BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

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from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>
date: Dec 25, 2025, 9:26 AM
subject: **VaYigash: Five Words and the Many Meanings of Mussar**
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Joseph's self-revelation to his brothers is undoubtedly a moment of great drama and emotion. Five Hebrew words: Ani Yosef; ha'od avi chai? "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" So little said, so much unsaid; and among all the possibilities, the Rabbis detected one dominant theme here: rebuke. The text tells us that his brothers could not answer him, for they were overwhelmed—nivhalu mipanav. Rashi tells us, “because of the bushah, the shame”. The Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 93:10) says more: "Woe to us from the day of judgment, woe to us from the day of rebuke." If the brothers, confronted by their youngest sibling, were reduced to speechless paralysis, what will become of us when we face the ultimate reckoning? (See also Chagigah 4b.)

Yet this observation demands explanation. Where, precisely, is the rebuke? Joseph offers no lecture, delivers no sermon. He simply states his identity and asks a question. Wherein lies the devastating tochachah that silenced these formidable men?

The Midrash itself underscores the paradox: "Joseph was the youngest of the tribes, and they could not withstand his rebuke." The implication is clear—if the youngest could produce such an effect with so few words, how much more so when we stand before the Divine. But this only intensifies the question. What wasthe rebuke?

The interpreters offer a constellation of answers, each illuminating a different dimension of moral confrontation—and each, perhaps, capturing a different face of what it means to be truly called to account.

The Question That Answered Itself

At its simplest level, the rebuke inheres in the question itself. The Netziv and the Torah Temimah note that "Is my father still alive?" is not a request for information—Joseph had just heard Judah speak at length about their father. It is, rather, a rhetorical thrust: Considering what you have put him through, could he possibly have survived?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe sharpens this further. Joseph is saying: I know that I am alive, standing before you. And I know that one who mourns a living person cannot achieve comfort, cannot find closure, because the soul senses the truth even when the mind does not. If our father has been unable to be comforted for twenty-two years—if he has been suffering without respite this entire time—can he still be alive after enduring such unrelenting anguish? The words carry their own accusation, requiring no elaboration.

The Inverted World

R. Avraham Pam, in his Atarah LaMelech, brings a different perspective, one that transforms this moment from a personal confrontation into a window onto ultimate reality. He connects Joseph's revelation to the Talmudic account (Bava Batra 10b) of one who glimpsed the World to Come and reported seeing an olam hafuch—an inverted world, where those elevated in this life occupy lowly positions, and the downtrodden rise to prominence.

This vision, R. Pam suggests, constitutes the most profound mussar imaginable. We frequently lament that life is unfair, yet we are often beneficiaries of that very unfairness. Others may deserve our position, our success, our stature—and in a world of true justice, the calculus would look quite different.

The brothers stood before a living demonstration of this principle. They had positioned themselves as Joseph's superiors, dismissing him as an arrogant dreamer unworthy of serious consideration. The "little brat" with grandiose visions, the youngest who needed to be managed, contained, removed. And now? He sat enthroned as viceroy of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. He is not only alive; he is in charge. He holds power, resources, and their very fate in his hands.

That reversal—the world turning over in one instant—is itself a taste of the olam hafuch. And it says, without saying: your hierarchy was wrong. Your sense of who stands where was wrong. Your confidence about "who you are" and "who he is" was wrong.

What greater rebuke can there be than a glimpse of what it would be like if the world would indeed be "fair"?

The Mirror of "Hypocrisy"

The Beit HaLevi identifies a different mechanism at work, one that strikes at the architecture of self-deception. Throughout the preceding chapter, Judah has delivered an impassioned plea centered on paternal concern: How can we return without Benjamin? Our father will die of grief. The responsibility will be ours to bear. How can you countenance such cruelty?

Joseph's response exposes the staggering blind spot in this argument. Throughout Judah's speech, the brothers have positioned themselves as the ones who truly understand what it means for a father to lose a beloved son—and they have cast the Egyptian viceroy as the callous one, indifferent to such suffering. They speak as though the very idea of depriving Jacob of his child is a moral horror that any decent person should recoil from, implicitly condemning anyone who would inflict such pain.

Ani Yosef. I am the son you sold into slavery, the one whose absence has tormented our father for over two decades. Is he even still alive after enduring that loss? You stand here in judgment of someone else's supposed indifference to a father's grief—while you yourselves are the ones who caused it.

This is the power of negiah—the way self-interest distorts perception. We are quick to identify moral failings in others while remaining oblivious to identical patterns in our own conduct. This is not true hypocrisy, which would signify utter falsity; it is simply the reality of human nature. We possess blind spots about our own behavior that can only be shattered when someone holds up the mirror with unflinching clarity.

And this is why it lands so hard. Many rebukes can be debated, deflected, rationalized away. This one cannot. It does not attack from the outside; it reveals from the inside. It turns their own argument back toward them—not as a clever rhetorical move, but as an unavoidable act of truth.

There is something uniquely devastating about discovering that your strongest moral language was built atop a forgotten inconsistency. That is the devastation that comes from the collapse of self-certainty.

The Flawed Calculation

The Ohel Moshe, citing Rav Shach, connects this episode to the concept of din v'cheshbon—the judgment and accounting we will all face. What is the significance of this double language? One interpretation, attributed to the

Vilna Gaon, explains that din is punishment for one's transgressions, while cheshbon is the accounting of all the good one could have accomplished with the same time, talents, and resources squandered on sin.

There is an additional reading: cheshbon refers to the calculation itself—the flawed reasoning, the internal logic that produced the sin. People rarely transgress because they love transgression. More often they sin because they have cheshbonot that are crooked: premises that are mistaken, assumptions that are untrue, mental arithmetic that was never checked.

Consider the brothers' original plan. They sold Joseph to prevent the realization of his dreams—dreams of dominance, of kingship, of being "over them." Their cheshbon was straightforward: remove him, and you remove the future he envisioned.

What happened? He became ruler over them precisely because of that act. The very plan designed to thwart his ascendancy became the mechanism of its fulfillment.

So the rebuke is double: not only did you do wrong, but your entire cheshbon—the rationale you relied upon—was fundamentally, catastrophically mistaken. And when a person realizes that his "smart plan" was the engine of his failure, the shame is intensified. It is not just guilt; it is the humiliation of having lived inside a mistake.

That is a terrifying kind of tochachah: the moment you discover that the logic you trusted most was the trap that caught you.

Twenty-Two Years of Error

R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, in his Asufat Maarachot, draws our attention to a remarkable feature of this narrative: the brothers were not wrong for a moment. They were wrong for twenty-two years.

We must be careful not to imagine the brothers as villains motivated by petty jealousy. These were the shivtei Kah, men of towering spiritual stature. When they judged Joseph, they believed—with complete conviction—that they were rendering righteous judgment. They were confident that the demands of justice obligated them to act as they did.

And then the difficult events in Egypt began. The viceroy accused them of espionage. He demanded they bring Benjamin. He imprisoned Simeon. And through it all, a terrible suspicion began to gnaw at them: "Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we did not listen."

Note carefully: even then, even as guilt stirred, they still believed "the judgment itself was true." They felt remorse for not showing mercy—for ignoring his pleas—but not for the fundamental correctness of their verdict. Day after day, for twenty-two years, they witnessed their father's inconsolable grief and did not waver from their position.

And then: Ani Yosef.

In that instant, reality itself slapped them across the face. Here the truth burst forth and struck them. Here they discovered that twenty-two years of certainty had been twenty-two years of error—and still they had not grasped the depth of their mistake until that very moment.

The Nature of True Tochachah

What, then, is the essence of this rebuke that the Sages found so paradigmatic?

R. Goldvicht notes that the Rabbis connected Joseph's tochachah to another famous rebuke—that of Bilaam's donkey. "Bilaam, wisest of the nations, could not withstand the rebuke of his donkey." The parallel is illuminating: Joseph was the youngest of the tribes; the donkey was the lowliest of creatures. Both simply presented facts—and those facts were enough to silence.

What is the common thread? Tochachah, in its deepest form, is not external criticism. It is the moment when reality itself speaks—when the truth a person has been evading suddenly becomes undeniable.

This is the tochachah that awaits us all: not a lecture from without, but a revelation from within. "When the Holy One comes and rebukes each person according to what he is"—not according to some external standard, but according to the very premises that person claimed to live by.

The Depth of Bushah

But why does such a revelation produce not merely regret, but paralysis? Why could the brothers not even respond?

R. Simcha Zissel Broide, in his Sam Derech, develops this theme from a psychological perspective. Bushah—shame—is not merely embarrassment. It stems from the deepest root of the soul. The Talmud (Yevamot78b) identifies bayshanim—those possessing the capacity for shame—as one of the three defining characteristics of the Jewish people. This capacity is woven into the very fabric of the Jewish neshamah.

Moreover, the greater a person's self-awareness and emotional depth, the greater their capacity for bushah. As one's perceptions grow and one's emotional sensibilities deepen, the experience of shame becomes correspondingly more profound, more penetrating, more searing.

R. Goldvicht distinguishes between two fundamentally different kinds of shame. The first is external: a person is caught in wrongdoing; his reputation is damaged; he is embarrassed before others. This shame, painful as it is, can be escaped. Change your environment, move to a new place, and the source of shame is left behind.

But there is a second kind of shame—the kind that comes when a person discovers that the entire fabric of falsehood he has woven over a lifetime was indeed false. This shame cannot be escaped, because its source is not external. The shame comes from within—from himself, from his own depths. When a man realizes that the internal edifice of his soul has collapsed, that the ground has shifted beneath his feet, that he no longer knows where he stands or where he is headed—that shame produces behalah. That is the paralysis that silenced the brothers.

