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Vayigash 5781

On The Highway Of Life

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered January 9, 1960)

After Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers, he sends them back to fetch their father, Jacob, and gives them three words of advice which our tradition regarded as most significant: *Al tirgezu ba-derekh* -- "do not fall out by the way."

Our rabbis were fascinated by this counsel, and tried to read into Joseph's words a number of ideas they think he had in mind. One of the most meaningful interpretations of Joseph's words can be found in the Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah, where the sages enumerate three specific instructions that Joseph gave his brothers when he said, *Al tirgezu ba-derekh*.

The first of these is *Al tifse'u pesiah gassah* -- "do not take large steps, do not speed too quickly." What is true in modern days was true in ancient years as well; speed is the greatest cause of fatal accidents. You are going to give our father some great and marvelous news, Joseph told his brothers, but do not endanger your lives by hurrying too quickly.

The second instruction he gave them was: *Hikansu be-chammah le'ir* -- "Whilst traveling, when you find you must turn in for the night, enter the city where you will be spending that night during the daytime. Do not enter it furtively and surreptitiously, lest the inhabitants suspect you of some evil designs. Finally, his third piece of advice was: *Al taamidu atzmekhem mi-divrei torah* -- "Although you are on your way for an exciting and intensely personal mission, do not during this time fail to continue your study of Torah."

I have no doubt that this sage counsel that Joseph gave his brothers, as our rabbis expounded it, has a significance that transcends the particular incident described in the Torah. I believe that Joseph's advice has relevance for all those who travel on the highway of life. For life itself is indeed a pilgrimage, a journey on a way. We speak of religion as a "way of life." In the Jewish tradition we describe worldly

conduct as *Derekh Eretz* --the way of the land--and religious conduct as *Halakhah*--a way, or going. In all facets of life, therefore, and in all times, Joseph's advice makes sense: *Al tirgezu ba-derekh*. Do not fall out by the way. Do not get lost in the byways of existence. Do not wander off the highway into the winding dead end alleys of experience. Do not take unnecessary risks on the highway of life and add fatalities that the call of the open road imposes upon the traveler.

My friends: it has been my intention to analyze with you this morning the words of Joseph as our rabbis interpreted them, and as they apply to our personal and communal endeavors in 1960. I had wanted to speak to you of the danger of *Pesiah Gassah*, the curse of speed in our daily lives, the problem of our constant, unceasing rush through life. I had wanted to urge you to desist from the mad hurry that characterizes our civilization, and to point out to you that if the life of our grandfathers was like a road, and that of our parents like a highway, then our lives are unfortunately like a throughway or turnpike.

However, despite my original intention, I feel that this pulpit must react to the events of these last two weeks that have so unnerved and disturbed not only the Jewish community, but the entire civilized community of the world, and it is in regard to these events that I find the advice of Joseph even more meaningful than usual.

The crude rash of swastikas, the hoarse cries of "Juden Raus!" that have descended like a plague of boils upon the Western World, from Cologne to New York, from Oslo to Melbourne, from Buenos Aires to Milan, are a shocking and irritating reminder that we Jews are guilty of having disregarded the first instruction that our sages attributed to Joseph: *Al tifse'u pesiah gassah*: "Do not speed."

In our desire to erase from our collective memories the burden of the knowledge of the world's guilt against us;

in our anxious wish to find about us a new world where men will be humans and not beasts, where decadence and horror will be replaced by decency and honor; we have been *Pose'im pesiah gassah*, we have been taking very large steps indeed and continuing on a pace much faster than that which the situation warrants. We have gone too far in accepting a wish as reality. We have been too quick and peremptory in forgiving and forgetting German brutality. We have been in a hurry to forget that seemingly civilized people can become sick with hatred and demented with enmity. We have forgiven all too quickly the guilt of the German people, even of former Nazis who pleaded helplessness and offered innocent intention as the way of obtaining atonement.

What has happened this past while, during the season of peace and good will on the Christian calendar, has perhaps had some good and constructive consequences. It has reminded us sharply that we are not as safe and secure as we perhaps had thought. It has challenged us into an awareness that the Western World's supposed repentance might after all be only superficial; that the protestations of sympathy to the people of Israel rings somewhat false and counterfeit. It has reminded us who are *Pose'im pesiah gassah*, that while we certainly ought not to submit to any mass hysteria, still there is a powerful and potent antisemitism that is latent in large numbers of people around the globe, and if you but scratch the surface, you may expect the glands of old hatred to exude the pus of a new antisemitism. *Al tirgezu ba-derekh -- Al tifse'u pesiah gassah*: We must slow down on the way we have been going these past several years.

