

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Vayigash

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein *Europe Is Gone*

What can one say about Europe? I imagine that if one wants to be bitterly truthful then one could easily say that Hitler has in effect triumphed. He branded the Jews as the root of all troubles and proclaimed that the “final” and only solution to the “Jewish problem” was to eradicate all Jews from the face of the earth. And as we all know, he followed through on his genocidal program.

A great deal of Europe, its leaders, intellectuals and common folk, willfully and almost gleefully cooperated in this genocide. Many did so actively while many more Europeans did so passively. Once the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed after the war ended, this irrational and pathological hatred of the Jews went underground. After all, it was too shameful to admit that the continent that prided itself on the advancement of civilization could be guilty of such organized, government-sponsored inhumanity and cruelty.

So, most Europeans shielded themselves from any true feelings of guilt by simply stating that they were ignorant as to what was occurring. The Vatican and other Christian churches aided many Nazis and other war criminals in escaping from Europe and settling rather comfortably in other continents, notably South America.

As penance for their atrocious behavior, many European countries, though not all, voted for the establishment of the state of Israel and granted the nascent nation diplomatic and sometimes even economic recognition and help. There the matter seemed to rest during the decade of the 1950s.

But the state of Israel, always being the burr under the world’s saddle, would not let the matter rest. The wound was too deep and raw and the world would not be allowed to so easily forget what had happened.

So, Israel captured Adolf Eichmann and placed him on trial for his crimes against the Jewish people and humanity. The trial, which lasted almost a year, revealed in a stark and graphic way what had happened to the Jewish people on European soil from 1939 to 1945. It was not only Eichmann and the Nazis that were the defendants in that most bruising and bitter trial, but in a very real sense, Europe itself was on trial.

And, when Eichmann was justifiably found guilty and executed for his crimes, subliminally Europe was also judged to be guilty and complicit in the horror of the Holocaust. Europe has never forgiven Israel for that trial and verdict. It is well aware that it is guilty but can never own up to this guilt.

In line with its time-honored obsession with the Jewish people and its innate necessity to scapegoat Jews for all of Europe's problems, Europe has turned its enmity, in an unremitting fashion, against the Jewish state. Israel should be pilloried and boycotted, delegitimized and isolated, while the noble Palestinians – fomenters of worldwide terrorism, intifadas and recurring wars – are worthy of diplomatic recognition, media support, financial aid and moral justification.

This is Europe's revenge against the Jews for surviving the Holocaust and thereby instilling the unease and guilt that Europe feels towards Jews, Judaism and the Jewish state.

To use a Christian phrase, Europe is sorely in need of redemption. Catholic countries such as Ireland, Portugal and Spain have not digested the lessons of history vis-à-vis the relationship of the Church and the Jews over the centuries. The liberal Left refuses to deal with its history of oppression and anti-Semitism that Marxism, the Soviet Union and the Left generally has inflicted on European and world Jewry.

It again bans circumcision and kosher slaughter, all in the name of some lofty ideals of infant and animal rights. All of this naturally occurs in the background of rampant child abuse and slaughter of humans, the repression of women, the elimination of minorities and the other pernicious facets of intolerant social norms, which characterize Palestinian and Islamic society.

Perfidious and hypocritical as it is, Europe nonetheless claims the high moral ground for itself, sneering condescendingly at the United States and feels justly entitled to be the moral judge over the state of Israel. Europe regrets not so much the Holocaust itself, but that the Jews survived it and because of it were allowed to create a nation state for themselves.

It will allow for the creation of Holocaust memorials and museums but objects to the state of Israel being included in the Jewish story that it depicts. Hamas is no longer a terrorist organization as far as Europe is concerned, but Israel should be hauled before the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Even George Orwell would be astounded to see how skewed the vision and policies of Europe are today. Only time will tell if Europe is ever able to right its perverse attitude towards Jews and Israel. History teaches us that it will be doomed somehow if it does not do so.

Shabbat shalom

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel *Vayigash*

As the Torah’s narrative of the story of Yosef and his brothers reaches its dramatic climax in this week’s parsha, one may feel justifiably surprised that the brothers were so shocked at Yosef’s revelation to them. After all, there was no shortage of revelatory hints strewn by Yosef throughout the unfolding story.

But the brothers, convinced of the rectitude of their actions and behavior, remained insensitive to Yosef and his words, dreams and vision to the end. This fact of willful blindness, no matter what facts are unfolding before one’s eyes, is not a rare occurrence in life. It is unfortunately a very common human characteristic.

The combination of self-righteousness, so-called ideological purity, human stubbornness and the reluctance to admit past error is a lethal mix. It corrupts thought and behavior and blinds the eyes, even of the righteous. The Torah describes the effects of venal monetary corruption thusly: “For graft will blind the sight of the otherwise righteous and pervert the utterances of the wise.”

There is no greater graft or corruption than the self-righteousness of the ideologues amongst us. The brothers disbelieved Yosef’s dreams from the onset and hardened their hearts and justified their behavior towards him. They convinced themselves that they could not have been wrong regarding such an important matter.

Blinded by their own convictions and worldview, of their exclusive role in creating the Jewish people without Yosef’s participation, the brothers were blind to the facts that unfolded before their eyes. I am reminded of the sign that I once saw on the desk of a noted professor of law that said “Don’t confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up!” Even the greatest among us fall into that trap.

There is a portion of the Jewish people who sincerely believe, whether for religious or ideological reasons, that the state of Israel should never have been created. Great rabbinic leaders of the past assured their followers that the state could not last longer than fifteen years or fifty years at the most. The facts thankfully belie those dark predictions and certainties.

There were ideologues on the left who said that by abandoning Marxism the state of Israel was doomed, as was the world of the Western democracies generally. Once again the facts of the matter have arisen to deny this skewed and dire viewpoint. All of the naysayers of the past still deny the present and continue to fight against the raging sea of facts that appear before their very eyes.

Twenty years after the Oslo agreements, it is apparent to all that somehow this process failed to bring even a modicum of peace to Israel and its Arab antagonists. Yet, having committed themselves to and having invested so much effort in a failed process there are still many who refuse to face the

facts and recognize that their worldview and assessment of the situation was wrong.

So even when Yosef stands before you, one is blinded by one's own prejudices and previous mindset. This is a very important lesson to be learned from the narrative of the Torah. The ability to admit wrong and change direction is one of the true hallmarks of human greatness. It certainly is necessary in our time and in our circumstances.
Shabbat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayigash
For the week ending 27 December 2014 / 5 Tevet 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

It's Nothing, Really!

"I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" (45:3)

How many times when you apologize to someone do you hear, "It's nothing, really! Why are you making such a business out of it? What did you do, after all? Forget it! It's really nothing."

Now for some people, saying "It's nothing" is genuine forgiveness. It really is nothing to them. However, most of the time what people really mean is, "It's nothing, really?! You must be joking! I don't even want to hear your voice. I just want to see you squirm around in front of me. I'm not letting you off the hook for anything. Apologize away. It's nothing, really!"

A person who refuses to accept an honest apology can make himself guiltier than the "guilty party". Just as Judaism prescribes the appropriate behavior for one who needs to apologize, so too here is a correct way to behave towards someone seeking forgiveness. Indeed, someone who turns a plea for forgiveness into an opportunity for vengeance, however subtle it might be, will very probably end up committing a graver sin than the original offense.

Picture Yosef's brothers standing in front of him, the utter humiliation and guilt of facing their young brother whom they had wronged so terribly. Now they were facing a king who had the power of life and death over them. How did Yosef react in this situation? Human nature would suggest that Yosef would, at least, have laid out in some detail all the hardship and suffering they had caused him. However, what we read in the Torah sounds more like an extended "thank you" note than a reproach.

"And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. Thus G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you. It is not you who sent me here but G-d."

The Torah teaches us that, as important as it is to say "Sorry", it's equally important to know how to say "I forgive you" in a way that genuinely comforts the offender.

Source: Da'at Torah

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Vayigash

Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)

Rashi quotes Chazal (Megillah 16b) who indicate that Yosef and Binyamin wept over the destruction of the Sanctuaries which would be built in their respective portions of Eretz Yisrael. Yosef cried over the two Batei Mikdash which were to be situated in Binyamin's territory, while Binyamin mourned the Mishkan Shiloh which was to be in Yosef's portion of Eretz Yisrael. Clearly, the weeping generated by these destructions could have occurred at a different time. Yosef and Binyamin had been separated for twenty-two years. The joy in meeting one another must have been overwhelming. Just talking about the missing years and what had happened to each one, their families and their experiences, should have taken precedence over what was going to take place in the future.

