

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYIGASH

DECEMBER 31, 2011

5 TEBET 5772

The fast of Asarah Betebet will be on Thursday, January 5.

DEDICATIONS : In memory of my grandmother Esther Bibi A'H (11 Tevet) and in memory of Molly Jemal A'H

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The 10th of Tebet is a fast day on which we say additional selihot in our prayers in order to remember the sad events that took place in the Temple Era during this time of year. Tzidkiyahu, the last king from the family of King David ruled over the Kingdom of Yehudah. The Temple stood in its glory in Yerushalayim, a bustling metropolis full of an active populous. Yirmiyahu, the prophet, went from place to place throughout the city begging people to make repentance and return Kedusha -- holiness -- to their lives. He said that if the people refused to heed Hashem's warnings -- the results would be disastrous. The people ignored the holy messenger and some even made fun of him.

Nevuzardan, a high officer of King Nebuchadnezzar, came with many battalions and laid siege to our holy capital. The siege began on the 10th of Tebet and resulted in the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash 2 1/2 years later. The purpose of fasting almost 2500 years after the events of the destruction took place is to awaken our hearts today to repentance. Our sages teach that anyone who lives at a time when there is no Bet Hamikdash must realize that had he or she lived when the Temple stood that his or her behavior would contribute to its destruction. Should we mend our ways and remove from our lives the behavior that brings destruction we will bring about the construction of the third Temple -- the one that will never be

destroyed -- and the coming of Mashiah speedily in our days. May we all spend the day productively contributing to that end -- Amen. (From R. Beyda)

Editors Notes

My father is an historian and archivist. When it comes to community matters, when it comes to Torah thoughts, when it comes to a piece of Art Deco furniture or a French Period rock crystal chandelier, my father can pull out a hard copy pretty much whatever you ask for. Some years back, he showed me his filing system for thoughts on each week's Perasha and Holidays. At the time I intended on making a similar system in the Synagogue so that one could simply open a folder and see perhaps a hundred or more articles. But I never did.

Instead I created an electronic file similar to his paper files for each portion, holiday and key Jewish subject and filed away audio classes and divrei Torah. Thus I transfer upcoming Parshiot and Holidays to my phone in advance and I can always look back. A couple of weeks ago I started transferring old newsletters relating to the current week into the weeks file as well. Thus when I have some time, I open my phone and not only can I learn something, I can take a walk down memory lane.

This week was another busy one, but Baruch Hashem the weddings far outnumbered the funerals. I was out late last night and didn't get back to the city til after midnight so my intention was to

work on the newsletter this morning.

As I noted before, my father had suggested that when I was pressed or unable to write, I could pull from previous newsletters done years back. I find that new people are reading the newsletter all the time and even when someone may have read a story years back, they enjoy seeing it again. In reviewing the archives for Vayigash I noticed that this is one week, I often noting being pressed for time. I imagine that coming almost every year on the heels of Hanukah and when the days are shortest and most people are out on vacation, it makes sense.

My father on Monday reminded me that next week we commemorate the Yahrzeit of his mother; my grandmother Esther Bibi.

So I found the following from 2003: I had been thinking of what to write and kept coming back to the 17 year gap between the sale of Joseph by his brothers and his revelation to them as he stood on the throne of Egypt. I imagined how crystal clear the memories of the sale of Joseph must have been to the brothers at that moment. It must have seemed like only minutes passed between the events. How strange and wonderful is the mind that Hashem has given us.

As I sat and began typing the dedication my mind wandered (as it is prone to do at 4AM). Focused on memories, I remembered back to the day my grandmother

passed away as if it were yesterday. It amazed me how relative time could be and how I could recall the events moment by moment.

The evening before I was on a 6PM flight to Milan. With the time change I arrived 7 hours later at 7 in the morning. The factory manager left the Red Fiat for me at the airport and I drove the 2 hour trip (at drive as fast as you can Italian speed limits) to Verona. I remember the snow along the road and the fog in the distance as I drove on the highway towards Venice. I worked at the factory all day and I can recall the exact pieces of furniture and paperwork we were reviewing. At about 8 we drove to the managers house for some dinner and then to the hotel in Lenago. I was so looking forward to a good night's sleep making up for the night I had missed.