The Collapse and What Comes After

When the brothers stood before Joseph and heard those two words, it was not merely that they were wrong about one thing. Their entire framework for understanding reality collapsed. Joseph's approach was vindicated; theirs was defeated. The ground shifted beneath them, and they could not speak.

And yet—and here R. Goldvicht offers a teaching of profound hope—even in that moment of collapse, the capacity for return remains.

A person confronted with the light of truth faces a choice. He can grasp stubbornly at the horns of his old system, clinging in arrogance to the ruins of his former certainty. Or he can stand before the truth and change.

The brothers' behalah was devastating—but it was also the necessary prelude to teshuvah. The human ego, R. Goldvicht notes, is fierce in its resistance. It will persist unto destruction rather than acknowledge error. Only the power of genuine bushah—shame that penetrates to the soul's core—can overcome the ego's defenses. And embedded within bushah lies the capacity to return, to rebuild, to transform.

Two Words in an Age of Endless Words

There is, perhaps, a contemporary dimension to this teaching that deserves reflection.

We live in an era when words travel farther, faster, and with more permanent consequence than at any point in human history. The brothers stood before Joseph, and their bushah was witnessed by a handful of people in a single room. Today, humiliation can be global and instantaneous—and it never fully disappears.

The Midrash marveled that Joseph, the youngest of the tribes, could reduce his brothers to silence with five words. In our age, even the smallest and most anonymous among us can wield that power. A single post, a brief comment, a few keystrokes—and someone's reputation, livelihood, or sense of self can be shattered before an audience of millions.

As Will Storr documents in his book The Status Game, "Today, even seemingly innocuous comments on social media can lead to a group coalescing in screeching outrage.." He notes further that "those who play in these mobs are a minority of a minority, and yet too often their commanding voice on social media becomes a commanding voice in our democracies... they achieve this outsized status partly by the spreading of dread. Their gossip, accusation, and merciless fury is designed to weave the illusion of consensus... and bully us."

The brothers' bushah was proportionate—it emerged from genuine wrongdoing confronted by undeniable truth. But the mechanisms of public

shaming in our era often bear no such proportion. The humiliation inflicted may vastly exceed any actual offense; the mob pronounces judgment without knowledge, without nuance, without the possibility of appeal. And unlike the brothers, who could weep together with Joseph and begin the process of repair, those subjected to online destruction often find no path back. The shame is permanent, searchable, endlessly retrievable.

This places upon us a responsibility to recognize the terrifying power now concentrated in ordinary hands. If five words from Joseph—words grounded in truth, spoken face to face, in a context where reconciliation remained possible—could produce such devastation, how much more cautious must we be with words that reach strangers, that persist forever, that allow no response and offer no path to teshuvah? The capacity to inflict bushah is no longer reserved for the powerful. It belongs to anyone with a keyboard. And with that democratization of destructive capacity comes an awesome weight of responsibility.

And yet, even as this reality prohibits us from wielding these tools recklessly, it also presents us with an extraordinary opportunity. For all of the dimensions of mussar explored above remain true in our age—and may be more readily accessible than ever before. The digital world is itself an olam hafuch, where hierarchies are constantly inverted, where the mighty fall and the obscure rise with dizzying speed. The mirror of inconsistency that the Beit HaLevi described—the exposure of our blind spots when our own arguments are turned against us—plays out daily in the public square, as old statements resurface to contradict new postures. The flawed cheshbonot that led the brothers astray find their parallels in the confident calculations that so often collapse before the unfolding of events. And the recognition that we may have misjudged not merely a person but an entire approach to life—that too confronts us regularly, if we have eyes to see.

We can recognize what this reality creates and receive all of these lessons. Every one of the teachings examined here—the inverted world, the power of negiah, the danger of flawed reasoning, the possibility of having lived for years inside a mistake, the discovery that our frameworks may be inadequate to reality—can serve as a mirror for self-examination. The digital age has not changed the human condition; it has only accelerated and amplified it. The tochachahthat once came rarely and privately now arrives constantly and publicly. We can let it harden us, or we can let it teach us.

Joseph's embrace can be our model. He wept with his brothers. He offered a framework for moving forward. He distinguished between the recognition of wrongdoing and the crushing of the human spirit. The goal of rebuke is growth, not devastation, and perspective can come from the most unlikely of places. If we approach the environment of our age with that understanding, we may yet find that even in a world of endless, indelible, inflammatory, unfair words, sparks of truth can be found that shine a light amid the heat; and the wise can use them to find their way back, and a path forward.

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from**: Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Dec 25, 2025, 12:18 AM
subject: Rav Frand - **Two Sets of Wagons Were Sent for Yaakov: One From Pharaoh and One From Yosef**

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayigash

Two Sets of Wagons Were Sent for Yaakov: One From Pharaoh and One From Yosef

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1362 – Flying East to West-West to East on a Fast Day-When Can You Break Your Fast? Good Shabbos!

We are all familiar with the dramatic story of Yosef finally revealing his true identity to his brothers. He then tells Pharaoh that these men are his brothers. The pasuk says, "Pharaoh said to Yosef: Say to your brothers, 'Do this: Load up your animals and go, enter into the land of Canaan.'" (Bereshis 45:17). Pharaoh promises Yosef's family first class accommodations in Mitzrayim. Pharaoh saw what Yosef had done for the country. Pharaoh saw what a smart man Yosef was. Due to Yosef's wise plan, Pharaoh was now sitting on a boatload of money because everyone had to come to Mitzrayim to buy food during the years of famine. Pharaoh figured that he wanted to keep Yosef happy and he also figured that if Yosef is so smart, he could only imagine what Yosef's father was like: Pharaoh wanted Yosef's father to come to Mitzrayim and be comfortable. "And take your father and your households and come to me. And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the choicest of the land. And you are commanded to say, 'Do this: Take for yourselves from the land of Egypt wagons for your small children and for your wives. Transport your father and come. And let your eyes not take pity on your vessels, for the best of the entire land of Egypt – it is yours.'" (Bereshis 45:18-20).

Yosef followed Pharaoh's instructions and gave the brothers wagons to bring their father and the rest of the family down to Mitzrayim. The brothers came back to Canaan and announced to their father "Yosef is still alive and he rules over the entire land of Mitzrayim." Initially, Yaakov could not believe it. They repeated to him the whole story – "and he saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him." At that point his spirit was rejuvenated.

Rashi (45:27) famously comments that the wagons were a signal to Yaakov regarding the Torah subject that he and Yosef had been learning immediately before their separation. They were learning the sugya of eglah arufah (the decapitated calf). The Hebrew word for wagon (agalah) is cognate to the word for calf (eglah) and Yaakov grasped the message that Yosef was sending.

We can ask three questions about this Rashi.

The first question is: Rashi emphasizes that these were the wagons that Yosef sent, not the wagons that Pharaoh sent. This seems to contradict the straightforward reading of the earlier pesukim, which clearly state that these were wagons that Pharaoh sent.

A second question is: What was so special about the wagons that caused Yaakov's spirit to suddenly be rejuvenated?

A third question is: It is quite a stretch to claim that upon seeing the wagons, Yaakov recalled the fact that he and Yosef were learning the parsha of eglah arufah when they were last together. This is not a gezeirah shava. There is no immediate word association between agalah and eglah that would prompt Yaakov to make a connection with the Torah subject that he had learned many years earlier with his favorite son.

I saw an essay from Rabbi Zev Leff, the Rav of Moshav Matisyahu in Eretz Yisrael, which addresses this Rashi:

As we mentioned, Pharaoh wanted Yaakov to come down to Mitzrayim in the worst way. Pharaoh's method to get Yaakov down to Mitzrayim was to tell him "Don't worry about anything. Let your mind not take pity on the vessels you will have to leave back in Canaan. You need not bring anything with you. We will provide you with all your needs here. You will have the best of everything in Mitzrayim." That was the enticement – in Pharaoh's mind, to get Yaakov to agree to come.

However, Yosef knew that if Yaakov Avinu felt he could not transport Eretz Canaan with him to Mitzrayim, he would never come. Yaakov was worried about one thing and that was the assimilation of this family. If Yaakov would be coming to Mitzrayim without his clothes, without his shtreimel, without his kapota, and without his bookcases full of sefarim – without all of that, and he would come to a brand-new place in Mitzrayim with an Egyptian wardrobe and everything that was the "best of Egyptian culture" – Yaakov would refuse to come.

Therefore, Pharaoh only sent three or four wagons – just enough to carry the people. Pharoah's plan was that there was no need to pack suitcases with clothes or furniture or household belongings. We will outfit you with everything you need, with the best that Mitzrayim has to offer. The wise Yosef realized that this was not the way to bring his father down to Mitzrayim. Therefore, Yosef sent many more agalos – to carry all the

furniture and possessions that Yaakov had acquired in Canaan. Yaakov needed many wagons to take every stitch of clothing, every sefer, every Chanukah menorah, every Shabbos candlestick, the silver esrog box etc., etc., etc. Yaakov didn't want to start afresh. He wanted to recreate his Eretz Canaan experience in Mitzrayim.

The questions we raised above can be answered by hypothesizing that there were two sets of wagons. There were the wagons that were sent by Pharaoh (to bring the wives and children) and then there was a totally different set of wagons that were sent by Yosef to bring all of Yaakov's possessions. That is why Rashi emphasizes "The wagons that Yosef sent."

