

Home Weekly Parsha VAYIGASH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

After Joseph is reunited with his brothers, and Jacob and his family journey to Egypt to settle there, Joseph brings his aged father in front of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh, who was Emperor then of the entire civilized world, asks Jacob a strange question. He asks him: "How old are you?" On the surface, this can appear to be a natural question that people ask when encountering someone of very advanced years.

Nevertheless, the question itself is disturbing to the one who is being questioned. It indicates that somehow that person has outlived his time and his usefulness. Otherwise why would the question be asked and of what value is it to the questioner if the older person responds and gives him a number indicating how long he has lived on the face of this earth. Jacob senses that there is a note of derision implicit in the question of the Pharaoh. He is reading the mind of the Egyptian king and he realizes that Pharaoh considers him and all that he represents to be a relic of the past, a has-been, someone who is irrelevant to the current world, its challenges and accomplishments.

Because of this deeper understanding of the frame of mind of the Pharaoh when he first sees Jacob, Jacob himself answers in what initially appears to be a very strange fashion. He says that his life as been short and bitter with troubles and that he has not yet achieved in his days the accomplishment of his ancestors. In effect he is telling the Pharaoh not to discount him and his life, short and troubled as it may have been. The old man is implying that he has something left in him yet to teach and guide future generations, and even the Pharaoh himself.

This is borne out at the conclusion of the short conversation between Pharaoh and Jacob. We are told that Jacob blessed Pharaoh though the text does not reveal what specific blessings Jacob bestowed upon Pharaoh. However Jewish tradition teaches us that the blessing was that the famine, that then engulfed the world and had Egypt itself on the verge of collapse, would end.

Joseph had already confiscated all the wealth, land and people of Egypt in order to feed them during the first two years of the famine. Apparently now there were no resources left for the Pharaoh to overcome this deadly famine. The Pharaoh does not realize that the old man standing in front of him, a person that he seems to view with little value and importance is really the messenger of God who will save Egypt, and in fact the throne of Pharaoh as well, from destruction and annihilation.

Pharaoh was looking for new solutions, new ideas, new gods in order to extricate himself from the problems that faced him and his people. Jacob represents the old way, the way of faith and belief in service to God and to God's creatures on earth. It is true that this may not have, at first, appeared to be a popular package for the Pharaoh to adopt, but eventually it will be the only thing that will save him in Egypt. The old confer blessings upon later generations. This is not often realized and therefore the blessings are discarded, but eventually it will be only Jacob's blessings that will prove to be worthwhile and effective.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayigash

פרשת ויגש ט"השע

מפניו נבהלו כי אתו לענות אהיו יכלו ולא חי אבי העוד יוסף אני אהיו אל יוסף ואמר
And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)

Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, and, in the space of a few moments, G-d's master plan became evident to all. All of the questions, pain and challenges that had transpired and that they had

experienced became clear to them. Twenty-two years of ambiguity had been lifted from their eyes. Yosef asked, "Is my father still alive?" This question begs elucidation. How many times must they repeat to him that their elderly father was still alive and living at home? The Kli Yakar explains that Yosef thought that they might have mentioned an elderly father who was inexorably attached to Binyamin, in order to garner Yosef's compassion. Perhaps he might show that he had a heart and not compel them to bring Binyamin, out of respect and compassion for their elderly father. Thus, he repeated his question in order to confirm his father's living status.

In an alternative exposition, Kli Yakar goes to the crux of their lapse in judgment in committing the deed of selling Yosef. Yosef asked, "Is my father still alive?" He is my father – not yours, because you did not seem to take into consideration your father's feelings when you decided to sell me! You acted as if he were not your father – but mine!" We now understand, says the Kli Yakar, why they cringed in his presence. His rebuke was quite powerful and provides a lesson for us all. How often do we act in a manner that shows sensitivity to our personal needs without thinking twice about its effect on others? To show consideration for others is the true barometer of one's sensitivity. One demonstrates his true inner strength of character during moments of stress or challenge. On the one hand, despite all that had transpired, in the moment of great emotional stress, Yosef was considerate of his brothers' feelings. To be alone with no one else present as he revealed his true identity to them took great courage. He did not want them to be shamed in public. Nonetheless, he rebuked them when he asked, "Is my father alive?" thus implying that he is mine – not yours. Children do not act in such a manner to parents.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates a story which demonstrates human consideration at its zenith. The story also teaches us that greatness in Torah is accompanied by exemplary middos tovos, character refinement. A Jew knocked on the apartment door of Horav David Povarsky, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevezh, with an important shailah, halachic query. The Rosh Yeshivah looked up from his Gemorah and listened to the man. Apparently, in an hour he was about to celebrate the Bris Milah and naming of his son. He and his wife were in disagreement concerning what name to give the child. Until that very day they had been in agreement that their little boy would be named Yehonasan. That morning, his wife changed her mind, because they had a neighbor who had lost a young boy whose name was Yehonasan. As a result, she absolutely refused to give her son that name.

The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "Do not give the name Yehonasan." He proceeded to return to his learning as if the man were not there.

The father/husband was not easily deterred. Not wanting to disturb the Rosh Yeshivah again, he waited patiently until the Rosh Yeshivah concluded learning. Then, he asked, "Rebbe, what is the reason that we cannot use the name Yehonasan? We do not believe in superstition. My son having a similar name to the deceased child is not a bad omen."

Rav Povarsky looked up at the man and said, "My decision had nothing to do with fear for the health of your son. What concerned me is that in a few years, when your son grows up and runs around playing in the neighborhood, the mother of the deceased child will hear you calling, 'Yehonasan, Yehonasan,' and this will cause her grief. It will bring back painful memories. This is why I am against giving this name to your son."

This is empathy. Understanding someone else's pain and thinking about how something that you do in some way infringes on another person, causing them to grieve. It may have nothing to do with you – and you may be well within your rights – but if you care enough to feel someone else's grief, you will refrain from executing your carefully laid plans.

We can derive a powerful lesson from this concept. Imagine that a young father or mother have planned to name their child after a family member or friend with whom they had been close. Now it comes to their attention that this name, albeit in perfect innocence with

absolutely no harm intended, might one day cause pain to another person. Suddenly, all the plans must change. Why? Because, as Jews, we not only think – but we also are mandated to see – outside of the box, with the “box” being ourselves. Any action on my part that might infringe upon another person’s emotions should be reconsidered and examined from all aspects. We should ask ourselves, “What if the shoe were on the other foot?” It is not just about being “nice,” “decent,” “humane” – it is about being Jewish. We are not like others. We have – and live by – the Torah.

לפניכם אלקים שלחני למחיה כי הנה אותי מכרתם כי בעיניכם יחר ואל תעצבו אל ועתה
And now, neither be distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you.” (45:5)

Yosef appeases his brothers, explaining to them that they were all part of a Divine Plan, in order to have him precede them to Egypt. By “trailblazing” the Egyptian exile which Klal Yisrael was destined to experience, Yosef was able to mitigate their and their descendants’ ordeal to some extent. Yosef was addressing his brothers, but it is a worthy lesson that is applicable to – and should be reviewed over and over by – us all. Hashem controls and guides the world. He has a Divine Plan in which we all have a role. We must be patient and trust in Hashem because, at the end of the day, we really are unable to alter the plan. We should open our eyes and minds to see how all of the inexplicable parts of the puzzle ultimately fit together.

The Divrei Yisrael (cited by Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita) writes (Parashas Beshalach), “When one believes that everything happens as a result of Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence, and not by chance, even the most minute detail, such as how many footsteps one takes (this means that he believes that each and every footstep is taken by Divine designation), then he will be spared from sadness and distress... because he firmly believes that nothing happens by man’s will, but rather, by Divine Decree.”

The Divrei Yisrael goes so far as to say that if one does not believe that each step that he takes is ordained by Divine Providence, then the brachah, blessing, of Hameichin mitzadei gaver, “Who prepares the steps of mankind,” is a brachah levatalah, unauthorized brachah, a blessing uttered for no reason. Often we go somewhere where we sustain a bad experience. We ask ourselves, “Why did I go there? I should have stayed away. I bumped into someone that caused me heartache.” We kvetch, complain and feel sorry for ourselves. If we would pause long enough to realize that Hashem is meichin mitzadei gaver, however, we would realize that Hashem was the One Who sent us there.

Horav Yitzchak Herszkowitz, Shlita (Nitzotzos) relates the story (allegory) of the man who was the only survivor of a shipwreck. He was able to swim to an uninhabited island. In order to provide shelter for himself, he gathered branches to build a small hut. It was not much but, at least, it would serve as a refuge from the animals that roamed the island. His belongings, which consisted of the clothes on his back and whatever he could grab before the ship went down, were placed into his new home.

One day, after he regained his health (his wounds that he suffered during the ship’s sinking had healed), he went searching for food or whatever would serve as a substitute. While he was in the woods searching, he saw flames coming from his makeshift hut. By the time he returned, nothing remained of his home and worldly possessions. He began to cry uncontrollably, beseeching Hashem, “Ribono Shel Olam, I am now alone in the world, bereft of my family, friends, and all my worldly possessions. Where do I go from here?” Miserable, he cried himself to sleep on the parched ground.

The next morning, he woke up to see sunlight and an approaching ship. He jumped up, as he saw men alighting from the ship and running towards him. “We are here to save you!” they declared. “But how did you know that I was here?” he asked incredulously. “We saw the fire and smoke that you sent up as a signal of distress,” they replied.

How telling. We do not realize that what we think is a moment/period of adversity is actually the catalyst for our salvation. The Ramchal interprets this perspective into the words of the Midrash that questions Yaakov Avinu’s reaction to his sons’ relating to him that they had told the Egyptian viceroy that they had an elderly father and a young brother at home. Lamah hareioseim li, “Why did you treat me so ill (by telling the man that you had another brother)?” (Bereishis 43:6) The Midrash wonders: “Yaakov had never spoken in such a manner. Hashem said, ‘I am occupied with coronating his son (Yosef) as a monarch, and he questions ‘Why I treated him so badly.’”