Nonetheless, it is the destruction of the Temples that occupied the minds of these two giants. How are we to understand their actions?

The Ksav Sofer offers a novel explanation. He cites the Talmud Yoma 9b, which states that the Bais Hamikdash fell victim to the three cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and adultery. The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of the sin of *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred, among Jews. This was despite their observance of mitzvos and performance of kind deeds. This teaches that the sin of *sinaas chinam* carries the same weight as all three cardinal sins.

The *mechiras Yosef*, sale of Yosef, was, for all intents and purposes, a manifestation of the sin of *sinaas chinam*. (I must add that this statement is relative, since we cannot possibly begin to understand the spiritual plateau of the *Shivtei Kah*.) One thing is for certain: Yosef and Binyamin were not in any way involved in *mechiras Yosef*. Perhaps this is why the Batei Mikdash were built in their territories. They had no taint of *sinaas chinam* on them.

The Chasam Sofer posits that, for this reason, when *mechiras Yosef* finally came to a conclusion, Yosef and Binyamin were "informed" by Heaven that, because no vestige of hatred existed among them, the Batei Mikdash and Mishkan Shiloh would be built in their respective portions of Eretz Yisrael. This is why it is that specifically when they meet each other, and they are informed about the Batei Mikdash, they cried. They were now acutely aware of their future loss.

The *Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei*: 929 substantiates this idea. He attributes the tragic murder of the Ten Martyrs to *mechiras Yosef*. He adds, that in every generation that sin manifests itself again. Ten righteous men of every generation carry upon themselves the weight of this tragic sin. To explain this statement, we must consider the fact that the sin of *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred, between brothers still manifests itself in many guises: some are blatant; others are very well concealed. Nonetheless, it is present, and, unless we focus more on *ahavas chinam*, the problem - with its concomitant punishment - will persist.

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, cites the *Zohar Chadash*, *Parashas Vayeishev*, that attributes our exile at the hands of Edom/Eisav's minions directly to *sinaas chinam*. Eisav personified this egregious mindset, acting it out to its fullest extent. A quick perusal through our tumultuous history indicates that the descendants of Eisav (who are obvious) have stood at the forefront of this baseless hatred. Whether it goes by the name anti-Semitism, or whatever label society attaches to it, it is unwarranted, baseless and senseless. It is hate for the purpose of hate. Rather than focus on Eisav, we should look inward and identify - in order to correct - those areas in which, as Jewish brethren, we are deficient in our demeanor towards one another.

Rav Friedman quotes Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kozmir, cited by his grandson, the *Divrei Yisrael* of Modzitz. In addition to focusing on *sinaas chinam* as the primary sin of *mechiras Yosef*, he explains that when Yosef and Binyamin met, their weeping was, in a sense, their preparation paving the way for their descendants to repair the sin of *sinaas chinam*. This is indicated by their not weeping for the Temple in their own territory, but specifically for the Sanctuary situated in the other one's territory. Brotherly love means that one cares for the other - not for himself. This was manifest by their weeping for one another.

In his inimitable manner, Rav Friedman expands on the fact that it was Yosef and Binyamin, the two sons of Rachel Imeinu, who paved the way for their brothers to place the greater emphasis on *achdus*, unity. In a well-known Midrash (*Pesichah Megillas Eichah*, *Midrash Rabbah*), Chazal relate that, during the Churban, destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, each of the Avos, Patriarchs, followed by Moshe Rabbeinu, came before Hashem to intercede on behalf of Klal Yisrael. Hashem did not listen to their pleas. It was only after Rachel Imeinu came forward and told her story that Hashem was "moved" to say, "Because of you, I will return Yisrael to the land."

Rachel's plea consisted of relating how she overlooked her natural desire to be the designated wife of Yaakov Avinu. Concerned for her sister's feelings, lest she be humiliated if discovered, she gave Leah Imeinu the

simanim, special signs, which Yaakov gave to her, just in case her father, Lavan, made a switch - which, of course, he did. Rachel's concern for her sister's emotional well-being went so far that she concealed herself in the room, and, when Yaakov spoke to Leah, Rachel responded, in order to prevent her sister from being put to shame. She overcame envy, allowing her sister to precede her in marriage, and she triumphed over her personal pain as she listened to Yaakov and Rachel, knowing that it should have been she who had become his wife. She did all of this out of selfless love for her sister. Thus, when Hashem, Who was punishing Klal Yisrael for their baseless hatred of one another, saw the incredible selfless love manifest by Rachel, He allowed the Jewish People

to return to the Holy Land. Thus, Yosef and Binyamin were continuing their mother's legacy of selfless love.

Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)

The casual reader of Biblical text, who refuses to look beyond the simple translation and delve into the profundities of the Torah's interpretation, sees an emotional meeting between two brothers who had been separated for twenty-two years. This might be the case if this were a secular novel and the two heroes were simple people. When an encounter is recorded in the Torah for posterity and the players are Yosef and Binyamin, two members of Shivtei Kah, one must be obtuse to view this meeting superficially. Chazal illuminate the scenario when they tell us that this was no simple emotional crying over a long separation; rather, Yosef saw the destruction of the Batei Mikdash which were built in Binyamin's territorial home in Eretz Yisrael. Binyamin wept over the Mishkan in Shiloh which was situated in Yosef's portion of Eretz Yisrael. One never ceases to be amazed at the denseness manifest by secular commentators, who absolutely eschew the truth.

Having said this, let us now understand why Yosef wept over Binyamin's destruction, and Binyamin wept for Yosef's troubles. One would expect each one to mourn his own personal adversity. Horav Aharon, zl, m'Belz, and the Imrei Emes, zl, asked this question shortly after these venerable Admorim arrived in Eretz Yisrael following the cataclysmic Holocaust tragedy which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of their chassidim, along with millions of their Jewish brethren. In a meeting with the remnants of their chassidus, they presented this question. In order to better understand and appreciate their response, I take the liberty of quoting a story which was related by Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, in Nitzotzos.

Chabad Lubavitch had a chain of clandestine yeshivos that operated under the radar of the Soviet authorities. The KGB were on the prowl, looking for any infraction on the part of the Jewish refuseniks. To be caught meant a quick trip to Siberia or another one of Russia's wastelands, exposed to the elements and subject to daily deprivation and beatings. There is no doubt that those who came to learn, as well as those who did the teaching, were individuals of a most elevated spiritual status.

Horav Yechezkel Fagin, zl, was one of these unique mentors whose devotion to spreading Torah knew no bounds. One time, he convened a group of students whom he felt were not devoting enough energy to davening, Torah study and middos, character trait, development. Even the finest student requires a little nudge every once in a while. He spoke with extreme emotion, and his words were well received. The young men began to weep, expressing their remorse concerning their failure to be more devoted to their spiritual growth.

Suddenly, one of the students whose turn it was to stand guard as a lookout, to warn the group of KGB police in the area, came running in to notify them that it appeared that the KGB were making a sweep of the area. The danger was very real. If they were caught - they would be in serious trouble. No excuse would suffice. To leave meant being subjected to intense questioning concerning why they were there in the first place.

Immediately, those gathered around the table came up with suggestions about how to avert a disaster. One suggested running for their lives. Another suggested shutting the light, thus giving the impression that the

house was empty. Another said that they should put newspapers and secular reading material on the table, so that the KGB would not suspect any wrongdoing on their part.

With the blessing of the Almighty, the KGB halted their search before they came to their house. They were now able to return to the table to continue their learning. Prior to continuing his lecture, Rav Fagin said, "I just saw something strange. Explain to me what is your greater fear: physical adversity or spiritual hardship?" Before they could respond, he continued, "How is it that when I spoke to you concerning your lack of spiritual ascendancy, you responded with remorse; yet, when you feared for your lives, you came up with various ideas on how to solve the problem? When your lives were in danger - not a single one of you cried! You immediately went to work seeking solutions."

One of the students replied, "Did you think that when the KGB comes knocking at our door, we would sit around with folded hands and cry? What would that help? When they come, one either hides or runs away. Crying helplessly is of no consequence!"