Now we understand the Medrash which Rashi brings, that Yaakov sees the wagon and immediately associates them with the sugya of eglah arufah that they had last been learning. Yaakov was rejuvenated by the thought "My son Yosef has been away from me for so long and yet he is still worried about assimilation and that is why he sent those extra wagons." The brothers had told Yaakov that Pharaoh sent wagons for the people and Yosef sent wagons for the possessions. Yaakov immediately understood that Yosef, too, was still concerned about assimilation, and appreciated the importance of bringing down all of the family's precious possessions, representing their life-style in Eretz Canaan.

Finally, we can understand the connection to the parsha of eglah arufah. It was not merely a play on words between agalah and eglah. It is much deeper than that.

What is the yesod (underlying concept) of the parsha of eglah arufah? Someone finds a dead body. The elders of the closest city need to come and say "Our hands did not spill this blood and our eyes have not seen." In other words, "We are not responsible for this murder." The Gemara (Sota 38b) explains that this means that they gave the person provisions before sending him on his way and they escorted him part of the way.

What is the distance requirement for escorting a departing visitor? The answer is four amos (which is no more than eight feet, at most). How does escorting a person for eight feet grant him any type of security? The Maharal explains how this makes him secure. The fact that they escorted him four amos demonstrates to him that "You are still one of us. You are not on your own. You are still part of our community." In a short while the person will be a mile down the road or even ten miles down the road, but he is still bound to the community who escorted him at the beginning of his travels. That knowledge – that someone can be physically located at point "X" and yet really be connected to point "Y" is all the chizuk that a person needs. This chizuk gives the person the fortitude to fight off any danger than confronts him on the road because he knows "I am still part of a community."

This is the yesod of eglah arufah and it is the yesod of the mitzvah of levaya (escorting). Yosef was sending the message to Yaakov Avinu: You may be in Mitzrayim but you can still be attached to Eretz Canaan. By bringing your possessions down to Mitzrayim, you can recreate your current experience. Levaya teaches us that geography is not destiny. You can be in a different place and all alone, but still be tied to the original place.

That is what Yaakov grasped that Yosef was trying to tell him: "Daddy, don't be afraid. You will come down to Mitzrayim but we won't get assimilated. Do you know why? It is because you will be able to recreate Canaan in Mitzrayim. You will be able to do that because you will have your sefarim and you will have your clothes." (They did not change their names and they did not change their dress.)

These were the extra wagons that Yosef sent, and that is why Yaakov's spirit was rejuvenated.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511 Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 http://www.torah.org/

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Shoulder of Tears

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The Torah describes the stirring moment when Ya'akov reunites with his long-lost son Yosef. Few scenes in the Torah evoke such quiet pain. After twenty years of longing and uncertainty, an aging father and the son who has risen to power in Egypt meet again. They draw close, embrace, and rest on one another's shoulders.

When the Torah describes the tears in that embrace, it states that one of them cried—as if the other did not. Chazal address this irregular phrasing: Yosef wept on his father's shoulder, but Ya'akov did not. Overwhelmed by emotion, Ya'akov directed that moment toward Shema, reciting the opening verse and channeling his joy into Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim.

There are moments when emotion gathers—joy, relief, fear, or gratitude—and a religious personality seeks to direct that inner tide toward expression rather than be carried away by it. Ya'akov, overwhelmed by the return of a son he had assumed dead, channels his feelings into worship. Though the formal verse of Shema would only be inscribed later in Torah, Ya'akov sensed its truth centuries earlier.

This scene leaves us with a resonant image: a human being directing emotion toward steady relationship with Hashem. In that moment, Ya'akov places his awareness of Hashem before his feelings for Yosef.

Torah or Tears

This portrait raises a question. What of Yosef ? Are we to imagine that, because he was not reciting Shema but simply weeping on his father's shoulder, he stands on lesser spiritual ground? If the ideal response is embodied in Ya'akov's Shema, does Yosef somehow fall short?

If Yosef did not recite Shema, his response is no less legitimate. Ya'akov turns the moment into ritual, but Yosef simply weeps on his father's shoulder. He has lived for two decades without a father's warm shoulder and without the reassurance that only a father can provide. He allows himself to feel love and longing directly rather than translate them into Shema. The Torah preserves his tears, and his response carries integrity.This scene contains two legitimate layers. It validates two pathways for navigating an emotionally charged encounter. One channels feeling through ritual—in this case, reciting Shema. The other allows emotion to remain human and unfiltered—the love of a son reclaiming a father. Ya'akov recites Shema. Yosef cries. Each response holds integrity.

By presenting these responses side by side, the Torah affirms that healthy relationships and the emotions they awaken are part of religious life. The capacities that animate our relationships were planted in us by Hashem. Bonds between parent and child—longing, reunion, and restored closeness—are fashioned by the divine will. When those emotions surface honestly, they, too, give expression to what Hashem placed within human experience.

Standing Alone, Standing Together

This scene raises a religious question. What room do we make for relationships within a life of avodat Hashem? How often do we stand before Hashem as solitary individuals—engaged in ritual, studying Torah, fulfilling obligation—and how much time and energy do we devote to building relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and the people who populate our days?

Religion often asks us to transcend surroundings and stand before Hashem in solitary submission. The gemara in Eiruvin even advances a jarring image: a person seeking mastery in Torah should be as indifferent to spouse and children as a raven to its young. Even if we treat that line as hyperbole—and some did not—it points to a sober truth: moments of ascent may demand a temporary sacrifice of affectionate bonds. Relationships, even with family, do not exhaust religious life. In the end, religion demands those silent moments in which we stand before Hashem alone.

At the same time, we pour energy into human attachment—shaping families and friendships that occupy large parts of our emotional lives. This, too, is not peripheral to avodat Hashem. Our tradition surrounds relationships with safeguards—prohibitions against deceit, humiliation, exploitation, or injury.

But the legal boundaries only hint at something deeper. We cultivate relationships not merely to avoid sin, but because loyalty, love, empathy, and responsibility enlarge the religious self. Standing alone before Hashem is indispensable—but so is the labor of standing with one another.

Why are relationships integral to religious experience? Why should we pour time, attention, and emotional resource into bonds that seem to siphon energy away from ritual, study, and inward ascent? Why should human attachment be counted among the labors of avodat Hashem?

The First Classroom

Firstly, because the bonds we build with others become templates for the relationship we hope to cultivate with Hashem. One might expect Sefer Bereishit to unfold as a treatise of theology, yet explicit theology is almost absent. We receive no full account of creation and no systematic defense of monotheism. Instead, the narrative lingers over the strains of family—competing wives, rival siblings, succession anxiety, honor, betrayal, and protection.

The implication is clear: the family is our first school of avodat Hashem. The traits we refine in human attachment—honesty, trust, devotion, loyalty, selflessness—are the traits we later bring to our encounter with Hashem. When we treat relationships as religious labor, we turn human connection into preparation for standing before Hashem.

Without Gaps

Secondly, we must frame relationships as part of religion so that our inner world does not become bifurcated. Bifurcation occurs when we act religious in select settings yet feel spiritually neutral across much of life. The result is a choppy interior landscape—brief peaks of piety interrupted by hollowness. Ideally, avodat Hashem is holistic. We stand before Hashem in every setting, though our awareness is expressed differently across the varied frames of experience. The goal is not unending ritual, but steady consciousness.If we cannot breathe avodat Hashem meaning into relationships, then portions of life fall outside our religious horizon. If we treat relationship-building merely as avoiding harm, rather than as investment, we leave countless hours untouched by religious purpose—and for long stretches we are nowhere near avodat Hashem.

Emotional Grounding

Finally, relationship-building is crucial to religion because religious meaning rests on emotional stability. If the inner structure of a person is brittle, religious achievement cannot endure; it bends and snaps under pressure. Relationships steady the inner life. They are harder to build in the modern world, yet more necessary than ever in an age of strain and anxiety.

The strain on relationships begins with practical pressures. The pace of contemporary living has become relentless, and screens have become ubiquitous. We once had time for conversation and the dignity of eye contact. Now the glare of devices absorbs attention, and the hurry of our days leaves little space to breathe into relationships.

A second pressure is ideological. The rise of individualism places strain on family life. Families demand compromise rather than constant self-assertion, and that runs against the cultural mood. And the erosion of boundaries compounds the problem. The workplace follows us into our homes and leaks into private spaces. We no longer work nine to five; the thin line between vocation and home makes sustaining relationships difficult.

Yosef ’s tears remind us that emotional health and human attachment are not distractions from avodat Hashem but part of its hidden architecture. His tears teach that standing before Hashem sometimes begins with standing alongside those we love.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>
date: Dec 25, 2025, 4:06 PM
subject: Tidbits • Parashas Vayigash 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l Parashas Vayigash • December 27th • 7 Teves 5786

This Tuesday, December 30th, is the fast of Asarah B’Teves. Asarah B'Teves was the tragic day on which Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Yerushalayim.

During Chazaras HaShatz of Shacharis, only the Shaliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu. Chazaras HaShatz is followed by Selichos, Avinu Malkeinu, Tachanun, and Krias Hatorah. Mincha includes Krias Hatorah followed by the Haftarah of a fast day (Yeshayah 55:6-56:8). Those fasting add Aneisnu in Shemoneh Esrei. Nusach Ashkenaz says Sim Shalom in place of Shalom Rav. The Shaliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu and Bircas Kohanim in Chazaras HaShatz. Avinu Malkeinu is recited.

The Abudraham explains that this fast would be observed even on a Friday because the Pasuk’s wording regarding Asarah B’Teves, “B’etzem Hayom Hazeh” (Yechezkel 24:2): On this very day, indicates it must be observed on this day specifically and is not postponed. He adds that this fast would technically be observed even on Shabbos itself - although this will never occur based on our current calendars.

