi for the acts they'd done, Yehuda began to slink away, fearful that Yaakov would criticize him for the story of Tamar. Therefore, Yaakov let Yehuda know that he could expect positive words.

He begins by saying that his brothers would praise him. This was not simply honoring him, but rather referred to the kingship which would be bestowed on him and his descendants. The next phrase, the hand on the nape of the neck, alludes to Dovid HaMelech, one of Yehuda's descendants, who would sing to Hashem as recounted in Sefer Shmuel (II 22:41), as well as in Tehillim Chapter 18, and say, "My enemies, You gave me the back of their necks (as they ran from me); I cut down those who hate me."

Finally, Yaakov says that the sons of Yehuda's father would bow to him. Since Yaakov had children from four mothers, he expressed that Yehuda would be universally acknowledged as the leader by Yaakov's sons, regardless of who their mother was.

It is curious that the posuk would begin by speaking about Yehuda's brothers, then switch to speaking about his enemies, and then return to his brothers. It is possible to say this refers to three different people. Yehuda, himself, would be honored and acknowledged as king, then Dovid, his descendant would rule, referenced by the second part of the verse, and finally, when all the children of Israel bow to him, it could refer to Moshiach. The chronology therefore requires the change in syntax.

However, it's also possible that the Torah is teaching us about the type of ruler a Jewish king should be. Instead of focusing on himself, his role is to guide the Jews in their service of Hashem and ensure they follow the Torah.

Yehuda was told he would receive the kingship. He would be successful, in the form of the house of Dovid, who would chase and defeat their enemies. Often, a king who is powerful becomes full of himself and praises his prowess in battle or his strategy in dealing with his enemies. He can become hardened and cruel, and become a despot.

This was not the way of Dovid and the descendants of Yehuda. From Yehuda's acknowledgement of his relationship with Tamar, to Dovid's acceptance of Noson HaNavi's rebuke, the kings of this line were humble, recognizing Hashem's control over them and the world, and willing to learn from their mistakes. For this reason, even after being successful in battle, the king would be bowed to by his brothers, for he would be worthy of such bowing by virtue of his own subservience to the King of Kings.

A man's wife fell ill and the doctors abandoned hope. Desperate, he went to the Chofetz Chaim in Radin who promised to pray on condition that the man not reveal that he had asked the Chofetz Chaim for help. The woman had a miraculous recovery.

Years later, someone else fell ill with the disease. Seeing their distress, the man broke his promise and revealed that when he faced this issue, he'd gone to Radin. Shortly thereafter, his wife's illness returned.

Immediately, he ran back to the Chofetz Chaim. "I am sorry but I cannot help you," said the sage. "But last time you davened and my wife was healed!" responded the distraught man.

"When you came to me last time," said the Chofetz Chaim, "I was a younger man. I fasted FORTY days for your wife to be healed. I am sorry, but I don't have the strength anymore."

What devotion great people have to their fellow Jews! Let us strive for similar greatness. © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

It's easy to resent being mistreated. It's also misguided to be resentful.

Yosef reassures his brothers that he harbors no ill will for their having plotted against him. "Although you intended me harm, Elokim intended it for good" (Beraishis 50:20), he tells his siblings, echoing his earlier words "It wasn't you who sent me here, but rather Elokim (ibid 45:8).

Those statements, Rav Yeruchom Levovitz, the famed Mir mashgiach, explained, were not mere polite, comforting words of forgiveness. They meant precisely

what they say: that Hashem was ultimately the reason for his having been mistreated and sold into servitude. [Note the use of "Elokim" in both psukim, indicating din, pure justice]. It was part of a plan.

In his Daas Torah, Rav Yeruchom writes that Yosef was telling his brothers that they really had nothing to do with his life's trajectory, that they had essentially been mere tools that were used in order to bring him to who he had become, the viceroy of Mitzrayim.

And so, Rav Levovitz continues, every person who feels wronged by another should not automatically be angry at his oppressor, since he is where Hashem wants him to be. Would anyone, the mashgiach asks, think to rail against a stone that fell on him? The oppressor is but a stone, the means by which Hashem's plan for the injured person is furthered.

It's an attitude vital for living a Torah-informed life.