As I entered the lobby, the receptionist of this small hotel told me that there was a phone call from New York at that very minute. Nobody spoke English in that hotel. In fact I don't think anyone in that town spoke English then. They thought that the call was probably for me. And it was.

My brother Ruby was on the line. He told me that he felt terrible being the one to bear bad news, but our grandmother had passed away. He told me that it would be important to my father for me to get back. I said that I would do my best. I hung up and phoned Alitalia. The earliest flight out of Italy was on an Alitalia flight out of Rome the next morning. But to get to Rome would be an all-night drive and there was no way I could do it. I called my manager who volunteered to join me. I apologized to the receptionist, tipped him and left. When I arrived back at my manager's

house, he told me that it was still possible to catch an overnight express train to Rome. We drove to the station and arrived just as the train pulled in.

I remember that I couldn't fall asleep because I would need to change trains in an hour. I sat and read Tehilim as I watched the countryside go by. And again I can still recall my thoughts on the train as my mind played the video of memories of my grandmother. The lunches she served us every Shabbat. The wrestling matches with my cousins in the bedroom. Her hospitality. Sitting with my grandfather while he studied. Observing how he took care with every detail of everything he did and trying to understand the underlying reasons.

I arrived in Rome, took a taxi to the airport, paid for my ticket and boarded the plane. All with almost no time to spare. And then we were delayed on the ground. When I arrived in New York I realized it would be too late to make the funeral so I went to my grandmother's house. The men had not returned from the cemetery yet. When they did get back and my father saw me, he was shocked. He would never have asked nor expected me to get back. But I'm sure my presence brought him some comfort.

Now that I have finished typing this story, I wonder what it has to do with the Perasha? Do I go back up and delete the story. Nah! I figure that my father will enjoy it and since he dedicated the newsletter I owe him.

Well let's go back to Joseph and his brother's for a moment. Try to imagine the paradigm shift that they must have experienced. Suddenly everything changed. All the confusion of the past year, of their first trip to Egypt, the

accusation that they were spies, the imprisonment of Shimon, the replaced money in their bags, the return home and the response of their father. Think of the months that passed with the knowledge that their brother Shimon remained in an Egyptian dungeon, that without Benjamin they could not return, that remaining in Canaan with the famine meant certain death. And then off they go with Benjamin. All goes well. They are treated royally by the Viceroy. They are free to go with their food. And then from that joy they are stopped. They are accused of theft. They deny the accusation. The seconds must have seemed like years as the Egyptians inspected sack by sack from oldest to youngest. And then they are plummeted into shocking grief when the chalice of the Viceroy is discovered in the sack of Benjamin. Back to Egypt with thoughts of confusion. What is happening? By their own word they have agreed to give themselves as slaves and have their brother executed. Perhaps they can negotiate their way out. But the Viceroy is fair and will allow them all to leave with the exception of Benjamin. How could they face their father. Perhaps they can battle their way out. What emotions must have played through them and then suddenly everything changes with two words. Ani Yosef. I am Joseph!

Until that point they still considered their sale of Joseph proper. They believed his dreams indicated his wickedness. Who was he to suggest that he would rule over them? Who was he to say they would bow to him? He was in their minds some power hungry egotist. But now they realized everything they held to be true was false. His dreams did come true. The sheaves of wheat in the midst of hunger were right on. What was white became black

and what was black became white.

The Rabbis tell us that just as seemingly strange and unconnected events suddenly transformed into the obvious to the brothers with the words Ani Yosef, so too the strange and seemingly unconnected events that we are living through will soon become clear to us when Hashem says to us, Ani Hashem. We look forward to hearing those two words bimherah beyameynu amen! Until we do though, we should be comforted in remembering that although we don't see the string that ties everything around us together, it is right in front of our eyes. There is a Divine plan and a Divine hand. As for us, let's just do the best we can and leave the rest to the Manhig Haolam.

PS... I just remembered a cute story about the city of Lenago that will make you laugh. On one of my trips I was working with two clients on two hotel projects at once. My wife Chantelle pitched in to entertain a designer from Seattle in Venice for the day while my sales manager Peter and I worked with another designer in the factory.