"Aha," said the Rav. "Now, I understand. There is no place for tears when you must move quickly and decisively. You know that crying will be of little consequence. It is a time for action. When it comes to issues of spirituality, suddenly you have time, you cry, feel bad, and slowly seek a solution to your spiritual morass. Why rush?"

The Rav explained to them that weeping is an excuse, a delay tactic to ward off a confrontation with reality. Crying solves no problem. It relieves one's emotions as it delays his reaction to the issue at hand. One who is serious about his desire to change and grow spiritually has no time for tears. He acts decisively and definitively - immediately.

This is the response the holy tzaddikim gave to their question concerning Yosef and Binyamin weeping over the other one's troubles. "When it comes to someone else's adversity; one cries. When the troubles are his own; when they are present - one acts. There is no time for weeping. We must immediately begin to rebuild. This is our tzarah, trouble."

This was the attitude of the Ponevezer Rav, zl. Following the Holocaust, he was asked how he could live with the tragedy, the pain of losing his yeshivah, friends and family. He replied, "I will rebuild it all! Every tear is another brick in the yeshivah. Every sigh is another shtender, lectern, in the bais hamedrash. I have put aside the pain, so that I can build and return the Torah-world to its previous splendor and majesty."

So Yaakov set out with all that he had and he came to Beer-Sheva. (46:1)

The Midrash asks where Yaakov Avinu went. Chazal respond, Lakutz arazim, "To cut down the cedar trees which his grandfather, Avraham Avinu, planted in Beer Sheva." I have referred to this Midrash a number of times, but upon perusing it again, I am struck with two questions. Yaakov is on his way to greet his long-lost son, Yosef, for whom he had mourned for twenty-two years. Can one ever begin to imagine the excitement that coursed through the Patriarch at this time? His son that he had given up for dead was not only alive, but had achieved the epitome of monarchy in the most depraved country in the world! Imagine, a Jew, reviled and castigated by the world, accomplishes the impossible - and is revered, admired and even loved! Yaakov must have been bursting with joy, effusive in his excitement. One would expect him to take the quickest route and use the speediest means of travel. Why did he make a stop in Beer Sheva to cut down cedar trees? If his goal was to transport these trees to Egypt, he could have sent his sons. Alternatively, once he had reached Egypt, had seen Yosef, and had spent some quality time with him, he could have taken a short trip to Beer Sheva to retrieve the trees. Making Beer Sheva part of his itinerary raised eyebrows. Apparently, an important lesson can be derived from here.

Second, if Yaakov felt it that important for him to go to Beer Sheva - fine - but why did he include his entire entourage in his trip? Why did his entire family have to accompany him on his tree-cutting expedition? Apparently, this was no simple event. It was a lesson for generations, to be passed on to his progeny, and they to theirs.

Yaakov went to retrieve the cedars planted by Avraham. These cedars would one day be the Kerashim, Beams, of the Mishkan. The cedars represented the most vital component in Klal Yisrael's fabric - the Torah. Without the foundation of the Torah, Yaakov could not have gone down to Egypt. Yes, he missed his son, but love for a child must be predicated upon the foundation set forth by the Torah. Children must know that their parents love them, but that they love Hashem even more. Children must know and appreciate the value of Torah. In order for children to appreciate Torah's value, they must observe this feeling emanating from their parents. Yaakov's children saw him as a loving father whose transcendental values of eternity superseded even his love of them. Furthermore, the children saw that his values were a legacy from the past. It was his grandfather who had planted the cedars which Yaakov would now transplant on Egyptian soil - for his future descendants to take with them into the wilderness. When they built the Mishkan, it was raised upon the foundation which Avraham and Yaakov had established.

This was the lesson that Yaakov wanted to impart to his family. Unless they stood by and watched, it would have had very little meaning. There is nothing like firsthand perception, actively seeing it.

I recently had occasion to see a young student attending shul on Shabbos, away from home. He was alone in shul with some friends. He never left his seat, davening the entire time, not even conversing with his friends, who were not maintaining perfect decorum. I wondered what secret ingredient his parents possessed: what had they put into his cereal; what "threats" had they imposed on him? Upon sharing my feeling with the boy's mother, she explained that her son had not been allowed to go to shul on Shabbos until he had been able and prepared to sit out the entire session next to his father and daven. The boy had been taught values when he saw his father daven. When children, regrettably, see their father sleeping late and arriving at the end of Shacharis for the Torah reading, or just in time to join in the festivities at the kiddush club, he receives an entirely different lesson. Our children remember what we show them. When they see us talking in shul - they will talk. When they see us davening - they will daven. We are the first line of defense for our children's positive growth. Unfortunately, we can also be the greatest offenders.

And Yaakov blessed Pharaoh. (47:7)

The blessing that Yaakov Avinu gave to Pharaoh had an enormous effect on Egypt's agricultural bounty. Indeed, Rashi explains that, following Yaakov's blessing, the Nile River rose up to "greet" Pharaoh and then irrigated the land. The Satmar Rav, zl, related that, in the twilight of the life of his grandfather, the Yismach Moshe, the heads of the community approached him with a complaint. Apparently, the sage davened privately in a room off of the main bais medrash. This bothered them. They added a few more foolish critiques, which they felt granted them permission to refuse him his meager salary and to search for a replacement. Clearly, people have not changed in the last hundred years. Excuses for replacing spiritual leadership are becoming more transparent, but no one seems to care.

The Yismach Moshe replied to them, "I would like you to take a count of how many fires our community has experienced in the last eighteen years (that he had been Rav). Also, please confirm for me how many women have miscarried a pregnancy. You will discover that, during my tenure as Rav of this community, there has neither been a fire, nor has a woman miscarried. Thus, I feel you owe me a salary for protecting the welfare of the city."

People take their spiritual leadership for granted. To merit having the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, as Rav, yet quibble about his practice at davening alone, bespeaks severe obtuseness of the mind. Yet, it is quite common, often fueled by an overactive ego, the result of wealth or other form of self-aggrandizement.

A similar idea may be gleaned from the pasuk which relates the Egyptians' request for seeds, so that they could plant and sustain themselves of the harvest, V'sen zera v'nichyeh v'lo namus, "And provide seed so that we may live and not die" (Ibid 47:19). Rashi explains that, according to

Yosef's timetable, Egypt was destined for two more years of hunger, so that seeds would not grow. Once Yaakov Avinu appeared in Egypt, however, his merit brought an end to the anticipated hunger.

The story is told that when the Shaagas Arye, Horav Arye Leib Gunzberg, zl, arrived in Metz to accept the position of Rav, the community was effusive with praise and excited over its good fortune. As one of the generation's preeminent gaonim, brilliant Torah scholars, he overwhelmed the city's scholars with his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and ingenious penetrating analytical skills. There was, regrettably, one sad note: He had already reached an advanced age (by the standards of the day). He was seventy years old.

The Shaagas Arye sensed the change in mood when they gazed at his aged body and his long, flowing white beard. The people seemed nervous, almost tense and upset. In an attempt to alleviate their fears, he shared with them the following dvar Torah: "The Torah teaches us that when Yaakov met Pharaoh, the king asked the Patriarch, 'How old are you?' The Patriarch replied that he was one hundred thirty years. He then added, 'Few and bad have been the days of my life, and they have not reached the lifespans of my forefathers' (ibid 47:9). Why was it necessary for Yaakov to add this last statement, which comes across like an apology for appearing to be so old? Furthermore, why was Pharaoh concerned with Yaakov's age? Since when do we greet someone and immediately question him concerning his age?"

"Rashi alludes to the explanation when he writes that, upon Yaakov's arrival, Egypt prospered like it never had before. The hunger that had been devastating the country ended. The Nile River was irrigating the land like it had never before. Pharaoh feared that it was all going to come to a halt - very soon. When he took one look at Yaakov, he became nervous. The Patriarch looked like an old man. This is why Yaakov told him that he had experienced an extremely difficult life. He had aged prematurely, and, in fact, he was much younger than his forefathers had been when they died. Pharaoh could rest assured. Yaakov was not 'leaving' in the near future.

"Likewise, my dear friends, I will have you know that I have had a very difficult life, which has taken its toll on my physical appearance. My body has sustained much travail. I assure you, however, that I will be Rav of Metz for at least twenty more years. You may rest assured."