"Take this rule," says Rav Yeruchom, "firmly in hand." ©2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

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The revelation that Yosef had survived and that he had also assumed a position of immense prominence, a testament to Hashem's extraordinary providence, was obviously a pivotal, even transformational, moment in the life of Yaakov Avinu. His personal response to this epiphany is obviously of paradigmatic importance given the principle of maaseh avot siman lebanim. The fact that the revelation engenders a clear transition in his identification from Yaakov to Yisrael -- "...vatechi ruach Yaakov avihem" (Bereishit 45:27) "Vayomer Yisrael..." (ibid 45:28) (followed by two more Yisrael references [46:1,2], before resuming an immediate return to the Yaakov persona emphasis [46:2,5,6] and a later broader oscillation between the two names [see 46:29-30], particularly throughout Parshat Vayechi, his final legacy), especially in light of the almost total absence of the "Yisrael" moniker (with the notable exception of 43:6-10, see R' Hirsch commentary) subsequent to the loss of Yosef (37:32), further catapults the paradigmatic significance of Yisrael's reaction.

I have previously analyzed some of the implications of Chazal's striking view (also cited in Rashi 46:29) that Yaakov-Yisrael delayed his much anticipated, joyous reunion with Yosef until he had completed the recitation of keriyat Shema! It is equally important to examine his initial reaction to this transformational development: "Vayomer Yisrael rav, od Yosef beni chai, eilchah ve-erenu be-terem amut." While a view in the midrash (see also R' Bachya) sees the word "rav" as part of a phrase marveling at what Yosef had been able to achieve while maintaining his religious integrity despite the formidable obstacles he

faced, the keriah cantillation, and the overwhelming majority of mefarshim perceived "rav" as a standalone exclamation. Yaakov simply exclaimed "rav"! What does this single terse word, somewhat jarring in this sentence structure, signify in this pivotal context that seemingly encapsulates a different, more aspirational trajectory for the bechir ha-avot? The interpretations of various classical commentators each provide important insight and perspective. Moreover, it is conceivable that the ambiguity of this surprising word choice is intentional, highlighting the validity of multiple themes pertaining to avodat Hashem.

Targum Yonatan, after chronicling numerous crucial episodes in which Yaakov previously merited extraordinary Divine intervention and salvation, emphasizes just how astonished Yaakov was at experiencing this totally unanticipated chesed. Evidently the usage of "rav" conveys a sense of overwhelming, possibly inexpressible gratitude. Rather than being jaded by his unique history of ubiquitous hashgachah, Yisrael articulates a profound hakkarat hatov that reflects his immense humility, immeasurable appreciation, and absolute subordination to Hashem. The purity of Yisrael's hakkarat ha-tov, reflective of profound personal humility and total devotion to Hashem, is truly inspiring and an impactful model.

R' Saadia Gaon, R' Bachya, Chizkuni, Malbim, and others offer an equally simple but foundational view. They render "rav" as an expression of sufficiency ("dai" or "maspik"), articulating a stark lesson in perspective. It would have been tempting to be dazzled by Yosef's position and success and by the potential implications for the future of benei Yisrael. There would be time later to contemplate and appreciate this dimension of Divine providence. Yet, in the moment, processing the revelation, these calculations would have been obscene. As a corrective rejoinder to the information that Yosef had not only survived, but was also the ruler of Egypt (45:26 "od Yosef chai vechi hu moshel be'eretz Mitzrayim"), Yisrael succinctly declared "rav", "od Yosef beni chai", asserting with absolute emotional and moral clarity that the significance of Yosef's preeminence was completely eclipsed by his mere survival. Yisrael's idealistic and unequivocal posture, even as he was processing an unimaginable and

incredibly complex new reality bespeaks of the exceptional perspective he embodied as tiferet, the bechir ha-avot, Yisrael. [In his Haamek Davar, Netziv, too, interprets "rav" as "dai", and as a statement of perspective and principle, though he posits that Yaakov was grappling with a different conundrum, weighing his halachic obligations to remain in Eretz Yisrael in light of his potentially renewed personal relationship with Yosef, initially leading him to conclude that a visit would suffice.]

The most ubiquitous interpretation of "rav" is

also the most intriguing. Unklelos ("sagi li chedvah"), Ibn Ezra, and Rashi ("od simchah ve-chedvah") identify the ambiguous "rav" -- abundance with joy! [Netziv posits that the word "vatechi" (in 45:27) already connotes a pivot to a state of joy.] On one level, this emphasis can be attributed to the return of Yaakov-Yisrael's prophetic capacity. Rashi (45:27), citing the midrash, notes that Yaakov appears to have been deprived of prophetic experiences in the aftermath of the profound suffering incurred by evel Yosef. Radak stresses the absence of simchah, a prerequisite for prophecy according to the passage in Massechet Shabbat (30b) in this context (though he himself understood "rav" somewhat differently). It is conceivable that those who interpret "rav" as joy perceive it as Yisrael's personal reaction to the return of this crucial dimension of his spiritual stature.

