

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

In his introduction to the Rabbinical Council of America's version of the ArtScroll Siddur, Rabbi Saul Berman has a lovely essay on the opening word of today's Parsha, vayigash, "And he drew close." Because the work is not widely available outside America, I summarise the essay here.

It is our custom to take three steps forward before beginning the Amidah, the "standing prayer." These steps symbolise a formal approach to the Divine presence. It is as if we had been ushered into the innermost chamber of the palace, and we "draw close" to present our petition to the supreme King of kings.

R. Eleazar ben Judah (c.1165-c.1230), author of the Sefer Rokeach, made the fascinating suggestion that these three steps correspond to the three times in the Hebrew Bible where the word vayigash, "and he drew close," is used in connection with prayer.

The first is the moment when Abraham hears of God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gemorah and the cities of the plain. "Abraham approached [vayigash] and said: Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?... Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:23-25)

The second occurs in today's Parsha. Joseph's silver goblet has been found in Benjamin's sack, just as he intended. Joseph -- whose true identity is still unknown to the brothers -- says that Benjamin will now be held as his slave. The others may go free. Judah, having given Jacob his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safe return, now pleads for his brother's release. "Then Judah drew close [vayigash] to him and said: Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord." (Gen. 44:18)

The third appears in the great confrontation at Mount Carmel between the Prophet Elijah and the 450 false prophets of Baal. Elijah proposes a test. Let each side prepare a sacrifice and call on the name of their deity. The one that sends fire is the true God. The 450 prophets do so. They prepare the sacrifice and ask Baal to send fire. Nothing happens. They cry all day, shouting, gyrating, lacerating themselves and working themselves into a frenzy but no fire comes. Then "Elijah stepped forward [vayigash] and prayed: O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and

have done all these things at Your command." Fire descends, and the people fall to the ground, saying: "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God" (I Kings 18). We recite this sentence seven times at the climax of Neilah on Yom Kippur.

Three approaches, three prayers, but very different from one another. Abraham prays for justice. Judah prays for mercy. Elijah prays for God to reveal Himself.

Abraham prays on behalf of strangers -- the people of the plain. They are, we know, wicked. The Torah told us this long before, when Lot first separated from Abraham to make his home in Sodom (Gen. 13:13). Yet Abraham is concerned with their fate. He pleads in their defence. Abraham speaks out of the covenant of human solidarity.

Judah pleads with Joseph for the sake of his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob who he knows will not be able to bear the loss of yet another beloved son. He speaks on behalf of the family and its integrity, the bonds of emotion that bind those who share a common ancestry.

Elijah speaks to God, as it were, for the sake of God. He wants the people to renounce idolatry and return to their ancestral faith -- to the one true God who rescued them from Egypt and took them to Himself in love. His primary concern is for God's sovereignty over the people. Later, when God reveals Himself on Mount Horeb, Elijah says, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." He speaks for the honour of God Himself.

Their respective stances, too, are different. Abraham, in the course of his prayer, calls himself "nothing but dust and ashes." Judah describes himself as a "servant" in the presence of a ruler. Elijah describes himself as a prophet, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left." Abraham represents our sense of awe in the presence of infinity, Judah our humility in the face of majesty, Elijah the grandeur and dignity of those who are bearers of the Divine word.

There are echoes of these encounters in the first three paragraphs of the Amidah. The first is about the patriarchs. God "remembers the good deeds of the fathers." This reminds us of Abraham's prayer.

The second is about Gevurah, God's governance of the universe, "supporting the fallen, healing the sick, setting free the bound and keeping faith with those who lie in the dust." When we recite it,

we are like Judah standing before Joseph, a servant or subject in the presence of sovereignty and power.

The third is about Kedushat Hashem, "the holiness of God's name," meaning the acknowledgement of God by human beings. When an act makes people conscious of God's existence, we call it a Kiddush Hashem. That is precisely what Elijah sought to do, and succeeded in doing, on Mount Carmel.