We do not recognize the contributions of our Torah leaders to our physical and material existence. We think that we benefit from them only in the spiritual dimension, but what do they have to do with our material lives? Their mere presence provides merit which would otherwise be unavailable to us. This is something which we should never take for granted.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column

Parsha Column, Vayigash: "Reconciliation"

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 18th 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.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain’s Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Birth of Forgiveness

There are moments that change the world: 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press (though the Chinese had developed it four centuries before), or 1821 when Faraday invented the electric motor, or 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web. There is such a moment in this week’s parsha, and in its way it may have been no less transformative than any of the above. It happened when Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers. While they were silent and in a state of shock, he went on to say these words:

“I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” (Gen. 45: 4-8)

This is the first recorded moment in history in which one human being forgives another.

According to the Midrash, God had forgiven before this,[1] but not according to the plain sense of the text. Forgiveness is conspicuously lacking as an element in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and the cities of the plain. When Abraham prayed his audacious prayer for the people of Sodom, he did not ask God to forgive them. His argument was about justice not forgiveness. Perhaps there were innocent people there, fifty or even ten. It would be unjust for them to die. Their merit should therefore save the others, says Abraham. That is quite different from asking God to forgive.

Joseph forgave. That was a first in history. Yet the Torah hints that the brothers did not fully appreciate the significance of his words. After all, he did not explicitly use the word ‘forgive.’ He told them not to be distressed. He said, ‘It was not you but God.’ He told them their act had resulted in a positive outcome. But all of this was theoretically compatible with holding them guilty and deserving of punishment. That is why the Torah recounts a second event, years later, after Jacob had died. The brothers sought a meeting with Joseph fearing that he would now take revenge. They concocted a story:

They sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers for the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. [Gen. 50: 16-18]

What they said was a white lie, but Joseph understood why they said it. The brothers used the word “forgive” – this is the first time it appears explicitly in the Torah – because they were still unsure about what Joseph meant. Does someone truly forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph wept that his brothers had not fully understood that he had forgiven them long before. He no longer felt ill-will toward them. He had no anger, no lingering resentment, no desire for revenge. He had conquered his emotions and reframed his understanding of events.

Forgiveness does not appear in every culture. It is not a human universal, nor is it a biological imperative. We know this from a fascinating study by American classicist David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: the origins of a moral idea* (2010).[2] In it he argues that there was no concept of forgiveness in the literature of the ancient Greeks. There was something else, often mistaken for forgiveness. There is appeasement of anger.

When someone does harm to someone else, the victim is angry and seeks revenge. This is clearly dangerous for the perpetrator and he or she may try to get the victim to calm down and move on. They may make excuses: It wasn't me, it was someone else. Or, it was me but I couldn't help it. Or, it was me but it was a small wrong, and I have done you much good in the past, so on balance you should let it pass.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with these other strategies, the perpetrator may beg, plead, and perform some ritual of abasement or humiliation. This is a way of saying to the victim, “I am not really a threat.” The Greek word *sugnome*, sometimes translated as forgiveness, really means, says Konstan, exculpation or absolution. It is not that I forgive you for what you did, but that I understand why you did it – you could not really help it, you were caught up in circumstances beyond your control – or, alternatively, I do not need to take revenge because you have now shown by your deference to me that you hold me in proper respect. My dignity has been restored.

There is a classic example of appeasement in the Torah: Jacob's behaviour toward Esau when they meet again after a long separation. Jacob had fled home after Rebekah overheard Esau resolving to kill him after Isaac's death (Gen. 27: 41). Prior to the meeting Jacob sends him a huge gift of cattle, saying “I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” (Gen. 32: 21). When the brothers meet, Jacob bows down to Esau seven times, a classic abasement ritual. The brothers meet, kiss, embrace and go their separate ways, but not because Esau has forgiven Jacob but because either he has forgotten or he has been placated.

Appeasement as a form of conflict management exists even among non-humans. Frans de Waal, the primatologist, has described peacemaking rituals among chimpanzees, bonobos and mountain gorillas.[3] There are contests for dominance among the social animals, but there must also be ways of restoring harmony to the group if it is to survive at all. So there are forms of appeasement and peacemaking that are pre-moral and have existed since the birth of humanity.

Forgiveness has not. Konstan argues that its first appearance is in the Hebrew Bible and he cites the case of Joseph. What he does not make clear is why Joseph forgives, and why the idea and institution are born specifically within Judaism.

The answer is that within Judaism a new form of morality was born. Judaism is (primarily) an ethic of guilt, as opposed to most other systems, which are ethics of shame. One of the fundamental differences between them is that shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. In shame cultures when a person does wrong he or she is, as it were, stained, marked, defiled. In guilt cultures what is wrong is not the doer but the deed, not the sinner but the sin. The person retains his or her fundamental worth (“the soul you gave me is pure,” as we say in our prayers). It is the act that has somehow to be put right. That is why in guilt cultures there are processes of repentance, atonement and forgiveness.

That is the explanation for Joseph's behaviour from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the point where, in this week's parsha, he announces his identity and forgives his brothers. It is a textbook case of putting the brothers through a course in atonement,

the first in literature. Joseph is thus teaching them, and the Torah is teaching us, what it is to earn forgiveness.

Recall what happens. First he accuses the brothers of a crime they have not committed. He says they are spies. He has them imprisoned for three days. Then, holding Shimon as a hostage, he tells them that they must now go back home and bring back their youngest brother Benjamin. In other words, he is forcing them to re-enact that earlier occasion when they came back to their father with one of the brothers, Joseph, missing. Note what happens next:

They said to one another, “Surely we deserve to be punished [ashemim] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us” ... They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. [Gen. 42: 21-23]

This is the first stage of repentance. They admit they have done wrong.

Next, after the second meeting, Joseph has his special silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack. It is found and the brothers are brought back. They are told that Benjamin must stay as a slave.

“What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.” [Gen. 44: 16]

This is the second stage of repentance. They confess. They do more: they admit collective responsibility. This is important. When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery it was Judah who proposed the crime (37: 26-27) but they were all (except Reuben) complicit in it.

Finally, at the climax of the story Judah himself says “So now let me remain as your slave in place of the lad. Let the lad go back with his brothers!” (42: 33). Judah, who sold Joseph as a slave, is now willing to become a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free. This is what the sages and Maimonides define as complete repentance, namely when circumstances repeat themselves and you have an opportunity to commit the same crime again, but you refrain from doing so because you have changed.

Now Joseph can forgive, because his brothers, led by Judah, have gone through all three stages of repentance: [1] admission of guilt, [2] confession and [3] behavioural change.

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Repentance presupposes that we are free and morally responsible agents who are capable of change, specifically the change that comes about when we recognise that something we have done is wrong and we are responsible for it and we must never do it again. The possibility of that kind of moral transformation simply did not exist in ancient Greece or any other pagan culture. Greece was a shame-and-honour culture that turned on the twin concepts of character and fate.[4] Judaism was a repentance-and-forgiveness culture whose central concepts are will and choice. The idea of forgiveness was then adopted by Christianity, making the Judeo-Christian ethic the primary vehicle of forgiveness in history.

Repentance and forgiveness are not just two ideas among many. They transformed the human situation. For the first time, repentance established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent I show I can change. The future is not predestined. I can make it different from what it might have been. Forgiveness liberates us from the past. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of reaction and revenge. It is the undoing of what has been done.[5]

Humanity changed the day Joseph forgave his brothers. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are no longer prisoners of our past.

[1] There are midrashic suggestions that God partially forgave, or at least mitigated the punishments of, Adam and Eve and Abel. Ishmael was said to have become a penitent, and there are midrashic interpretations that identify Keturah, the woman Abraham married after the death of Sarah, with Hagar, implying that Abraham and Isaac were reunited and reconciled with Sarah's maidservant and her son.

