



A close friend of 15 years was recently stricken with cancer. Impressively, she expressed how fortunate she is that she has the correct ideas about God. She is fully correct in her sentiment. I wish to impress on our readers how crucial it is to have the correct knowledge of God, dispelling wrong notions as well. I asked her if I could quote her in my next email to Mesora readers, but she asked to be anonymous. On her behalf, I urge all our readers to familiarize yourselves with Maimonides' 13 Principles. Click here to read: <http://www.mesora.org/13principles.html>

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS	1,2,3
BANNING GOD	1,3
PARSHAS VAYIGASH	4
INSIGHT INTO PRAYER	5
FRIENDSHIP: LOVE & COMPASSION	6

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## Banning God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Genesis 37:33, when the sons of Jacob presented to him the bloodied coat of many colors to cover-up of their sale of their brother Joseph, Rashi quotes an astonishing Medrash (allegory):

"Why didn't God tell Jacob the truth?" (That Joseph was indeed alive). The Medrash continues, "The reason God didn't disclose the truth about Joseph, was that when

(continued on page 3)

## Joseph and his Brothers

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

In analyzing Joseph's relationship with his brothers we must ask several salient questions which will help shed light on the entire sequence of events recited in the Torah.

We must first analyze the source of the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Joseph was their father's favorite since he was born the son of his old age. However, Joseph reinforced their resentment by telling his brothers the content of two dreams that he had. This fact indicated his arrogant nature. The dreams were obviously divinely inspired. However, we must understand why there were two dreams. Furthermore, the brothers' response to each dream was different. The first dream was concerning the bundles of wheat. The brothers' response to this dream was continued hatred. The second dream concerning the constellations evoked a different response. The brothers were jealous and Jacob heeded this dream. The difference between the dreams can help us appreciate the different responses. The first dream reflected that Joseph would rule them physically. The bundles of wheat represent physical sustenance. Thus the brothers hated him even more for they resented



that they would be physically subservient. However, the second dream reflected that Joseph would be the mentor, that he would lead them spiritually as well. The constellations represent spirituality. This evoked a response of jealousy. However, Jacob heeded the dream because he recognized Joseph's potential. We must appreciate that the brothers' envy was based upon the fact that Jacob had chosen Joseph as the one who would be the leader and carry forward the tradition. The brothers did not act upon mere jealousy. They determined based upon Joseph's vanity and narcissism that he was not deserving of such an honor. He constantly told their father lashon hara, derogatory talk concerning them. His revealing to them his dreams reinforced their opinion that he was arrogant and unworthy. It

reinforced their image of his vanity. Jacob, however, realized Joseph's intellectual abilities and conviction and realized in time he would mature and mold his character as a wise man. As time passed Jacob's assessment of Joseph's abilities and nature was proven accurate.

The brothers sinned by misjudging the situation and not trusting their father. The dreams merely bolstered the resentment that they had for Joseph. As a result they sinned by allowing their emotions to control their actions and shape their opinion. They committed an injustice against their brother by selling him into slavery. They did not realize, because of his arrogance and vanity, that he was capable of change. This was the background that set the stage for Joseph's encounter with his brothers some thirteen years later.

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# Joseph *and his* Brothers

**RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**

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At the outset, an important footnote throughout the entire ordeal must be examined. The brothers during their entire encounter with Joseph did not recognize him, nor suspect that the Viceroy could be Joseph, despite their intimate knowledge of him. This incongruity could be explained because of the very nature of their sin. They miscalculated Joseph's potential for greatness. They viewed him as a vain and arrogant person. Accordingly, they felt by selling him into slavery, it would ensure that Joseph would not be the mentor. They felt that such an egotistical and vain person, would succumb to the life of the physical. They thought the support and security of his father and family was essential and without it, he would desert the tradition. Therefore, the Medrash tells us that when they entered Egypt they looked for Joseph in the houses of ill repute. They never imagined nor appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was their "chate", sin. They misjudged his abilities and failed to realize that he was still a child at the time they passed judgment, and capable of change. Therefore, this image was still in their mind and prevented them from ever imagining that Joseph was the Viceroy.