What is the significance of Asarah B’Teves? The B’nei Yissaschar explains that Aschalta D’Paranusa Adifa, the onset of tragedy, is most significant, and that Asarah B’Teves was the beginning of the siege which led to the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and so many other subsequent tragedies. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, vol. 2, Vayikra, Drush 7 Adar) explains that on this date the Beis Din Shel Maalah decreed the destruction. Furthermore, the Chasam Sofer states that any generation that does not merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash is considered as if it was destroyed in its days. If so, each year on this date the Beis Din Shel Maalah reconvenes regarding the status of the generation and their worthiness for the Beis Hamikdash’s rebuilding.

After Chanukah, used wicks, cups and oil should be disposed of in a respectful manner (i.e. by placing them in a plastic bag before disposing of them). Some have the minhag to burn the wicks on the last day of Chanukah; others burn them at Bi’ur Chametz before Pesach.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana (in case of necessity) is Friday night, January 2nd.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 104 • Yerushalmi: Succah 8 • Mishnah Yomis: Bechoros 8:5-6. Siyum next Friday, Mazal Tov! Arachin begins next • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 13a-15a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 36:27-37:9

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn’t speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

The fast day of Asarah B’Teves is this Tuesday, December 30th.

VAYIGASH: Yehudah protests Yosef’s persecution of the shevatim • Yosef reveals his identity • Yosef instructs the family to settle in Goshen • Yosef sends wagons with provisions for the brothers' journey to Canaan • Yosef gives the brothers gifts • Yaakov is informed that Yosef is alive • The members of Yaakov’s family descending to Egypt are listed; they number 70 altogether • Yehudah travels ahead to open a Yeshivah • Yosef and Yaakov’s reunion • Yosef instructs his brothers how to speak with Pharaoh • Yaakov meets with and blesses Pharaoh • At the beginning of the years of hunger, the Egyptians can no longer afford food • Pharaoh supports the priests • The Egyptians seek to sell themselves and their property to Yosef and Pharaoh.

Haftarah: The Parashah relates the episode of the brothers’ reunion in Mitzrayim after years of separation. Yechezkel (37:15-28) relates the prophecy that the Shevatim will one day join with true unity under the Melech HaMashiach.

Parashas Vayigash: 106 Pesukim • No Mitzvos Listed

"וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף"

“And he saw the wagons which Yosef sent” (Bereishis 45:27)

Chazal explain that Yaakov was rejuvenated when he saw the wagons his son Yosef sent, as they symbolized the last Torah topic they had studied together: Eglah Arufah. What was this message which Yosef was sending to his father?

Rav Uren Reich shlit”a answers: Chazal say that when Yosef set out to find his brothers, his father began escorting him out. Yosef protested, “I do not require this escort, as I am not a guest, but rather a member of the household.” Yaakov responded that a lone traveler may face dangerous

circumstances along the way. Escorting a departing traveler even just a short distance provides a symbolic accompaniment and a sense that he is not alone, giving him confidence to persevere on his journey. Thus, it was important that he escort Yosef as well.

This discussion of Yaakov and Yosef regarding escorting guests was thus related to the laws of Eglah Arufah, which pertains to properly escorting a departing traveler. By sending the wagons, Yosef hinted to his father that he was, in fact, alive and well, both physically and spiritually. For despite their geographical distance, he constantly felt his father's presence, as indeed this feeling of never being alone enabled him to withstand the spiritual challenges he faced over the many lonely years in a land devoid of spirituality.

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

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from**: Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
date: Dec 25, 2025, 1:21 AM
subject**: Rav Kook on VaYigash**: **The Reunion of Joseph and Judah**

VaYigash: The Reunion of Joseph and Judah

We all have limited amounts of time and energy and must learn how to apportion these resources wisely. In particular, we need to find a balance between activities that are directed inwardly, for our own personal development, and those directed outwardly, for the benefit of others. As Hillel taught, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I?" (Avot 1:14). Both areas are crucial. The difficulty lies in deciding how much of our time and resources should be dedicated to inner growth, and how much for reaching out to others.

The nation as a whole also needs to juggle these two competing spheres. The search for the correct balance was played out in the dispute between Joseph and his brothers. Their struggle corresponded to two different paths within the Jewish people — one stressing the nation's own spiritual development, and the other emphasizing Israel's universal responsibility and influence.

Eidut and Torah

The Jewish people are crowned with two qualities, Eidut (testimony) and Torah, as it says: "[God] established testimony in Jacob; He set down Torah in Israel" (Psalms 78:5). What are these two qualities?

The essence of Eidut is to accurately report facts as they occurred. Nothing may be added or altered when giving testimony. Torah study, on the other hand, involves chiddush — creative and innovative thought.

This dichotomy of Eidut and Torah is the root of the conflict between Jacob's sons. Joseph stressed the concept of Eidut, as it says, "a testimony (eidut) for Joseph" (Psalms 81:6). The aspect of Eidut reflects Joseph's desire to interact with the nations and expose them to the authentic message of monotheism and morality.

On the other hand, the other brothers — and especially Judah, their leader — emphasized the Torah and the special holiness of the Jewish people. They sought to develop and cultivate the unique heritage of Israel. Thus it was Judah whom Jacob picked to establish an academy of Torah study in Goshen.

Furthermore, the Midrash credits Judah with burning the wagons that Pharaoh sent to bring Jacob's family to Egypt. Judah ordered that the wagons be destroyed when he saw that they were engraved with idolatrous symbols (Breishit Rabbah 94:3). This act, introducing the law of destroying idols with fire [later codified in Deut. 7:25], demonstrated Judah's focus on the aspects of purity and innovation in Torah.

The Message of Shema

Joseph and Judah, and their paths of Eidut and Torah, were united when Jacob brought his family down to Joseph in Egypt. The Sages noted a peculiar incident that took place during the family reunion. The Torah relates that Joseph cried on his father's neck, but is silent regarding Jacob's actions at this emotional meeting. What was Jacob doing? According to the Midrash, he was busy reciting the Shema.

What was the significance of the Shema at that particular time?

The Shema's message is, of course, one of unity. "Listen, Israel: God is our Lord; God is one" (Deut. 6:4). These two phrases refer to two levels (or stages) of God's unity in the world. The first level is "God is our Lord." This is God's unity as it is currently revealed in the world, a world created according to the blueprint of Torah, and through which we can recognize the greatness of the Creator. The second, higher level is "God is one." This is God's unity as it will be revealed in the future, a unity that will encompass the entire universe.

Judah represents the first level of God's unity, a unity manifested through the Torah and the special role of the Jewish people. Joseph, on the other hand, sought to sanctify God's Name among the nations and bring knowledge of one Creator to the entire world. He represents the second level, the universal unity of God. Jacob's recitation of the Shema thus encapsulated the combined visions of both Judah and Joseph.

The Scales of the Leviathan

The two paths within Jacob's family — Judah's path of particularity and Joseph's path of universality — split when Joseph was sold as a slave. The brothers' reconciliation and the unification of these two paths took place in Vayigash, when Judah drew near to his brother Joseph (Gen. 44:18).

The Midrash chose a curious verse to describe the coming together of Joseph and his brothers. The word vayigash ("and he drew near") also appears in Job's description of the scales of the giant Leviathan: "One is so near (yig'shu) to the other, that no air can enter between them" (Job 41:8).

What do the Leviathan's scales have to do with the reunification of Jacob's family?

According to the Sages, this fearsome sea creature belongs in a category of its own. All living creatures have both males and females, except the Leviathan (Baba Batra 74b). In other words, while all other creatures reflect a quality of duality and fracture that exists in our imperfect world, the Leviathan retains something of the universe's original unity. Thus the Talmud describes the Leviathan as being akalton — twisting around and encompassing the entire world (Rashi ad loc). The Zohar (2:179a) teaches that "its tail is placed in its mouth." In other words, this wondrous creature has neither beginning nor end. Undetected, it surrounds and unites the entire world. This hidden unity will be revealed in the future, when the righteous tzaddikim will feast on the Leviathan (Baba Batra 74b).

The future will reveal the underlying oneness of the universe, the ideal balance of Torah and Eidut, of Judah and Joseph, of our inwardly and outwardly directed efforts, of the particular and the universal. The two paths will be united like the scales of the Leviathan, magnificently arranged "one so near to the other that no air can enter between them."

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, vol. 10 (1930))

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from: **TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org>
date: Dec 24, 2025, 8:37 PM
subject: Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Hashem's Descent

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky
Hashem's Descent

As Yaakov is on the verge of leaving for Egypt, he experiences a prophetic dream. Hashem tells him, "Don't be scared of going down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will come up with you as well". Rashi explains that the promise to 'come up with him again', refers to the fact that Yaakov's body will return to Eretz Yisrael for burial. We can also understand it to mean that all of Israel will at some point get out of Egypt and come back to Eretz Yisrael. But the first half of the passuk, i.e. that Hashem will 'descend' into Egypt with him, is much less clearly understood.

The medrash (Shemos 15:16; 23:5) teaches us that Hashem "descended with us" into every exile that we have been cast into. Thus, in our parsha it says, "I will go down with you". Similarly, the medrash quotes pessukim telling us that this is true in Babylon, as well as in the so-called Greek exile, and so too when Edom exiled us. The medrash adds that in each one of these exiles we

were found to be “whole”, meaning, dedicated to Hashem and keeping our faith. But in what sense does it mean that Hashem “comes down with us” into exile? The term used to describe Hashem in the medrash is Shechina which means the Divine presence. That is almost by definition contradictory. For the “place” for the Divine presence is in Eretz Yisrael, more specifically, in the Beis Hamikdash. It is there that the presence was felt. Galus, by its very definition, is a period of separation from Hashem, and that of not really being able to sense him. The Hashem’s very description of galus periods is, “on that day [that Klal Yisroel does wrong], I will hide my face from them” (Devarim 31:16). The Torah then states it with a double emphasis (ibid 18), meaning a totality of obfuscation. So how has Hashem “been in exile” with us, when the core definition of exile is almost the exact opposite? The divine presence marks the sense that Hashem is there with us, and it is He who is endowing us with good, for He is pleased with us. We might call it a feedback mechanism, where Hashem lets us know, and reflects back to us, how satisfied he is with our conduct.