Well at the end of the day Chantelle was to take the train from Venice back to Lenago. It was the first time she was staying in this town and in the hotel Salieri. The hotel was named for the famous composer Antonio Salieri who was born in the town. Salieri was the court musician to the Emperor in Vienna for some 60 years. His nemesis was Mozart. You must have all seen Amadeus. It won the academy award in 1984. F Murray Abraham played Salieri whose talent could not approach that of Mozart, and who was in competition with Mozart for

recognition. I needed to give you that background.

So Chantelle gets to the Venice station and asks for a ticket to Lugano instead of Lenago. (Lugano is in Switzerland north of the Italian town of Como where we had been many times). Lugano is about 3 hours away from Venice, while Lenago is about 30 minutes away. On the train she asks the conductor how long until she gets to Lenago and he tells her that she will change trains in Milan. She realizes that something is wrong and his friendly help, she finally makes it to Lenago's train station. She gets in the cab and suddenly forgets the hotel's name. For ten minutes in broken Italian she tries to explain to the driver to take her to the hotel. She does not remember the name, but tries to play an association game with the driver. "Not Mozart but blank _____" She told me she tried this over and over again. "Not Mozart but blank _____" This Italian driver who certainly did not see the movie had no idea what she was talking about. I can only imagine the frustration over this "crazy American". To this day I don't know how she ever got back that night. I think that she was just so charming that everyone tried to help. My wife is something special!

One more thought based on what I heard from my friend Yehudah Isaacs last night

You don't get a second chance to create a first impression

Pharaoh needed someone to interpret his dreams. The wine steward informed Pharaoh that Yosef had the ability to interpret dreams since he had interpreted his dreams and the baker's dreams correctly while they were together in prison. When the wine steward told Pharaoh about

Yosef, he did not refer to Yosef by name but rather he provided Pharaoh a rather lengthy description- "a youth, a Hebrew, a slave of the chamberlain of the butchers." Rashi cites the Chazal to explain, "Cursed are the wicked for their good deeds are incomplete." The wine steward mentions Yosef in demeaning terms "a youth," by this the wine steward meant that Yosef was a fool and not fit for a position of greatness. "A Hebrew" meant that Yosef was not even familiar with the Egyptian language. And "slave" as it is written in "...the protocols of Egypt that a slave may not rule and may not even wear princely garments."

And when Moshe leaves prison, it seems that the whole idea of a haircut and a shave was his idea. The wine steward not only tried to disqualify and create a negative first impression verbally. If it was up to him, Yosef would appear before Pharaoh and look the part of a worthless slave.

R. Eliyahu Mizrachi (c. 1450-1526) explains: Yosef's reason for improving his appearance is not the same as that of any prisoner who is released [after two years!], because Yosef did not yet know whether he was going free or being released temporarily. The only reason for Yosef to get a haircut therefore is purely out of respect for the crown.

Rabbi Avraham Fischer writes that, "One senses that Yosef wants to make a good impression on the king because he sees before him an opportunity to realize his own dreams of leadership."

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky writes, that we know that first impressions have the greatest impact on a person. Since the wine steward described Yosef as incompetent, ignorant of the Egyptian

language, and a slave, before Pharaoh met Yosef, he would have already formulated a negative impression of him.

Combine that with the clothes and disheveled manner of a typical prisoner.

We can see why the wine steward is cursed.

Yosef did his Hishtadlut. He knew that there was little he could control what the wine steward may or may not have said. He knew that this was his shot and he better make it count. Following the opinion that it was his idea to get the shave and haircut, we should always remember as Yehuda explained in the name of Michael Bernstein: We don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Yehuda confronts Yoseph in the aftermath of the stolen chalice. Yehuda reviews the past events, starting from Yoseph's suspicious interest in their family.

2nd Aliya: Yehuda's final plea, that he would remain a slave instead of Binyamin, triggers Yoseph to reveal himself. Yoseph mitigates his brother's shock and obvious shame by explaining to them the hidden hand of Hashem in all that had occurred.

3rd Aliya: Yoseph instructs his brothers to bring Yakov and the rest of the family to Egypt. Pharaoh, having heard the news of the brother's arrival, confirms Yoseph's offer.

4th Aliya: Yoseph sends provisions and transportation for Yakov's entire household. Yakov

is told of Yoseph being, "alive and well and ruling the land of Egypt".

5th Aliya: Yakov wishes to see Yoseph, but first asks Hashem for instructions. Hashem reassures Yakov that the time of slavery and nationhood has begun, and that he must go to Mitzrayim. The 70 direct descendants of Yakov are counted.