The Ramchal explains that, undoubtedly, this was a tzarah, a case of adversity. Yaakov’s sons descend to Egypt to purchase food for the family. The end result of this trip: Shimon is incarcerated and now he is told that he must send Binyamin, if he ever wants to see Shimon again. The reaction should have been: Pray to Hashem so that He “sweetens” the Din, Justice, that whatever decree hangs over the family be ameliorated. Certainly, someone of Yaakov’s stature should not complain, “Why did You do something that would cause me such harm?”

Ramchal continues that, on the contrary, from here we may derive that all good things are preceded by pain. Chazal state: “Three gifts have been granted to Klal Yisrael as the result of yissurim, troubles, pain: Torah, Eretz Yisrael and Olam Habba, the World to Come.” Therefore, when adversity strikes, we must take it with a grain of salt, secure in the knowledge that it is the precursor of good.

The problem is that we view life through a myopic lens. We are plagued by spiritual astigmatism that distorts what we see in such a manner that we only perceive bad when, in fact, what we see is really to our benefit. A well-known story, publicized by Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, involved his mother, who was well-read and one of the few women in her neighborhood who could read the Jewish newspaper, Der Yiddishe Tagblatt. The women of the neighborhood would gather at her home for a “reading”, during which she read the newspaper out loud for the women.

One day, when Mrs. Galinsky was in her kitchen peeling potatoes, a woman visited and was waiting for Mrs. Galinsky to conclude her kitchen work so that she could “hear” the news. Meanwhile, the woman began flipping through the pages of the newspaper. Suddenly, she came running into the kitchen in a panic, “How can you be so passive, peeling potatoes, when a large ship has sunk?” She brought in the paper which had a picture of a ship submerged in the water. Mrs. Galinsky patiently took the paper from her, turned it around, and said, “Since you do not know how to read, you failed to realize that you were holding the newspaper upside down.” Once the paper was put in the upright position, it was clear that the ship was not sinking.

The lesson of the story (as explained by Rav Galinsky) is simple: If one does not know how to look at a picture, he might conjecture that terrible things are happening, when, in fact, the opposite is true. Thus, matters which appear to be tragedies are really the precursors for good events. One just has to know how to read the picture.

An elderly Jew, an immigrant of Frankfurt Am Main who had survived the Holocaust and rebuilt his family in Eretz Yisrael, rose to speak at his grandson’s bar mitzvah. This was his poignant message: “Tonight, as we celebrate my dear grandson’s bar mitzvah, I take the podium to share with you a Torah thought from Rabbiner S. R. Hirsch, zl, the man who saved German Jewry from the scourge of secularism.

“When Yosef was finally reunited with his father, they embraced. Chazal teach that Yaakov Avinu was reciting Shema Yisrael as he embraced Yosef. Why? Was there no other time for reciting the Shema? Rav Hirsch explained that the Shema Yisrael was Yaakov’s personal monologue to himself (Yisrael being his other name). He said, “Shema Yisrael/Yaakov – listen! Now, as you see your beloved son, Yosef, you sense Hashem as Hashem, which is Rachamim, Mercy (Hashem’s Name which corresponds to His Attribute of Mercy), and Elokeinu/Elokim, which is Din (Hashem’s Name when employing His

attribute of strict justice). I have been through both Rachamim and Din. There were years that were filled with Divine Compassion and years during which I felt His Strict Justice. Now that I see Yosef in all of his glory as a viceroy, yet a fully-committed Torah Jew, I acknowledge that Hashem Echad – it was all Hashem/Rachamim! It appeared as Din, but actually it was all Hashem's lovingkindness!"

The grandfather now paused for a moment, looked at the gathering, and exclaimed, "We went through so much travail. We suffered; we were hounded and beaten, reviled and many of us murdered. Those of us who survived might wonder why? Why were we subjected to such Din, Strict Justice? I see now why. I see now that what I thought was Strict Justice was actually Divine Mercy. Had I remained in Germany unscathed, I would never have merited to see my grandson as a bar mitzvah, proud, committed, Torah Jew. I see now that it was all Hashem Echad – all Divine Mercy!"

We all experience some sort of travail. It is either financial, spouse, children, health, personal success, etc. Everyone has his/her peckel, package of issues, complaints. We now (actually, we always had) have the Torah's perspective on adversity. It is Heaven designed and Heaven-sent for a reason, to achieve a vital and critical purpose, one that will ultimately change our lives for the better. Our only option is to hang in with complete trust in Hashem, because, after all, He is behind it all.

גשנה לפניו להורות יוסף אל לפניו שלח יהודה ואת

He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen. (46:28)

Chazal interpret, L'horos lefanav, "To prepare ahead of him," with the word l'horos being derived from the word horaah: to teach, to decide halachah. Yehudah was sent to establish a bais horaah she'mishom teitzei Torah, a house of learning, a yeshivah, from which the Torah would emanate. Yehudah was the first Rosh Yeshivah. The question is obvious. Yehudah was the melech, king, monarch of the brothers. True, he was quite proficient erudite, and was undoubtedly a scholar, but Torah erudition and dissemination were not his primary vocations. He was occupied with malchus, kingship. The commentators, each in his inimitable manner, address this question.

We may suggest the following. Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, observes that the word Goshnah (to Goshen) has the same gematria, numerical equivalent, as Moshiach. It is also not by chance that the Jewish residence in Egypt was Goshen. These words stem from hagashah, which means to come near, to bring close, as in the opening words (and title of our parsha) Vayigash eilav Yehudah, "And Yehudah came close." It was only after this "closeness" was experienced that Yosef revealed his identity. It was only once a mutual affection was established, an open relationship of brotherhood, that a meeting of the minds could take place to confront their past indiscretion. Likewise, it is only when all the Jewish People see themselves as brothers, approaching one another amicably, with the love that brothers have (or should have) for one another, that we will experience the advent of Moshiach Tziddkeinu.

There is, of course, the undesired – but all too frequent – alternative of, "They saw him from afar, and when he had not yet approached them, they conspired toward him to kill him" (ibid 37:18). When we resort to viewing brothers from afar, refusing to establish mutual affection, the worst may occur.

To maintain such harmony we must have strong leadership who is respected and accepted by all. Such leadership is similar to monarchy, with the Torah, which is the Rosh Yeshivah's primary source of distinction, as the source of his unique wisdom, infusing his personality with a sense of sovereign majesty. As such, he senses an achrayos, responsibility, for his flock; indeed, for all of Klal Yisrael. Yehudah was the perfect mix, being able to meld his monarchial personality with his Torah erudition. I must add that the harmony among Jewish brothers is only sought, and is only possible, when the brothers all accept and adhere to guidelines, ie, Torah, of the same Father.

היי שני ימי היו ורעים מעט שנה ומאת שלשים גורים שני ימי

The years of my dwelling are 130; few and terrible were the years of my life. (47:9)

Our Patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, stood before Pharaoh, and, when asked his age, Yaakov replied, "The years of my dwelling are 130; few and terrible were the years of my life." What provoked Yaakov to add that his life was short and miserable? Why not just answer the question? How old are you? 130 – end of conversation. Obviously, Yaakov felt that simply stating his age was insufficient. It was necessary to explain the kind of life he had endured. Why?

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, distinguishes between "dwelling" in the world and "living" in it – or between mere existing and living life to its fullest, maximizing the potential of one's life. If Pharaoh wanted to know the Patriarch's age, how long he had been existing/dwelling in this world, then the answer was 130. Yaakov intimated that this period could not be defined as living, however, because these years were few and terrible. How does Yaakov define "terrible"?

The Patriarch added, "And they did not attain the years of life of my ancestors in the days of their dwelling. And these are the days of life of Avraham that he lived" (Ibid 25:7). Avraham Avinu's 175 years on this world were filled with "life." Yaakov implied that while he spent 130 years on this world, he could not say that all of these years were filled with "life."

How did Yaakov define life? Apparently, he lived differently than we do. To him, living meant living with Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration, and with hashroas ha'Shechinah, the Divine Presence, hovering over him. There were years during which he was deprived of Ruach HaKodesh, due to the sadness that enveloped him. Being alienated from Hashem, despite good physical health, does not define life. Life without Hashem is just not living. True life means utilizing our given time on this world to living it to the fullest spiritually. A material, physical good time does not mean that one has "lived." He has existed.

The story is told of a man who visited a certain town and was shown its cemetery. As he walked from grave to grave reading the tombstones, he was shocked to see that everyone in the town had died at a young age. On one tombstone, he read that the deceased had been a mere twelve years old when he passed. Next to him was someone who barely lived ten years, and soon the man was baffled because he had met a number of people and most of them were in their twilight years. Had there been a major epidemic of which he was unaware? When he asked his guide to explain this anomaly, the man replied that, in this town, age was calculated on a different scale. The duration of a person's life was not measured by how many years the man had actually "breathed," but by how many days of his life were used productively. Many of the people buried in the cemetery had lived well into their senior years, eighty, ninety – even one hundred years old, but they had not made the most of their lives. Much of their time was wasted on frivolity and foolishness, futility after futility, sitting around doing little to nothing, talking for no purpose, living lives devoid of spirituality, value and meaning. They were recipients of G-d's greatest gift – life – and they had wasted it.

It goes without saying that, for a Torah Jew, the definition of life is a life of Torah. Each and every day of our lives must be spent productively. Thus, Torah study must be the primary focus of our existence. It is our life-force. Our goal must be Torah learning per se, not necessarily its mastery and accumulation of knowledge, but just simple learning and more learning for the sake of learning.