When analyzing the entire sequence of events commencing with the brothers descent into Egypt, and their meeting with Joseph and his ultimate revelation of his identity, one gets a rather puzzled picture. It leaves an impression of a rather prolonged detached series of events without any type of logical nexus.

Furthermore, many of Joseph's actions seem petty. When he recognizes his brothers he remembers his dreams and he responds by accusing them of being spies. Why didn't he reveal his identity to his brothers immediately? How come Joseph continues to place his brothers through a series of ordeals. The most encompassing question and perhaps the most disturbing, is once Joseph had the ability why didn't he communicate with his father and tell him of his well-being. Surely he would have spared Jacob undue suffering.

In order to start to appreciate the import of these questions, we must assert one logical proposition. Joseph's entire intentions were to benefit his brothers by affording them the opportunity to do teshuva, repentance. All the events can be explained by keeping this motif in mind when analyzing each event. Joseph used his ingenuity throughout the entire sequence and did not arouse suspicions in order to enable the events to develop in a manner that would facilitate their ability to do teshuva gemura, complete repentance.

Joseph foresaw that his brothers would be coerced to come to Egypt to buy provisions because of the famine. As a result, he viewed the situation as the opportune time to allow his brothers to repent. He was hoping that they would search for him and rectify the situation. Upon their first meeting with Joseph he acted as a stranger to them. The Torah tell us that Joseph remembered the dreams and accused them of being spies. Joseph was not vengeful. He was aware that the prophecy would become true and that this presented an opportunity to allow his brothers

to change and ultimately acknowledge him as the mentor. Paragraph 42 verse 3 states "And the ten brothers of Joseph went down to Egypt to buy provisions." Rashi comments that they are referred to as Joseph's brothers because they regretted their actions and were determined to buy Joseph's freedom, at whatever price. Thus they had started on the path of repentance. In fact, they entered Egypt from ten separate



entrances. This would facilitate their secondary mission of searching for Joseph and obtaining his freedom. However, his accusation of their being spies had to have a basis in order to dispel any suspicions. He knew that they entered from different entrances in order to search for him. He thus concluded that they felt guilty and realized that this presented an opportunity for him to question them. As a result of their guilt they tried to impress Joseph by telling him that they were searching for their brother. They sought to impress him with their loyalty. Thus he asked them, if your brother couldn't be bought would you fight for him. They responded in the affirmative. Joseph had thereby set a basis for his accusations. They affirmed that they would break the law if necessary. Therefore, his claim that they were spies was valid.

Joseph thereby sought the imprisonment of Shimon for two reasons. He sought to have Benjamin brought to Egypt. He also desired to isolate one of the brothers. In order for it to be a complete repentance, the same situation must arise and the person

must demonstrate that he has changed by not falling victim to the same trappings of the sin. Therefore, Joseph sought to create similar circumstances to afford them the opportunity of teshuva gemura. This required that they must face their father and advise him of their need to bring Benjamin to Egypt. They had to countenance their fathers' despair and take responsibility for Benjamin's well being.

Upon being presented with these circumstances the brothers stated that this sad state of events had befallen them because of their unjust actions against Joseph. Joseph heard their misgivings and turned from them and cried. Rashi comments that he cried because he heard that they had charatta, they regretted their actions. It was not a mere emotional response. He cried because he realized that one of the components of teshuva was present. They had regrets over their past actions. The Torah specifically tells us that they were upset because they did not have mercy upon their brother when he cried to them. They were callous to his pleas for sympathy. However, he could not reveal himself as yet, because he wanted to ensure that they would be completely forgiven and elevate themselves to a higher level of conduct. This could only be done after his entire plan had unfolded.

The Torah also affords us an interesting insight into the process of repentance. Genesis Chapter 42 Verse 22 states "And Reuben answered them saying, Did I not speak unto you saying do not sin against the child and you would not hear, and also behold his blood is required." Reuben's statement seems to be a response to a question. However, no question was asked. It follows the verse whereby the brothers acknowledge their guilt for not responding to Joseph's pleas for mercy. It therefore appears that since Reuben was the eldest, the brothers were attempting to shift much of the blame onto Reuben. However, Reuben's response was not merely defensive. Repentance demands that the wrong doer properly

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# Joseph and his Brothers

**RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**

□ Transcribed by students

□ (continued from page 2)

acknowledge his guilt. If one denies his culpability, his is incapable of doing teshuva and to change his character. The Torah emphasizes this point by phrasing Reuben's response as an answer. The brothers had to acknowledge their guilt if repentance was to be effective.