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of galus. A person who is shallow may describe the situation of galus as being one that Hashem has abandoned us. This means that I believe we deserve it and therefore Hashem has cast us off. A perspective like that really cuts us off from Hashem.

But there is a second perspective in the same situation. That is the perspective that Hashem has deemed the only way possible for us to rectify what we've done wrong is through suffering, remorse, and coming to the recognition of what is true and right. This means that Hashem has not cast us off but has put us in a situation where we taste the fruits of our wrongdoings, and rethink our actions. This means that we sense Hashem in the darkness and pain and suffering. We may not know exactly what and why ,but we sense that we are going through a cleansing process. While it is painful and difficult and many times confusing when we go through a period like that, it is a world of difference than thinking we have been cast off. The first perspective certainly induces pain and remorse, but if we feel we have been abandoned, it breeds terror and despair. It means that there's nothing really to hope for, and the pain and suffering are pointless.

Dovid Hamellech said, “even if I go in the valley of death I fear not, for you are with me” (Tehillim 23:4). This does not mean that Hashem will necessarily save me - He may or may not - but whatever will come I'm not scared of it, because I know that it has meaning and a purpose. It is like the difference between a child in a hospital who is not only in pain, but frightened, bewildered and terrorized by everything around him, for he does not understand it. The adult may be in pain and apprehensive, but he knows and understands that there is a purpose and hope in the treatment at the hospital. That same child when he is holding on to his father's hand in the hospital, is still in pain and frightened, but he's not terrorized. He feels his father holding on to him and that there must be a rhyme and reason for what's happening; some sort of purpose.

Rav Hutner zt”l, in his letters, describes two friends of his: the first one said, “whenever I knock upstairs, there is no one home”. I got to know this bocher better, and he was a superficial person. On the other hand, the second one said, “whenever I knock upstairs, they hide from me”. I got to know this bocher better, and I found him to be a person of great depth.

Thus, Hashem is telling Yaakov that even when there will be times of galus, His Divine presence will be there. The person who has spiritual sensitivity will detect and feel Hashem in the very suffering and pain as well. It is appropriate, most appropriate, to do what we can to better ourselves and be relieved of our suffering. But still, the suffering itself is understood as being there to change us, to move us to do what's good for us.

This is an important understanding as we contemplate the difficulties that Klal Yisrael is enduring. Usually, the focus is on bitachon and hope for the ending of the sufferings. That certainly is worthy, most worthy, to pray for. But the more fundamental understanding is that we have not been cast off by G-d. They are not random acts of meaningless antisemitism or violence. Rather it is Hashem pushing us, prodding us, and awakening us to change into the people we need to be, so that Hashem can once again embrace us openly. When that happens, iy”H the second half of the passuk will also be fulfilled: Hashem will go up with us again to Eretz Yisrael.

From: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> Rabbi Kaganoff's Sunday night shiur <rabbi-kaganoffs-sunday-night-shiur@googlegroups.com>, date: Dec 25, 2025, 8:21 AM subject: Bikur Cholim **Bikur Cholim** By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: How many mitzvos? Which mitzvos does one fulfill when performing bikur cholim?

Question #2: Only visiting? Is the mitzvah fulfilled simply by visiting the sick?

Question #3: How often? How many times a day can I perform bikur cholim?

Question #4: Focus! Do I need to focus on the fact that I am performing a mitzvah in order to fulfill it?

Forwarded

The Gemara (Nedarim 39b) cites a reference to the mitzvah of bikur cholim in parshas Korach. After realizing the gravity of Korach's rebellion against belief in Hashem, Moshe Rabbeinu declared to the Benei Yisrael: “If these (Korach and his cohorts) will die like all men do, and what happens to all other men will happen to them, then Hashem did not send me. However, if Hashem will produce a new creation and the earth will open its mouth, swallowing them and all that is theirs, such that they plummet alive into the grave, you will know for certain that these men have angered Hashem” (Bamidbar 16:29- 30). Rava explains: “Most men take ill and are bedridden; they are then visited by people who check to see what needs to be attended to. If this happens to Korach and his party, people can say that Hashem did not send me.” The Gemara concludes that this is a Biblical hint to the mitzvah of bikur cholim. Another allusion to bikur cholim is at the beginning of parshas Vayeira (Bereishis 18:1), where it says that Hashem visited AvrahamAvinu. Rashi points out that this occurred on the third day after his bris milah was performed, and Hashem was fulfilling bikur cholim, visiting and providing care for the ill. Yet another reference to the mitzvah of bikur cholim is in parshas Tazria (Vayikra 13:45) where the Torah tells us that the metzora calls out to whoever can hear him that he is tamei. Chazal explain that this is so that they should daven for his swift and complete recovery (Shabbos 67a; Mo'eid Katan 5a; Sotah 32b; Chullin 78a; Niddah 66a). We will soon see the important role of prayer in the mitzvah of bikur cholim.

Praying for good health The Gemara (Shabbos 32a) notes, “A person should always pray that he not become ill, because once he gets ill, he is told, ‘find merits on the basis of which you will be healed.'” Other Biblical sources are quoted to demonstrate the mitzvah of bikur cholim, although it is disputed among the rishonim whether the specific mitzvah of bikur cholim is min 2 haTorah or not. It is important to note that all halachic authorities agree that observing bikur cholim properly fulfills several mitzvos min haTorah, including ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocha, love your fellowman as yourself (Vayikra 19:18) and vehalachta bi'derachav, acting in the ways of Hashem (Devarim 28:9). It could also easily fit within the heading of other mitzvos (Shu”t Sho'el Umeishiv 3:244), such as lo sa'amod al dam rei'echa, do not stand by idly when someone is endangered. The dispute among the rishonim and ge'onim is whether there is a specific mitzvah of bikur cholim among the count of the 613 mitzvos (opinion of the Behag), or whether it is an aspect of performing chesed and developing our character (Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 14:1). The Gemara (Sotah 14a) teaches that we have a mitzvah to follow in Hashem's ways, and that this mitzvah includes the requirement to take care of the needs of the ill. “Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said, ‘How are we to understand the words of the Torah: “You should follow Hashem, your G-d (Devarim 13:5).” How is it possible for a human being to follow the Holy One, blessed is He, when the verse states that “Hashem, your G-d, is a consuming fire?” (Devarim 4:24; 9:3) Rather, it means that we are to emulate Hashem's attributes – just as he dresses the unclothed… takes care of the sick… consoles the mourners and buries the dead, so should we.'”

Similarly, the Torah teaches “You must clarify to them [your children] the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the pathways in which they are to walk and the deeds that they are to perform” (Shemos 18:20), which the Gemara (Bava Kama 100a) explains includes gemillas chesed, bikur cholim and other, similar, acts of kindness.

What does the word bikur mean? Although the word “bikur” means “visit” in modern Hebrew, the original meaning of “bikur” is “examine” or “check.” Chazal refer to bikur korban, which does not mean to see how the animal awaiting hakravah is feeling or to check its blood pressure, but to check to see that it has no blemish (Pesachim 96a). The primary responsibility of the mitzvah of bikur cholim is to check and see what the ill person needs and to do whatever one can to meet those needs (Toras Ha'adam). Since we rule that mitzvos tzerichos kavanah, i.e., to fulfill a mitzvah requires being cognizant of that fact, any medical professional gains much merit by being aware of this every day and all day. Thus, a physician, nurse, nurse's aide, or medical clown performs the mitzvah of bikur cholim all day long. If they regularly have in mind that they are fulfilling what Hashem wants us to do, they are rewarded for each and every time that they inquire about the ill and assist in their care. However, one who performs the same activities while looking at it exclusively as a job, but not as an opportunity to imitate Hashem's wondrous ways, misses the opportunity to receive all this reward. In addition, constantly recognizing that I am acting like Hashem and fulfilling His mitzvos makes a tremendous impression on one's neshamah. A pharmacist, who may not see the patients, should still begin the day by remembering that he is performing two mitzvos, one of emulating Hashem, and the other of bikur [3] cholim, by making sure that the patients receive their proper pharmaceutical care. It would seem to me that, should a medical professional think they might forget to have this in mind all day, should express before beginning their day's work, “I am declaring that all the acts of chesed I do today should fulfill the Torah's mitzvos.”

Ramban The earliest, most authoritative, and most extensive work we have on the topic of bikur cholim, pikuach nefesh, aveilus and related topics is the Toras Ha'adam, authored by the Ramban. When the Tur (Yoreh Deah Chapter 335) introduces the laws of bikur cholim, he goes out of his way to laud the Ramban's work as his primary source. It is also important to note that the Ramban quotes frequently from halachic sources of Chazal that we no longer have, particularly from texts of Meseches Semachos that are now missing in our versions of this early work. (This fact is noted by the Gra and the Chiddushei Hagahos.) There is also a fascinating bibliographic detail about the Toras Ha'adam. It was published twice in the sixteenth century (1519 in Constantinople and 1595 in Venice) and then not again until the mid-nineteenth century!