A poignant analogy of the meaning of Torah study as our life force may be gleaned from the hesped, eulogy, given by Horav Shmuel Auerbach, zl, for his saintly father, Horav Shlomo Zalmen, zl. "When the doctors told us that blood was spurting from my father's lungs," Rav Shmuel said, "I reflected, this is the blood of Torah, the blood of ahavas, love, of Torah.

"When one learns Torah in his youth, its words become ingrained in his blood. This is especially true when one has no food, for then the Torah becomes his food. In my father's home, they had no food, and, instead, he consumed divrei Torah, subsisting on it. These divrei

Torah became the components of his blood during his childhood.” This is the meaning of a “lived” life.

Va’ani Tefillah

לְעוֹלָם עִמָּהֶם לְקוּוּהוּ וְשִׁים – V’sim chelkeinu imahem l’olam. And put our lot together with them forever.

Our behavior may not always (ever?) be on the same plateau as the righteous (and all of the preceding who represent the apex of Torah Judaism), yet we want to strive to be together with them. We never want to be apart from them – even though our demeanor neither reflects nor is worthy of this closeness. This phenomenon is to be observed when we see Jews of all stripes flock to a tzaddik, righteous person, leader. They are acutely aware of his greatness and of their distance from him. Yet, they want to be near him, learn from him, be inspired by him, and, of course, receive his blessing. Are they currying spiritual points, so that they can continue doing their own? No! Deep down they really care and know that this is where “it is” and where they should be, but... Then there are those of our co-religionists who observe little to nothing, yet flock to the Kosel, pick up their white kippahs, walk over to the wall, place their hands or their heads on it and pray. Before they leave, they place their little notes between the stones. Why? Because when all is said and done, their Yiddishe neshamos, their Pintele Yid, their essential Jew, want “in” and this is the definition of “in” from their perspective.

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a

What would Nechama Lebowitz say about the new approach to learning Tanach?

As is well-known, Professor Nechama Lebowitz left her stamp on the study of Tanach, not just amongst adults, but also, through her methodological approach, amongst students of Israeli schools. She worked hard to make this study meaningful and to engrave it deeply in the students’ memories.

So what would she say about the new approaches to the study of Tanach being advanced? Actually, there’s no need to guess, because the issue came up when she was yet alive. It is recounted in Chevata Deutch’s book “Nechama”. There, in Chapter 15, Chevata tells the story of how some twenty years ago, a Rabbi, one of her own teachers, presented himself for the position of national superintendent of Tanach Studies, in order to foment a revolution in the way it was taught. What he had in mind was an interdisciplinary approach. He thought a new –Land-of-Israel-school-of-thought should be created that would not fear the new Tanach research, but would use it to expand the field of study. He argued against Nechama Lebowitz, whose whole aim was simply to transmit knowledge and understanding. In his method, the Rabbi argued, everything begins with love. Availing ourselves of Biblical realism answers this “love” by connecting the student to the Torah, and saying to him, “The Torah is relevant in the here and now.”

Obviously, Nechama Lebowitz also sought to endear Torah learning to the student, but the question was how to do it. She made light of using Biblical realism, and viewed it as cheap exhibitionism. To her, it seemed foreign and petty.

She greatly loved, for example, to teach Tehilim Chapter 23, “Hashem is my shepherd, I shall not want.” To the argument that you can not understand the chapter without understanding shepherding concepts, she responded with ridicule, explaining that the Torah transcends time and is universal, and it should not be lowered down to the earth.

Multi-disciplinary study includes geography, archaeology, grammar and history, and not just commentaries as a “crutch”, in that Rabbi’s words. Lebowitz, by contrast, sought to distance herself from all this. She was quite familiar with those approaches - after all, she had studied in Germany at the Universities of Heidelberg, Marburg and Berlin, and at the Advanced Beit Midrash for Jewish Studies at Berlin, which greatly appreciated these fields. And she was awarded a PhD from the University of Marburg. She was an expert in the school of Biblical

Criticism! Yet in contrast to those who believe that one must be familiar with Biblical Criticism in order to confront it, she determined that the best approach is to ignore it by staying close to the traditional commentaries. She held that one must learn “the opus itself, not the stages of its coming into being, not the factors that influence its creation and not the story and the content out of which it sprouted, but the object itself. Likewise, it mustn’t be studied as a document attesting to things outside of itself, regarding the moment of its creation in the religious, political or economic sphere. In short, Bible mustn’t be studied as an entity that reflects a period, but as one speaking on its own behalf.”

She writes, for example, about the beginning of Parashat Masa’ei: “Before us we have about forty verses consisting of nothing but the names of places. This dry list is certainly of great interest to scholars of antiquities and geographers who toil to identify names, but what does it have to do with the Torah, which, as the Divine poet wrote in Tehilim (19:8-9) is “enlightening”, “brings one joy”, and “restore’s one’s sanity”? After all, it was that way, and not as grist for archaeological, historical and geographical stories that its true students of every generation viewed it, always searching for what was promised to us in its regard, ‘For I give you good instruction’ (Mishlei 4:2). And what is the good instruction hidden in this list of names? And as though the Torah already wished to warn us that we mustn’t make light of such a list of names, which for the person seeing with human eyes seems devoid of content, it therefore, precisely here, prefaced the list with the words: ‘Moshe recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by Hashem’ (Bemidbar 33:2).”

The rule to be learned is this: The Torah constitutes good instruction. It restores one’s sanity. It is enlightening. It sets out to teach us moral lessons!

Therefore, the program that was being presented to the schools, and that was set to replace, partially, the previous approach, made Nechama Lebowitz shudder. Whoever tried to convince her otherwise could not persuade her in the slightest degree.

Obviously, we mustn’t accuse her of arrogance because she steadfastly held on to her approach. Everyone knows that besides her having been a professor, she also lectured to the masses, was full of humility, and was known for her simple way of life. Her students called her “Nechama”, and she preferred the title of “teacher” to that of “professor”. “Teacher” is what appears on her tombstone.

Here is an example of her work: There is a well-known question: After Yosef rose to greatness, why didn’t he send off in search of his father? To this a new interpretation was offered: Yosef thought that his father had accepted the brothers’ argument and had rejected him the way Avraham had rejected Yishmael and Yitzchak had rejected Esav.

Yet Nechama Lebowitz responded to this interpretation, saying: It could not be that Yosef would suspect his father of such! It could not be that Yaakov would stop loving Yosef!

Another example: A theory arose according to which the sin for which King Shaul lost his kingdom was not his taking spoils from Amalek and sparing Agag – the reasons mentioned by the Prophet Shmuel in his rebuke of Shaul to explain his severe punishment – but rather his wiping out of only part of Amalek rather than all of it.

Nechama Lebowitz asked: If so, why didn’t Shmuel point this out to him? The response offered was that Shmuel did not know...

For Lebowitz, reading the Tanach without the commentaries constituted conceit, even arrogance.

Indeed, above all else, Nechama Lebowitz was a great educator. She therefore “ascribed little importance to the question of whether the student knows the source of the educational truth he has absorbed from the sources – Scripture itself or our Sages’ commentaries. She had a wealth of stories, at the center of each of which stood a simple, unlearned person, who had absorbed a moral/educational idea from our Rabbinical commentaries and had accidentally ascribed that idea to Scripture itself. For example, a mother castigated her son for mistreating a cat, and she quoted to him what was ‘written in the Torah’ about Moshe saving the young goat. In another case, a soldier who had fought in Sinai related how he and his comrades fell under heavy fire. Suddenly

one of them was wounded, and the medic endangered himself and crawled, under fire, to administer first-aid. 'Surely he got this from Avraham, whom the Torah says jumped into a fiery furnace,' explained the soldier. Nechama quoted him excitedly, saying, 'What does it matter where he learned his self-sacrifice from? So what if people get confused, as long as they take away values and models to apply throughout their lives.'

Simply put, she did not teach in an academic manner. Her approach, rather, was based on faith, education, Rabbinic commentaries and tradition.

Hope, and then Hope Again by Jonathan Rosenblum

Mishpacha Magazine

I've just returned from my first trip to Poland and to the death camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau. I do not want to write yet of my reactions — at least not at length.

The enormity of the absolute evil of the Nazis, yemach shemam, falls into the category of things about which Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu — when the latter sought to understand why Rabi Akiya suffered such a painful and horrible death — "Shtok! Kach alah b'machshavah l'fanai — Silence! Such is what arose in My thought" (Menachos 29b).

Rav Moshe Shapira ztz"l once pointed out while visiting Krakow that the great rabbis who witnessed the Churban did not speak of it. They followed the advice of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: "I found nothing better for a person [literally, the body] than silence" (Pirkei Avos 1:17). Silence reduces the body's barrier to the soul, and is the prerequisite for any deep understanding.

But of the power of the experience one can speak. Not everyone, of course, is affected, and no two Jews will be affected in precisely the same way. But in recent years, the sluice gates of emotion unleashed by trips to the camps where Jews were slaughtered with industrial efficiency have proven to have a lasting impact on many different types of Jews. For years, JRoots, an organization affiliated with Aish-UK, has been bringing over 1,000 British Jewish youth to Poland a year. Those trips have proved crucial to arousing a powerful identification with the Jewish People and a commitment to our continuity.

And a friend of mine recently described the impact of such trips on disaffected chareidi youth as overwhelming. One such young woman told me that the death camps helped her put her own struggles in perspective, and thereby minimize them.

WHILE IT IS PREMATURE to write of what I took away from the trip and the ways in which I was changed, one can at least identify some crucial determinants to the power of the experience. The first is preparation (as with almost anything meaningful in life). Rebbetzin Esther Farbstein's two-volume *Hidden in Thunder*, which addresses, inter alia, the wrenching halachic dilemmas posed by the Holocaust, has long served as my Tishah B'Av reading. In specific preparation for this trip, I focused on memoirs of Gutta Sternbuch (Gutta), Frieda Bassman (Miracles), and Pearl Benisch (To Vanquish the Dragon), as well as Hanoch Teller's *Heroic Children*. Memoirs and individual stories provide immediacy, and protect against the sheer magnitude of the Nazi evil turning the Holocaust into an abstraction.