Upon their return home, he secretly returned the money to them because he intended to keep them off guard. They suspected that he would accuse them of stealing the money. However, when they returned with Benjamin, he made no such accusation, but on the contrary he befriended them. This allowed him to place the cup in Benjamin's sack without raising suspicions. They totally discounted any doubts they had because he did not question the earlier incident. Psychologically he allayed any fears that they may have possessed. Therefore, on their return, he ate and drank with them and they feasted together.

It is interesting to note that since Joseph was sold into slavery, he did not drink wine. He missed their absence. Although he was ruler of a great land and had his own children, there was still a void in his life. He respected his brothers as wise men, as individuals with whom he shared a common intellectual heritage. This vacuum was always felt and prevented him from indulging in wine. This day, with his brothers present, he allowed himself to partake.

Before sitting down to the meal he used his cup ostensibly as a tool for divination. He sat them in order at the meal based upon their ages. The brothers were amazed. They did not suspect magic but were in awe of the fact that he was totally prepared for their meeting and had obtained such detailed information about them. He used the cup because it would serve as the perfect excuse for Benjamin's unlawful possession of the cup. Benjamin ostensibly stole the cup to help him find his brothers whereabouts. At the meal he desired to foster their emotions of jealousy, so he sat with Benjamin. He again discounted their suspicions by

claiming that he would sit with Benjamin since they both did not have mothers. Joseph also favored Benjamin by giving him portions five times greater than the other brothers. Joseph was not merely expressing his fondness for Benjamin. He was recreating the same situation that existed between Jacob and himself. In furtherance thereof, he placed the goblet in Benjamin's sack. He wanted to place Benjamin in jail in order to recreate his entire ordeal, to the greatest extent possible.

The brothers responded by ripping their garments and acknowledging that G-d was punishing them for their sin of selling Joseph. Thereby, Judah made an appeal on behalf of his brothers for Benjamin's freedom. He acknowledged their guilt by selling Joseph and offered himself as a slave in Benjamin's stead. Judah's appeal was a lengthy plea to Joseph's compassion. They had to appeal to his mercy because they couldn't deny their guilt and say that Joseph set them up. They also sinned against Joseph by not acting compassionately. A complete teshuva demanded that they recognize their oversight, therefore they were coerced into appealing to his kindness. Thus, when they offered themselves in Benjamin's place, they demonstrated that they were at a higher level of perfection and their repentance was complete. Joseph immediately revealed himself unto his brothers. Upon his revelation, his primary concern was his father Jacob's welfare. Until this point he could not inform his father that he was still alive. To do so, would have prevented his brothers, the progenitors of B'nai Yisroel of doing teshuva. Had he advised his father earlier of what transpired, the brothers might have been incapable of facing their father. They might have fled and this would have jeopardized the continued existence of B'nai Yisroel. Accordingly, Joseph was forced into remaining silent. However, after they did teshuva and elevated themselves to a higher level, they were able to face their wrongdoing. Therefore, when their repentance was complete and he was able to reveal himself, he immediately sent a message to Jacob advising him that he was still alive. This message contained an allusion to the last topic they were learning together. This served to comfort Jacob, for he realized that the tradition would be carried on through Joseph, as Jacob had envisioned. □

## Banning God

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

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the brothers banished and cursed all who would reveal to Jacob their sale of Joseph, they included God in their banishment and curse." But Isaac - Jacob's father - knew the truth that Joseph was alive, but Isaac said to himself, "How can I reveal that which God does not reveal?"

One unavoidable problem is the brother's inclusion of God into their ban and curse. How do we understand such a statement? Man has little control over his own life, let alone an inclusion of God in a ban! Such a notion is completely against all foundations of Judaism.

This cannot be taken on face value, and the Rabbis authoring this Medrash have something else in mind.

I believe this statement teaches the same idea derived from another Rabbinical saying, "the righteous decree and God fulfills." This means to say that those who are completely righteous, i.e., those whose actions never veer from God's ways, will live in a manner completely endorsed by God. A person who is so in tune with God's ways can be described as one who "decrees and God fulfills" - indicating his complete adherence to God.