In addition to the error of *Pesiah Gassah*, of making too many far reaching assumptions about a "good" Germany, we have been negligent in the second aspect of *Al tirgezu ba-derekh*: *Hikansu be-chammah le'ir* ---the instruction to come into the city during daylight. We have been satisfied with furtive, indirect, half-hearted attempts at assuring Jewish survival, and especially at teaching Western Germans how to reconstruct their lives. We have not been sufficiently forthright and frank in demanding publicly and openly the total reconstruction of German society so that such crimes as we have witnessed in our lifetime might never recur.

And who knows but that the eagerness of the State of Israel to accept monetary compensation for the blood of martyrs and still worse--her anxiousness and unhesitating

willingness to sell weapons to this nation of murderers (despite all the political and economic justification which we can bring to bear in her favor) has given West Germany the "chutzpah" to relax its denazification program. Perhaps because of this Germany has felt that its past sins have been "officially" forgiven.

Now, however, we must abandon silence and indirection. The right way, the right *Derekh*, is *Hikansu be-chamma le'ir* --the open, frank, forthright. Expose your honestly held convictions to the light of the sun, and express them in daylight--before the open bar of world public opinion.

Allow me to give you some examples of what I mean. About a month ago, a law was introduced into the German Parliament singling out antisemitism as a special crime, punishable by special penalties. Yet this law was defeated by a combination of West German politicians and the local Jewish community which refused to have Jews singled out for special mention in the laws of the West German Republic. What frightening foolishness! As if the name "Jews" can even be forgotten in the history of Germany. A thousand years from today, no student will ever be able to read a history of that people without summing through the crimson, bloods stained pages of national disgrace in which the face of German bestiality in all its horrible evil will show through to terrify and terrorize people who will live in the dim future. And yet, even our own Jews are afraid to have the fact of Jewry suffering under the Nazis mentioned publicly.

Another example is the way we have begun to adjust to and even condone the largely negative attitude of the Western powers, even the United States, to the State of Israel. We have learned to accept with equanimity the fact of American "neutrality" in Israeli-Arab problems, a "neutrality" which clearly favors Arab truculence against the young Jewish State.

We have been indifferent, indirect and "*shtandlanistic*" in demanding the immediate removal from the West Germany of Nazi professors, teachers, journalists and--irony of ironies!--Nazi judges! We have allowed ourselves to be moved by the crocodile tears of the Bonn Government.

We have not been persistent in insisting that German teachers and German public schools teach their young charges about the disgraceful episode of Nazidom.

But worst of all, to my mind, has been our fundamental

error: and that is the conspiracy of silence which has made it unpatriotic and even subversive for American Jews to protest the foreign policy of the United States Government in its insistence upon German reunification. Why have we been so passive and ready to accept reunification as the cornerstone of American foreign policy, when British citizens have been far less inhibited in this willingness to accept the resurrection of the German beast? Englishmen have been more opposed to reunification than Americans because they suffered more than Americans did in World War II. By the same token, we Jews should have been the major champions of non-reunification. Is it true that the temporary policies of the late Secretary of State in the Cold War ought to have taken precedence over basic humanitarian lessons that we have learned from recent history? Is it true that we have the right to forgive and forget all the suffering of our brothers? Is it true that Germans really have repented, and that they are all ready to enter into decent society and into the company of civilization? The answer is no, and not only once no, not only twice no, but six million times no!

Hikansu be-chammah le'ir. In addition to going slow, to the *Pesiah Gassah*, we must, in our own subjective attitudes towards this nation with its unspeakably evil past, adopt as a motto for our action: *Hikansu be-chammah le'ir*: openness and forthrightness. We must insist upon the proper denazification. We must support the State of Israel with all the power and influence at our command. We must protest this amoral and grotesque attempt to revive the German nation. We must not make a secret about our feelings concerning so vital, historic and crucial a matter.

Finally, if we are so crudely reminded of the blight of antisemitism once again, at the attempt at genocide aimed against us, at the obliteration of our people, our response must be not only negative, but also positive.

What do I mean by positive? I mean: being better, stauncher, more affirmative and more authentic Jews. *Al tirgezu ba-derekh*, the way to avoid fatal accidents on the highway of national life, is: *Al taamidu atzmekhem mi-divrei torah*-never forgetting the study of Torah. Yes, by building ourselves up spiritually we can better resist the radical onslaught of the bigoted antisemitic world.