Praying for the ill and attending to their needs Many people err to think that the mitzvah of bikur cholim is simply to visit the ill and cheer them up, but do not realize that the mitzvah includes attending to the ill person's needs and praying on their behalf. The Toras Ha'adam writes, “It is a great mitzvah to visit the ill, since this causes the visitor to pray on the sick person's behalf, which revitalizes him. Furthermore, since the visitor sees the ill person, the visitor checks to see what the ill person needs” (also see Beis Yosef, Yoreh Deah 335). We see that praying for the ill is an even greater part of the mitzvah than attending to his needs, since he first mentions praying and then refers to attending to the other needs as “furthermore.” When praying for someone ill, always include a request that he get well together with the rest of the Jewish ill (Shabbos 12b). This helps the prayer be accepted, since the merit of the public is rallied (Rashi). The many tefillah and tehillim groups that daven for lists of ill people to get better are thereby fulfilling some of the aspects of bikur cholim, while still being able to attend to the needs of their own household. The authorities note that someone who visits a sick person without praying for his recovery has not fulfilled all the requirements of the mitzvah (Toras Ha'adam, based on Nedarim 40a; Rema, Yoreh Deah 335:4). Therefore, medical professionals should accustom themselves to pray for their sick patients in order to fulfill the complete mitzvah of bikur cholim. A simple method of accomplishing this is to discreetly recite a quick prayer, such as “Hashem, please heal this person among the other ill Jewish people, besoch she'ar cholei Yisroel,” as one leaves the person's room. A doctor in his office can recite the same quick prayer. I know a physician who makes lists of his patients' names and includes them in his daily davening. When wishing someone refuah sheleimah, what one is doing is offering a short prayer on behalf of the sick person. [4] When praying in the presence of the ill person, one can daven in any language, although when praying not in his presence, it is advisable to pray in loshon hakodesh (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 335:5 and Taz ibid.). Among several other lessons that the amora, Rav Pinchas ben Chama, derived from various passages in Tanach, we find the following: Whoever has an ill person in his household should go to a wise man (a Torah scholar) to ask that he pray for the ill person. Rav Pinchas derives this from a posuk in Mishlei (16:14), The anger of the King brings the angels of death, but the man who is wise can atone for this (Bava Basra 116a). This is the basis for asking tzaddikim to daven for the ill. The Rema quotes this in Yoreh Deah (335:10), mentioning that one should ask a great Torah scholar in the city to daven on behalf of the ill.

Small illness The Gemara (Yerushalmi, Brochos 4:4) implies that one should pray for the healing of even a relatively minor illness. To quote: “Every illness has the potential to become life threatening.”

Rasha The Sefer Chassidim discusses whether we should pray for a sick person who has separated himself from the Jewish community. He cites pesukim from which we see that one should not.

Aspects of visiting a choleh The visit is to benefit the choleh. In most circumstances, a visit should be short and not tiresome or uncomfortable for the ill person. Sometimes the sick person wants to rest, but feels obligated to converse with a visitor (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 335:4). In such cases, visitors think they are performing a mitzvah, while, unfortunately, they are actually doing the opposite. It is important to remember that the entire focus of bikur cholim is on the sick person's needs and not on the visitor's desire to feel noble or important. I remember my mother, a”h, having such guests during one of her hospital stays; although she kept hinting that she wanted to rest, they didn't catch on and stayed. They thought they were performing a kind deed, while, in reality, they were harming a sick person who desperately needed to rest. Always cheer up the choleh (Gesher Hachayim). This is included in attending to his emotional needs. The Ramban states that one of the aspects of bikur cholim is that the ill person appreciates spending time with his friends (Toras Ha'adam, page 17 in the Chavel edition). First three days The Gemara teaches that when a person becomes ill, for the first three days he should be visited only by family and close friends. After these days pass, others (the beraisa quoted states, “the more distant ones”) should also come to visit. (The Ramban understands that the “distant ones” come on the third day, and apparently explains the passage I will cite [5] shortly in the same way.) However, if it is clear that he is seriously ill, others may come in the first three days. In this context, the Gemara (Yerushalmi, Peah 3:7) tells us a somewhat amusing anecdote. Rabbi Yosi, one of the most frequently quoted amora'im in the Talmud Yerushalmi (some have the text that it was either Rabbi Asi or Rabbi Yonah), had fallen ill. On the fourth day of his being bedridden, Rabbi Chuna (some say it was Rav Huna [Penei Moshe; Chavel]), Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Chizkiyah came to visit him. Rabbi Yosi teased them for following the words of the beraisa too literally when it states that non-family members should wait until the fourth day to visit. Since you are my friends, you should have come right away (Toras Ha'adam; Penei Moshe) – friends are as good, sometimes far better than, family. The Reshas (the earliest commentary that we have on the Yerushalmi) understands the passage slightly differently: Rabbi Chuna, Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Chizkiyah were his disciples and should never consider themselves “the more distant ones,” regardless of whether or not they are close biological family. Thus, he was upset at their tarrying to come, notwithstanding that they were well intentioned.

Two visitors Many people have the custom to go with another person when they fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim. This practice is based on a statement of the She'iltos of Rav Acha'i Gaon (#93), one of the few full-length halachic works that has been passed down to us from the era of the ge'onim. Rav Acha'i simply states that when going to fulfill bikur cholim, he should not go alone but with someone else. In his commentary, Ha'amek She'eilah, to the She'iltos, the Netziv suggests a source for this ruling, and then comments that he has not found this opinion mentioned in any other work, from the earliest to the latest.

Don' visit The Gemara (Nedarim 41a) teaches that certain sick people should not be visited. Specifically, it says not to visit someone with: (1) A stomach ailment, because it is embarrassing for the patient who may need to excuse himself to the restroom for long periods of time. (2) Headaches, for whom talking to others or even a small amount of noise is disturbing. (3) Eye ailments (some say that those with eye ailments are also very sensitive to noise; others mention other reasons why they should not be visited). Obviously, the Gemara is teaching that one

should use common sense not to visit someone who would prefer to be left alone. In all of these cases where the ill person should not be disturbed, one fulfills bikur cholim by coming to the hospital or wherever the ill person is and inquiring and observing from outside the ill person's room what is needed (Toras Ha'adam). When a patient has visitors, the staff is more likely to provide better care since they see that other people care for the sick person. 6 Similarly, the Rema (Yoreh Deah 335:2) rules that one should not visit someone who thinks that you despise him, since the visit will have the opposite effect of what bikur cholim is meant to accomplish. In this, the Rema overrules an earlier authority who contended that such a person could visit a choleh.

Substandard care What should one do if he realizes that the ill person is receiving substandard care? In this instance, one should try to upgrade the choleh's care without agitating him in the process (Gesher Hachayim). However, the Gesher Hachayim points out that discussing directly with the sick person that he needs better care could easily be an aveirah, not a mitzvah, because this causes the sick person to become agitated and perhaps to lose hope, which is the opposite of what they need in order to get better. Since it is more likely that a poor person is receiving inadequate care or has no one to care for his needs, it is usually a greater mitzvah to visit a poor choleh than a wealthy one (Sefer Chassidim #361). Additionally, the poor person is more likely to be in financial distress because of his inability to work due to his illness (Ahavas Chesed 3:3). If two people need the same amount of care and one of them is a talmid chacham, it is preferable to attend to the talmid chacham first. If the talmid chacham is being attended to adequately and the other person is not, first take care of the other person (Sefer Chassidim). We have not yet finished the topic of bikur cholim, and we will return to it iy"H next week. Conclusion People who fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim are promised tremendous reward in Olam Haba, in addition to many rewards in this world (Shabbos 127a). In addition to all the obvious reasons for the mitzvah of bikur cholim, the Kli Yakar, in his commentary to Bamidbar (16:29), offers an additional reason for fulfilling bikur cholim: to benefit the visitor -- because it can serve him as a wakeup call. Seeing someone ill influences the visitor to think about the importance of doing teshuvah. This provides extra merit for the sick person, since he caused someone else to do teshuvah, even if it was unintentional. May Hashem send a speedy recovery to all the ill!

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Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Revivim

The primary role of the members of the Tribe of Levi is to lead the army spiritually, and disciplinarily * In addition to strengthening the spirit of the fighters before battle, the anointed priest for war was a partner in the decisions of the General Staff * In addition, the priests would carry the Ark that accompanied Israel in its wars * The role of the officers was to encourage the fighters, and punish deserters * The Hasmoneans continued Moshe Rabbeinu, who, after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Israel was in grave danger, called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!"

The Roles of Levi in the Army In the previous column we learned that members of the Tribe of Levi participated in Israel's wars to defend the people and the Land, as explained in Scripture, the words of our Sages, and the writings of early and later authorities. Therefore, when the soldiers from the Tribe of Levi were counted in the days of David, their number was no less than that of the soldiers from the other tribes (I Chronicles 12:24–39), and some of them even served as commanders of the army, such as Benaiah son of Yehoiada.

In this column we will continue to learn that according to the guidance of the Torah, the first role of the members of the Tribe of Levi was to lead the army spiritually, and disciplinarily. That is, initially they would select from the Levites all those suited for these roles, and afterward, the remaining Levites would enlist in the army like all of Israel. And as we learned last week, according to most halakhic authorities, in a mandatory war to save Israel ('milchemet mitzvah'), they were obligated to enlist, and according to some authorities, it was a mitzvah for them to enlist, but not an obligation.

The Anointed Priest for War In addition to the High Priest (Kohen Ha-Gadol) who was responsible for the service in the Temple, another priest was anointed with the anointing oil, who was called the 'Kohen Mashuach Milchama' ("Anointed Priest for War").His role was to encourage the warriors of Israel with words of faith, such as: "Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching battle against your enemies—let not your heart grow faint; do not fear, do not panic, and do not be terrified of them. For the Lord your God goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deuteronomy 20:2–4; Maimonides, Laws of Kings 7:1–3).