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

[3] Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

[4] See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

[5] Hannah Arendt makes this point in *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 241.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayigash

Nice Guys Finish Well

Yosef sent gifts to his father upon wagons (agalos). When Yaakov saw the wagons, his spirit was rejuvenated because he was convinced that Yosef was still alive. Rashi cites the Medrash that by sending wagons (agalos), Yosef was sending a signal to Yaakov that he remembered the last thing they studied together before being separated. They had been studying the laws of the decapitated calf (Eglah Arufah). (The term eglah [calf] has the same root as the word agalos [wagons].) The law of Eglah Arufah is that if a person leaves a city and is subsequently found dead, the elders of the closest city need to bring an atonement known as the Eglah Arufah, because it involves decapitating a calf.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos elaborate upon Rashi's comment. The Daas Zekeinim explain that when Yaakov sent Yosef on his mission (to look for his brothers) Yaakov accompanied Yosef part of the way. The Daas Zekeinim derive this from use in the narrative of the word "Vayishlacheihu" [and he sent him] [Bereshis 37:14]. The Daas Zekeinim say that throughout the Torah, the word Vayishlacheihu does not merely mean "he sent him"; rather it means "he escorted him."

When Yosef's father started accompanying him, write the Daas Zekeinim, Yosef urged him to go back home. At that point, Yaakov told Yosef that he wanted to teach him the Torah value of "levayah" [escorting someone on the road], which is learned from the law of Eglah Arufah. (This is by virtue of the fact that the Elders of the city need to state that they do not have blood on their hands because they did not refuse to escort the dead person on his journey.) The implication of the statement of the Elders in the procedure of Eglah Arufah is that someone who neglects to provide escort on the road is guilty of spilling innocent blood.

Why is levayah [escort] so important? The Maharal explains that the escort shows the person being escorted "you are still a part of us; you are not alone; you are still part of a community." As part of the community, the person still has the merit of the community and in this merit he should be confident that he will be protected on his journey. When one is "on his own," accidents can happen and thus the Elders of a community who let someone go off totally on his own retain a responsibility for what happens to him.

Yosef understood that Yaakov was teaching him much more than just the law of levayah. Implicit in Yaakov's message and implicit in the mitzvah of levayah is that one must care about his fellow Jew and look for opportunities to give him chizuk [strength]. This was the last message Yosef heard from his father before their separation and this is the message Yosef carried with himself for the next 20 years: The importance of worrying about one's fellow man and trying to strengthen him.

If we look back at the entire story of what happened to Yosef in Egypt, we see a pattern in his behavior throughout the narrative. To put it in very mundane terms (not really appropriate for Yosef HaTzadik), Yosef was always a 'nice guy.' Everything turned out for Yosef's good because he was a 'nice guy'. He was thrown into the dungeon. There he met the Wine Butler and the Baker. We know the story. He interprets their dreams and as a result of that he is recommended to Pharaoh and ultimately becomes the Viceroy of Egypt. But how does it all start? It starts with Yosef being a 'nice guy.' Yosef saw them one morning and asked them "Why are you in such a bad mood?"

How many people sitting in a dungeon would have that attitude? Here are two Egyptians who probably would mistreat Yosef because he was a

"lowly Jew" and Yosef was still genuinely concerned that they seemed to be upset. Yosef wanted to know what was bothering them and see if he could in any way put their minds at ease. Because of that kindness, everything turned around for Yosef. This was Yosef's attitude throughout his entire sojourn in Egypt. He was always worrying about the other person. This saved him.

When the brothers finally learned the identity of the Viceroy of Egypt and they were petrified of him, what was Yosef's reaction? "It is not your fault! The Master of the Universe sent me here. You do not need to worry! I was sent here to provide salvation from the famine." Yosef did not need to say that. He could have let them stew in their guilt. Why did he need to say that? Yosef said it because this is what he learned from his father: Be a nice person, strengthen your fellow man and care for him.

The Baal HaTurim interprets the pasuk "Al Tirgazu b'Derech" [Bereshis 45:24] to mean that Yosef told his brothers not to trespass on the way home. He warned them not to take short cuts through other people's property and rely on the fact that they were the brothers of the Viceroy of the country who had special perks. Yosef was constantly worried about doing the right thing and about not hurting another person.

This is the Torah lesson Yosef learned from Yaakov when they last saw each other. This is what saved him. Yaakov understands this message when he sees the 'Agalos'. Yosef is 'telegraphing' the message: "Father, do you know why I survived these past 20 years? It is because I never forgot the lesson of Eglah Arufah."

A Story With Two Connections to the Parsha

received an e-mail from Dr. Leon Zakarowitz of Far Rockaway, who related an interesting story about his wife's grandfather, Rav Yosef Lichter. Rav Lichter was a descendant of the Rama"n and was himself a Dayan in Europe before World War II. Rav Lichter and his three sons survived the war by disguising themselves as Polish peasants. They apparently were never in the Concentration Camps.

Yosef Lichter was meticulous in his observance of the practice of Kiddush Levanah [Sanctifying the New Moon]. He used to quote the 'Segulah' that is mentioned in various sources that one will never die in the month in which he sanctifies the New Moon. He used to say that Kiddush Levana is a 30 Day Insurance Policy.

When the Nazis were finally defeated and the Russians moved into Poland, the Russians imposed a dawn to dusk curfew. It was prohibited to walk in the street after dusk. Rav Lichter did not want to violate his firm practice of reciting Kiddush Levanah, so he took his chances, went outside, and recited the prayer for Sanctification of the new moon.

He was arrested by the NKVD (associated with the Soviet Secret Police). They took this poor Jew down to a dimly lit basement in front of a Soviet judge. They accused him of violating the curfew. The judge asked him in Russian, "How do you plead – guilty or not guilty?" Rabbi Lichter responded, "Not guilty" and then he began speaking in Yiddish. He figured "What do I have to lose? I'll tell him the truth!" He could have lost his life for this, but he felt that he had nothing to lose.

He told the judge, we have a religious custom to bless the new moon every month, the moon is only visible after dusk, and that is why I violated the curfew. Upon hearing this, the judge told the NKVD officers to leave the room. He then asked Rabbi Lichter – "Do you remember, long before the war, you were once walking home from shul, and there were a bunch of bullies beating up a little Jewish boy named Chaim? You stopped them and told them 'Leave the kid alone.'"

The Judge then looked at Yosef Lichter and said "I am Chaim!" He brought the soldiers back in and told them, "This person is a long time Communist. He is a Communist from before the war. He is a good person. He is for the masses. Leave him alone, take him back home, and make sure that he is not harmed."

This story has two connections to Parshas Vayigash. First, we see that when one is a nice person, it always comes back to his benefit. Second, this is yet another example of an "I am Yosef" incident. Just like when Yosef saw his brothers and announced to them, "I am Yosef" they were shocked,

this is a somewhat similar story of "I am Chaim." "Since you stuck up for me in the past, now I am going to stick up for you now."

Yosef Lichter survived the war. He came to Borough Park. He had children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He was saved and lived into the 1960s because he earned the message of Eglah Arufah – that when someone cares about another person, one will eventually be repaid in ways that can save his or her own life!

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Psalm 128: Striving for Excellence

"Happy is the one who fears God, who follows in His ways. When you eat of the toil of your hands, you are happy and it is good for you." (Psalms 128:1-2)

"אֲשֶׁר יִלְבֹּשׁ כִּלְיֵי יָדָאֵהוּ, הֵדֵלֶקֶת בְּדַרְכָּיו. יָגִיעַ בְּכֶסֶד, כִּי תֵאָכֵל, אֲשֶׁר יִרְדֶּה וְטוֹב לֵךְ."

The Toil of Your Hands

The Talmud (Berachot 8a) explains that the psalmist is referring to two different types of individuals, and it makes an astonishing claim about the importance of self-reliance:

"One who supports himself from his own labor is greater than one who fears Heaven.

"About a God-fearing individual, it says, "Happy is the one who fears God," while regarding one who lives from his own work, it says, "When you eat of the toil of your hands, you are happy and it is good for you." "You are happy" in this world, and "it is good for you" in the next world. Regarding the God-fearing person, however, it does not say "it is good for you."

This statement is surprising. Had the Sages noted that fear of Heaven is a valuable trait for the world to come, while self-sufficiency is important for living in this world, this would have been understandable. But they claimed just the opposite! Fear of Heaven reflects a form of happiness - "you are happy" - in this world; while self-sufficiency relates to the ultimate good - "it is good for you" - of the next world. How is that?

Two Mindsets

We usually think of self-reliance only in terms of livelihood. In fact, it is a mindset that relates to all aspects of life - material, intellectual, and spiritual. The Talmud is not just contrasting the hardworking farmer with the yeshiva student who is supported by charity. The Talmud is comparing two basic philosophies of life.