6th Aliya: Yakov and Yoseph reunite after 22 years. Five of the brothers and Yakov are presented to Pharaoh. Yakov blesses Pharaoh. The year is 2238.

7th Aliya: The remainder of the Parsha is a flashback to the two years preceding Yakov's arrival. Yoseph's master plan for reconfiguring Egyptian society is detailed. Yoseph follows the broad outline of his advice to Pharaoh regarding the administration of the 7 years of plenty. The famine must have been of enormous intensity for Yoseph to accomplish his plan in just two years. Although the people "sell" themselves to Pharaoh in order to get food, Yoseph's plan maintains their sense of dignity and independence.

Yechezkel 37:15 ... In the year 2964 - 797 b.c.e, following the death of Shlomo Hamelech, the nation was divided between Rechavam ben Shlomo and Yiravam ben Nivat. Rechavam ruled over Yehudah and Binyamin, and Yiravam ruled over the other 10 Tribes. Rechavam was a direct descendant of Dovid Hamelech, and Yiravam was a descendent of Ephrayim. In this week's Haftorah, Yichezkel Hanavi prophesied the time when the divided kingdom's of Yehudah and Yisroel would unite beneath the single banner of the family of King David.

The connection to our Parsha is obvious. Our Parsha begins with a confrontation between Yehuda and Yoseph. Both were destined to be Kings over the Jewish people. However, Yoseph's reign was limited to necessity and circumstance while Yehuda's would be as eternal as the Jews themselves.

It is important to note that the close relationship between Yehuda and Binyamin, even though they were not from the same mothers, was maintained throughout history. It gives additional meaning to the Rashi on pasuk 40:14 that explains why Yoseph and Binyamin cried for each other at the time of their reunion. Rashi explains that the tears were for the eventual destruction of the Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash. In truth, the removal of Hashem's presence from our midst occurs when there is hatred and divisiveness. The Tribe of Binyamin should have been closest to Ephrayim and Menashe. Instead, the division of the Land placed Yehudah closest to Binyamin, allowing for a singular unity between the two tribes that would allow them to share the actual structure of the Bais Hamikdash. It was as if Hashem was telling us that Yehuda's willingness to sacrifice for Binyamin at the beginning of Parshas Vayigash is the kind of unity that will maintain Hashem's presence in our midst.

The coming of Mashiach can only happen when a divided nation reunites. May it happen soon, and in our life times!

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

**“Then you shall say, ‘Your servants have been shepherds from our youth until now, both we and our forefathers.’”
(Beresheet 46:34)**

In this week's perashah, we read a dialogue between Yosef and his brothers that is repeated between the brothers and Pharaoh. Yosef says that when Pharaoh will ask, "What is your vocation?" you should respond "We are shepherds and so were our ancestors." Rabbi Chaim Weinberg asks, why is it so important for the brothers to tell Pharaoh how their forefathers supported their families? And second, what is so significant about being a shepherd that Yosef instructed his brothers to emphasize this to the king?

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch on Parashat Beresheet explains that Hevel's occupation found favor in Hashem's eyes while Kayin's did not. It is hinted in the wording, "And Hashem accepted Hevel and his gift." Hashem accepted Hevel's gift not only because the gift was superior but also because Hashem was happy with the vocation he had chosen. R' Hirsch discusses this topic and contrasts a farmer (Kayin's occupation) who toils laboriously from dawn until late at night, with a shepherd, who sits next to his sheep with ample time to contemplate Hashem's Torah and His greatness (Hevel's occupation). Most of our ancestors chose to support themselves in this way so they would have time to invest in spiritual pursuits.

When Ya'akob and his sons went down to Egypt they did not forsake their ancestral profession even though shepherding contravened everything Egypt stood for. Their chosen vocation enabled them to remain true servants of Hashem who had the time and peace of mind to dwell on Torah study and to live a life sanctioned by Torah.