These three prayers -- each an historic moment in the unfolding of the human spirit towards God -- together represent the full spectrum of emotions and concerns we bring to the act of prayer. Each is introduced by the word *vayigash*, "and he approached, drew close, stepped forward." As we take three steps forward at the start of each prayer, we are thereby retracing the footsteps of three giants of the spirit, Abraham, Judah, and Elijah, re-enacting their great encounters with God.

On 21 July 1969 Neil Armstrong, the first human being to set foot on the moon, uttered the famous words: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Our three small steps towards heaven represent three no less historic leaps for mankind. *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

“Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father, to Goshen; and he presented himself unto him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.” (Genesis 46:29) Of all the figures in Genesis, Jacob's life is the most clearly depicted, his emotional experiences ranging from ecstatic heights to painful descents clearly recorded. And of all his sufferings, probably the most painful moment occurs when the brothers bring home the blood-soaked coat of many colors and ask their father if indeed it belongs to Joseph. Whatever happened until then – his running away from Esau, his discovering that he'd been hoodwinked by Laban, his burying of his beloved Rachel on the side of the road after less than a decade of married life – cannot compare to the moment when he is led to believe that his beloved son has been ripped apart by a wild beast. The text is explicit concerning Jacob's suffering; inconsolable, he mourns many days, and accepts the fact that he will even go to his grave a mourner.

In a sense Jacob's life is over, since all his hopes for the future had been bound up in his beloved Joseph. Abraham almost lost his future with the binding of Isaac, but Jacob actually did lose his future for the twenty-two years he lived thinking his favored son and heir for the birthright had been torn by a wild beast. And

if his confrontation with the bloodied coat marks the greatest suffering in Jacob's life, then the encounter between Jacob the elderly father and his living son Joseph must be the most significant moment of Jacob's life.

When father and son do meet at last, the tears flow freely. Indeed, the Torah records the very words of Jacob which reflect the feelings of a man who has achieved total peace and serenity with God: “Now I may die, since I have seen your face, that you are yet alive.” (Genesis 46:30)

If it is true that Jacob's encounter with Joseph is the central experience of his life, redeeming not only his own faith but the promises God has given to Jacob's descendants, then the meeting should illuminate basic truths not only about a father and son, but also about the nature of the Jewish people and our destiny.

What immediately strikes us is the ambiguity in the account of the tears. We don't know who fell on whose neck, or who wept. Was it Jacob or Joseph? Rashi comments that it was Joseph who wept. Then what was Jacob doing at that moment? According to the Midrash, Jacob was busy saying the Shema, ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One.’

Nahmanides disagrees with Rashi, arguing that simple common sense doesn't allow for the view that the old father held back his tears while the younger Joseph gave vent to his emotions. After all, everybody understands that if you have an old father who finds his son alive after believing that he's been dead for the last twenty-two years, and a son who has reached the position of second-in-command to Pharaoh, how could we doubt that the tears must have emanated from the elder Jacob's eyes? It would certainly have been understandable for both to have wept, but since the weeping in this verse is done in the singular, it must have been Jacob who wept.

And yet Rashi's interpretation must be addressed. Why does he assign Joseph the tears and his father the Shema? What's so significant about the Shema, especially at this moment?

During the twenty-two years of mourning, Jacob's life had been hopeless. For so long he'd been living in a fog of despair, in sharp contrast to the years prior to Joseph's death when his entire life had been pregnant with meaning as he prepared his favorite son for eventual leadership of Israel, as he fashioned for him the mantle of the birthright. He had certainly reiterated the tradition of the Covenant between the Pieces, the mission of Israel to the nations, the ultimate goal of ethical monotheism to perfect the world under the kingship of God. And then arrived the black, bleak day when ‘Joseph has been torn, yes, torn by a wild beast,’ when the bloodstained garment was brought to him; he could hardly be blamed if he allowed himself a momentary lapse of faith. Until then, it had been so

clear to him that all of the divine promises which were to befall his descendants were to be realized through Joseph, first-born of his beloved Rachel, devoted student of family lore, dreamer of lofty dreams. And now without Joseph, what is to become of the divine promises?

From this vantage point, it makes very good sense that Jacob's immediate response to his encounter with Joseph was the profound confirmation of his faith in the traditions of his father, and in the future of his people. Hence he declares the formula of Jewish faith, the acceptance of the yoke of divine kingship, Shema Yisrael, our belief in ultimate world acceptance of ethical monotheism. In effect, Jacob is telling Joseph that now he understands that God's covenant with Abraham will indeed be fulfilled, no matter how bleak the picture, no matter how dark the exile. Hear O Israel, the Lord who is now our God will eventually be crowned as the ruler of universe, on that day God will be one and His name will be one. Never give up on our faith, no matter what. From the perspective of my life, I now realize that the tragedy which I experienced was merely God's preparation of the Covenant between the Pieces, the survival of the family, the enslavement in and eventual exodus from Egypt, the redemption of the world. ©2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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He certainly emerges from the entire bewildering and tragic events as a heroic and noble figure, still the beloved son of his father and the heir to the double portion birthright of the first-born. Yet, in terms of the long range view of Jewish history, Yosef is not the vehicle of Jewish survival. His kingdom of the northern ten tribes of Israel is relatively short-lived and riddled with wicked kings and widespread idolatrous practice. The kingdom of Yosef is never restored and the remnants of the northern ten tribes are eventually absorbed into the kingdom and tribe of Judah. Yosef's triumph is seen in Jewish history as being legitimate but essentially temporary. It is his brother Yehudah who emerges as the ultimate hero and guarantor of Jewish survival and as the true head of Yaakov's family. The Jewish people are called upon his name and it is through his descendants that legitimate royalty comes to Israel. The future salvation of Israel and the messianic vision of full and complete redemption and a better world for all are assigned to the family and descendants of Yehudah. He is the ultimate victor in the debate between Yosef and himself that this week's parsha highlights.

The obvious question that presents itself is why this should be. After all it is Yosef who is the righteous one, the one who resisted physical temptation and who persevered in his loyalty to the ideals of the patriarchs

of Israel under the most trying and difficult of circumstances. Yehuda on the other hand can be superficially judged and found wanting in his behavior regarding Tamar and in his leadership role in the sale of his brother as a slave. So why, in historical terms, is he the hero and savior of Israel while Yosef is not?

Though God's will, so to speak, in all of these matters remains hidden and inscrutable to us mere mortals, a glimmer of understanding can come to us from the words of Yaakov that will appear in next week's parsha. Yaakov blesses Yehudah for his ability to rise from error and tragedy and continue forward. It is Yehudah's resilience that marks his character and behavior. He redeems himself from the error of his treatment of Yosef by his unconditional and self-sacrificing defense of Binyamin. He admits his error in condemning Tamar and their children become the bearers of Jewish royalty. The secret of Jewish survival lies in Jewish renewal and resilience. It is the one national trait that outweighs all other factors in Jewish history. It certainly is the one most in demand in our current Jewish world today as well. ©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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers with the simple words "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3).

Commentators note a degree of harshness in Joseph's words. Kli Yakar, for example, observes that although Joseph proclaims, "I am Joseph," he fails to include the words "your brother."

Kli Yakar adds that the brothers also sense that Joseph's question, "Is my father still alive?" contains a rebuke. Joseph refers to Jacob as his father, not as the father of his brothers. He purposely chooses these words to drive home to his brothers that by selling him, they failed to show concern for their father – they indeed behaved as if Jacob were not their father.

The omission of the words "your brother" and the portrayal of Jacob as Joseph's father alone startled his siblings. In the words of the Torah, "And his brothers could not answer him, for they were frightened by his presence" (45:3).

In the very next sentence, however, Joseph softens his words (45:4). There, he repeats, "I am Joseph," but this time, as Kli Yakar notes, he deliberately adds the words "your brother." The healing process has begun.

The healing seems to reach another level when Joseph tells his brothers that they should not be upset at having sold him. God had a deeper plan for Joseph – to save Egypt and the world from famine. In other

words, from the evil of the sale, good had come (45:5–7). As the Yiddish expression teaches, A mensch tracht, un Gott lacht (A person plans, and God laughs). No matter how much an individual anticipates outcomes, God alone can see the bigger picture.

Joseph concludes this section by strengthening his comments with the words, “And now, it was not you that sent me here, but God” (45:8). Hence, Joseph is partially conciliatory and partially harsh – conciliatory in that he assures his brothers that it was all for the good, and harsh in that the good did not come from them but from God.

As Rabbi Zvi Dov Kanotopsky, in his wonderful work *Night of Watching* (Jerusalem: Tzur-Ot Press, 1977), writes: “Joseph feels duty-bound to reply that all they have contributed is a transgression. They are not the senders, but the sellers. This transgression may not call for despair [as the outcome orchestrated by God was good]...but it does call for repentance.”

After twenty-two years of separation, the reunion of Joseph and his brothers contains different elements. As in any dispute between siblings, the first words uttered by the aggrieved party are often laced with contradictions – indicating that the healing process does not occur in an instant; it takes time and patience. ©2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Conflict between Judah and Joseph

The prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars and the moon- of a time where he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

One of the obvious differences between Jacob's and his son Joseph's dreams is that Joseph's dreams always come to fruition. In fact, whatever Joseph sets his mind to accomplish, he is successful. When he arrives in Egypt after being sold by his jealous brothers he is able to work for an influential person in Egypt's government. When he is thrown into jail he gains favor with the head of the prison. And when he finally interprets Pharos dream he is elevated to the position as Viceroy, perhaps the most powerful position next to the king himself. Everything that Joseph touches seems to turn to gold.

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems

to work out for him. He presents his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph after he is willing to give his life to save the life of his brother Benjamin, only to be embarrassed to own up to his mistake of initiating and carrying out the sale of his brother Joseph-and realizing that he is standing before his long lost brother, the dreamer-and that his dreams have come true.

To make things more difficult, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that the future king of Israel the forecaster of the Messiah would come from Joseph!

One reason that our sages explain this phenomenon is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to Jacob that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as “yhudim”, Jews...

But even more important –and this is the character trait that brings me closer to identify with Judah-is his humanness and the fact that he makes mistakes in his lifetime and has the strength and ability to own up to his wrongdoings and start over. His descendent, King David has these same character traits. David, on a simple level-displays poor judgment with reference to Bat Sheva, and a host of other incidences as stated in the book of Samuel, but is always able to rise up from his mistakes and begin anew. His character, which is essentially the character of his ancestor Judah, is one who is represented by a typical Jew who is faced daily with religious challenges and sometimes fails and sometimes is successful. The strength of the Jew is the ability to own up to responsibility and to admit wrong and then start anew.

This appreciation of the fallibility of the human being is one that parents should keep in mind when judging their children and placing undue burdens and responsibilities on them expecting them to be perfect in every way. Parents very often use their children as scapegoats to realize their dreams, without concern for what is really good for their children. Teachers also, often, have unreasonable expectations from their students not allowing them to falter even one bit, without concern that they are after all only dealing with children and that everyone should be given some slack at different times in their lives. I have seen parents who make sure that their children are enrolled in every conceivable activity after school, without keeping in mind that children need some down time and space for themselves and sometimes make mistakes.

The strength of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet aspires to great heights. ©2020 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Separation or Participation in Society

When Yosef's brothers returned to their father, Ya'akov, after discovering that Yosef was now the surrogate leader of Egypt, they reported to Ya'akov all of Yosef's instructions including that he should bring the entire family to Egypt where they would be able to receive food and a dwelling place during the remaining years of the famine. Ya'akov knew that this was not a short period of time, but instead the beginning of the prophecy of Avraham, that the B'nei Yisrael would be exiled in a strange land for four hundred years. They would become slaves, worked strenuously, and eventually be freed and return to the land that Hashem had promised them. Ya'akov was very frightened by this exile, for he was uncertain of the future generations' devotion to Hashem and the ways in which they might be influenced by the negative environment of Egypt.

Yosef was the son who had demonstrated that he was closest to his father in many ways. He devoted his early years to study Torah with his father. His father had honored him with the Coat of Many Colors, a sign of his leadership. Yosef understood the future needs of the B'nei Yisrael even though his brothers' jealousy would cause them to misinterpret his ideas. His dreams involved sheaves of grain and heavenly bodies, a future that he understood but was unclear to his brothers. Yosef's ability to analyze the needs of the B'nei Yisrael in the present and the future guided his actions when his whole family joined him in Egypt.

The Torah quotes Yosef's prediction of Par'ao's first inquiry about Yosef's family when he would be introducing his brothers to the Egyptian leader. First Yosef told his brothers exactly what he would state to Par'ao and what they should also answer to Par'ao: "And Yosef said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'My brothers and my father's household who are in the land of Canaan have come to me. The men are shepherds, for they have been cattlemen; their flocks and cattle, and everything they own, they have brought.' And it shall be, when Par'ao summons you, and says, 'What is your occupation?' Then you shall say, 'Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth till now, both we and our forefathers,' so that you may settle in the Land of

Goshen, every shepherd is an abomination to Egypt."

Our Rabbis ask what these words were intended to say to Par'ao. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch suggests that Egypt was a caste system of "artisans, workers on the land, soldiers ..., and not shepherds of someone else's flocks." Hirsch explains that the caste system in Egypt required that "the first question was naturally about their profession." Though the brothers were not shepherds directly, they owned the sheep and hired herdsmen to attend to them. This profession was looked down on by the Egyptian caste system. Hirsch continues, "To Par'ao's question they were unashamedly to acknowledge this unpleasant fact, for the disgust which the Egyptians had for their calling, which they could not disguise, -- just as altogether, the dislike of the Jews by the nations -- was the first means for the preservation of that race that was destined for an isolated path through the ages."

The Kli Yakar explains that the whole purpose of Yosef's scripted words for his brothers was to create a separation from Par'ao and Egyptian society. Yosef's instructions were that his brothers should call themselves cattlemen (herders) and only afterwards to clarify herders as shepherds. Par'ao also had cattlemen and shepherds, but his shepherds had a different view of the sheep. Par'ao's shepherds honored the sheep, treating them as a god. Instead of controlling the sheep, their task was to protect them from accidents, but to allow them to graze freely. They would not strike the sheep to get them to conform to follow or to stay within a safe area. The Kli Yakar also states that Yosef emphasized that his brothers were owners of the animals that they shepherded. This indicated that they would not serve the animals as these animals were their livelihood.

HaAmek Davar points out that there was another reason for Yosef's instructions to his brothers. Yosef understood that he could not suggest to Par'ao that Par'ao should isolate the B'nei Yisrael in a small portion of his land. Par'ao was unlikely to want the B'nei Yisrael gathered together in one place, a natural fifth-column. Yosef wanted his brothers' words to Par'ao to influence Par'ao to suggest isolating them on his own. If the idea came from Par'ao directly, it would appear that it would be accepted by all Egyptians.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin makes two other observations from Yosef's instructions that are important for our discussion. When Yosef spoke to Par'ao, he said, "The men are shepherds." HaRav Sorotzkin asks why Yosef did not describe them as his brothers instead of "men." HaRav Sorotzkin explains that their message was that the entire house of their father was involved in shepherding. It would not be sufficient to just isolate Yosef's brothers. HaRav Sorotzkin also explained that the brothers had come to Egypt with their animals so that Par'ao could not later

claim that these animals were part of the flocks sold by the Egyptians to Par'aoth for Yosef's stored grain.

The concept of isolationism was a double-edged sword. While the separation acted to shield the B'nei Yisrael from the negative influence of the Egyptians, it also made the B'nei Yisrael a mystery which caused distrust and suspicion. The beginning of Sefer Shemot (Exodus) showed how Par'aoth manipulated his people to fear the B'nei Yisrael and to view them as an existential threat to their way of life. Our Rabbis have expressed that the B'nei Yisrael were saved from Egypt by two things: they maintained their special clothing and they maintained their Jewish names. There have always been those who will advocate for an "enlightened" approach where we are called upon to "blend" with the modern world. Others will say that one must never take on the assimilating changes to our uniqueness. Yosef understood that the people must be unique or they would cease being worthy of Hashem's commandments. It is hard for us to know whether he was correct in his approach. May we each seek to serve Hashem fully, whether apart from the worldly society or adapting modern times to Torah values. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd say to him, "So says your son Yosef, Hashem has placed me as a master for all Egypt..." (Beraishis 45:9) After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and tried to reassure them that they were not to blame for his ending up in Egypt, it was time to let Yaakov know he was alive. Yosef commanded his brothers to hurry to his father and give him a message. "So says your son Yosef, Hashem made me the master of all Egypt." More than that, they were to recount to Yaakov all they had seen of his power and grandeur.

Because of his position, Yosef was unable to honor his father by leaving Egypt to visit him, and therefore he asked Yaakov to hurry down to see him in Egypt. He promised to care for Yaakov and his family, and part of the message of his power was that he would be able to create a special area in Goshen for Yaakov and his family to live, without mingling with the Egyptians. Yosef would clear the area for them and he was able to do this because of the great rank he held.

For a father who wanted his sons to be involved in serving Hashem, not a foreign government, and who desired that they be righteous and learned, why was this news the impetus for Yaakov to come see his son? Would it not have been better for Yosef to tell Yaakov that he was fulfilling the mitzvos of the Torah and raising his sons as his father raised him? It seems that Yosef's lofty position would be a reason for Yaakov to stay away.

However, we must pay attention to the order of

Yosef's message to his father. He told his brothers, "Tell my father Hashem made me the lord of this land." In other words, He sent me here for a purpose. Once Yosef made that declaration, it showed that he did not view himself as a powerful man with great success. Rather, he viewed himself as an Eved Hashem, a person seeking to achieve what Hashem put him on this world for.

Then, he said to tell Yaakov about the greatness and honor he had. However, all of this was tempered by that first statement of fact: This is not my greatness, but rather the great responsibility Hashem has bestowed upon me. I am here to do what He wants me to, and I cannot abandon my post.

To Yaakov, this would be something he would be pleased to witness; to see his son surrounded by wealth and power, and to find it meaningless other than to fulfill Hashem's will. The message Yosef conveyed was that he recognized the place where Hashem puts us is where we are to accomplish. This was the righteousness Yaakov desired from his children, so he hurried to see Yosef.

R' Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l, the great Rosh Yeshiva and sage, was on his way to deliver a lecture in Yeshiva when he was stopped by a beggar asking for alms. R' Isser Zalman gave him a generous amount but the fellow complained that it wasn't enough.

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

"Why are you shocked?" asked R' Isser Zalman. "Do you think I'm better than him because I've learned a lot of Torah and I give shiurim? The circumstances of life have led me to be a Rosh Yeshiva and him to be a beggar. I do not feel superior to him so I felt obligated to grant his request, regardless of how he made it." © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Shepherds were abhorrent to ancient Egyptians, Yosef tells his brothers, as he relates what they should tell Par'oh in order to reserve the area of Goshen for his immigrating family (Beraishis 46:34). We find this in Mikeitz as well (43:32; see Rashi and Onkelos there)

Some commentaries understand that as indicating that the Egyptians protected livestock and shunned the consumption of meat. Ibn Ezra writes that the Egyptians were "like the people of India today, who don't consume anything that comes from a sensible animal."

Pardes Yosef (Rabbi Yosef Patzanovski) references the Ibn Ezra and explains that the ancient

Egyptians considered the slaughter of an animal to be equivalent to the murder of a human being.

Although far distant in both time and place from ancient Egypt and India, some people in the Western Hemisphere today have come to embrace the notion that the sentience of animals renders them essentially no different from humans.

To be sure, seeking to prevent needless pain to non-human creatures is entirely in keeping with the Jewish mesorah, the source of enlightened society's moral code. But those activists' convictions go far beyond protecting animals from pain; they seek to muddle the fundamental distinction between the animal world and the human. A distinction that is all too important in our day, for instance, when it comes to issues pertinent to the beginning or end of life, or moral behavior.

A book that focuses on "the exploitation and slaughter of animals" compares animal farming to Nazi concentration camps. Its obscene title: "Eternal Treblinka." Similarly obscene was the lament by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals founder Ingrid Newkirk that "Six million Jews died in concentration camps, but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses."

But even average citizens today can slip onto the human-animal equivalency slope. American households with pets spend more than \$60 billion on their care each year. People give dogs birthday presents and have their portraits taken. Such things might seem benign but, according to one study, many Americans grow more concerned when they see a dog in pain than when they see an adult human suffering.

We who have been gifted with the Torah, as well as all people who are the product of societies influenced by Torah truths, consider the difference between animals and human beings to be sacrosanct.

It is incumbent on us to try to keep larger society from blurring that distinction. ©2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“**T**his is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23). I remember the day during Chanukah one year when it all of a sudden occurred to me to turn the verse around and make it a corollary: If something does not seem from God, then it is only because it stopped being wondrous in your eyes. Restore the wonder and fix your spiritual vision.

Realizing this side of the verse felt like the sun rising on a previously dark evening, and resulted in a solid approach to teaching people how to see God. It also gracefully dovetailed with the Rambam's advice on how to achieve love and fear of God, and other important sources as well. That was about thirty years

ago, and it has never gotten old. The idea and excitement remain the same, which is saying an awful lot about both.

Had I been smart I would have realized then, that the other verses in that paragraph could possibly yield similar corollaries and insights, like I did this Chanukah. For example, the verse before the one mentioned above says, "The stone the builders rejected became the cornerstone" (Tehillim 118:22). Dovid HaMelech, who had been written off by his father and brothers, wrote this about himself because he ended up becoming the king of the Jewish people and ancestor of Moshiach Ben Dovid. And, I'm sure he also had Yosef HaTzaddik as well in mind when he composed it.

This verse has been my own cornerstone when explaining the more kabbalistic nuances of Jewish history, especially to people who expect it to be straight as an arrow. I also use the verse to remind myself from time to time not to be easily fooled by first impressions of people or events. Little ends up being in the end what it seemed to have been in the beginning, and often when it comes to Jewish leaders.

Which led me to think of the corollary: If you want to be a cornerstone, you'll have to be despised by the builders, i.e., the very people who seemingly should respect you.

Just to qualify, this idea is only true if God doesn't despise you as well, which means you are doing right by Him. You have to be doing your best to please God with what you have become and what you do. So, why then would the "builders" not like you as much as they should? Because conventional people do not like unconventional people. People who do things by the book do not like it when others do not, even if their result is the same, or even better.

They're not completely wrong. On the contrary, Torah mesorah has worked because of convention and by sticking firmly to rules and standards. But in our zeal to preserve those rules and standards, we often forget about the Yosefs and the Pinchases and Dovid's of history, the exceptional leaders who developed into exceptional leaders because they were unconventional in their service of God, while never breaking Torah or its traditions in any way.

But every society is protective of itself and its members. The brothers sold Yosef to protect the future of the Jewish people from learning from Yosef's ways and following them in the wrong way. Their concern was real since it was Yeravem, a descendant of Yosef, who later built golden calves. It was just that their approach to Yosef and their concern ended up being wrong.

The harshness that is targeted at the unconventional can be very intimidating for those who prefer to fit in and go unnoticed. No one wants to be a pariah, and some people would rather ignore their specialness than be castigated for it. Fitting in for them

is a better fit than accomplishing unique things and being despised, or at least marginalized.

After all, Yosef was despised for many decades before he became that cornerstone of God. Dovid too. Yiftach had to leave mainstream society to make a life for himself before society came looking for him to be its hero. Who knows how many others like them have had to do the same or even had a chance to find out how special they were to God?

Why must it be that way? For a couple of reasons, some of which may only be known to God. But the more obvious reasons are things like humility...tests of faith in God...to develop resilience, you know, standard leadership qualities. Undoubtedly, the path to greatness and prominence for some is straight and uncluttered, which makes it easier for everyone.

But ever since Avraham became Ish Ivri, "the guy on the other side," being great and conventional have not always been the best of partners. And for all we know, Moshiach, who has to already be here in the world, may be a difficult pill for many to swallow once he reveals himself and assumes his final redemption duties. How many of us will end up standing there in shock at the revelation, stunned to the point of complete silence like Yosef's brothers in this week's parsha?

Given where we are in history at this time, and all that is currently happening, it might be worth dwelling on that point before turning the page to next week's parsha. For all we know, their story in this week's parsha is to better prepare us for our current one. ©2025 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our Parashah begins, "Yehuda approached him and said, 'If you please, my master, may your servant speak a word in my master's ears...'"-- i.e., Yehuda asked the Egyptian viceroy (Yosef) for permission to speak firmly to him about Binyamin.

Separate from the verse's literal meaning, Midrash Rabbah comments that the verb "approach" in our verse alludes to prayer. And R' Yaakov Yosef Hakohen of Polnoye z"l (1710-1784; author of the earliest Chassidic works and a primary source for the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov) writes that this verse contains the "secret of prayer." What does this mean?

R' Shmuel Berezovsky shlita (Slonimer Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains with a story: A certain Chassid had an illegal still in his house. One day, he learned that someone had informed on him to the Russian Czar's police, and he knew that a harsh punishment awaited him. Immediately, he ran to the Shul, threw open the Aron Ha'kodesh and began to recite Tehilim tearfully. Eventually, he reached the verse (63:2), "My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You; in a parched and thirsty land with no water," and

he begin to scream it over and over again with such enthusiasm that he could be heard in the street. The local rabbi heard and came to investigate. The Chassid told him, "At first I was praying about my troubles, but when I reached this verse I was possessed by an incredible longing just to speak to Hashem, just to be close to him, and nothing more."

This explains the Slonimer Rebbe, is what the Midrash is teaching: True, prayer is a way that we ask Hashem for our needs. The highest form of prayer, however, the "secret of prayer," is one that is about a desire to be close to Hashem, to speak to Him for the sake of having a relationship. "May your servant speak a word in my Master's ears..." (Darchei No'am 5764)

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"And they told him, saying, 'Yosef is still alive,' also that he is ruler over all the land of Egypt; but his heart skipped a beat, for he did not believe them." (45:26)

R' Yosef Konvitz z"l (1878-1944; rabbi in Newark, NJ; President of the Agudath HaRabonim of the United States and Canada) asks: If Yaakov did not believe his sons, why did his heart skip a beat? Conversely, if his heart skipped a beat because he was so moved by the news that Yosef was alive, why does the Torah say that he did not believe them?

R' Konvitz answers: The Torah (Bereishit 37:34-35) relates that, when Yosef was sold, Yaakov "mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted." Rashi z"l explains that Hashem designed the world such that one's attachment to someone who has passed away will lessen over time. But Yosef was still alive, so Yaakov's attachment to him never lessened, and therefore Yaakov could not be comforted. [Until here from Rashi]

Presuming that Yaakov was aware of this "decree" of Hashem, it would follow, continues R' Konvitz, that Yaakov knew that Yosef was alive. This would explain why his heart only skipped a beat when he was informed that Yosef was alive, whereas most people would faint upon hearing such news. This also explains our verse. It does not mean that he did not believe his sons that Yosef was alive. To the contrary, "His heart skipped a beat" -- instead of stopping entirely--"for he did not believe them"--22 years earlier when they said that Yosef had died.

R' Konvitz adds: Perhaps this is what King David had in mind when he said (Tehilim 130:5), "I hoped for Hashem, my soul hoped, and I longed for His word. My soul [yearns] for Hashem, among those awaiting the dawn, those awaiting the dawn." The exile has been so terrible, writes R' Konvitz. What keeps us longing for redemption? The very fact that we continue to await the dawn, the redemption, is what assures us that there will, indeed, be a redemption. (Divrei Yosef) ©2025 S.Katz & torah.org