The first outlook is that we should do our utmost to succeed, using our best efforts and talents. This trait may be found in industrious businessmen, world-class athletes, and dedicated scholars, all of whom enjoy the benefits of their hard-won labors. This work ethic is applicable to all areas, including the spiritual. When we devote our energies towards growth in Torah scholarship, character refinement, acts of kindness, and so on, we exhibit the trait of self-reliance.

The second attitude, as typified by the God-fearing, ultimately boils down to a passive reliance on Divine intervention. The pious mindset does not reject human effort, but it is willing to settle for the minimum exertion necessary. For the rest, one trusts that God will take care of things.

This approach is expressed by a passive attitude not only with regard to one's livelihood but also regarding spiritual aspirations. Such a person, unwilling to tax his brain, will settle for a superficial understanding of Torah knowledge and wisdom. He will not struggle to achieve excellence in Torah, nor in other spiritual attainments.

But what is so terrible with this 'fear of Heaven' mentality? Why should one constantly struggle for excellence?

Bread of Shame

Were one to believe the sales pitches of travel agents, life's ultimate pleasure would be a relaxing vacation on a secluded beach. This may be enjoyable, but our greatest pleasure comes, not from resting, but from hard work. Our greatest satisfaction in life comes from the fruit of our own labors. Our happiest moments are when we finally attain hard-earned goals. This deeply-felt sense of fulfillment is innate to human nature.

In fact, of all our inherent ethical qualities, this particular pleasure is the loftiest. Our free will to take initiative in order to achieve and perfect ourselves is a fundamental characteristic of the human soul. It is wrong to sit passively and rely on others to toil for us. Trust in God is a positive trait, but one should rely on Divine assistance only in those situations when one is unable to help oneself.

The ethical benefit to be found in self-reliance is the foundation of the entire Torah. We are judged according to our actions and free choices. This is the very purpose of the soul's descent and its struggles with the body's physical desires. The Kabbalists referred to these efforts as 'fleeing' from nehama dekusufa (the 'bread of shame'), the embarrassment felt when receiving an undeserved handout. True good is when we are able to elevate ourselves through our own efforts.

Good of the World to Come

Now we may understand the Talmud's comparison between the pious who fear Heaven and those who support themselves. The essence of fear of Heaven is to rely on Divine assistance. Paradoxically, fear of Heaven is a type of enjoyment - albeit, in its highest form - in that one 'relaxes' and relies on the current state of affairs. Thus, the Sages understood that the happiness of this trait - "Happy is the one who fears God" - is a happiness that belongs to this world.

The good that comes from self-reliance, from growth through our own efforts, on the other hand, belongs to the absolute good of the next world, "a world which is pure good." Only there will this trait be properly appreciated.

Even in its lowest form, self-sufficiency is praiseworthy. It is proper to honor those who have acquired this trait even in its simplest form, supporting their families through honest labor. Such individuals will continue to utilize this valuable trait in all areas, including spiritual pursuits.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 41-42)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 27 December 2014 / 5 Tevet 5775

The Many Facets of Asarah B'Teves

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Although to many the only notable aspect of the upcoming fast of Asarah B'Teves (the 10th of Teves) is that it is by far the shortest fast day in the Jewish calendar for anyone in the Northern Hemisphere (my heartfelt sympathies to the South Americans, So'Africans, Aussies, and Kiwis), nonetheless, the Fast of Asarah B'Teves is quite unique. For example, unique to this fast, is that it is the only one that we do actually observe as on a Friday[1]. Even Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the actual destructions of our Batei HaMikdash, gets pushed off. Yet, obviously, to maintain this distinction of being the only Fast Day that we actually do observe and fast on Friday, there must be much more to the Fast of Asarah B'Teves than meets the eye. In turns out that Asarah B'Teves has several exceptional characteristics that are not found in any other fast day.

Why This Fast?

The reason given for fasting on Asarah B'Teves is that it is the day that the wicked Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar started his siege of Yerushalayim[2], foreshadowing the beginning of the end of the first Beis Hamikdash, which culminated with its destruction on Tisha B'Av several years later. Therefore, Chazal declared it a public fast, one of four public fast days that memorialize different aspects of the catastrophes and national tragedies associated with the destruction of both Batei HaMikdash[3].

Three-Day Fast?

According to the special Selichos prayers said on the fast[4], a unique aspect of Asarah B'Teves is that we are actually fasting for two other days of tragedy as well; the 8th and 9th of Teves. In fact, both the Tur and Shulchan Aruch assert that if possible one should try to fast on all three days[5]. Nevertheless, of the three, only Asarah B'Teves was actually mandated as a public fast day[6].

The 8th of Teves

On the 8th of Teves, King Ptolemy II (285 - 246 B.C.E.) forced 72 sages separately to translate the Torah into Greek (the Septuagint). Although miracles guided their work and all of the sages made the same slight but necessary amendments, nevertheless this work is described as "darkness descending on the world for three days", as it was now possible for the uneducated to possess a superficial, and frequently flawed, understanding of the Torah, as well as providing the masses with a mistaken interpretation of true morality[7].

The 9th of Teves

Although several decisors write that the reason for fasting on the 9th of Teves is unknown[8], nonetheless many sources, including the Kol Bo and

the Selichos recited on Asarah B'Teves, as well as many later authorities, explain that this is the day on which Ezra HaSofer (as well as possibly his partner Nechemiah) died. Ezra, the Gadol HaDor at the beginning of the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash, had a tremendous impact upon the nascent returning Jewish community of Eretz Yisrael. He drastically improved the spiritual state of the Jewish people and established many halachic takanos, many of which still apply today[9]. With his passing, the community started sliding from the great spiritual heights Ezra had led them to. Additionally, since Ezra was the last of the prophets, his passing signified the end of prophecy.

Other sources attribute fasting on this day to the passing of other specific Tzaddikim on this day, including Shimon HaKalphus and Rav Yosef HaNaggid, or the birth of 'Oso HaIsh', the founder of Christianity, in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were r¹ murdered (see extensive footnote 9). The Sefer HaToda'ah[10] posits that it's possible that "darkness descended on the world for three days" alludes to the triple woes of these three days: the 8th, 9th, and 10th of Teves.

Fasting on Friday?

Another exclusive characteristic of Asarah B'Teves is that, as mentioned previously, it is the only fast that can fall out on a Friday. This is fairly interesting as there is a whole debate in the Gemara about how to conduct fasts on a Friday, when we also must take kavod Shabbos into account[11], implying that it is a common occurrence. However, according to our calendar, a Friday fast is only applicable with Asarah B'Teves, and it happens quite infrequently. The last few times Asarah B'Teves fell out on a Friday were in 1996, 2001, 2010, and last year, 2013. It is next expected to occur in 2020 (5781). After that, 2023 (5784), 2025 (5785), 2034 (5795), and 2037 (5798).

Halachos of a Friday Fast

The halachos of a Friday fast generally parallel those of a regular fast day[12]. In fact, even though there is some debate in the Rishonim as to the Gemara's intent that 'Halacha - Mesaneh U'Mashlim - a Friday fast should be completed' whether or not one may be mekabel Shabbos early and thereby end the fast before nightfall[13]. Nonetheless, the halacha follows the Shulchan Aruch and Rema that since Asarah B'Teves is a public fast (Taanis Tzibbur) and not a Taanis Yachid, one must fast the whole day and complete it at nightfall (Tzeis HaKochavim) before making Kiddush[14].

There are those who maintain it is preferable to daven Maariv earlier than usual on such a Friday night, to enable making Kiddush, and breaking the fast, exactly at Tzeis HaKochavim[15].

A Shabbos Fast?!

The third and possibly most important attribute of Asarah B'Teves is that according to the AbuDraham, if Asarah B'Teves would potentially fall out on Shabbos, we would all actually be required to fast on Shabbos![16] (Notwithstanding that, with our calendar, this is an impossibility[17].) He cites proof to this from the words of Yechezkel referring to Asarah B'Teves (Ch. 24, verse 2) that the siege transpired "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh", implying that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter the conflicting occurrence. This would also explain why it is observed on Friday, as opposed to any other fast.

Yet, the AbuDraham's statement is astounding, as the only fast that halachically takes precedence over Shabbos is Yom Kippur, the only biblically mandated fast. How can one of the rabbinic minor fasts push off the biblical Shabbos? Additionally, Asarah B'Teves commemorates merely the start of the siege, and not any actual destruction. How can it be considered a more important fast than Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the destruction and loss of both of our Batei HaMikdash? In fact, the Beis Yosef questions this declaration of the AbuDraham, stating that he "does not know how the AbuDraham could know" such a ruling. As an aside, this does not seem to be the actual halacha, as other Rishonim, including Rashi and the Rambam, both explicitly state that if Asarah B'Teves falls out on Shabbos it gets pushed off.

Commencement Is Catastrophic

Several authorities, including Rav Yonason Eibenschutz and the Bnei Yissaschar[18], understand the AbuDraham's enigmatic statement as similar to the famous Gemara in Taanis (29a) regarding Tisha B'Av. It seems that historically the Beis HaMikdash only started to burn toward the end of the 9th of Av (Tisha B'Av) and actually burned down on the 10th. Yet, Chazal established the fast on the 9th, since Aschalta D'Paranusah Adifa, meaning that the beginning of a tragedy is considered the worst part. Likewise, they maintain that since the siege on Asarah B'Teves was the commencement of the long chain of tragedies that ended with the Beis HaMikdash in ruins and the Jewish people in exile, its true status belies the common perception of it as a minor fast, and potentially has the ability to push off Shabbos. Indeed, the MidrashTanchuma[19] teaches that it was already fitting for the BaisHaMikdash to actually be destroyed on AsaraB'Teves, but Hashem, in His incredible mercy, pushed the destruction off to the summertime, so that we would not have to be exiled in the cold. Hence, AsarahB'Teves's role as the 'beginning of the end' underlies the severity of this fast day.

The famed Chasam Sofer[20] takes this a step further. He wrote that the reason Chazal established a fast for the siege on Asarah B'Teves, as opposed to every other time Yerushalayim was under siege over the millennia, is that on that day in the Heavenly Courtroom it was decided that the Bais HaMikdash was to be destroyed a few years hence. There is a well-known Talmudic dictum that any generation in which the Beis HaMikdash has not been rebuilt, is as if it has been destroyed again[21]. Therefore, he explains, every Asarah B'Teves the Heavenly Court convenes and decrees a new Churban. He adds though that, conversely, a proper fast on Asarah B'Teves has the potential to avert future Churbanos. We are not fasting exclusively due to past calamities, but rather, similar to a Taanis Chalom, we fast for a dream, to help prevent a tragedy from occurring. [He even refers to such a fast as an oneg, a delight.] That is why the fast of Asarah B'Teves, even though it is considered a minor fast, nonetheless has the potential to possibly override Shabbos. These explanations would also certainly elucidate why we would fast on a Friday for Asarah B'Teves.

The Rambam famously exhorts us to remember the real meaning underlying a fast day. It's not just a day when we miss our morning coffee! The purpose of fasting is to focus on the spiritual side of the day and use it as a catalyst for inspiration towards Teshuva[22]. In this merit may the words of the Navi Zechariah - "The Fast of the Fourth (month, 17th of Tamuz), the Fast of the Fifth (month, Tisha B'Av), the Fast of the Seventh (month, Tzom Gedalyah), and the Fast of the Tenth (month, Asarah B'Teves), shall be (changed over) for celebration and joy for the household of Yehuda" - be fulfilled speedily and in our days.

This article was written L'iluy Nishmas the Ohr Somayach Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, the Kedoshei Har Nof and R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Henna Rasha bas Yitta Ratza and Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba, and l'zechus Yaacov Tzvi ben Rivka and Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

[1] See AbuDraham (Hilchos Taanis), Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 550, 4), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 4), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. end 2), and Mishna Ber ura (ad loc. 10).

[2] Melachim II (Ch. 25, verse 1), Yirmiyahu (Ch. 52, verse 4), Yechezkel (Ch. 24, verses 1 & 2).

[3] See Zecharia (Ch. 8, verse 19), Gemara Rosh Hashana 18b, Rambam (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5, 1- 5) and Tur & Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 549 & 550).

[4] See the Selicha for Asarah B'Teves that starts with the word Ezkerah.

[5] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580).

[6] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 549 & 550).

[7] As told at length in Gemara Megillah 9a. For a slightly different version see Maseches Sofrim (Ch. 1, 7 - 8). This quote is found in Megillas Taanis (Ch. 13); and cited by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580). See Sefer HaToda'ah (vol. 1, Ch. 8, Chodesh Teves, par. Yom Kasheh) at length.

[8] See Tur & Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580). However, many poskim, including the Ba'er HaGolah (ad loc. 4), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 6), Taz (ad loc. 1; who concludes 'tzarich iyun rav' on the Tur and Shulchan Aruch for not knowing that Ezra HaSofer died on that day), Elyah Rabba (ad loc. 5), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 1), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 6), Mishna Berurah (ad loc. 13), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 20), all cite the Kol Bo (63), BeHa"G (Hilchos Tisha B'Av V'Taanis), or the Selichos of Asarah B'Teves (ibid.) that the tzara on that day is that Ezra HaSofer died. The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 3) diplomatically states that originally they did not know which tragedy occurred on that day to mandate fasting, and afterwards it was

revealed that it was due to Ezra HaSofer's passing on that day. Rav Yonason Eibeschutz (Ya'aros Dvash vol. 2, 192 - 193) gives an interesting variation on this theme. He maintains that since Ezra's role in Klal Yisrael in his time was akin to Moshe Rabbeinu's, Chazal wanted to withhold publication of the day of his passing, similar to the Torah stating that "no one knows of Moshe's burial place" (Devarim, V'Zos HaBracha Ch. 34, verse 6). However, the Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 580) points out that the statement in Megillas Taanis (and later cited by the BeHa"G) that 'lo kasvu Rabbeinu al mah hu' seems to be referring to a separate occurrence than its next listing, that Ezra HaSofer died on that day, and that they are not one and the same. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Parshas Vayigash, Drush for 8 Teves s.v. kasav BeHa"G) answers that Ezra was similar to Moshe Rabbeinu, and drastically improved the spiritual state of the Jewish people, and yet, even after he died, Klal Yisrael felt satisfied and blessed simply to have been led by him when he was alive, and did not see any reason to fast on the day he died. Yet, when the Torah was later translated into Greek, enabling the "Tzaraas of the Minim", only then did they realize the import of Ezra's passing and established it as a fast day. Yet, previously, they did not know why to fast on the 9th of Teves. Rav Baruch Teumim - Frankel (author of the Imrei Baruch, in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 580) cites several other sources opining different tzaddikim's passings on the 9th of Teves as the reason for fasting, including Shimon HaKalphus, 'who saved Klal Yisrael during the days of the Pritzim', and to whom 'Nishmas' is attributed. [Known as Patrus, it has been surmised that he was a Jewish pope, placed by Chazal to infiltrate the early Christians, to ensure that Christianity became a separate religion (see Otzar HaMedrashim pg. 557). Some say he was 'Ben Patora' mentioned in Gemara Bava Metzia 62b. Ostensibly he was not the same Shimon HaKalphus (or Kippa) mentioned derisively by several Rishonim, including the Machzor Vitry (Pesach 66), and Rav Yehuda HaChasid (Sefer Chassidim 191), as 'Shimon Petter Chamor'], and Rav Yosef HaLevi, son of Rav Shmuel HaNaggid, who was assassinated on the 9th of Teves in 1066, thus ending a Golden Age for Jewry in Spain. He quotes the Raavad's Sefer HaKabbalah that 'when Rabbeinu HaKadmonim wrote Megillas Taanis and established a fast on the 9th of Teves, they themselves didn't know the reason. Later on, after Rav Yosef HaNaggid was assassinated we knew that they foresaw this tragedy with Ruach HaKodesh'. An additional reason for fasting on this day is cited by the Rema in his commentary to Megillas Esther (Mechir Yayin, Ch. 2, 16) that we fast on the 9th of Teves as Esther was forcibly taken to Achashveirosh's palace in the month of Teves (possibly on this day). Interestingly, some posit (as heard in the name of Rav Moshe Shapiro shlit"a; also found in the Davar B'Ito calendar, 9 Teves; the origin of this seems to be the 12th century Sefer HaAvor, by R' Avraham bar Chiya) that the real reason for fasting is that the 9th of Teves is the true birthday of 'Oso Halsh', in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were r"l murdered.