The nature of the group with whom one travels also has a major effect. The Nesivos Tours trip included a very high percentage of children of survivors. And for Shabbos in Krakow and the following day at Auschwitz-Birkenau, we were joined by 30 members of congregation Shoavei Mayim of Toronto and their rav, Rav Yoel Adler. Almost the entire Toronto group were descendants of survivors: At least two brought their grandparents' memoirs with them.

At the place where Josef Mengele, yemach shemo, and his notorious cohorts engaged in their infamous selection process, an older member of the Toronto group related how his shver would constantly repeat for the rest of his life after Auschwitz, "Why didn't he say 16?" with respect to his oldest son. His son was big for his age and could easily have passed for 16, the cut-off age for being assigned to work, but answered honestly that he was 15 when Mengele asked him.

Another young man told me that he is named for a great-uncle, who promised his dying brother in the Krakow ghetto that he would look after the brother's son. At Auschwitz, when the son was signaled to the left, his uncle joined him in fulfillment of his promise.

Rabbi Adler is a passionate, inspiring talmid chacham of great depth. On the grounds of Birkenau, he cited the famous Shemini Atzeres derashah of the Piaseczner Rav, Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira Hy"d, delivered in the Warsaw Ghetto. In our time, the Piaseczner said, HaKadosh Baruch Hu combines the kavanos of one Jew or group of Jews with maasim of others to the merit of both. Yitzchak Avinu was eager to be sacrificed at the Akeidah, and thus his "ashes"

are ever before Hashem. And the actual ashes of Yitzchak Avinu's descendants burned in the crematoria are the fulfillment of Yitzchak Avinu's intent to be a korban (though, chas v'shalom, not in the way he intended). Similarly, Rav Adler suggested, if we are transformed in some way by the remembrance of what took place in these places, we give new meaning to the sacrifice of those who died there.

The third — and perhaps most crucial — factor in one's experience is the quality of the guide. Without our guide, Rabbi Ilan Segal, I feel that I would have lost 90 percent of the impact of the trip. This was his 25th trip to Poland, and his encyclopedic knowledge allowed him to bring out the precise educational messages of each place we visited — the camps, the ghettos of Warsaw and Krakow, and the *kiarei tzaddikim*.

Both the inhuman cruelty of the Nazis and the remarkable examples of spiritual heroism of Jews under the most extreme circumstances came to the fore. From the perspective of evil, every SS guard in the camps and the participants in the *Einsatzgruppen* killing squads were there only by virtue of their free choice. And on the side of spiritual heroism, one of those operating the gas chambers was once asked how he knew that no one was still alive. He replied, "When we no longer heard Jews screaming *Shema Yisrael*."

AT ONE POINT, RABBI SEGAL related a story he heard from Rabbi Sinai Adler, a survivor of Auschwitz. At the early morning *appel* (roll call) one morning, a fellow prisoner asked Rabbi Adler, "Why does Dovid Hamelech repeat the words [Tehillim 27:14], 'Kavei el Hashem — Hope to Hashem'?" Even the question was highly unusual. The *appel* could last as long as four hours, during which time prisoners were expected to stand at attention, in thin garments, under the watchful eyes of SS guards, ever eager for a pretext to shoot. Prisoners did not speak to one another.

The questioner answered his own question: When you have no more reason to hope, when you just want it to be over soon, then strengthen yourself, and once again "hope to Hashem."

After hearing that story, one of the young men from Toronto told me, "I can't even imagine that level of *emunah*." He was not alone in wondering how he would have stood up to the test of Auschwitz. At one level, the question forces itself upon us. But at another, we cannot possibly know the answer.

Outside the *Plaszów* labor camp, adjacent to Krakow, Rabbi Segal related a story told by Rabbi Yisroel Spitzer (the *kallah's* grandfather) at Rabbi Segal's son's recent *sheva brachos*. During the Holocaust, Rabbi Spitzer was assigned to drive a small train transporting cement. At one point the engine derailed, and he stood there helplessly, not knowing what to do.

The Nazi overseer told him to push the engine back onto the tracks. When Rabbi Spitzer stared at him in disbelief, the Nazi told him, "Are you a Jew? If you are a Jew, you can." And what did he do? He somehow lifted the train back onto the tracks.

A wealthy donor once told the Klausenberger Rebbe ztz"l when the latter was collecting to build Laniado Hospital in Netanya, "I'll do what I can." The Klausenberger Rebbe told him that he should consider carefully the implication of what he was saying. "Had someone asked me before the war whether I could walk ten kilometers, I would have been shocked by the suggestion. Before the war, I had to walk no further than from my home to the *beis medrash* next door. But I found out that I could walk ten kilometers. Not only walk, but run. And not only ten kilometers, but far more.

"Before the war, I did not even carry my *tallis* bag to shul. My *shamash* did. But I found out in the camps that I could carry 30 kilo boulders all day long."

None of us know what our true capacities are — be they spiritual or physical. But we should know that they are far, far greater than we think.

Does My Father Love Me? (Vayigash 5779)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It is one of the great questions we naturally ask each time we read the story of Joseph. Why did he not, at some time during their twenty-two year separation, send word to his father that he was alive? For part of that time — when he was a slave in Potiphar's house, and when he was in prison — it would have been impossible. But certainly he could have done so when he became the second most powerful person in Egypt. At the very least he could have done so when the brothers came before him on their first journey to buy food.

Joseph knew how much his father loved him. He must have known how much their separation grieved him. He did not know, could not know, what Jacob thought had happened to him, but this surely he knew: that it was his duty to communicate with him when the opportunity arose, to tell his father that he was alive and well. Why then did he not? The following explanation,[1] is a tantalising possibility.

The story of Joseph's descent into slavery and exile began when his father sent him, alone, to see how the brothers were faring.

His brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

(Gen. 37:12-14)

What does the narrative tell us immediately prior to this episode? It tells us about the second of Joseph's dreams. In the first, he had dreamt that he and his brothers were in the field binding sheaves. His stood upright while the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to him. Naturally, when he told them about the dream, they were angry. "Do you intend to reign over us? Would you rule over us?" There is no mention of Jacob in relation to the first dream.

The second dream was different:

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (Gen. 37:9-11).

Immediately afterwards, we read of Jacob sending Joseph, alone, to his brothers. It was there, at that meeting far from home, that they plotted to kill him, lowered him into a pit, and eventually sold him as a slave.

Joseph had many years to reflect on that episode. That his brothers were hostile to him, he knew. But surely Jacob knew this as well. In which case, why did he send Joseph to them? Did Jacob not contemplate the possibility that they might do him harm? Did he not know the dangers of sibling rivalry? Did he not at least contemplate the possibility that by sending Joseph to them he was risking Joseph's life?

No one knew this better from personal experience. Recall that Jacob himself had been forced to leave home because his brother Esau threatened to kill him, once he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing. Recall too that when Jacob was about to meet Esau again, after an interval of twenty-two years, he was "in great fear and distress," believing that his brother would try to kill him. That fear provoked one of the great crises of Jacob's life. So Jacob knew, better than anyone else in Genesis, that hate can lead to killing, that sibling rivalry carries with it the risk of fratricide.

Yet Jacob sent Joseph to his other sons knowing that they were jealous of him and hated him. Joseph presumably knew these facts. What else could he conclude, as he reflected on the events that led up to his sale as a slave, that Jacob had deliberately placed him in this danger? Why? Because of the immediately prior event, when Joseph had told his father that "the sun and moon" – his father and mother – would bow down to him.

This angered Jacob, and Joseph knew it. His father had "rebuked" him. It was outrageous to suggest that his parents would prostrate themselves before him. It was wrong to imagine it, all the more so to say it. Besides which, who was the "moon"? Joseph's mother, Rachel, the great love of Jacob's life, was dead. Presumably, then, he was referring to Leah. But his very mention of "the sun and moon and eleven stars" must have brought back to his father the pain of Rachel's death. Joseph knew he had provoked his father's wrath. What else could he conclude but that Jacob had deliberately put his life at risk?

Joseph did not communicate with his father because he believed his father no longer wanted to see him or hear from him. His father had terminated the relationship. That was a reasonable inference from the facts as Joseph knew them. He could not have known that Jacob still loved him, that his brothers had deceived their father by showing him Joseph's bloodstained cloak, and that his father mourned for him,

"refusing to be comforted." We know these facts because the Torah tells us. But Joseph, far away, in another land, serving as a slave, could not have known. This places the story in a completely new and tragic light.

Is there any supporting evidence for this interpretation? There is. Joseph must have known that his father was capable of being angered by his sons. He had seen it twice before.

The first time was when Shimon and Levi killed the inhabitants of Shechem after their prince had raped and abducted their sister Dina. Jacob bitterly reprimanded them, saying:

"You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed"(Gen. 34:30).

The second happened after Rachel died. "While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah – and Israel heard of it" (Gen. 35:22). Actually according to the sages, Reuben merely moved his father's bed,[2] but Jacob believed that he had slept with his handmaid, an act of usurpation.

As a result of these two episodes, Jacob virtually broke off contact with his three eldest sons. He was still angry with them at the end of his life, cursing them instead of blessing them. Of Reuben, he said:

Unstable as water, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it. (Gen. 49:4)

Of his second and third sons he said:

Shimon and Levi are brothers –
Their swords are weapons of violence.

Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly,

For they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.

Cursed be their anger, so fierce,

And their fury, so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob

And disperse them in Israel. (Gen. 49:5-7)

So Joseph knew that Jacob was capable of anger at his children, and of terminating his relationship with them (that is why, in the absence of Joseph, Judah became the key figure. He was Jacob's fourth son, and Jacob no longer trusted the three eldest).