Similarly, the brothers are termed to have "included God in their ban and curse", should God divulge their cover up to Jacob. This means that the brothers' wish that Jacob not find out about Joseph's sale was actually in line with God's will. It is completely impossible that man have any control over God, and all similar statements must be understood in a manner which maintains an uncorrupted view of God.

We can speculate why God wished that Jacob not find out the truth: It seems God wished that the Jews enter Egypt, only to emerge from servitude to freedom via God's salvation. A Rabbi once explained that God desired that the Jewish nation emerge in a state of salvation, thereby indelibly branding the identity of the Jewish nation as one "saved by God". God is thereby inextricably bound up in this nation's identity as its Savior. We see that the Jewish law also incorporates this central concept, as we align our prayers with the concept of God's salvation.

We now come to the question of how Isaac knew of the cover up. If all who were present at Joseph's sale were the nine brothers alone, (Reuben was home servicing Jacob at the sale - Rashi) and they all swore each other to secrecy, there is no possible means for any communication to reach Isaac about this event. The only other possibility for Isaac's awareness of the sale is what Isaac himself perceived upon the brother's return.

What were the facts? Isaac saw the brothers presenting the bloodied coat to Jacob, asking Jacob to recognize if it was Joseph's. To this, Jacob concluded that a wild beast devoured Joseph. I would speculate that what might have happened is as follows: Isaac saw that only the coat was returned. Perhaps thinking, "Why should they find only the coat and no remains of Joseph, this isn't normal, that an animal will separate the coat and drag it off to a place without any of the body. Animals seek food, not clothes. An animal will not prefer the garment over flesh." Additionally, perhaps, Isaac said, "Why am I - Isaac - the only one who sees this question? After all, why should not - at least - one brother have the same question as I have?" Perhaps Isaac concluded some idea from this unanimous acceptance of the coat as proof. Perhaps he thought that the only way all the brothers would be satisfied that a garment alone was proof of Joseph's death, was if they were all trying to force that conclusion as a lie. A true investigator will wonder three things as did Isaac, 1) why no bodily remains were found, 2) why the coat was no where near any remains, and most powerfully, 3) why the brothers were so easily satisfied that the coat alone was evidence enough. Isaac concluded the brothers were conspiring a lie. However, Isaac felt that something so grave as Joseph's sale must not be revealed by himself, as silence in this matter must be in line with God's will. Isaac had a keen understanding of God's providence, and realized this is a matter certainly being addressed by God. Isaac's hands were tied.

We can also ask why Jacob didn't see through the smoke screen: Perhaps he was so distraught at the possibility of Joseph's death, and then seeing the precious garment he gave to Joseph, that he was overcome by emotion and could not see clearly as did Isaac. Perhaps even the brothers knew how Jacob would react to this sight of a bloodied coat, and planned it that way. □

# Parshas Vayigash

RABBI BERNARD FOX

**"Yosef could not hold in his emotions. Since all his attendants were present, he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' Thus no one else was with him when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers." (Beresheit 45:1)**

At the end of Parshat Miketz, Yosef hid his goblet among Binyamin's possessions. He then sent his officers to capture Binyamin and accuse him of theft. Yosef's officers carry out their master's orders. They bring the brothers before Yosef. Yosef tells the brothers that they may return to their father. However, Binyamin will be punished for his crime. He will be placed in bondage in Egypt. In our parasha Yehudah appeals to Yosef for Binyamin's release. He offers to take Binyamin's place. He volunteers to serve as a slave in place of Binyamin. Yehudah completes his appeal. Yosef is overcome with intense emotion. He commands his servants and ministers to leave him. He is prepared to reveal himself to his brothers. Why did Yosef command his servants to leave? The Torah provides an ambiguous response. The pasuk seems to indicate two reasons. First, Yosef could no longer restrain his feeling. Second, he planned to reveal himself to his brothers. What is the connection between these two factors? Our Sages offer different explanations. Rashi reinterprets the passage. He explains that Yosef was not overcome with emotion. He offers an alternative translation of the opening phrase of the passage. "Yosef could not endure." The Torah is telling us that he could not endure displaying his brothers' shame. He was prepared to reveal himself. He would tell his brothers that he was Yosef. He was the brother they had plotted against and sold into slavery. The brothers would be confronted with the injustice of their behavior. Yosef did not want the Egyptians to learn of his brothers' intrigues. He did not want to disgrace his brothers in the presence of the Egyptians. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers another explanation. He accepts Rashi's assertion that Yosef did not want the Egyptians present when he confronted his brothers. However, Ibn Ezra explains that Yosef was overcome. Yosef was prepared to

reveal himself. Ideally, he would have waited until he was alone with his brothers. However, he could not wait for this opportunity. Why could he not delay the revelation? He was overcome. He could no longer maintain his disguise. Therefore, he was anxious to remove his servants. Nachmanides offers a very interested variation on these explanations. He also agrees that Yosef did not want the Egyptians present at the moment of his revelation. However, he offers an alternative explanation for this concern. Yosef planned to bring his father and brothers down to Egypt. His plan would require the acquiescence of Paroh and the Egyptian people. He expected Egypt to open its borders to foreigners. This new group must be positively represented. Yosef needed to convince the Egyptians that they should not fear these foreigners. The Egyptians could not discover that Yosef's family had intrigued against him and showed disregard for their father's feelings. This knowledge would evoke suspicions. How could the Egyptians trust the loyalty of a family that sold a member into slavery? Would the brothers be faithful to Paroh? They had not been faithful to their own father! In order to avoid creating these suspicions, Yosef hid from the Egyptians the events leading to his bondage.

**"And Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?' And they could not respond to him for they were confused." (Beresheit 45:3)**

Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. He then asks, "Is my father still alive?" This question is difficult to understand. Surely, Yosef knew the answer. Yehudah had just appealed to Yosef on behalf of Binyamin. He had described the deep love between Yaakov and Binyamin. He had told Yosef of the deep anguish Yaakov would experience if he were separated from his youngest son. It was clear that from this petition that Yaakov was alive. Yehudah was asking Yosef to act with compassion for Yaakov. Why does Yosef now ask, "Is my father still alive"? Klee Yakar offers a response to this question. He explains that Yosef had listened to Yehudah's appeal. Yet, he remained uncertain. He was not sure his father was still alive. He knew that Yehudah was attempting to save Binyamin. Perhaps, his description of the love between Yaakov and Binyamin was

an invention. In order to save Binyamin, Yehudah might lie about Yaakov. Now, Yosef has revealed himself. He assumes that the brothers realize that they are not in danger. He asks if his father is truly alive. He expects that his brothers have no reason to deceive him. Yosef's brothers were unable to respond. Klee Yakar explains that their reaction was a direct consequence of Yosef's choice of words. He described Yaakov as his father. He did not ask, "Is our father alive?" The brothers feared that this choice of words reflected a rebuke. Yosef was accusing them of not feeling sympathy for their father. They had allowed Yaakov to suffer the loss of a beloved son. They had not treated Yaakov as their father. They assumed that Yosef was claiming that only he was faithful to Yaakov. He was the only true son. Upon hearing this perceived rebuke, the brothers were confused. They could not respond. Yosef realizes that the brothers are confused and afraid. He then explains to them that he is not their enemy.

**"And they told him the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them. And he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him. And the spirit of Yaakov their father was renewed." (Beresheit 45:27)**

Yosef sends his brothers back to Canaan. They are to bring Yaakov and their families to Egypt. They return to Yaakov and tell him all that transpired with Yosef. Yaakov sees the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him down to Egypt. Yaakov is revitalized by the news. The pasuk clearly refers to the wagons as impressing Yaakov. Why did the wagons have this impact? Our commentaries offer various explanations. Most provide homiletic interpretations of the significance of the wagons. However, Gershonides offers a simple explanation. Earlier, in Parshat Meketz, Paroh appointed Yosef as his prime minister. Paroh issued a number of decrees to reinforce Yosef's authority. One was that no person was permitted to "lift one's hand or foot" without Yosef's consent. What was the meaning of this decree? Unkelos explains that "raising of one's hand" refers to bearing arms. "Raising of one's foot" means riding on a horse. In other words, no one was permitted to carry a weapon of ride upon a horse without Yosef's authorization. Gershonides expands upon Unkelos'

interpretation. In Egypt, horses were reserved for the use of royalty. They were a sign of status. All others were required to use donkeys. Rav Meshulam ben Rav Menahem confirms Gershonides' assertion regarding the importance of horses in Egyptian culture. He traveled to Egypt and other countries in 1481. A diary of his travels survives. At that time Egypt was a Moslem country. Yet, he reports that the custom regarding horses was still in effect. He writes that everyone was required to ride on donkeys. Only the rulers were permitted to ride horses. Gershonides notes that Yosef asked permission from Paroh to give wagons to the brothers. It seems odd that Yosef would need Paroh's authorization for such a petty issue. Gershonides explains that Yosef was really suggesting a radical departure from Egyptian custom. Yosef wished to give the brothers horse-drawn wagons. This went beyond Yosef's personal authority. The brothers were not royalty. Furthermore, they were foreigners. Nonetheless, Paroh acquiesced. We can now understand the impact of the wagons upon Yaakov. He was aware of Egyptian custom. He also understood the Egyptians' prejudice against Hebrews. Yet, his son Yosef had sent horse-drawn wagons to carry him to Egypt. This indicated that Yosef had amassed remarkable influence in Egypt. Rashbam adds an interesting point. Our pasuk indicates that Yaakov's spirit was renewed by this experience. The commentaries disagree on the exact meaning of this phrase. Rashbam interprets the phrase to mean that Yaakov saw that Yosef's dreams had become reality. He truly was a ruler. This accords with Gershonides' explanation of the significance of the wagons. Sending horse-drawn wagons was a sign that Yosef's dreams of becoming a ruler were prophetic. ■

Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 45:1. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 45:1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 45:1. Rav Shlomo Ephraim Luntshitz, Commentary Klee Yakar on Sefer Beresheit 45:3. Sefer Beresheit, 41:44. Targum Unkelos, Sefer Beresheit 41:44. Gershonides, Commentary on Beresheit, page 232. Elkan Nathan Adler ed., Jewish Travelers of the Middle Ages (Dover, 1987), p 159. Sefer Beresheit, 45:21. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 244. Rabbaynu Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 45:27

# Insight into Prayer

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

We find in the Torah (Gen, 30:2), Rashi states when Rachel desired children, having none, she asked her husband Jacob that he should have prayed for her. When Jacob responded, according to Rashi, "God has withheld children from you and not me", he was not acting viciously. He meant to say, "You have the need, not me, and God has not answered you. You must then be the one to pray, as prayer enables one to reflect on their own needs, hopefully directing you to your flaws, repenting from character traits preventing you from childbearing."

The institution of prayer, "tefila", contains numerous ideas and insights. The very word "tefila" contains the root "pi-lale", which means to judge. One is judging their needs as they pray. One is to come before God, with ordered and previously judged requests. "Are my supplications deemed valuable in God's eyes?" Such a question is appropriately addressed prior to presenting one's prayers to God. If one wishes something, he or she must first determine it is a good as defined by God, and this we can determine only through study of His Torah system.

Another concept is the one praying attests that "God knows my thoughts". Via this realization, that all man's thoughts are revealed to God, man is enabled, and coerced in a way, to be completely honest with himself, as there is no 'fooling God'. Man must realize, "whatever I think, God knows". Therefore I must be honest in what I actually value, be it good or bad. God knows me. This might be a subtle point, but feel it is so essential to realize. It is a central component of prayer, albeit rarely enunciated. Standing before God requesting our needs normally obscures the fine points which we must ponder. If we do realize that God knows us, this very standing before God prompts us to reflect on what it is we come to request before God. Then, hopefully, the one praying will question his very requests. He may analyze whether his desires fit into God's plan for mankind. This is the vital role of prayer - it motivates

man to come to terms with his needs, questioning, analyzing, and updating his former requests with only those filtered and approved by Torah standards.

So many people complain that God doesn't answer us. But God does know each man's thoughts. God created our minds, He surely knows each one of our thoughts. We say this on Yom Kippur. Therefore, if what one requests goes unanswered, it is a great lesson, and man should be as thankful when unanswered as when answered. This divine silence teaches that perhaps our requests are not in line with God's plan for man. Meaning, the request is harmful. What should be our response? We should immediately reflect on what might be corrupt in our requests. We should talk it over honestly with a wise man, a rabbi, or a teacher, someone well versed in Torah, and human psychology. He, more than anyone else, is able to determine where you veer from Torah values. He will explain the correct values, and you may learn how to improve your life. This is why the Talmud says, "If one is sick, go to a wise man." The Talmud doesn't say "go and get a bracho", a blessing. Why a wise man? As we said, only he can look carefully at your life and analyze your character and your desires. He can then see what flaw exists in your nature, leaving you either unprotected or deserving of punishment by God, causing illness to befall you. Then you may incorporate this knowledge into your life and save yourself. So too in all areas, not just illness. Don't wait until you are ill to analyze introspect - do so now.

What else do we learn from the institution of prayer? It also reminds us that God is the One who created the system of morality. Therefore, we come to Him alone to ask forgiveness. This is one of the 13 requests in our Shemona Esray prayer. How do we learn that God created morality? It is via our request for forgiveness from only Him. Isaiah 43:25, "I, I erase your willful sin for My sake, and your sins I will not recall." His ability to forgive means He governs man, on earth, and

in the next world where retribution might meet us. We are reminded of His omniscience, as He says He will not recall one's sins when one repents.

He alone sets the standards of good and evil, so from Him alone do we request forgiveness. Only He can forgive, because only He determines morality. Only He has the ability to wipe away our sins, as only He can hold man accountable. Nothing aside from God can punish.

We learn our halachic formulation of prayer from Channa, when she prayed for a child. She moved her lips with no emanating voice. We see that prayer requires a concretization of our wishes, otherwise left in the realm of blurred thoughts. This concretization in the form of articulation transfers our abstract thoughts into a solidified reality, and we are confronted more clearly with our own wishes, allowing us to examine desires otherwise left unnoticed. Again, we see how useful prayer is. Our self examination is enabled by converting inner, silent feelings into articulated structures of our lips. This very act brings our thoughts into a perceptible light, from their normally, hidden state.

Prayer means that God is a reality - He is the One with Whom we converse. This is so vital, as most of our days may be spent intercouring with our fellow man. We forget the reality of God's existence as a truth. Do we think of Him as real as our friend? Our friend responds when we talk. In prayer, although we do not hear a response, this in no way alters the truth of God's knowledge and interaction in our lives. By praying, we admit His participation in our dialogue of prayer. Their is a Recipient of our prayers.

When King Solomon became king at 12 years of age, God spoke with him in a dream saying, (Kings I, 3:5) "Ask what I (can) give to you." God was referring to advancing Solomon's knowledge unnaturally, as knowledge is only in proportion of one's studies. But here, this once, God granted a man knowledge other than by natural means. My deduction is that God would not give King Solomon knowledge without his request. Why would God not give something without a request? Perhaps this teaches that man must approach God for his needs. This act of request imprints on man the idea that man's good can only be a good, if man realizes his fortune as emanating from God. Only a request from God will teach man this essential

concept. Had good befallen man with no prior request, he may not attribute his good fate to God. Prayer teaches that man's fate comes from God. God therefore requested that King Solomon think into his request, and then he gave him that gift of knowledge afterwards. This taught two lessons to King Solomon: 1) Knowledge comes from God alone. God said, "Ask what I (can) give to you". What "I" shall give, and no other. 2) One must think into his requests prior to prayer. For this reason, God did not initially reveal what e was offering King Solomon. He required him to examine himself, and only then respond.

Also, King Solomon was directed to asking for knowledge per se, as God intimated that He was offering something that only He could provide. Physical objects can be obtained by man, but knowledge, only through God. King Solomon took God's dream message and used his knowledge to deduce what God was offering. We see once again, that God causes man to use his mind when relating to God. Perhaps this is how God relates in all cases. He causes man not to simply hear something, but in a dialogue initiated by God, prophecy, God demands man's mind be engaged, and this is achieved via a certain raw form of information where the prophet must engage his thinking. In prophecy, man is not simply hearing a clear message - he must engage in an analysis of God's words. As God holds all knowledge, His word is not as man's - completely understandable. This is impossible. God gives prophecy to man in a raw form, and man must 'study' God's word, not just listen to it. This must be, as the One of infinite wisdom is speaking. Maimonides teaches that each prophet receives his visions from God in a language suitable specifically for him. We learn from this that man can only relate to God on the plain of intelligence. Many fools believe they can "be in touch with God" via their feelings, or other nonsensical notions. Torah teaches otherwise.