What a lesson this is to all of us! There is no doubt that

there is a time when one will choose a means of livelihood. However, we must make sure our chosen parnasah is one that allows us ample time and peace of mind to pursue a Torah life and Torah study. Doing so will enable us to continue our Torah studies for our own benefit and to bring pleasure to Hashem. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

As the brothers of Yosef were deliberating how to prevent him from endangering their status in the eyes of their father, Ya'akob, an Arab caravan pulled into view. The brothers decided to sell Yosef to this caravan, which ultimately brought Yosef into Egypt. The Torah mentions that this caravan was carrying sweet smelling spices. Our Rabbis point out that this was highly unusual, since Arabs usually sold petroleum products which have an offensive odor. The Rabbis say that this occurred so that Yosef should not have to smell anything unpleasant. This may seem puzzling to us, for Yosef was being separated from his beloved father and sold into slavery to a country whose morals and values were totally alien to him. What difference would it make what he smelled on the way to Egypt? Would someone who is being kidnapped have veshalom, care what kind of odor was in the "paddy wagon"?

The answer is that the smell is not important; the "message" behind the smell is. When Yosef smelled a beautiful fragrance when it should have been something worse, he realized that Hashem was orchestrating this event and therefore his faith became strengthened. When things are tough for us, we have to look for small signs which show us the Hand of G-d and this in turn will make the going easier. These small signs are all around us. We

just have to open up our eyes and see the Divine Providence and this will help us build our faith to go through the ups and downs of life. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

LONG TERM Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The great Musar classic Orchos Sadikim defines happiness as "the feeling of complete peace in one's heart, without any sense of fear. One who achieves his desires and suffers nothing that saddens him will be constantly happy.

As with most other important milestones in life, techniques must be learned and practiced, and skills fine-tuned, before the goal can be reached. People chase after happiness by sampling an assortment of exciting and entertaining activities. Concerts, sporting events, amusement parks, restaurants, and shopping trips all share one common denominator which causes them to fall short of bringing true happiness to the joy seeker. They are all external stimuli that, at most, can only produce a temporary elation. When the event is over, so is the good feeling that was confused with true happiness.

Today's technology has further compounded this problem. Instead of producing the bliss promised by advertisers with the introduction of every scientific advance, the "new" gadgets that appear almost daily have created a mindset that demands instant gratification without effort. But you can't download happiness at broadband speeds, nor is it a signal you can pick up on a portable, wireless device. Happiness is an internal trait developed and learned through great effort. It is a feeling that is independent of external stimuli.

Get started on the long, hard process of learning to be happy. When the opportunity for an instant “high” is offered, take a deep breath – and pass! The first step to acquiring the character trait of happiness is committing to the long-term development process it takes to learn any complex science or hone a talent. You can’t learn to play piano or golf by pressing a button, and neither can you learn instantly to be happy. It only takes a minute to commit to the long learning process, but it will yield long-term benefits. It can even lead to a constant state of happiness.

**Rabbi’s Corner:
Rabbi Elie Abadie, M.D.**

A turning point in early Jewish History takes place in this week’s Parashat Vayigash. The center of action changes from the Land of Israel to Egypt. Yaakob, after residing for 22 years in the Land of Israel, moves southward toward Egypt to see his beloved son Yoseph. Accompanying Yaakob were all of his children and grandchildren; totaling seventy people, including Yoseph and his children!

Yaakob, on his way to Egypt, sent Yehudah, his son with leadership qualities, ahead of him to prepare the town of Goshen for their arrival. Why was it necessary for Yaakob to send his son Yehudah to prepare the town for their arrival? Weren’t they the guests of Pharaoh and Yoseph? Wouldn’t Pharaoh and Yoseph have prepared the town for their arrival? Having the supreme leaders of a country prepare for one’s visit requires nothing from the visitor to worry about during his stay! I am sure Yoseph would have, at least, have been concerned that his father and family would have had a proper place to stay and live.

Our Sages comment on the word “להורות – to show the way” emphasizing the different meaning of the word “להורות – to teach”. Yaakob, as interpreted by our Sages, was not concerned or worried about his lodging or comfort. He was concerned about the spiritual survival and continuity of his family and the new generation to be born in Egypt after his passing. Yaakob sent Yehudah to establish an educational institution where Yaakob’s children, grandchildren and all of the generations to come would be educated in order to maintain a loyalty to Abraham’s and Isaac’s traditions and values. Without any concern about the education and edification of the new generation in the family and community values, the new generation would not survive the foreign cultural onslaught that would be surrounding them.