There is evidence of another kind as well. When Joseph was appointed second-in-command in Egypt, given the name Tzafenat Pa'neah, and had married an Egyptian wife, Asenat, he had his first child. We then read:

Joseph named his firstborn Menasheh, saying, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's house." (Gen. 41:51)

Uppermost in Joseph's mind was the desire to forget the past, not just his brothers' conduct towards him but "all my father's house." Why so, if not that he associated "all my trouble" not just with his siblings but also with his father Jacob? Joseph believed that his father had deliberately put him at his brothers' mercy because, angered by the second dream, he no longer wanted contact with the son he had once loved. That is why he never sent a message to Jacob that he was still alive.

If this is so, it sheds new light on the great opening scene of Vayigash. What was it in Judah's speech that made Joseph break down in tears and finally reveal his identity to his brothers? One answer is that Judah, by asking that he be held as a slave so that Benjamin could go free, showed that he had done teshuva; that he was a penitent; that he was no longer the same person who had once sold Joseph into slavery. That, as I have argued previously, is a central theme of the entire narrative. It is a story about repentance and forgiveness.

But we can now offer a second interpretation. Judah says words that, for the first time, allow Joseph to understand what had actually occurred twenty-two years previously. Judah is recounting what happened after the brothers returned from their first journey to buy food in Egypt:

Then our father said, "Go back and buy a little more food." But we said, "We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us."

Your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, ‘He has surely been torn to pieces.’ And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery.” (Gen. 44:27–31)

At that moment Joseph realised that his fear that his father had rejected him was unwarranted. On the contrary, he had been bereft when Joseph did not return. He believed that he had been “torn to pieces,” killed by a wild animal. His father still loved him, still grieved for him. Against this background we can better understand Joseph’s reaction to this disclosure:

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. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” (Gen. 45:1–3)

Joseph’s first thought is not about Judah or Benjamin, but about Jacob. A doubt he had harboured for twenty-two years had turned out to be unfounded. Hence his first question: “Is my father still alive?”

Is this the only possible interpretation of the story? Clearly not. But it is a possibility. In which case, we can now set the Joseph narrative in two other thematic contexts which play a large part in Genesis as a whole.

The first is tragic misunderstanding. We think here of at least two other episodes. The first has to do with Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac, we recall, loved Esau; Rebecca loved Jacob. At least one possible explanation, offered by Abarbanel,[3] is that Rebecca had been told “by God,” before the twins were born, that “the elder will serve the younger.” Hence her attachment to Jacob, the younger, and her determination that he, not Esau, should have Isaac’s blessing.

The other concerns Jacob and Rachel. Rachel had stolen her father’s terafim, “icons” or “household gods,” when they left Laban to return to the land of Canaan. She did not tell Jacob that she had done so. The text says explicitly, “Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods” (Gen. 31:32). When Laban pursued and caught up with them, he accused Jacob’s party of having stolen them. Jacob indignantly denies this and says “If you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live”. Several chapters later, we read that Rachel died prematurely, on the way. The possibility hinted at by the text, articulated by a Midrash and by Rashi,[4] is that, unwittingly, Jacob had condemned her to death. In both cases, misunderstanding flowed from a failure of communication. Had Rebecca told Isaac about the oracle, and had Rachel told Jacob about the terafim, tragedy might have been averted. Judaism is a religion of holy words, and one of the themes of Genesis as a whole is the power of speech to create, mislead, harm or heal. From Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers (“They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him”), we are shown how, when words fail, violence begins.

The other theme, even more poignant, has to do with fathers and sons. How did Isaac feel towards Abraham, knowing that he had lifted a knife to sacrifice him? How did Jacob feel towards Isaac, knowing that he loved Esau more than him? How did Leah’s sons feel about Jacob, knowing that he loved Rachel and her children more? Does my father really love me? – that is a question we feel must have arisen in each of these cases. Now we see that there is a strong case for supposing that Joseph, too, must have asked himself the same question.

“Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me,” says Psalm 27. That is a line that resonates throughout Genesis. No one did more than Sigmund Freud to place this at the heart of human psychology. For Freud, the Oedipus complex – the tension between fathers and sons – is the single most powerful determinant of the psychology of the individual, and of religion as a whole.

Freud, however, took as his key text a Greek myth, not the narratives of Genesis. Had he turned to Torah instead, he would have seen that this fraught relationship can have a non-tragic resolution. Abraham did love Isaac. Isaac did bless Jacob a second time, this time knowing he was Jacob. Jacob did love Joseph. And transcending all these human loves is

divine love, rescuing us from feelings of rejection, and redeeming the human condition from tragedy.

Shabbat shalom

Since this is a leap year, in which we add an extra month for Adar, this year has 385 days – making it the longest year that our current Jewish calendar can have. Therefore, I am presenting:

The Longest Year

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

“Thirty days hath September / April, June and November.” If we were to adapt this poem to, l’havdil, our current, standardized Jewish calendar, we would say that thirty days hath Tishrei, Shvat, Nissan, Sivan, Av, and sometimes Cheshvan1 and Kislev. But the idea of having a standardized Jewish calendar seems to run counter to several mishnayos in Rosh HaShanah. In those mishnayos, we see that whether a specific month has 29 days or 30 days depends on whether witnesses saw the new moon and testified in beis din early enough to declare the 30th day Rosh Chodesh (that is, the first day of the next month). In addition, the Gemara² states that at times Elul could be 30 days long — which cannot happen in our calendar.

How did our empirical calendar become so rigid and predictable? The Torah (Shemos 12:2) commands the main beis din of the Jewish people (also known as the Sanhedrin), or a beis din specially appointed by them, to declare Rosh Chodesh upon accepting the testimony of witnesses who observed the new moon.³ The purpose of having eyewitnesses was not to notify the beis din that the moon had appeared; the beis din had extensive knowledge of astronomy and could predict exactly when and where the new moon would appear and what size and shape it would be.⁴ The Torah obligated the beis din to wait for witnesses, however, and they could only rule on whether the 30th day would be the last day of the old month or would become the first day of a new month, based on testimony. If no witnesses to the new moon arrived on the 30th day, then the 31st day became Rosh Chodesh, regardless of the astronomic calculations (Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 24a). At that point in Jewish history, any month could be either 29 or 30 days.

The Torah also commands us that Pesach must always fall during the spring (Devarim 16:1). This seemingly innocuous mitzvah actually requires considerable manipulation of the calendar, since months, derived from the word moon, are determined by the length of time from one new moon to the next, which is a bit more than 29½ days. A lunar year is, or more accurately, twelve lunar months are, almost exactly 354 days. The seasons of the year, on the other hand, are calculated according to the solar year, because seasons change based on where the sun’s most direct rays strike the earth. This varies daily, as the most direct rays move from the north Tropic of Cancer to the south Tropic of Capricorn and back again. A solar year is a bit less than 365¼ days, and is based on the length of time it takes the earth to rotate around the sun. Since Pesach must always take place during the spring, the calendar cannot be twelve lunar months every year, because over time, the eleven-day discrepancy between the lunar and solar years would cause Pesach to wander through the solar year and occur in all seasons.⁵

The Two “Other” Calendars

There are four calendars commonly in use in the world today, two of which make no attempt to resolve the discrepancy between solar and lunar years. The most common secular calendar (the Gregorian or Western calendar) is based solely on the sun. Although the year is nominally broken into twelve months, the use of the word “months” here is a significant departure from its original meaning. In the Gregorian calendar, months have no relationship to the cycles of the moon. Most secular months have 31 days, while the lunar cycle is only about 29½ days, and even secular months that have 30 days do not relate to any phase or change in the moon. Similarly, the length of February as a month of either 28 or 29 days has nothing to do with the moon. Thus, although the word month should correspond to the moon, the Gregorian calendar is purely a solar one, with the borrowed term, “month,” given a meaning detached from its origin.

Another calendar that is seeing increased use today is the Muslim one, which is purely a lunar calendar of twelve lunar months, some 29 days and some 30. In truth, a pure lunar calendar has no real “year,” since a year is based on the relative locations of the sun and the Earth and the resultant seasons, while a lunar “year” of twelve lunar months completely ignores seasons. The word “year” is used in the Muslim sense only as a basis for counting longer periods of time, but has no relationship to the sun. In fact, the Muslim “year” is only 354 or 355 days long — almost eleven days shorter than a solar year. Therefore, a Muslim who tells you that he is 65 years old is really closer to 63 according to a solar year count. He has counted 65 years, each of which is at least ten days shorter than a real (solar) year. (I trust that Guinness takes these factors into account when computing world records for longevity and the like.)

The Muslim year “wanders” its way through the seasons, taking 33 years until a specific month returns to the exact same point in the solar year in the previous

cycle. In the interim, that month has visited each of the other seasons for several consecutive years.

13 month years

There are two commonly used calendars whose months are based on the moon, and years are based on the sun. The traditional eastern Asian calendar, usually referred to as the “Chinese Calendar” and the Jewish calendar, both accommodate this by having some years that are thirteen months and others that are twelve. The methods used by these two calendars to decide which month is doubled and when are quite different. Since our articles are on halacha, I will not discuss the details on how the Chinese calendar decides which month to double and when to do so.

The Jewish Calendar

As we have seen, we are commanded to create a calendar that uses the lunar cycle to define the months, but also to keep our months in sync with the seasons, which are dependent on the sun, in order to determine the dates of the Yamim Tovim. The only way to do so is to occasionally add a month, thereby creating a thirteen-month year, to offset the almost eleven-day difference between twelve lunar months and a solar year. The result of this calendar is that although each date does not fall exactly on the same “solar date” every year, it falls within a close range relative to the solar year. Who determined which years have thirteen months?