It stands to reason that just as the High Priest stood at the head of the system of priests who served in the Temple, so too the 'Anointed Priest for War' stood at the head of a framework of priests who supported the fighters in their various units.

In addition to strengthening the spirit of the fighters before battle, the 'Anointed Priest for War' was a partner in the decisions of the General Staff, to the extent that our Sages said (Nazir 47b) that many depend on him, for "the entire battle formation is arranged according to him" (Rosh ad loc.; and likewise, Rashi and Tosafot there).

Sounding the Trumpets Another role of the priests in war—and this too is a commandment from the Torah—was to sound the trumpets in order to encourage the fighters to bravery and trust in God, and to bring Israel to remembrance before God for good (Numbers 10:8–9). Thus, they did in the war against Midian, when Phinehas the priest sounded the trumpets (Numbers 31:6).

And likewise in the war of Jericho, the priests blew the shofars before the Ark of the Lord during the seven days in which the warriors of Israel encircled the city, and thereby, led the war spiritually (Joshua 6:4). The Bearers of the Ark That Went Out with the Fighters In addition, the priests would carry the Ark, which accompanied Israel in its wars, and through this the Divine Presence rested in the camp of Israel and they merited help from Heaven, as it is stated: "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to save you and to deliver your enemies before you" (Deuteronomy 23:15). It stands to reason that the guard of priests who carried the Ark consisted of courageous fighters who were able to protect the Ark from the enemy, who would strive to capture it, and thereby decide the battle. As was customary in all armies, elite soldiers were stationed to guard the standard that stood near the commanders of the campaign. So, we find that in the war that the Philistines waged against Israel at Ebenezer, the priestly guard failed, and the Philistines killed Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli the High Priest, who guarded the Ark, and captured the Ark of the Lord that had been brought to the battle. As a result, Shiloh was destroyed, and Eli the High Priest died (I Samuel 7:2–14).

The Levites as Officers Who Determine Who Is Exempt from War In addition to being teachers of halakha, educators, and judges, the Levites also served as officers, as our Sages said: "At first (in the days of the First Temple), they would appoint officers only from among the Levites" (Yevamot 86b), as it is stated: "And the Levitical officers are before you" (II Chronicles 19:11). (See also I Chronicles 23:1–4; 26:29; 34:13; and Be'er Sheva, Sotah 42a; Aseh Lecha Rav 3:48.)

The officers were those who enforced the law, as it is stated: "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates" (Deuteronomy 16:18). As part of their role as officers, the Levites were responsible for granting exemptions from a discretionary war (milchemet reshut) to soldiers who had just built a house, planted a vineyard, or married a wife, as well as to soldiers whose hearts were faint, and who might lose their composure in battle, as it is stated: "And the officers shall speak to the people, saying: Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it—let him go and return to his house… And when the officers finish speaking to the people, the commanders of the armies shall take command at the head of the people" (Deuteronomy 20:5–9).

In a mandatory war (milchemet mitzvah), in which all were obligated to enlist, the officers were responsible for determining who was exempt from the war due to unavoidable circumstances, such as injury or illness.

Punishing Those Who Flee the Battlefield After the battle began, the role of the officers was to encourage the fighters and punish those who fled the battlefield. As our Sages said (Mishnah Sotah 8:6), guards were stationed behind the fighters—namely, "strong and resolute officers" (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 7:4)—to punish deserters, in order to prevent defeat. As our Sages said: "And iron axes were in their hands, and anyone who sought to retreat—the authority was given to strike his legs, for the beginning of collapse is flight" (see Jerusalem Talmud Sotah 8:10).

Song and Prayer Another role of the Levites in war was that a group of them would stand during the battle in song and prayer on behalf of the soldiers. As it is stated in the days of Jehoshaphat: "And the Levites from the sons of the Kohathites and from the sons of the Korahites arose to praise the Lord God of Israel with an exceedingly loud voice… And when they began with singing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who had come against Judah, and they were struck" (II Chronicles 20:19–22). Some say that the psalm "May the Lord answer you on the day of distress" (Psalm 20) was written for the Levites who prayed for the fighters in battle (Meiri, Sotah 42b). It stands to reason that for this role they selected Levites who sang, and played musical instruments in the Temple. How They Merited These Roles The Levites merited serving in these roles after they volunteered for them at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moses called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!" and "all the sons of Levi" gathered to him (Exodus 32:26). Together with him they fought against the sinners, and aroused Israel to a process of repentance (see Exodus 32:29; Deuteronomy 10:8). Likewise, when Israel sinned with Baal Peor and a great accusation arose against them, to the point that a terrible disaster was about to befall them, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest took a spear in his hand, struck the sinners, and thereby stopped the downward spiral after the Midianites and their idols, and "the plague was

halted from upon the children of Israel" (Numbers 25:1–9). As a result, he merited the covenant of peace and the High Priesthood for himself, and his descendants (Numbers 25:13). Our Sages said that when Aaron died and the 'Clouds of Glory' that protected Israel departed, the Canaanites came to fight against them. As a result, some families in Israel became afraid and sought to return to Egypt, retreating eight stages from their encampments on the journey to the Land. But the Levites pursued them to bring them back so that they would not flee in battle, and a fight broke out between them in which seven families from the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, and Gad fell, and four families from the Tribe of Levi fell (Rashi, Numbers 26:13). As a continuation of this, the Levites were appointed as officers, whose role included ensuring that the fighters would not flee the battlefield.

The Tribe of Levi — An Elite Unit When the Lord commanded Moses to count all those fit for military service in Israel, He commanded not to count the members of the Tribe of Levi among them, because they were not given a territorial inheritance in the Land of Israel (Numbers 1:45–47, 49; 2:33; 26:62). Our Sages said (Numbers Rabbah 1:11–12) that Moshe Rabbeinu became distressed and feared: "Perhaps there is a defect in my tribe, that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not desire that we be counted!" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "I did not say this to you for that reason, but to remove them from the decree, so that they should not die with them." For when the soldiers of Israel heard the evil report of the Land and sinned in the Sin of the Spies, and sought to return to Egypt instead of conquering the Land, it was decreed upon them that they would die in the wilderness. But the members of the Tribe of Levi were not partners in their betrayal, and therefore, the decree that they would die in the wilderness did not apply to them. Had they been counted with the other tribes, they would have been caught up in their sin, and the destroying angel would have struck them as well. Similarly, our Sages said that after the princes of Israel brought the offerings for the dedication of the altar, Aaron the priest became distressed because his tribe had not been among the participants in the dedication of the altar. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Do not fear; you are destined for a greatness greater than this." For "the offerings apply only as long as the Temple stands, but the lights will forever shine opposite the face of the Menorah" (Numbers Rabbah 15:6; Tanchuma, Beha'alotcha 5). Nachmanides explained (Numbers 8:2) that this refers to the lights that our Sages instituted to be lit following the miracle of Hanukkah performed for the Hasmoneans, descendants of Aaron, which are lit even in days when the Temple is destroyed, and offerings are not brought on the altar.

The Hasmoneans In this way, the Hasmoneans continued Moshe Rabbeinu, who after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Israel was in tremendous danger, called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!" And similarly, in the days of the decrees of destruction of the Greek kingdom, the Hasmonean priests arose, raised the banner of rebellion, and called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!" After many heroic battles they defeated the Greeks, annulled their decrees, and restored the Kingdom of Israel to its place for more than two hundred years (Maimonides, Laws of Hanukkah 3:1; Peninei Halakha, Festivals 11:1–6). Thus, when the people of Israel falter, and the nation and the Land are in danger, the Tribe of Levi—and among them the priests—serve as a kind of elite commando unit that, in times of crisis, enters fierce battle against Israel's enemies, decides the campaign, and helps Israel return to its sacred destiny.

Conclusion and Further Questions Thus, those who wish to be considered as the Tribe of Levi must be the most devoted to the people of Israel and its wars, and in addition to being soldiers themselves, must encourage enlistment in the army, and elevate the spirit of heroism of the soldiers.

Parshat Vayigash: The True Art of Negotiation

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"You are to be acknowledged master by your brothers; the sceptre of rulership shall never depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet…unto him shall be the gathering of the nations." (Genesis 49:8, 10)

Who is really the most important of the brothers, Joseph or Judah? At the outset of the Joseph stories, it is clear that at least Jacob and Joseph believe that it is Joseph. After all, Joseph is the one who receives the coat of many colors from his father – a clear symbol of the birthright – and Joseph is the one who dreams that all the brothers, and indeed all the cosmos – will bow down to him. Yet, by the end of the sequence, at least Jacob has changed his mind. Judah is granted the birthright and not Joseph. Joseph seemingly accepts the situation. What happened and why?

The dramatic change in Judah is clearly delineated in the Bible. We first meet him in depth as a clever salesman, driven more by profit motive than sibling sensitivity when he cleverly suggests selling Joseph as a slave to a caravan of Midianite traders passing in the distance rather than leaving their hapless brother in the pit, waiting for the scorpions to unleash their poison. True, Judah thereby saved his brother from certain death (at least by starvation, if the pit was empty), yet we can- not overlook the fact that the brother who actually initiates Joseph's sale into slavery is none other than Judah. Perhaps Judah should have tried harder to rescue Joseph completely! And from the moment he is sold, Joseph's fate appears likely to be sealed; the likelihood of any of the brothers ever seeing him again is virtually nonexistent. Because of Judah, Joseph the dreamer is as good as dead, certainly to his aged father. More than two decades later, Judah makes a selfless plea to the Grand Vizier (Joseph) that instead of imprisoning Benjamin as a slave in Egypt because the missing silver goblet was found in his food sack, he – Judah – will stand as a substitute. This reveals a total turnaround in the character of Judah. He emerges as the classic penitent, since true penitence involves correcting one's sin at its core; if in the past he was instrumental in turning Joseph into a slave, then the only possible restoration is for Judah to now make himself a slave instead of Benjamin. The nobility of spirit demonstrated by Judah's willing sacrifice of his own life – a spiritual descendant of Isaac on the Akeda – is enough to thrust him into a position of leadership, to cause Jacob to declare concerning Judah: "from the 'torn' [Joseph], you have arisen…" (Gen. 49:9_.