Prayer reiterates our conviction in God's existence. He is all-knowing; Omniscience. He has control over the entire universe; Omnipotence. God relates to man via knowledge.

Relate to Him through knowledge. Maimonides said, "In accordance with one's knowledge is his love of God." So too, in accordance with ones knowledge, does God relate to man. ■



# Friendship is Love and Compassion

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“A friend loves at all times and becomes as a brother in adversity.” Proverbs 17:17.

Who is a true friend? It is someone whose philosophical life and values we share. A true friend cares about each other's well-being and are happy to share in each others goals, achievements, and growth. A true friend enjoys sharing ideas relating to the philosophy of Judaism and of Torah, since this is the essence of their friendship. One shouldn't think, “I'll keep this information to myself so I will become greater than my friend.” Sharing knowledge is the basis and essential part of the friendship that gives each one the strength and courage to continue in their search for truth and continuing along the path in doing God's will.

How much time can friends spend in meaningless talk? Talking about the stock market for hours doesn't provide real growth. Real growth can only come through Torah thought, through acquiring knowledge. Stock is acquisition – growth of a different kind! True friendship continues with each one helping the other to correct their thoughts by communicating and exchanging ideas by searching for truth together. In the most ideal way we nurture our friendships this way and we prove to each other that we are loyal to the friendship by being involved in God's wisdom together. The strongest bonds of friendship can be maintained this way and help to bring peace to each other's lives.

There is mutual respect and enjoyment in the good and pure traits and intentions our friend possesses. We are there for each other not only in the

good and joyful times, but also in times of great sorrow and adversity. For in times of sorrow it is this friend who remains. Why, because the friendship was cultivated by the searching for and the sharing of truth to begin with. Sorrow and times of distress is also truth... Sorrow and crisis are part of the reality, of life. And so our “true friend” is there for us and with us and is willing to help us with the burdens that adversity brings. Your friend understands the idea: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And so your friend commiserates with you and listens to you sincerely and encourages you to speak freely from your heart about your sadness. There is trust between you and your friend wants to help you because he/she knows that you are feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable. Your friend also understands that chesed isn't only in giving “things” to each other, chesed is also giving of oneself by genuinely caring.

Friend equals love and compassion. There cannot be true friendship without compassion. From the book Horeb, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch says: “Compassion is the warning voice of duty, which points out to you your brother in every sufferer, and your own sufferings in his, and awakens the love which tells you that you belong to him with all his sufferings with all the powers that you have. Do not suppress this compassion! If you do, it will no longer well up of itself, and you will have cut yourself off from the company of all your fellow creatures. You yourself will have destroyed the first proof of your mission as man and Israelite. Your heart becomes a stone and there no longer sounds in it the

voice of God, reminding you of your mission...”

In times of your distress the true face of your friend's compassion shows. This is how we know for sure if our friend is sincere – no other way can express this. This is what to look for in a true friendship. Compassion. Don't think that expressing compassion is a sign of weakness, it is not. Don't be trapped by the fake Hollywood standards of friendship. To the contrary, compassion is the deepest emotion a person can express because it is also part of love. There is no real love without compassion and no real compassion without love. It's impossible to have one without the other. So, what if there were no one on earth, and you were left alone; to whom would you show your compassion? Who would be your friend? So, don't say, “Well, my friend will always be there for me, no matter what.” That is not always true. We should never take each for granted or take advantage of each other. Every friend's job is to be involved in their friend's perfection within their capability. Every conversation and meeting is an opportunity to be of help to your friend. Every situation, especially if it is challenging is an opportunity to look into yourself and improve yourself. Your friend's challenging situation is an opportunity for you to be involved in chesed, chesed shel emes with that friend.

Be as honest with yourself as possible and be sure about who you choose to be your friend. In adversity does your friend love at all times and becomes as a brother? ▣