Throughout the rest of Jewish History, from the days of Yaakob until today, Jewish communities in their dispersion in the world have always strived, as soon as they arrive at new shores and towns, to establish schools and learning centers. Formal and informal centers of education subsequently flourish in these new towns and cities; thereby reassuring Jewish survival and continuity. Without it, we would have become yet another ancient people that became extinct and featured in a museum.

Following in the footsteps of Yaakob, here in the City of New York, we have established the Sephardic Academy of Manhattan – SAM - to ensure the survival and continuity of our people and community. SAM focuses in instilling our Traditions and Values in a cutting edge educational environment. More than anything else, SAM provides the wherewithal to all of the students in order to survive and

flourish as proud Sephardic Jews for many generations to come.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Vayigash, Goshen, and Mashiah Parashat Vayigash tells of Yaakob and his family’s move from Eretz Yisrael to Canaan. We read that as Yaakob made his way toward Egypt, he sent his son Yehuda ahead, for the purpose of establishing a place of learning: “He sent Yehuda ahead to teach him the way to Goshen” (46:28).

The Torah in this verse refers to the area of Goshen with the term “Goshna,” which means “to Goshen.” Rav Nissan Alpert (1927-1986) noted that the word “Goshna” has the same numerical value as the word “Mashiah” (358) – indicating some connection between this context and our hopes for the arrival of Mashiah. Rav Alpert explained that the word “Goshen” is closely related to the first word and name of the Parasha – “Vayigash” – which means “approach.” The Parasha begins with Yehuda approaching Yosef (“Vayigash Elav Yehuda”) to plead that he allow Binyamin to return to his father. We find this term again a bit later, after Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, when he says to them, “Geshu Na Elai” – “draw near, if you will” – and they obliged – “Vayigashyu” (45:4). This Parasha is about “Vayigash” – Yosef and his brothers “approaching” one another, drawing near to each other, after many years of separation. Just before the brothers threw Yosef into the pit, the Torah writes, “they saw him from afar” (“Va’yiru Oto Me’rahok” – 37:18). As long as they saw each other “from afar,” as long as there was a distance between them, there was hatred and animosity. This distance is rectified in Parashat Vayigash, when Yosef and his brothers draw

near to each other, and bond together in peace and harmony.

For good reason, Rav Alpert commented, the word "Goshna" – which alludes to the theme of closeness between Jews – is equal to "Mashiah." The Messianic Era will arrive only at the time of "Vayigash," when we, like Yosef and his brothers, set aside our petty differences and come together in peace and unity. When we are able to eliminate the distance between neighbors, between family members, between spouses, and between business associates, and work together with goodwill and mutual respect, then Mashiah can come. As long as we "see each other from afar," if we keep our distance from fellow Jews with whom we have differences, our nation will not experience redemption. The redemption will come once we achieve "Vayigash Elav Yehuda" – closeness between Jews, genuine feelings of camaraderie and goodwill that overshadow the differences and disagreements that unfortunately separate us from one another.

Rabbi Wein

As the story of Yosef and his brothers unfolds and reaches its climactic end in this week's parsha, we are left with the bewildering sense that there is no absolute right or wrong in the unfolding tale. Yosef is judged wrong in his original behavior towards his brothers in bringing inaccurate tales regarding them to their father. The brothers are judged wrong in casting him in a pit and thereafter selling him into slavery.

All of the brothers including Yosef are judged to have caused their aged father pain and suffering in not revealing to him the story and Yosef himself is criticized for not revealing himself to Yaakov for

the first nine years of his rise to power in Egypt. Yet in spite of all of the negativity and guilt involved, the Torah portrays the reunion of the family in happy and complimentary terms.

This is true even though all of them realize that the family will reside in Egypt for a long time and that the return to the Land of Israel is to be a long postponed dream yet to be realized. Families are not perfect and events within them do not always proceed smoothly. However the parsha emphasizes that the family unit must overcome all of the obstacles that lie in its way and must strive at all costs to preserve the sense of family amongst all of its members.

The story of Yaakov's family is the story of almost all later Jewish family life – of quarrels, misunderstandings, misjudgments, and yet somehow of goodness, kindness, tolerance and reconciliation. Jewish tradition teaches us that all later disputes within the Jewish world – and there have been many bitter ones over the millennia – are already foretold in the story of Yosef and his brothers. And yet in spite of it all, the Jewish people remain a family with shared ideals and an optimistic vision for its future.