But Joseph also changes, and his change involves a newfound humility which enables him to recognize Judah's superiority. But this change is more subtle, and requires our reading between the lines of the text. Joseph first appears as an arrogant youth, his dreams testifying to an exalted sense of self. He sees himself as king over his brothers, their sheaves of wheat bowing down to his, the sun, the moon and the planets all genuflecting before him. And as long as he dreamt dreams of agriculture in Egypt, universal power and domination, far removed from the family shepherding in the land of Israel, Joseph understood that he had constructed an internal grammar alien to his family, a language his brothers and ancestors didn't speak. Joseph seemed a mutation, an alien revolutionary independent of the family traditions. He was apparently gifted, but he dare not be accepted by his brothers. They were not ready to take him for what he was, a man of many colors, of manifold visions and cosmopolitan dreams. And so when his brothers sold him into slavery, they dealt with him more as a stranger than as a brother, an outsider having more in common with Esau than with Jacob. And Joseph accepted his brothers' judgement. He was truly different, a seeker after the novel and dynamic Egyptian occupation of agriculture, a citizen of the world, rather than a lover of Zion. When in Egypt, he easily accepts the Egyptian tongue, answers to an Egyptian name (Tzafenat-Pane'ach), and wears Egyptian garb. He has graduated from the family; not only are they not interested in him, he is not really interested in them!

It is only in the Torah portion of Vayigash that Joseph pulls away the mask and stands revealed before his brothers and sends for his aged father. But to understand why it takes place right now, we first have to understand why our portion Vayigash begins in the midst of one of the most tension-filled encounters in the entire Torah. Is the Torah merely interested in the dramatic effect, presenting the life and death struggle of Benjamin as a cliff-hanger, keeping us in suspense by ending the preceding portion right when it seems that there is no hope left for the wrongly accused Benjamin, whose sack of food turned out to be the hiding place of the Grand Vizier's missing silver goblet?

Judah's defense speech keeps returning to the theme of an old father waiting at home for his youngest son. The word 'father' appears thirteen times (Jacob is a father to thirteen children), an extraordinary emphasis if directed to a stranger with no knowledge of the family. Would it not have been more logical for Judah to have based his defense on the circumstantial nature of the evidence against Benjamin? Indeed, since their payment for all food purchases keeps turning up in each of the brothers' sacks, there is a clear indication that a foreign hand has taken the freedom to open their bags. Once a strange hand is moving about freely within the brothers' property, that same hand could have easily planted the evidence in Benjamin's sack. But instead of this defense, Judah sticks to one tale, the story of their family and the sufferings of

their aged father. If Benjamin is a thief, why should the age or mental condition of Benjamin's father matter to the Egyptian Grand Vizier? A thief must be punished; Benjamin should have been concerned for his aged father and not have perpetrated a crime against the Grand Vizier. Why should one expect the Grand Vizier to be concerned about the thief 's ancient father?

Admittedly, the situation is extremely tense. After having nearly brought their father to his death with their sale of Joseph, the brothers dare not now contemplate returning home to Israel bereft of Rachel's second son. Judah, who promised his father that he would be responsible for his father's youngest, initially steps forward and speaks up at the end of Parashat Miketz:

"…What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold we shall be my lord's servants, also us, and also the one in whose hand the goblet was found." (Gen. 44:16)

Judah recognizes the 'iniquity' of the brothers, a continuation of a theme first expressed when the Grand Vizier originally confronted them with the charge that they were spies:

"And they said, one to another, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he implored us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.'" (Gen. 42:21)

These words of Judah to the Grand Vizier are the culmination of this theme. Why are the brothers being mistreated to such an extent by this Grand Vizier? It is an act of God, think the brothers, obviously punishing them for their mistreatment of Joseph – measure for measure. The brothers behaved ignominiously toward Joseph, and now they must pay the price. Judah's offer that the brothers become slaves to the Grand Vizier because 'God has found out the iniquity of your servants' is a clear expression of Judah's conviction that they must all now be punished together – all but Benjamin who had nothing to do with the sale of Joseph. They must accept the will of God.

But the Grand Vizier shifts the tables on Judah. He rejects the offer of all the brothers becoming servants. He wants only Benjamin:

"Only the man in whose hand the goblet is found, he shall be my servant. And as for you, go up in peace unto your father." (Gen. 44:17)

This is when Judah grows confused. According to his calculations, God was punishing the brothers as a result of the evil they had perpetrated against their brother. That is how he understood the mishaps which had befallen the family ever since they met this Grand Vizier. The way Judah surmised it, since the brothers had sinned as a collective unit, they must now suffer as a collective unit. But Joseph's singling out of Benjamin as the only brother who would be enslaved challenged Judah's perception. After all, Benjamin had never been part of the conspiracy against Joseph. He was too young; if any of the brothers were innocent, Benjamin was innocent. Why should he be the only one punished?

Now we can understand why the portion of Miketz ends precisely when it does. It has little to do with the desire to create suspense, and largely to do with Judah's new-found awareness as to the identity of the Grand Vizier. Because if it wasn't God who had planned their experiences in Egypt, it could only have been the Grand Vizier. And why would the Grand Vizier have it in for them, unless…

The portion of Vayigash opens with the words, "Then Judah stepped near unto him [Joseph], and said, 'Oh my Lord, let your servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears…'" (Gen. 44:18). Until this point, Judah had believed that the Kafkaesque nightmare they were experiencing was the result of God's punishment. Judah now realizes that this cannot be the case. He now begins to perceive the unfolding of a trail of evidence that casts new light upon the Grand Vizier's true identity. He recalls that Shimon, the brother who instigated cast- ing Joseph into the pit, was singled out to sit in prison as a hostage after their first sojourn to Egypt for food. He now remembers how, upon their second visit, the Grand Vizier arranged their seats according to their ages when he invited them for a celebratory repast (Gen. 43:33). Only two people aside from the family who were present could have known the proper ages of the brothers: father Jacob and brother Joseph. And Jacob was in Israel!

Yes, an Egyptian, a Grand Vizier couldn't care less about an old father – unless it was his old father as well. Every word of Judah's is now calculated – and successfully earns him a bull's eye. Joseph also now recognizes Judah's profound wisdom and the ability of Judah to have pierced through his veil of deception and revealed his true identity. Judah has now emerged as the tikkun, i.e., repair – and thereby the most proper heir – of Jacob. Jacob's tragedy was his sin of deception, perversely continued by Joseph's pose as Egyptian Grand Vizier; Judah's mastery is his gift of cutting through the deception, and in so doing becomes worthy of the Abrahamic birthright.

The moment of Judah's understanding is also the moment of Joseph's understanding – as well as Joseph's repentance. He now sees the master plan, the divine guidance in all that has transpired. The brothers must come to Egypt not to serve him – Joseph – but rather to fulfill the vision of Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces. The family of Abraham must live to spread the message of ethical monotheism throughout the world, but they will first return to the land of Israel which will always be the familial and national homeland. Joseph is ready now to recognize Judah's superiority, and to subjugate his gifts of technology, administration and politics to Judah's Torah and tradition. Joseph is now able to surrender his dream of kingship over the brothers and request that his remains be eventually brought to Israel. Joseph is now ready to reunite the family under the majesty of Judah. And such is the case in Jacob's blessing.

But Jacob does not express forcefully enough the vision of unity, the initial dream of Rebecca when she merged the Esau-like skins with the hands and voice of Jacob. The aged patriarch merely creates a split between the double material portion of land which goes to Joseph, and the spiritual leadership, which goes to Judah (Gen. 49:8–10, 22–26), an understandable replay of the same split his father Isaac had effectuated a generation earlier; apparently, we most often do repeat the mistakes of our parents, especially if we feel guilty toward them and seek their forgiveness. Hence, in First Temple history, Judah-Jerusalem will separate from Ephraim-Northern Israel, and the seeds of a difficult exile were planted, whose bitter fruits would last for close to 2,000 years. And if Ephraim represented material prosperity, technological and administrative know-how, scientific and philosophical expertise, then Judah – bereft and isolated, exiled and violated – could hardly be expected to stand up to a holocaust!

However, the prophet Ezekiel, in this portion's prophetic reading (haftorah), provides an ultimate rapprochement – nay, unity – between all of the tribes; 'Now you, son of man, take yourself one wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Judah and the children of Israel, his companions," and take another wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Joseph, the wooden tablet of Ephraim, and all the children of Israel, his companions." And bring close to yourself one to the other, for you as one tablet, and they shall become one' (Ezekiel 37:16, 17). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, felt the footsteps of the Messiah and the nearness of redemption. He saw in Theodor Herzl, architect of the administrative and political characteristics of the Jewish State, the Messiah from the House of Joseph-Ephraim (he eulogized Herzl as such upon his death, in his famous encomium from Jerusalem); he anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah from the House of David-Judah, who would give spiritual meaning and universal redemptive significance to the hands of Esau which so successfully waged wars and forged an advanced nation-state phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Holocaust. Hopefully, the vision of Rebecca will soon be realized…

Shabbat Shalom