Moreover, Chazal continuously emphasize the distress and suffering that singularly characterized Yaakov's life. In the beginning of Vayeshev (36:1), they note "bikesh Yaakov leishev be-shalvah kaftzah alav rogzo shel Yosef". In his initial meeting with Pharaoh (47:9), Yaakov describes his challenging and difficult life -- "...me'at ve-raim hayu sheni chayay...". Chazal project (see also Ha-ketav ve-ha-Kabalah's discussion of, "...veYosef yasim yado al einecha" (46:4)) that the last seventeen years of Yaakov's life, reunited with Yosef, was an intensely joyous era that counteracted the previous seventeen years of deep gloom initiated by mechirat Yosef. In this respect, the focus on "rav" as simchah marks an important new phase and a crucial corrective in his life.

However, the terseness of this usage, and the very determination that ultimate abundance -- "rav" -- refers to joy implies a factor that transcends a mere functional role -- the facilitation of nevuah, or the balancing out of a life of extreme stress and obstacles. Yisrael, in this expression of joy as overflow, as a maximalist personal-religious experience, possibly formulated simchah as an inherent dimension of avodat Hashem, albeit one that also justifies the urgency of cultivating simchah in a balanced halachic life and undergirds its indispensable role as a prerequisite for prophecy. Indeed, theme of "ivdu et Hashem besimchah", alongside "ivdu et Hashem beyirah", and the integration of "gilu bereadah" is axiomatic in halachic life. Rambam (end of Hilchot Lulav) crystalizes this theme, as does R' Aaron ha-Kohen mi-Lunel (Orchot Chayim, end of Hilchot Kiddushin, p. 69, the commentary on the berachah achritah of sheva berachot -- "asher bara sason ve-simchah". He states: "ki kevod Hashem be-simchat nefesh kedai shetihyeh muchenet lekabel mei'hodo. Ki hayagon sotem mekorei hanefesh, vehi mechizah mafseket beinah levein Elokehah".)

Finally, the balance of tza'ar and simchah specifically in the personal history of Yaakov, that also

embodies the national destiny of Yisrael, is a compelling theme that justifies this terse crystallization, this succinct encapsulation of the paradigmatic shift in Yaakov-Yisrael's trajectory. It is surely no coincidence that Yaakov-Yisrael, the bechir ha-avot who embodies the integrative quality of tiferet experienced the most turbulent and wide-ranging experiences of all of our avot. His paradigmatic life demonstrates that avodat Hashem addresses all circumstances, that it can and must be foundational to all dimensions of life. Indeed, the usage of "rav" subtly but powerfully articulates precisely the capacity and aspiration for comprehensive avodat Hashem, irrespective of the challenge or obstacle. By declaring "rav" upon reflecting on "od Yosef beni chai", undoubtedly referencing pure hakkarat hatov, emphasizing the priority of Yosef's very survival over his preeminent status, certainly also referring to a renewed capacity for simchah in avodat Hashem despite the devastating travails that had rendered his Yisrael persona and that dimension of spirituality dormant for such an extensive period, Yaakov-Yisrael, asserted the absolute comprehensiveness of Torah life and underscored the rejuvenation of Yisrael.

The capacity to integrate a comprehensive range in avodat Hashem, to deeply appreciate hashgachat Hashem with proper perspective and a keen sense of ikkar ve-tafel, and even to abruptly pivot from tza'ar to simchah is axiomatic in Torah life. We just concluded the joyous celebration of Chanukah. According to Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 3:3 -- his rendering of "yom tov" in Shabbat 21b as "simchah") these days of "simchah" counteracted days of profound oppression (3:1 -- "vetzar lachem le-Yisrael meod mipneihem", and Bamidbar 10:9-10). Rambam (Hilchot Avel 1:1) introduces the laws of mourning by emphasizing this range, noting the comment of the Yerushalmi that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted both the seven day mourning period and the seven day celebration of marriages. [See, also, Sefer haMitzvot, no. 59, and the comment of Magid Mishnah, Hilchos Taanit 1:1]. Even as we are presently appropriately transfixed by and ensconced in the trials and sorrow of war, it is important that we anticipate a more joyous future, in which, like Yisrael before us, we can proudly proclaim and celebrate "rav", in its manifold meanings.

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