The Torah records for us that Yosef's revelation of his identity to his brothers was a simple two word statement – ani Yosef – I am Yosef. Implicit in that statement is the demand of Yosef to be seen by the brothers as a unique individual and not as a carbon copy of his father or of any of his brothers. Yosef is the ultimate nonconformist in the family and the entire dispute arises due to his brothers' unwillingness to allow him that nonconformist role in the family.

Every family has nonconformists in its midst. How the family deals with this situation is truly the measure of its inherent unity and purpose. Many of the problematic issues that plague the Jewish world generally stem from the fraying of family bonds and the loss of an overriding sense of family under all circumstances. All human failings – greed, jealousy, mean-spirited behavior, spitefulness and even violence – are evident in family situations. Recognizing the symptoms of such behavior before they develop – and become chronic – is one of the keys of maintaining the necessary sense of family bonds that alone can prove vital and successful under all circumstances.

Ricky Cohen

A number of years ago, I attended a Tony Robbins seminar. Robbins is a world renowned motivational speaker who has taught life and career building skills to tens of thousands of people, over a span of 25 years. He typically teaches in a large room with hundreds, and at times, thousands of people in the audience. He has great presence and the ability to communicate important ideas as he inspires people. At one point in his presentation, he suggested that we kick-start each day with excitement, self-empowerment and drive, and not allow the day to begin with our eventual involvement. He called this "waking up the morning." I'm a serious note taker, because I understand that when you take notes – even if you never look at them again – you are more engaged mentally, and will remember 200-300% more than you would if you simply listened. As Robbins was concluding this part of his seminar, I looked down and realized I was writing my notes in

Hebrew. It was curious that I had filled my page with the pesukim (versus) and berachot (blessings) we say when we wake up in the morning, rather than writing a shortened version of what he was saying. As a follow up to that day, I went back and relearned the words and the concepts with which we start our day. The insights are exciting and crucial.

Our Sages advise that we should say, or think, three phrases as we begin each day. Each phrase stands on its own, and should be said with a focus on the words and on the concepts behind the words.

The first phrase is called the "Modeh Ani" ("I Acknowledge"). The words are as follows: "I acknowledge before You, the King who is alive and forever, that You returned my soul to me with compassion. Abundant is your faith." When we say these words, we acknowledge that we have been given life again - as each day of life stands on its own - as an independent gift. But no less important are the last four words: "Abundant is your faith." The subject of this prayer is the individual, so when you or I say: "Abundant is your faith" we are reminding ourselves how great our Creator's faith is in us. The person who says these words thoughtfully, and with an understanding of their intent, is empowered to wake up his morning and begin his day with an altogether different perspective.

The second phrase our Sages advise us to say is: "Ve'ahavta le'reacha kamoha" – "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." There is little doubt that the person who begins his/her day thoughtfully and intent-fully, saying these words, will frame his day with a more loving, accepting and open approach to those around him. But here, as well, the underpinning is essential. "Love

your neighbor as you love yourself," is mostly about the idea that giving love to another is contingent on your ability to give love to yourself. It is about unconditionally loving yourself, no matter how things are going. It is a commitment to guard that self-love, so that anything that challenges it – like loose ends of pain, or open ended situations that create guilt, are confronted and removed.

The third phrase is something our Sages advise should be thought. Thoughts are transformative - and can easily and decisively change a person's outlook and mood. Each person should begin each day intensely thinking the six life building words: "The world was created for me." When some begin their day, they think about how unstable things are, how powerful the competition is, and how saturated the market is. They are frightened by the great speed with which change now impacts things, and wonder if they can react quickly enough to build something successful. Young adults feel this acutely, as does anyone whose livelihood has been compromised during this recession.

If, on the other hand, you have the perspective that "the world was created for you," it means that the speed at which things currently move is there to facilitate your new idea; the huge focus on technology and communications is a platform for you to launch your new company or volunteer effort, and the fact that boundaries no longer exist and competition is from every corner on the planet says that sales opportunities have no boundaries as well. So you can wake up tomorrow morning, or you can wake up your morning.

Use the spectacular insights of our Sages to frame your day – and thereby build ambitious

things in your life. Teach your children how to begin their days. Who would've thought that there could be some much Torah in a Tony Robbins seminar?