[9] As found throughout Shas - see for example Bava Kama (82a) and Kesuvos (3a).

[10] Sefer HaToda'ah (vol. 1, Ch. 8, Chodesh Teves, end par. Yom Kashev).

[11] Gemara Eiruvim 41a.

[12] However, even those who advise not to bathe on a regular fast day, nevertheless allow one to do so on a Friday fast, L'Kavod Shabbos, with hot water as usual [see Bach (Orach Chaim 550, 3; although cited by both the Ba'er Heitiv and Mishnah Berurah as the source for this rule. Nevertheless, this author has been unable to locate where exactly the Bach states an explicit Erev Shabbos exception for bathing), Elya Rabba (ad loc. 2), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 3), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. end 6), and Shu"t Siach Yitzchak (247)].

[13] Although the Gemara (Eruvin 41a; also in Midrash Tanchuma, Bereishis 2) concludes 'Halacha - Mesaneh U'Mashlim', even so there are many Rishonim (most notably Tosafos ad loc. 41b s.v. v'hilchasa) who understand that to mean that one may conclude his Erev Shabbos fast at Tzeis HaKochavim, even though it means he will enter Shabbos famished (a situation that is normally disfavored), and not that one must conclude his fast on Friday night at Tzeis HaKochavim. A further complication is that this also may depend on whether one is fasting for personal reasons (Taanis Yachid) or an obligatory public fast (Taanis Tzibbur). The Rema (Orach Chaim 249, 4) concludes that for a Taanis Yachid one may rely upon the lenient opinions and end his fast after he accepted Shabbos, prior to Tzeis HaKochavim (especially if he made such a stipulation before commencing his fast), yet for a Taanis Tzibbur, he rules that we follow the Rishonim who mandate strict interpretation of the Gemara, and we must fast until actual nightfall on Friday night. It is debatable whether the Shulchan Aruch is actually fully agreeing with this approach or not. See explanation of the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 21 and Biur Halacha s.v. v'im) at length. This has since become normative halacha. See next footnote.

[14] See Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 249, 4), based on the Rosh (Taanis Ch. 2, 4) and Maharil (Shu"t 33); Magen Avraham (ad loc. 8), Bach (ad loc. end 6), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 7), Elya Rabba (ad loc. 10), Korban Nesanel (Taanis, end Ch. 2, 60), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ad loc. 12), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (121, 6), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Lech Lecha 23), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 10), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 21 and Biur Halacha s.v. v'im), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 29 & 31), Shu"t Yabea Omer (vol. 6, Orach Chaim 31), Shu"t Yechaveh Daas (vol. 1, 80), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Chanuka, Shu"t 14), Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim. 249, 7 & 559, 25), and Rav Mordechai Eliyahu's Darchei Halacha glosses to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (121, 5). The Netei Gavriel adds that B'shaas Hadchak and l'tzorech gadol one may be mekabel Shabbos early and rely on the lenient opinions, as long as it is after nightfall according to several opinions (meaning, a much earlier zeman of Tzeis HaKochavim than the faster would usually observe).

[15] See Shulchan HaTahor (Orach Chaim 249, 13) who writes that usually it is assur to complete a Friday fast until Tzeis HaKochavim, even an obligatory fast, as it is an affront to

Kedushas Shabbos; rather, he maintains that one should be mekabel Shabbos early and have his seudah before nightfall. Yet, in his explanations (Zer Zahav ad loc. 4) he maintains that regarding Asarah B'Teves on Friday, since we are beholden to follow the ruling of the Rema, one should still be mekabel Shabbos early, and daven earlier than usual, to enable us to end the fast with making Kiddush at the exact zeman of Tzeis HaKochavim.

[16] AbuDraham (Hilchos Taanis), cited with some skepticism by the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim end 550), Rashi (Megillah 5a s.v. aval) and the Rambam (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5, 5) both explicitly state that if Asarah B'Teves falls out on Shabbos then it gets pushed off. Similarly, the Ibn Ezra, in his famous Shabbos Zemer 'Ki Eshmera Shabbos' explicitly states that Yom Kippur is the only fast that can override Shabbos. This is how the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 550, 3), as well as later poskim (see, for example, Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 549, end 2), rules as well. However, there are many who do defend the AbuDraham's statement based on the verse "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh". The Minchas Chinuch (Parshas Emor, Mitzva 301, 7), explaining why nowadays we do not observe fast days for two days (as opposed to other Yomim Tovim, due to the safek yom). He asserts that the Neviim established fast days in specific months, but did not set the actual day it must be observed, hence the ambiguity in the Gemara which days to observe them. Since they were never established as being mandated on one specific day, they are unaffected by the safek yom, and nowadays only one day must be observed. A similar assessment regarding the establishment of fast days was actually expressed by several Rishonim, including the Ritva (Rosh Hashana 18b s.v. v'ha) and Tashbatz (Shu"t vol. 2, 271). Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (Chiddushei HaGra"ch V'HaGri"z al Shas, 'Stencils', pg. 27, 44) takes this a step further to explain the AbuDraham's statement (although quite curiously, he inexplicably attributes this statement to the BeHa"G, who in fact makes no mention of this and does not mention the AbuDraham). He asserts that Asarah B'Teves is the exception to this rule of the Neviim's ambiguity of exact day, since it is stated about it that it must be observed "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh", and therefore would be fasted upon even if it fell on Shabbos. Similarly, the Ohr Somayach (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5, 6 s.v. v'hinei, in the brackets) defends the AbuDraham's statement, based on a diyuk in the Gemara's (Eruvin ibid.) choice of question about a Taanis Yachid on Friday, with no mention of a Taanis Tzibur. He posits that the reason the Gemara did not cite such a case is that Asarah B'Teves is the only Taanis Tzibur that can fall out on Friday, and if it can override Shabbos due to "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh", then certainly one would be required to fast the whole Friday for it! For more on this fascinating topic see Minchas Asher (Moamid vol. 2, Tzomos, 43).

[17] According to our calendar Asarah B'Teves cannot fall out on Shabbos. The AbuDraham (Hilchos Taanis) himself mentions this, as does the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 550, 4 & 5), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 3), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 2), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 8). Everyone can easily make this calculation themselves. See Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 128, 2) regarding which days various Roshei Chodesh can fall out on. For the month of Teves, Rosh Chodesh cannot fall out on a Thursday. That means Asarah B'Teves, ten days later, cannot fall out on Shabbos!

[18] Ya'aros Dvash (Vol. 1, Drush 2 for 9 Teves, 32 - 33; see also vol. 2, 191 - 193 s.v. v'hinei yadua), Bnei Yisachar (Maamrei Chodesh Kislev / Teves 14, 1), and Shu"t Shoel U'Meishiv (Mahadura Kama vol. 3, 179). The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Parshas Vayigash pg. 40b s.v. vad"z) also cites this reason and explains that it is only at the end of a tragedy when salvation has a chance to sprout. We see this from the famous Gemara at the end of Makkos (24a - b) with Rabbi Akiva, who laughed when he saw foxes wandering through the ruins of the Beis HaMikdash. Only when a tragedy is complete can there be a glimmer of hope for the future redemption. See also sefer Siach Yitzchak (pg. 293) and R' Moshe Chaim Leitner's sefer Tzom Ha'Asiri at length. Rav Yonason Eibeschutz adds that according to his calculations, Nevuchadnetzar's actual siege on that first Asarah B'Teves commenced on Shabbos; meaning that that Asarah B'Teves that Yechezkel wrote "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh" about was actually Shabbos. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Parshas Vayechi, Drush for 8 Teves 5599, s.v. ksviv) agrees with this assessment and offers a variation, that the reason Nevuchadnetzar was successful in his conquest of Yerushalayim, as opposed to Sancheirev, was due to lack of Shemiras Shabbos among its inhabitants!

[19] Midrash Tanchuma (Tazria 9). However, see Midrash Tanchuma (Bereishis 2 & 3), who actually takes a very strong stance against fasting on Shabbos, as 'Kavod Shabbos is adif than one thousand fasts'!

[20] Toras Moshe (vol. 2, Parshas Vayikra, Drush for 7 Adar, pg. 9b - 10a, s.v. kasuv).

[21] Yerushalmi Yoma (Ch. 1, 1, 6a).

[22] Rambam (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5, 1); see also Mishnah Berurah (549, 1).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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