Under the original system, the main beis din appointed a smaller special beis din to determine whether the year should have an extra month. This special beis din took into consideration:

- 1) Astronomical data, such as when Pesach will fall out relative to the vernal equinox (the spring day on which day and night are closest to being equal in length).
- 2) Agricultural data, such as: How ripe is the barley? How large are the newborn lambs and pigeons?
- 3) Weather: Is the rainy season drawing to a close? Is there a famine?
- 4) Convenience, or more specifically, the halachic inconvenience of creating a leap year. The shmittah and the year following were never made into leap years, and the year before shmittah usually was.
- 5) Infrastructure. For example, the condition of the highways and bridges.

All of these points influenced whether the thirteenth month, the additional Adar, would be added.⁶ When this system was in place — during a period without interruption from the time of Moshe and Yehoshua until about 300 years after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash — the main beis din sent written messages notifying outlying communities of the decision to create a leap year, and the reasons for their decision.⁷

Creation of the “Permanent” Calendar

During the later era of the Talmud, Roman persecution made it impossible to continue declaring Rosh Chodesh based on eyewitness testimony. Thus, Hillel HaNasi (not to be confused with his more illustrious ancestor, the Tanna Hillel, also sometimes called Hillel Hazakein, who lived several hundred years earlier) instituted a calendar based purely on calculation, without human observation of the new moon. Rambam explains that the mitzvah of the Torah is that if it becomes impossible to declare Rosh Chodesh and leap years on the basis of observation, then the beis din should create a permanent calendar.⁸ Hillel HaNasi’s calendar kept the same basic structure of 29- and 30-day months and twelve- and thirteen-month years, but it was based purely on calculation and not on the variables mentioned above.

When Hillel HaNasi created the new calendar, he incorporated in its calculations several innovations. The two major changes in this new calendar are:

1) A Leap of Fate

Leap years now follow a regular pattern of seven leap years, called me’ubaros, and twelve non-leap years, called peshutos (ordinary), in a nineteen-year cycle. The third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth years of the cycle are always leap years, and the rest are ordinary years. This year, 5779, is the third year of the cycle and thus is a leap year.

2) The Haves vs. the Have-Nots

The length of most months is now fixed. Tishrei, Shvat, Adar Rishon (which exists only in a leap year), Nissan, Sivan, and Av will always have 30 days; Teves, regular Adar (in a common, nonleap year), Adar Sheini (in a leap year), Iyar, Tammuz, and Elul are always 29 days long. The months of Cheshvan and Kislev are the only months that can vary — sometimes they are 29 days and sometimes they are 30 days.⁹ A year in which both Cheshvan and Kislev have only 29 days is called chaseirah, lacking. If Cheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30, the year is considered kesidrah, expected or regular. If both Cheshvan and Kislev have 30 days, the year is called sheleimah, full.¹⁰

Both ordinary and leap years can be either chaseiros, kesidran, or sheleimos. Thus, in the new calendar, all ordinary years are either 353 days (if both Cheshvan and Kislev have 29 days), 354 days (if Cheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30), or 355 days (if both Cheshvan and Kislev have 30 days). All leap years are either 383 days (if both Cheshvan and Kislev have 29 days); 384 days (if Cheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30), or 385 days (if both Cheshvan and

Kislev have 30 days). Since Adar Rishon always has 30 days, the addition of an extra month in a leap year always adds exactly thirty days.

(Because the nineteen-year cycle synchronizes the lunar calendar with the solar year, the Hebrew and English dates of births, anniversaries, and other occasions usually coincide on the nineteenth anniversary of the event. If yours is off by a day or two, do not fret. Your recordkeeping is accurate, but the cycle of nineteen years relates only to whether it is a leap year, not to whether the years are of the exact same length. The lengths of Cheshvan and Kislev are determined by other factors, plus the fact that February 29 does not occur every secular year will affect whether your 19th, 38th, 57th, 76th, or 95th Hebrew and secular birthday or anniversary exactly coincide, or whether they are slightly off.)

Revealing Top Secret Information

In order for the new calendar to be established properly, a very carefully-guarded secret had to be revealed. Chazal had always kept secret how one can predict when the new moon is destined to appear, a calculation called the sod ha’ibur. This information had always been kept secret in order to prevent false witnesses from coming forth and testifying that they saw the moon at a time when they knew it could be seen. With the new calendar coming into use, this was no longer a concern. Moreover, people had to know the secret in order to calculate the calendar correctly. The sod ha’ibur is that each new moon appears 29 days, 12 hours, and 793 chalakim or 793/1080 of an hour after the previous new moon.¹¹

Once one knows when the new moon, called the molad, occurred on one Rosh HaShanah, he could add the sod ha’ibur figure either twelve or thirteen times (depending on the number of months that year) and determine the time of the molad in the next year, which is the most important factor in determining the date of the next Rosh HaShanah.

Another factor had also been guarded as a secret: that Rosh HaShanah sometimes takes place not on the day of the molad, but the next available day (see below). In the old system, this happened when the molad fell on the afternoon of Rosh HaShanah and the moon would not be visible in Eretz Yisrael until the next day. When Rosh HaShanah was determined by the observation of witnesses, this information was important not only in determining when Rosh HaShanah falls, but also when interrogating potential witnesses testifying to the appearance of the new moon. Although the new calendar is no longer dependent on witnesses seeing the moon, and so we could conceivably set Rosh HaShanah even in a year when the molad falls during the afternoon, we nevertheless postpone Rosh HaShanah to the following day. Thus, creating the calendar in a way that it could be used required revealing these two secrets, so that a person could determine which day should be Rosh HaShanah in the coming year.

Additional Innovations

Did you ever notice that Yom Kippur never falls on Friday or Sunday? If it did, we would have to observe two consecutive days, both of which have the stringency of Shabbos. Even today we can appreciate the difficulty that this poses, although it was even greater in the era before the discovery of the principles of refrigeration.

When the calendar was based on observation, Yom Kippur did sometimes fall on either Friday or Sunday.¹² However, Hillel HaNasi’s new calendar included some innovations that were not part of the earlier calendar. The new calendar does not allow Yom Kippur to fall on either a Sunday or a Friday, thus avoiding the difficulty of having two Shabbos-like days fall consecutively. It also does not allow Hoshana Rabbah to fall on Shabbos, which would cause the cancellation of the hoshanos ceremony.

As long as the calendar was determined on the basis of eyewitness testimony, the halachah favored having Rosh Chodesh fall on its most correct day, over the concerns of having two Shabbos-like days fall consecutively, or canceling the hoshanah ceremony on Hoshanah Rabbah. ¹³ But after eyewitness testimony could no longer be used, and we were going to implement a permanent calendar that fulfilled the mitzvah in a less-preferred way anyway, the halachah then went the other way: it favored keeping Yom Kippur from falling on Friday or Sunday, and keeping Hoshana Rabbah from falling on Shabbos.

In order to accommodate these innovations, Rosh HaShanah could now fall only on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, or Shabbos, since if it falls on Sunday, Hoshana Rabbah falls on Shabbos; if Rosh HaShanah falls on Wednesday, Yom Kippur falls on Friday; and if Rosh HaShanah falls on Friday, Yom Kippur falls on Sunday. This would mean that when Rosh HaShanah in the coming year would naturally fall on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, an extra day is added to the calendar to make sure that Rosh HaShanah falls on Monday, Thursday, or Shabbos instead.¹⁴ This concept of ensuring that Rosh HaShanah not fall on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday is called

רֵאשִׁית לַאֲדָר, lo adu Rosh, meaning that the beginning of the year, Rosh HaShanah, does not fall on א, the first day of the week, Sunday; ג, Wednesday; or ו, Friday. It is predominantly for this reason that there was a need to have Cheshvan and Kislev sometimes 29 days and sometimes 30, in order to make the exact length of the years flexible.

Although adding one day to the year so that Rosh HaShanah will not fall on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday seems simple, at times the calculation needs to

take additional factors into consideration, as we will see shortly. Since Hillel HaNasi's calendar did not allow a common year to be longer than 355 days and a leap year to be shorter than 383 days, the only way to avoid this happening is by planning in advance what will happen in the future years, and adjusting the calendar appropriately.

In order to accommodate these various calendar requirements, Hillel HaNasi established four rules, called *dechiyos*, which, together with the *sod ha'ibur* calculation and the nineteen-year rotation, form the basis of determining our calendar.¹⁵ We'll use a sample two years calculation of the molad for Rosh HaShanah to explain a *dechiyah*. A few years ago, the molad calculation for Rosh HaShanah fell on Wednesday evening, and Rosh HaShanah therefore was on Thursday, which is what we would expect. But the following year's molad fell on Tuesday, less than two hours before the end of the day. Although the molad was on Tuesday, it was too late in the day for this molad to be visible in Eretz Yisrael, and therefore Rosh HaShanah could not occur before Wednesday. However, since Rosh HaShanah cannot fall on a Wednesday, because of the rule of *lo adu Rosh*, it had to be pushed off to Thursday, or two days after the molad. For this reason, that year had to have an extra day, making it not only a leap year, but also a *sheleimah*, when both Cheshvan and Kislev have thirty days. This created a year of 385 days, the longest a year can be.¹⁶

As mentioned above, although the leap years follow a fixed nineteen-year cycle, whether the year is *chaseirah*, *kesidrah*, or *sheleimah* is determined by the other factors we have noted, and therefore does not follow the nineteen-year pattern. Rather, one first calculates when Rosh HaShanah should fall out based on the *sod ha'ibur*, then checks the rules of the *dechiyos* to see what adjustments need to be made, and then determines on which day Rosh HaShanah should fall. As a result, whether the year in question needs to be *chaseirah*, *kesidrah*, or *sheleimah* requires calculating not only that year's schedule, but also the coming year's calendar requirements. A result of all these calculations is that although there might seem to be many potential variables used in calculating the years (the day of the week of Rosh HaShanah, whether it is a leap year or ordinary year, and whether the year is *chaseirah*, *kesidrah*, or *sheleimah*), for reasons beyond the scope of this article, there are only seven possible prototype years for an ordinary year, and seven for a leap year.