Our rabbis long ago expressed a great truth by playing on two worlds: “*Sinai*” and “*Sine’ah*,” the mountain on which the Torah was given and the Hebrew word for hatred or antisemitism. The core of antisemitism, according to

our rabbis, lies in the resentment of the unredeemed pagan world at the challenge that issues from Torah which was given to Israel. It is this challenge of Sinai that throughout history has resulted in the paroxysm of *Sine’ah*, of vicious hatred and vile bigotry directed against the Jew as the reminder of a God in Heaven Who demands a right action and decent conduct.

Let us, therefore, in the face of this renewed *Sine’ah* from both sides of the Iron Curtain, respond to the challenge by a return to Sinai. When hatred is today expressed against Jews, we Jews must answer with greater loyalty to that which makes Jews Jewish: Torah, tradition, our great heritage. Children and adults, old and young, men and women, must return with renewed vigor to the sources of our Jewish tradition. Only by remaining strong within, spirituality, can we have the fortitude to ward off the attack from without.

We Jews today find ourselves in a situation comparable to the brothers of Joseph: On the way, on the highway from Joseph to Jacob, for, in a way, Joseph and Jacob symbolize two eras. We today are leaving the era of Joseph, the rich and powerful “*shtadlanim*” with highly placed connections who prefer private wire pulling to the public airing of deeply held convictions, who tread very slowly when it comes to “Jewish” problems; who look and act and feel and sound 150% Egyptian; who will not want to be “too Jewish” in the light of the city although they may remain completely loyal to the shadow of Torah in their own homes.

We are heading, hopefully, back to an era of Jacob--to an open, forthright, and realistic era of ancestral Torah and the tradition of our fathers; an era where, like Jacob, we will be willing to struggle with adversaries, and openly proclaim what we think is right and decent.

We have lived through the Joseph era, we can appreciate all the more the call to those preparing for the journey on that great highway leading to Jacob: *Al tirgezu ba-derekh* --let us go not too fast, not too furtively, always with faith and with Torah.

May our ways be clear of mishaps, and may the highway of our lives, both individually and collectively, be blessed with the blessings of Torah, of which it is written: “Its ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.”

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Shma - The Unity of Good and “Evil” in the World

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

There is a famous Rashi in this week’s Parsha. When Yakov was finally reunited with Yosef, the pasuk says “*Vayerae el aviv, vayipol al tzavorav, vayevk al tzavorav od*”. You see from this that only one of them cried. Rashi quotes Medrash Chazal: “Which one of them cried? Yosef. Why didn’t Yakov cry? (He was just reunited with his son after twenty-two years). The Medrash says: he was “*kore es Shma*” - he was saying Shma.

All the meforshim assume that Rashi doesn’t mean to say — coincidentally, it was the time for saying Shma when Yosef happened to show up, but that there is something deeper and more significant going on here.

There are different ways that Baalei Mussar explain this. I saw an interesting explanation of Rav Maharil Diskin. What is Shma? Why would Yakov say Shma at that time? Shma is a very simple thing - Shma Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad. The unity of Hashem. Why would people not believe in the unity of Hashem? In the course of history, many people believed that there is, *chas veshalom*, more than one force in the world. The Zoroastrians held that there were two “gods” and the ancient pagans conceived of many “gods”, etc. The answer is that there is a multiplicity of forces in the world. People are tempted to think that all these different forces in the world are at loggerheads - totally opposed to each other. And therefore there must be different “gods”. Or at the very least - those who are more sophisticated, like the Zoroastrians, who hold that there is “good” and “evil” in the world and they can’t be coming from the same place. They are two opposite things that clash. So it must be that there are at least two powers in the world. Someone could see things this way, even if they don’t become a heretic. The problem is they see good and they see evil. The good things they attribute to Hashem. But when they see the evil, they don’t see how that fits in. It makes them separate from Hashem and they don’t see the unity of Hashem.

What happened to Yakov? All these years he had this evil of *mechiras Yosef* that befell him and obviously he still believed in the *Krias Shma*, but in a way, he couldn’t

really experience the unity of Hashem on the same level. Because in Yakov’s mind Hashem stood for good, and then there was so much negative that was “bad” that he didn’t see how the picture fit together. Finally after twenty-two years he not only reunited with Yosef, but he also saw how all of it was good. *Ki l’michya shlachani Elokim lifneichem lasum she’eyris ba’aretz, lechachayos lachem l’fleyta gedola*. After twenty-two years he understood that all the bad that happened was really “*Rachmana l’tav avid*”. It was really all from the same place. That it was all good and necessary. There is good in the world that we see how it’s good *b’shaito*. And then, there are things that seem bad *b’shaito*, but in the end — when we see the end of the story — which we might be *zoche* to see in our lifetime like Yakov (but we might not). Yakov understood that it was good that he was separated from Yosef, because that’s the way the family could survive and that it was all part of the Divine plan. At that moment, Yakov was so overwhelmed by the realization that all the duality and the lack of unity in the world that he felt for twenty-two years was really a facade, and that Hashem really caused it all for the good; the Divine plan was all in the same direction. He was so overwhelmed by the realization of “*Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*” — by the thought of unity of everything in the world and that everything comes from Hashem — that he was distracted from falling and crying over Yosef, And that’s what Chazal mean by “Yakov was saying the Shma”.