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

There are rare and special moments when the world changes and a new possibility is born: when the Wright brothers in 1903 made the first man-made flight, or in 1969 when Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon, or when, almost 6,000 years ago, someone discovered that marks made in clay with a stick could, when the clay dried, become permanent signs and thus writing, and civilization, were born.

There is such a moment in this week's parsha, and arguably it has had a greater influence on the course of history than any of the above. It happens when Joseph finally reveals his identity to his brothers and then, while they are silent and in a state of shock, goes 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.

It may be the case that God has forgiven before this. Certainly according to some midrashic readings of previous episodes, God has. But in the plain sense of the text, He hasn't. Did God forgive Adam and Eve? Did God forgive Cain after he had murdered Abel? Probably not. He may have mitigated their punishment. Adam and Eve did not immediately die. God places a mark on Cain's forehead to protect him from being killed by someone else. But mitigation is not forgiveness.

God does not forgive the generation of the Flood, or the builders of Babel, or the sinners of Sodom. Significantly, when Abraham prays for the people of Sodom he does not ask God to forgive them. His argument is quite different. He says, "Perhaps there are innocent people there," maybe fifty, perhaps no more than ten. Their merit should, he implies, save the others, but that is quite different from asking God to forgive the others.

Joseph forgives. That is a first in history. There is even a hint in the Torah of the newness of this event. Many years later, after their father Jacob has died, the brothers come to Joseph fearing that he will now take revenge. They concoct 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]

The brothers understand the word "forgive" – this is the first time it

appears explicitly in the Torah – but they are still unsure about it. Did Joseph really mean it the first time? Does someone really forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph weeps that his brothers haven't really understood that he meant it when he said it. But he did, then and now.

Why do I say this was the first time in history? Because of a fascinating recent book by an American Classics professor, David Konstan. In *Before Forgiveness: the origins of a moral idea* (2010), he argues that there was no concept of forgiveness in the literature of the ancient Greeks. There is 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 *sungnome*, 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 couldn't 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.

Konstan argues that forgiveness, at least in its earliest form, appears in the Hebrew Bible and he cites the case of Joseph. What he does not make clear is why Joseph forgives. There is nothing accidental about Joseph's behaviour. In fact the whole sequence of events, from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the moment when he announces his identity and forgives them, is an immensely detailed account of what it is to earn forgiveness.

Recall what happens. First he accuses them 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. To put it technically, Greece was a shame-and-honour culture. Judaism was a guilt-repentance-and-forgiveness culture, the first of its kind in the world.

Forgiveness is not just one idea among many. It transformed the human situation. For the first time it 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. And when I forgive I show that my action is not mere reaction, the way revenge would be. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of the past. It is the undoing of what has been done (a point made by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*).

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.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Joseph said to his brothers: I am Joseph, is my father still alive?

And his brothers were not able to answer him, for they were affrighted before him". (45:3)

The Torah has taken us along on the roller coaster ride which has been the life of Yosef Hatzadeek. Yosef's bitachon in Hashem's providence is the model for us.

In our Perasha, the final confrontation between Yosef and his Brothers is described in all of

its depth. As Yosef says the famous words, "I am Yosef, Is my Father yet alive"?

The Brothers' response is "And they could not reply, because they were bewildered & terrified."

This tremendous lesson that even the most righteous must suspect their motives, and even the wisest can be led astray by envy, stands out as one of the great teachings of Hashem's Torah.

Our Sages have learned that from the Brothers' stunned & terrified reaction to the rebuke of the truth of Yosef's revelation, we learn great principles.

Firstly, that on the great Day of Judgment we will have to face the truth about our own lives since Hashem will be our Judge. We will be terrified and without answers.

Secondly, we will also discover that we have deceived ourselves. Just like the Brothers who had felt they were entirely justified until Yosef finally revealed himself and the truth. They saw that they had been in error for 22 years and were shocked.

Everyone is deceived about his character flaws. Instruction (mussar) is needed before it is too late. Only by going to a Hacham to ask for advice on what and how to correct and improve your character, and by learning, can a person find out the truth about himself.

We are all deceived about ourselves and filled with flaws. Only by learning can we rescue ourselves before the Great Yom Hadin.