Each of these fourteen prototype "years" is identified by a three-letter acronym, in which the first letter identifies the day of the week of the first day of Rosh HaShanah; the second letter denotes whether the year is *chaseirah*, *kesidrah*, or *sheleimah*; and the third letter identifies the day of the week of the first day of Pesach. No letter is used to denote whether the year is an ordinary year or a leap year, because this can be calculated by knowing how many days of the week there are between Pesach and Rosh HaShanah. In a common ordinary year that is *kesidrah*, Pesach falls two days later in the week than Rosh HaShanah. In a leap year, it falls four days later, the two additional days being the extra two days that Adar Rishon, which is thirty days long, adds to the count of the days of the week. Of course, these calculations must be adjusted one day in either direction if the year is *chaseirah* or *sheleimah*. Thus, the acronym for this year, 5779, is *bais shin zayin* ב"שז – Rosh HaShanah was on a Monday, the year is a *sheleimah* (both Cheshvan and Kislev had 30 days), and the first day of Pesach is on Shabbos.

Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Vayigash: "Reconciliation" Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

I have known more than my share of families that are torn by discord. I think most of us, perhaps even all of us, are familiar with families in which brothers and sisters have not spoken to each other in years, sometimes even having forgotten the original reason for the destruction of their relationship. My background and experience in the field of family therapy has given me even broader exposure than most to this unfortunate phenomenon.

Colleagues of mine in the practice of psychotherapy will concur that overcoming feelings of hatred and urges toward revenge is one of the most difficult challenges that they face in their practice. Reconciling parents and children, husbands and wives, is a frustrating process for those of us who counsel families. The successful reconciliation of ruined relationships is a rare achievement, especially after the misunderstandings have festered for years.

The great eighteenth-century moralist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, contends that these difficulties are intrinsic to our human nature. Thus he writes:

"Hatred and revenge. These, the human heart, in its perversity, finds it hard to escape. A man is very sensitive to disgrace, and suffers keenly when subjected to it. Revenge is sweeter to him than honey; he can not rest until he has taken his revenge. If, therefore, he has the power to relinquish that to which his nature impels him; if he can forgive; if he will forbear hating anyone who provokes him to hatred; if he will neither exact vengeance when he has the opportunity to do so, nor bear a grudge against anyone; if he can forget and obliterate from his mind a wrong done to him as though it had never been committed; then he is, indeed, strong and mighty. So to act may be a small matter to angels, who have no evil

traits, but not to 'those that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust.'" (Job 4:19) (Mesilat Yesharim [The Path of the Upright], Chapter 11)

Granted that one must approximate the angels in heaven in order to overcome the natural human inclinations to hate and take revenge. How, then, do we explain the astounding reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, which occurs in this week's Torah portion? (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

Joseph's brothers came to hate him because of what they saw as his malicious arrogance. Joseph certainly had reason to hate his brothers, who cast him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions. We can easily understand that he would attribute his years of imprisonment to their betrayal of him. And yet, in last week's Torah portion, we learned that they came to regret their actions and to feel guilty for what they did to him. "Alas, we are at fault...because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us." (Genesis 42:21)

It is in this week's parsha that we learn of the forgiveness that Joseph demonstrated toward his brothers. We read of a dramatic, reconciliation—a total triumph over hatred and revenge. What inner strengths enabled Joseph and his brothers to attain this rare achievement?

I maintain that quite a few such strengths help Joseph's brothers to rejoin him harmoniously. One was their ability to accept responsibility for their actions. Over time, they reflected introspectively and concluded that they were indeed wrong for what they did. Self-confrontation, and a commitment to accepting the truth when it surfaces allowed them to forget whatever originally prompted them to hate Joseph.

I further maintain that the underlying dynamics of Joseph's ability to forgive were very different. He came to forgive his brothers because of two fundamental aspects of his personality: his emotional sensitivity and his religious ideology.

Joseph's sensitivity becomes apparent to the careful reader of this and last week's Torah portions. The most reliable indication of a person's sensitivity is his ability to shed tears of emotion, his capacity to weep. Joseph demonstrates this capacity no less than four times in the course of the biblical narrative:

Subsequent to his initial encounter with his brothers, we read that "he turned away from them and wept..." (Genesis 42:24); when he first sees his younger brother Benjamin, "he was overcome with feeling...He went into a room and wept there..." (ibid. 43:30); unable to contain himself after Judah's confrontational address, "his sobs were so loud that...the news reached Pharaoh's palace..." And finally, as we will read in next week's Torah portion, this is Joseph's response to his brothers' plea for explicit forgiveness: "and Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him." (ibid. 50:17).

No doubt about it. The biblical text gives us conclusive evidence of Joseph's emotional sensitivity. But there is another secret to Joseph's noble treatment of his brothers. It relates to his philosophy, not to his emotional reactivity.

If there is one lesson that Joseph learned from his father Jacob during his disrupted adolescence, it was the belief in a divine being who ultimately controls man's circumstances and man's destiny. When a person wholly has that belief, he is able to dismiss even the most painful insults against him. He is able to attribute them to God's plan and not to blame the perpetrators of that insult. Thus was Joseph able to say, "So, it was not you who sent me here, but God..." (ibid. 45:8) The power of genuine faith to instill the awareness that even hurtful circumstances are part of the divine plan is, in my opinion, best described in this passage from the anonymous 13th century author of *Sefer HaChinuch*, in his comments on the commandment to desist from revenge:

"At the root of this commandment is the lesson that one must be aware and take to heart the fact that everything that happens in one's life, whether it seems beneficial or harmful, comes about because of God's intervention...Therefore, when a person is pained or hurt by another, he must know in his soul...that God has decreed this for him. He should not be prompted to take revenge against the perpetrator, who is only indirectly the cause of his pain or hurt. We learn this from King David who would not respond to the traitorous curses of his former ally, Shimi ben Gera."

The author of *Sefer HaChinuch* sees King David as the exemplar of this profound religious faith. In these final Torah portions of the Book of Genesis, we learn that Joseph was King David's mentor in regard to the capacity to rise above the misdeeds of others and to see them as but part of God's design.

It is not easy for us lesser believers to emulate Joseph and David, but we would be spared much interpersonal strife if we would at least strive to do so.

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Parshas Vayigash For Crying Out Loud

It was a war of words, a battle of will, power, and courage. Who would blink first: Yehuda or Yoseph?

This is the scenario. Before the brothers departed Egypt, Yoseph had surreptitiously planted his silver goblet in his brother Binyamin's sack. Not long after Yoseph sends his brothers back to Canaan, his agents pursue them, arrest them, and accuse them of robbery. Lo and behold, Binyamin is caught with the

silver goblet. Binyamin is brought back to the palace where Yosef sentences him to eternal servitude. The brothers are helpless.

Yehuda, having accepted full responsibility for Binyamin's safe return, pleads with Yosef while he also prepares for battle. After all, he exclaims, "How can I return to my father without my brother, lest I see the evil that will befall my father!" (cf. Genesis 44:34).

Yosef sees the true feeling that Yehuda and the brothers show for the youngest one, and cannot continue his charade. He sends all the Egyptians from the room and bursts out, "I am Yosef! Is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) Hardly a commentary fails to expound upon the obvious question. Yosef was just told how eagerly Yaakov awaits the return of Binyamin. Therefore Yosef knew that Yaakov was alive. Why now did he ask the question?

It was the Jewish wedding of the century, the daughter of Rabbi Chaim Elazar Schapiro, the illustrious Munkatzcer Rebbe, was to marry the son of the Rebbe of Partzov. Both Chassidic dynasties were royal, aristocratic, and majestic. And the ceremony was to be equally regal. The bride and groom would ride in opulent carriages, drawn by four white horses. The wedding meal was so large that every needy member of the community would be allowed to partake. It was the Jewish event of the century!

There was so much excitement that an actual news crew came to film the wedding. The footage would be incorporated as part of the pre-feature newsreels shown at American movie theatres across the Atlantic! "Imagine!" thought the reporters, "this would attract hundreds of Jewish people who had roots in Europe into the theatre!" The difficult part was to convince the Munkatzcer Rebbe to speak for the cameras. The Rebbe vehemently opposed the frivolities and wanton ideas of the cinema, and would not participate in a film. The producer assured the Rebbe that only his voice, not his face (an assurance that proved to be false), would be presented to the large audiences.

"Rebbe, this is a wonderful opportunity for you to talk about the Hassidic court of Munkatzce! Imagine how many Jews would be fascinated by your life's work. It would also be a wonderful opportunity to send personal wishes to all your followers who have left Europe to come to America."

Finally, the Rebbe consented. The film caught the Rebbe speaking for the microphones and the camera that was obscured from his view. He was very brief. Tearfully, he repeated his message a few times and then turned his head and stopped talking.

The American crew was excited. They were going to present the wedding with its entire mystique and majesty to American audiences.

However, when the wedding film was shown in American theatres the scene of the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony was a stark contrast to the interview with the Rebbe. They did not see a jubilant Rabbi Schapiro toasting the large audience upon the joyous occasion. Instead, they saw Rabbi Schapiro pleading tearfully on the silver screen. "Yidden heet der Shabbos!" "Jewish Brothers! Keep the Shabbos!" Those were the only words he said. Then he turned his face and wept. Those were the only words that the Rebbe chose to speak. (The film is now archived at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.)

Yosef had bottled his emotions from the moment he saw his brothers upon their entry to Egypt until the moment he revealed his identity in the privacy of his chambers. But all the while of his pent-up emotion there was one question he felt he had to ask. How is my father? Is he alive and well? Although the information was afforded him, he felt a responsibility — almost instinctive in nature — to ask about his dear father's welfare. All he had on his mind throughout the ordeal was that one question. The moment he was free to talk his piece, he instinctively asked, "Is my father still alive? How has he fared through this trying ordeal? Those words were on his heart and mind for 22 years. The moment he had the opportunity to speak, he did not chastise his brothers. He did not demand retribution. He did not seek vengeance. All he did was reveal his true feelings and asked the question that was quashed for 22 years. How is my father?"