And throughout all of history (you know, when we are in the “twenty-two years”), we don’t always see the whole picture. We don’t see how everything comes only from Hashem, in whom we believe, who is so perfect and so good. But in the end, just like Yakov found the answer (and there is always an answer), our job is to try our best to internalize as deeply as possible “*Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*” and to see how everything is ultimately unified — everything is one and everything is for the good. And even if right now we don’t see it, ultimately there is a unified explanation for everything that Hashem does and it all comes from a place of goodness.

Did the Avot Study Torah? Why Does It Matter?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

One of the distinctive aspects of Judaism is its emphasis upon Torah study. Unlike other religions in which study is generally relegated for “men of the cloth”, in Judaism the study of the word and will of God – as distilled in His Torah, is incumbent upon everyman. It is the tri-part balance between belief, study and commandments which lends Judaism its durability. Yet, hundreds of years before God conveyed His word to man our Avot, the founders of our people, discovered God’s presence. In a confusing pagan world of immorality and violence, they discerned the presence of a One Creator and carved out lifestyles based on the Divine will. How did these great men and women uncover the presence of G-d in this confusing world?

Firstly, they were able to perceive a Divine artist of the grand masterpiece called the universe. The midrash describes Avraham as observing our world as a sprawling “city” noticing its order, proportion and symmetry. Convinced that there must be an architect for this city he searched for God’s presence. The world we inhabit bears the imprint of God’s intelligent design: some people are able to sense Him in the science of our universe, while others are more awakened to the Divine presence by the beauty of creation. Either way, our Avot peered at their world and traced it back to God.

However, they didn’t just sense God in “cold science” or even in the radiant beauty of our universe. Additionally, they identified a moral energy to our world. Rational science is emotionless and “morally blank” but our world bristles with moral spirit. Our universe is built upon science and math in a manner which supports life and human welfare; our world is a delicately balanced system which enables human existence. Without this balance the world would be inhabitable, even though it would still exhibit scientific order. There is moral spirit which created a world of life and welfare. Moreover, these great founders of our nation didn’t just detect moral spirit to this world- they fashioned their lives and their societies in the image of this moral Creator. They introduced bold new ideas into the human experience: justice, ethics and respect for the human condition. Our Avot noticed the moral underpinnings of God’s world and re-landscaped the human realm based on the Divine image peering at them.

Finally, our Avot detected G-d through history. They appreciated that that human experience isn’t static but that history is, instead, directly impacted by human behavior. History is adversely affected by human malfunction and misconduct just as it is redeemed by human virtue and moral heroism. History has a beginning and a definite endpoint- the perfection of Man in a kingdom of God. At the center of this historical struggle between good and evil are the Jewish people- tasked with redeeming humanity and teaching God to Man. This mission would be fiercely and violently opposed by enemies of God, but God would always protect his people and assure their survival. Sensing this historical journey, the Avot were able to detect the Divine author of history.

However, despite their remarkable ability to detect G-d in Nature and History our Avot also studied Torah. The midrash stresses that all Avot studied Torah, but the more famous images portray Ya’akov’s Torah study. Initially, Ya’akov is presented as a “tent-dweller” and the midrash identifies these tents as study halls of Torah. Subsequently, the midrash reports that Ya’akov studied Torah for fourteen years in a yeshiva, prior to journeying to join Lavan and his family. Finally, in parshat Vayigash, the midrash describes Yehuda’s advance mission prior to the family’s descent: to assemble a yeshiva in Goshen to assure serious Torah study in Egypt. These are the more well-known sources; beyond these portraits of Ya’akov’s Torah study, the midrash also describes Avraham and Yitzchak as students of Torah.

These midrashim about the Torah study of our Avot raise very interesting questions. Firstly, what exactly were the Avot studying, if the text of Torah as we know it had yet to be delivered? It is difficult to determine precisely what form of Torah text predated the actual delivery of Torah at Sinai. As Torah is the will of G-d, it obviously predates human history and Torah certainly existed prior to its delivery at Sinai. Additionally, there are many different “ways” to read the Torah, beyond the actual form which was delivered to us. Torah letters and words can be recombined in countless permutations, yielding numerous additional layers of meaning. Having received our version of the Torah at Sinai, we must read “our version”, but it is altogether possible that our Avot had access to different versions unbeknown to us.

In addition to studying the sections of Torah which had been delivered to them, our Avot intuited the Divine logic of Torah even without an explicit or precise text. The midrash describes Avraham's "kidneys" as pulsing with Torah knowledge; Avraham lived in such harmony with God that his very being sensed and lived Torah and its logic. Even without organized texts of God's word, our Avot were able to "feel" the will of God and implement that will in their actions and lifestyles.

Why does all this matter? Why is it significant that our Avot studied Torah before it was delivered to us at Sinai? Why is this a recurring theme in the midrash?

Firstly, their Torah study was their gateway to the Divine presence in Nature and Science. As Torah contains an "approximation of G-d" and His will it is a portal to understanding the entire universe, all of which is the handiwork of God. Ideally, and by definition, all science and all wisdom can be accessed through the study of Torah. As science is G-d's system and Torah God's will, Torah is, by definition, a blueprint for all science and all creation. Sadly, most mortals cannot ever hope to understand Torah well enough and deep enough to access science, math or music solely through this blueprint; those who seek to study other elements of God's world must study it frontally. However, hypothetically all reality can be accessed through Torah. If the Avot discerned God in their universe, they were aided by Torah and the revealed will it contains. Deciphering God through Nature alone without

the "codes" which Torah provides would be imperfect and deficient.

Secondly, by studying Torah, we create a greater Divine presence in our world. The more that human beings understand Torah the closer humanity is to Him. The more we study the more we know of Him; both rationally and supernaturally the presence of God is augmented the more that His creatures understand Him. The Avot viewed themselves as builders- they were laying a spiritual foundation for humanity; they imagined a world of God's presence and laid a platform for this reality. It is inconceivable that they structured this platform without interacting at some level- cognitively or intuitively- with God's Torah.

Finally, the Torah study of the Avot was crucial in introducing a vital aspect of Judaism- observance of commandments. Again, it is unclear what form and what level of mitzvah observance our Avot adhered to; however, it is abundantly clear that their lives were, at the very least, synched to the general halachik system. Perhaps they adhered to the entire system, but, minimally, their lives were harmonized with halachik fundamentals gleaned from Torah study. Judaism is predicated upon a belief system, but also upon the concept of subservience to Divine commandments. Without a life of submission to commandments the religious platform our Avot were constructing would have been inadequate.

The First Baal HaBayis

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Vayigash, we learn of the great reunion between Yosef, his brothers, and his father, after a twenty-two year separation. When the brothers return to Egypt to procure food for a second time, due to the severe famine ravaging the land of Canaan, they present themselves before the viceroy (who is, of course, and unbeknownst to them, Yosef their brother). At this point, Yosef can no longer contain himself, and to the utter astonishment of his brothers, he declares, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" (Bereishis 45:3).

After reconciliation, and assuring his brothers that he bears no ill-will towards them, for certainly it was G-d Who sent him before them to Egypt, to be a provider of life, he urges his brothers to hurry to father and tell him

that his son Yosef yet lives, and that he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt. And so, what seems to be great triumph in Yaakov's descent to Egypt to reunite with his long lost son, is actually the beginning of the bitter Egyptian exile.

With his father and brothers and families in Egypt, Yosef will be able to continue to rule over the land, and provide for all of its citizens, while simultaneously taking care of his family. The pasuk tells us: וַיֹּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף, אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֶחָיו, וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, בְּמִישַׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּאֶרֶץ רַעַמְסֵס בְּאֶשֶׁר, צִוָּה פַרְעֹה, and Yosef settled his father and his brothers, and he gave them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ramses, as Pharaoh had commanded (47:11). Rashi notes that Ramses was in the land of

Goshen, where the family of Yaakov settled.

וַיַּכְלִיכַל יוֹסֵף אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֶחָיו, וְאֶת כָּל-בֵּית אָבִיו--לֶחֶם, לְפָנָיו
הָטָף - and Yosef sustained his father and his brothers and his father's entire household with bread, according to the (needs of) the young children and the entire household (47:12 with Rashi).

Here we have Yosef the righteous, the man of integrity, the identifiable Hebrew (see 39:14,17, 40:15, 41:12), the one who clung tenaciously to the ideals, morals and norms of the house of Avraham, in the role of Yosef the businessman, the provider, the sustainer of life, the ruler and king. I often think of Yosef as the COO (Chief Operating Officer), CEO (Chief Executive Officer), and CFO (Chief Financial Officer) of ancient Pharaonic Egypt. Yet, despite all of this, he never allowed power and money to corrupt his faithful and pure ways, nor his devotion to G-d.

Rav Soloveitchik teaches, "Torah knowledge originated on Mount Sinai, and it was passed down from one generation to the next. The quintessence of Jewish history is based on the connection between teacher and student - the continuity of the Torah, the mesorah. This mesorah requires both the rav and the talmid; by their efforts, the Torah survives eternally.

"There is another mesorah of great significance: the mesorah of Jewish balebatim, the laypeople. This mesorah is not one of concepts, but rather of methods and images. It is a continuity of a type of personality. The first baal habayis was Yosef. In Egypt, he provided support for his father and his brothers. Our survival in galus, in exile, is due not only to the struggle of the Jewish scholar, but also to the efforts of the Jewish baal habayis.

"There are three characteristics that balebatim possess which make them unique. First, the baal habayis feels a clear awareness of his responsibility not only for himself, but for the entire Jewish community. Second, the baal habayis has a pragmatic mind; he has an aptitude for decision-making and decision-executing. Finally, the baal habayis is a visionary; he is a dreamer, he looks to the stars. From whom were these traits (which sustain us through our millennia of exile) inherited? From the first Jewish baal habayis, Yosef.

"How did the Torah portray Yosef? His first dream involved bundles of wheat; he was an individual with

a prosaic, practical vision. There was another dream, however: of stars in the heavens. Both dreams were found in Yosef's personality. He was pragmatic (represented by the sheaves of wheat), but he also looked to the stars. He was a visionary, imagining the limitless goals that he could achieve in aiding his nation (and sustaining his family)" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Bereishis, p.345-347).

Throughout our millennia of exile and wanderings, our nation has survived through the traditions, laws, ways and study of Torah, as passed down from rebbi to talmid in each and every generation. This is the responsibility of each and every Jew, to ensure that once he is no longer of this world, his students and descendants will continue the transmission of the chain of Torah to the next generation... and so on and so forth.

And yet, there is another mesorah, another tradition, that also ensures our survival as a nation through the ages. This is the mesorah of the Jewish home, the businessman, the layperson, the Jew who goes out into the world, yet remains steadfast to the laws and ideals of Judaism in all that he does and everywhere he goes. Even as he is involved with the world around him - his own 'sheaves of wheat' - his eyes reach upwards - towards his own 'heavenly bodies' - always striving to be both a man of the field and a servant of G-d.

As did Yosef throughout his leadership in Egypt, the Jewish baal habayis, the layperson, takes responsibility for others, thinks practically and realistically in regard to what must be done, and finally, always remains a visionary, knowing that Torah and kemach are not mutually exclusive, but can be successfully meshed together in his personality and his life.

The Yid ha'Kadosh (Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Peshischa, 1766-1813) was known to say: "Is it a novelty to be a person who creates miracles? Any simple person can do wonders and create miracles. It is indeed a novelty to be a good Jew. It is not easy to be a good Jew" (Tales of the Righteous, by Simcha Raz, p.210).

Yosef's enduring legacy is the model of a stellar Jew who combines pragmatics with a never-ceasing vision of grandeur. It is based on his example that every Jewish layperson must form, shape and live his life. May we be wise and courageous to emulate the path that he forged.

Perspectives of the Past

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

How do we evaluate the past? How do we spend our time in the present? How often do we think about the future? In his book, *“The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change Your Life,”* Dr. Philip Zimbardo outlines six subjective time perspectives that people experience as they relate to the past, present, and future. Dr. Zimbardo argues that when looking at the past, it is best to be high in a past-positive time perspective and low in a past-negative time perspective. When thinking about the past, there may be “facts” as to what happened in our lives, but we have a choice to provide the past narrative with a positive spin or a negative one. Past-negative perspectives are associated with depression and getting stuck ruminating in past experiences, while past-positive perspectives help ground us better in the present and focus on the future.

From one perspective, Yaakov’s life can be summed up as one traumatic event after another: starting with a death threat from Esav, followed by Lavan’s continual trickery, dealing with Dinah’s abduction, experiencing constant family strife, the death of his beloved Rachel, and culminating with the “death” of his cherished son, Yosef. When Paroah asks him his age, Yaakov responds with a past-negative perspective that his life has been short and bad (Bereishit 47:9).

While perhaps we can empathize with Yaakov’s response because of all the hardship he had experienced, the midrash (quoted by the Daat Zekeinim) critiques Yaakov’s perspective—instead of looking back and giving a subjective stamp of disapproval on his life, he should have shifted perspectives. Instead of focusing on the trauma, he should have realized that Hashem saved him from Esav and Lavan, and returned Dinah and Yosef. The midrash suggests that for each word mentioned in that interaction (33 in total), a year was taken off Yaakov’s life. While Yitzchak lived for one hundred and eighty years, Yaakov only lived for one hundred and forty-seven.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski contrasts this midrash with another one that critiques Yaakov. The midrash states

that while Yaakov was mourning Yosef, he exclaimed that Hashem had turned away from him. The midrash criticizes Yaakov’s complaint by projecting Hashem’s response: “I am busy setting things into motion to make his son the viceroy, and he is complaining that I have turned away?” Yet, this midrash does not identify any punishment. Why is Yaakov punished for saying his life was short and bad, but not for stating that Hashem had turned away? Rabbi Twerski suggests that there is a fundamental difference between a response during suffering and a response after suffering. While ideally Yaakov should not have questioned Hashem even amidst suffering, he was not punished because the pain of suffering is so great that he was not held accountable in the moment. Yet, after the suffering was over, when he had already been saved from his enemies and his children had been returned, Yaakov is held accountable for not shifting his perspective. Yaakov was expected to look back at the past and not complain.

In contrast to Yaakov, Yosef’s success seems to stem from his ability to have a past-positive time perspective and to be future-oriented. He names his first son Menashe precisely because Hashem allowed him to forget the traumas of his childhood. Yosef’s ability to totally forgive his brothers required a firm belief in Hashem’s providence over past events and a strong desire to move forward and not get stuck in what had already transpired. His success as Paroah’s viceroy stems from an ability to predict the future economic climate of Egypt, and more importantly, to devise and execute a plan to successfully avert national disaster.

While we cannot fully evaluate Yaakov both because we should not judge how people react to traumatic events as well as because we cannot fully grasp the greatness of our forefathers, the midrash clearly wants us to learn a valuable lesson. To the extent that we can work hard on shifting our own perspectives toward the past from being past-negative to past-positive, we will be more able to appreciate the present and plan for a more successful future.

Meaningful Employment

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

The truth was out and the story was spreading fast – Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, and an epic reunion ensued. Upon hearing the news about his trusted prime minister, Pharaoh reacts in the way one would expect: (Bereishis 45:16):

“The news was heard in Pharaoh’s house that Yosef’s brothers had come. This was good [news] in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants.”

In a magnanimous gesture, Pharaoh invites all of Yosef’s extended family to Egypt, promising them the best of the land during their stay. Based on the grandness of the gesture and the fact that Yosef had steered Egypt through an unprecedented agricultural crisis, it was expected that once his family was all reunited, they would come to meet Pharaoh. One would also assume that the meeting would be characterized by camaraderie and goodwill. However, when Yosef discusses the upcoming encounter with his brothers, he takes the measure of prepping his brothers regarding exactly what they should say to Pharaoh. He even goes so far as to only allowing Pharaoh to meet five of his brothers. Why was Yosef so careful about this meeting? Why did the conversation need to be scripted? Why were some brothers excluded? Why not let the seemingly genuine emotions surrounding this significant occasion emerge naturally? Though a meeting with the king is not an inconsequential matter, his actions and precautions seem a bit extreme.

In the run-up to this meeting, Yosef instructs his brothers as follows (ibid 46:31-33):

“Yosef said to his brothers and to his father’s household, ‘I will go up and tell Pharaoh. I will say to him, ‘My brothers and my father’s household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds, for they are owners of livestock. Their sheep, their cattle, and all their possessions, they have brought [with them.]’ And when Pharaoh calls you, and says, ‘What is your occupation,’ You should say, ‘Your servants have been livestock owners from our youth until now, we and our fathers;’ so that you will be able to settle in the land of Goshen, since every shepherd is abhorrent to Egypt.”

It could not be any clearer how Yosef was “guiding” his brothers in their impending conversation with Pharaoh. After explaining a bit about his brothers to Pharaoh, Yosef offers an odd introduction (ibid 47:2):

“From among his brothers, he took five men, and he

presented them to Pharaoh.”

Why just take five of his brothers? Rashi explains (ibid): *“From the least strong among them, who do not [even] appear strong, for if he [Pharaoh] would find them strong he might induct them into his military.”*

Therefore, to avoid any chance of any of the brothers being drafted (the first example of draft dodging in history), Yosef wants the brothers to project an image of physical weakness. Why go to all this trouble? What was Yosef’s thinking here?

The answer may lie in the portion preceding the reunion between Yosef and his father. Yaakov, upon finding out that Yosef was alive, sets out to Beer Sheva on the way to Egypt. After his arrival, God communicates with him, reassuring Yaakov not to be afraid when going down to Egypt because a great nation would be emerging from him. What was Yaakov’s fear? The Sforno (ibid 46:3) explains that Yaakov’s fear centered on this pivotal decision to move everyone down to Egypt. While he was aware of the eventual galus that would befall his future generations, the details of the Divine Plan – the necessity of Egypt as their future home – was beyond his knowledge. Seeing God’s guiding of events, and being reassured that the path led to Egypt, he was concerned as to the effect this move would have on the fledgling nation. God’s message to Yaakov was that the future nation could not withstand long term existence in the Eretz Canaan of that time. The situation was ripe for assimilation and the nation’s comfort level in their surroundings would essentially become an obstacle to their ideological evolution. At this early stage, to be placed in such an environment would result in the destruction of the Jewish people. Residing in Egypt would ultimately avoid this fate. In order to flourish, Bnai Yisrael needed to be isolated to allow for positive growth. Egypt was the best location to achieve this objective. At the time, the Egyptians found much of the Jewish “culture” repugnant, noted in their unwillingness to even dine with Ivrim (ibid 43:32). The Egyptians’ aversion would create definitive social boundaries, allowing for the nation to grow and thrive separate from Egyptian society. As pointed out by the Sforno (and recited in the haggada), Bnai Yisrael were “distinctive” (*metzuynaim*) while in Egypt, testament to the clear separation between themselves and Egyptian society.

It was the news that Yosef was alive that eventually

allowed for Yaakov to see how the Divine Plan was unfolding. Yosef, though, understood through his encounters with his brothers, that ultimately the future of Bnai Yisrael would unfold in Egypt. He realized, much like Yaakov came to understand through prophecy, the necessity of keeping his family separated from Egyptian society. This was what steered him in his dealings between his brothers and Pharaoh. The first step in this process was directing his family to the locale of Goshen (ibid 45:10). We see Yosef instructing Yehudah to take the lead, arranging for the arrival of the family (46:28). Interestingly, Rashi (ibid) notes that, according to the Midrash, Yehudah's intent was to set up a house of learning in Goshen. The idea he is trying to convey is the importance of establishing a solid ideological foundation in the land where they would all reside. Goshen was not simply going to be a quick trip. It was to be the center of Jewish life, and Yehudah was given the task of setting the foundation for it prior to the family's arrival.

With the location for his family set, Yosef proceeds with his discussion with the brothers. To simply ask for a separate area to live in would only arouse suspicion and mistrust from Pharaoh. This drove Yosef to ensure that certain details were emphasized in the brothers' dealings with Pharaoh. Yosef had the brothers accentuate the fact that they had been shepherds their whole lives – “from our youth until now” – demonstrating to Pharaoh that they were not opportunists coming to take advantage of the situation in Egypt. He also knew that the Egyptians viewed shepherding negatively, which would mean that he would be inclined to offering them a separate area of land in which to reside. Thus, we see Yosef guiding his brothers for the sole purpose of gaining Pharaoh's willing approval

to their settling in Goshen.

Yet this was not enough, demonstrated through Yosef's only allowing the five “weakest” brothers to meet Pharaoh. Was Yosef's concern merely fear of death in battle, or was there something deeper here? Yosef's primary objective was to create a physical and ideological separation between Bnai Yisrael and the Egyptians. Yosef recognized that preventing integration went beyond geography. Being drafted into the army would also sow the seeds for future assimilation. A soldier must fight for his country, and the nationalism and patriotism that evolves in order to do that becomes intrinsic. Obviously, allegiance to Egypt would be antithetical to Yosef's plan. This is not to say that fighting for one's country as a Jew is, by definition, harmful. For an individual, it could demonstrate a tremendous hakaras hatov. However, to the burgeoning nation, at the beginning stages of its evolution, this would have posed tremendous danger to the future of Klal Yisrael. Therefore, Yosef ensured that Pharaoh would have no reason to enlist the brothers and would leave them to shepherding.

A momentous event was taking place in the history of the Jewish people – the relocation of Yaakov and his sons to Egypt. Yaakov, through prophecy, came to understand the rationale for this displacement. The brothers' encounters with Yosef, and the unveiling of the God's plan, helped Yosef understand what was to take place. Yosef's orchestration of the events was not just motivated by the desire to keep the brothers out of harm's way, but to ensure the ideological well-being of the future Bnai Yisrael. At this stage in the evolution of Bnai Yisrael, it was up to Yosef to help bring about the Divine Plan. And as we see, through his intelligent plan, the future was secure.