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayigash

What is the Crying All About?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

When Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, he gives them instructions to go back and tell their father of the great honor he has in Mitzrayim. He requests that Yaakov bring down the entire family to live in Mitzrayim and promises that he will provide for them. Next, the pasuk says: "Then he fell upon his brother Binyomin's neck and wept; and Binyomin wept upon his neck." [Bereshis 45:14]

As we know, in contrast to all the other brothers who were only half-brothers to Yosef, Binyomin was Yosef's only full sibling. A special

kinship existed between them, so when they finally embraced, they fell on each other's necks and they cried.

Rashi quotes an interesting teaching of Chazal that sheds light on the nature of their respective crying: Yosef cried "over the two Batei Mikdash [Temples] that are destined to be in the portion of the Tribe of Binyomin, and whose end is to be destroyed." And Binyomin cried "over the Mishkan of Shiloh which is destined to be in the portion of Yosef (e.g. — Ephraim who is descended from Yosef) and whose end is to be destroyed."

This was not merely two long separated brothers crying tears of happiness at being reunited after so many years. The tears were a result of the Ruach HaKodesh [Divine Prophetic Spirit] that each one possessed, which led them to cry over the spiritual tragedies that would take place in the future in each other's territory in Eretz Yisrael.

A comment on this Medrash cited by Rashi is in order:

Why at this moment in time in particular did both Yosef and Binyomin think about Churban HaBayis [the future destruction of the House of G-d]? Neither one even existed yet! Perhaps one of two approaches can be suggested here.

There is a startling comment from the Sefas Emes. Yosef had been putting his brothers through the wringer for the last two parshios. Yosef made them jump through hoops — with this condition and that accusation. This was a traumatic, terrible experience for Yosef's brothers. Someone could view this as revenge. "Yosef is giving back as good as he got. He wants to torture them!" Finally, when the pasuk says that Yosef could no longer withhold himself and he broke down to them, and announced "I am Yosef", we say to ourselves — "At long last, this is over. Yosef is no longer torturing his brothers."

The Sefas Emes has an entirely different take on this narrative. He says "Heaven forbid! Yosef was not getting back at his brothers. This was not an issue of revenge." Yosef was trying to provide his brothers with kaparah [atonement] for all that they did to him. They needed to atone for what they did to him, the Sinas Achim [hatred of brothers], and the extreme form of sibling rivalry. In fact, we still need to atone for it. That is why to this day on Yom Kippur when we talk about the Ten Martyrs (Asarah Harugei Malchus), we begin the story with mention that the Roman Emperor began his assault on the Ten Martyrs by telling them "I remember what your ancestors did to their own brother." On Yom Kippur, even now, we still need to atone for the sin of Yosef's brothers.

The Sefas Emes explains that had Yosef been able to hold out longer, not break down, and not reveal himself ("Ani Yosef") yet, they could have completed the atonement and we would still have the Beis HaMikdash. This is precisely the opposite of the way we usually understand the story. We hear "I am Yosef" and we think "Thank G-d! The ordeal is over!"

The Sefas Emes understands just the opposite: What a tragedy. Had Yosef been able to continue, the kaparah for sinas achim would be complete, our eternal punishment for the matter would not have been necessary, and the Beis HaMikdash would have never been destroyed. Can you imagine that?

Perhaps this is why Yosef suddenly cried over the Churban Habayis eventually occurring in Binyomin's portion. Yosef was bemoaning the fact that he was not successful in fully executing his plan. "I could not do it! And because of that the atonement is not yet complete, and they will yet need to pay for this sin with the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash." Unfortunately, because of this, we are still suffering to this very day.

This is one approach to answering the question of why specifically now the thoughts to mourn the future destruction of the Batei Mikdash were triggered.

The other approach, again, presumes that Yosef was trying to undo the damage of the sinas achim [brotherly hatred]. We always talk about the fact that there are two opposite concepts: "sinas chinam" [undeserved hatred] and "ahavas chinam" [undeserved love]. "Ahavas chinam" implies thinking about the situation of the other person rather than thinking about oneself. Here, Yosef, when he looks at Binyomin says "Do you know what bothers me? I am bothered by your loss — the

destruction of the Kodesh Kadashim in your portion!" Similarly, when Binyomin sees Yosef, he too says, "I am bothered by your loss – the destruction of the Mishkan in the portion of Ephraim." This is the path to repairing the problem and the sin of sibling rivalry and hatred between brothers – to stop focusing on oneself and to look upon the problems of the other person.

As to the last comment in Rashi – that Binyomin cried over the Mishkan in Shilo that was in Yosef's portion and was destined to be destroyed – I wish to share the following thought I saw in a sefer called Milchamos Yehudah:

After the Mishkan in Shilo was destroyed, it was again resurrected, and first put in Nov and later in Giveon. So even after the Mishkan ceased to exist in Shilo, it had a rebirth in two other locations. If that is the case, how can we compare the "destruction of Mishkan Shilo" to the two destructions of the Beis HaMikdash? After the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash, we still do not have a Beis HaMikdash two thousand years later! It is a loss that has been irreplaceable for two millennia. Mishkan Shilo, on the other hand, was a temporary loss that was eventually restored in Nov and Giveon. What is the comparison?

The Milchamos Yehudah writes that there is more here than merely the loss of one Mishkan and the replacement with another one. Mishkan Shilo had a sanctity that no other Mishkan or Beis HaMikdash ever had. Any person who could see the Mishkan in Shilo – no matter where he was – could eat kodshim kalim [sacred meat of 'lighter' sanctity]. People could otherwise only eat kodshim kalim in the confines of the Beis HaMikdash. However, Mishkan Shilo had an amazing quality to it. Even if I lived fifteen miles away from Shilo but up on a hill, if I could see the Mishkan, I could eat kodshim kalim. This was not true in any of the other Batei Mikdash.

Why was this so? It was because Shilo was in the portion of the Tribe of Yosef, and Yosef has a special merit regarding the eyes. What does that mean? When Yosef was tempted by the wife of Potiphar, he turned the other way and did not succumb. This is why – in Yaakov's deathbed blessing to Yosef – he says, "A son of grace is Yosef, a son of grace to the eye..." [Bereshis 49:22] Yosef guarded his eyes and as a result of that he did not succumb to the enticements of Potiphar's wife." That is why, as long as Mishkan Shilo could be seen with someone's eyes, the person was allowed to eat sanctified meat. This is through the merit of the tzadik Yosef.

So not only is this something that applied only to the Mishkan in Shilo, but as long as the Mishkan stood in Shilo the merit of Yosef was still present, and Klal Yisrael did not have a problem with their wandering eyes that we all suffer from today. This was the zechus of Yosef. When Mishkan Shilo was destroyed, this ability to control our wandering eyes was lost with it. Yes, the Mishkan was rebuilt in Nov and Giveon, but they were not located in the portion of Yosef, and that zechus of Yosef to help us guard our eyes, never returned.

The Egyptians Hated Shepherds, but...

There is an old French expression which translates "The more things change, the more they stay the same." The following is an example of that.

The Torah teaches "And it shall be, when Pharaoh 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, because every shepherd is an abomination to Egypt." [Bereshis 46:33-34]. The brothers were shepherds and Yosef instructed them that when Pharaoh asks them what they do for a living, they should respond that they have been cattlemen from the time of their youth onwards. There was a plan behind this – so that they could live in the Land of Goshen. Yosef wanted the children of Yaakov to be separate from the Egyptians.

The Egyptians abhorred the whole profession of shepherding because they looked at sheep as their gods. This is why there was such self-sacrifice involved in the Israelites openly taking lambs and slaughtering them for the Korbon Pesach. The fact that shepherds would slaughter and eat sheep was an abomination to the Egyptians. Therefore, the plan was for the Egyptians to isolate the Israelites in Eretz Goshen, so they would have nothing to do with them.

The brothers did what Yosef instructed, and when they came before Pharaoh and he asked them about their livelihood, they told him that they are shepherds. They explained that they came to Egypt because due to the famine, there was no longer grazing grounds for their cattle and they requested to settle in the Land of Goshen. "We understand the sensitivity here. We are shepherds. Sheep are your gods. You cannot stand this profession. Let us all move to Goshen where we will be out of sight, out of mind, and not offend anyone."

Pharaoh acquiesces to their request. "The land of Egypt is before you—in the best of the land, settle your father and your brothers; let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know that there are capable men among them, appoint them as managers of the livestock that which is mine." [Bereshis 47:6].

Pharaoh has sheep? What happened to the fact that these are the gods of the Egyptians? What happened to the idea that the Egyptians abhor shepherds? All of a sudden, Pharaoh is asking Yosef to provide him top notch shepherding talent for his own set of cattle?

This is the story of all dictators. There is one type of practice and set of rules for the masses, for the plebeians, the proletariat, and there is another type of behavior for the rulers. This is what we saw when the Communists were in power. The people cannot have cars, they cannot have this and they cannot have that. However, do you think the rulers of Russia lived with that deprivation? We see today that the people in North Korea are starving. They literally have nothing to eat. Do you think that Kim Jung Un is suffering? He has a taste for good Scotch. The people are starving while he sits there having a L'Chaim with schnaps!

So how do we explain that? The people are suffering! The answer is that even when "the people" are suffering, the rulers know how to take care of themselves. This goes all the way back to Biblical times. Pharaoh says "Oh yes, stay in Eretz Goshen. The people cannot stand cattlemen. Sheep are their gods! However, by the way, I have a personal flock and I am looking for a few good men. Give me your best shepherds!"

This is an example of "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Transcribed by David Twersky

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה