



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>

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume II, No. 12...Dec. 20, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

DEAD ASKING MERCY	1, 3
MENASSHE & EPHRAIM	1, 2
DEGREE OF PARENTAL HONOR	2
I DIDN'T KNOW, I'M NOT TO BLAME	2
GENTILES FOLLOWING REASON	3
THE SNAKE'S PUNISHMENT	3
PARSHAS VAYECHE	4
FORGIVENESS - SELICHA	5

SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE.www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Mennashe & Ephraim's Blessings

RABBI BESSER

Transcribed by Moshe Ben-Chaim

An interesting occurrence is noted during this weeks parsha: As Joseph brings his two sons before his father Jacob, Jacob blesses Joseph, by blessing Mennashe and Ephraim. What is strange is the placing of Jacob's hands on their heads, and in doing so, Jacob crosses his hands, placing his right hand on the child to his left, Ephraim, the younger.

Rabbi Besser asked two questions: 1) Why must one place their hands on someone to bless? Won't the blessing take hold even without physical contact? 2) What was the nature of this blessing, that, according to Rashi, when one blesses their son in the future, one will say, "G-d shall place you as Ephraim and Mennashe". Why were these two selected to be the model of a fathers blessing towards his son?

Rabbi Besser answered the following: When Jacob saw Joseph's two sons, he desired to know one thing, "were they at odds with each other as all of the previous sons were?" Avraham had two sons, Yishmael and Isaac, and they were at odds. Isaac had Esav and Jacob, both at odds with each other. Jacob had 12 sons, 10 were opposed to one, Joseph.

Now stands Joseph before Jacob. Are Joseph's two sons at odds with each other as well?



To determine this, (Jacob was not familiar with Mennashe and Ephraim, [Gen , 48:8] "who are these?" referring to Joseph's sons), Jacob sought to awaken any sibling rivalry by placing the dominant hand on younger son, Ephraim. (Normally the elder is favored, and Jacob was clearly favoring the younger). If there was rivalry, this would bring it to the forefront in some form. When Jacob saw there was no animosity between the two brothers, even as the younger was being favored, Jacob blessed them with the one blessing which epitomizes specifically 'children' living properly - having no rivalry towards one another. He therefore

blessed them stating that when a father wants to wish the best for his sons, he should bless them as Ephraim and Mennashe, as the two sons who shared peace, and not the common rivalry. The bracha itself embodies this concept, as the text reads. "G-d shall place you as Ephraim and Mennashe", Ephraim the younger, is first in the text.

One could ask as to what brought about this peace in these two brothers, not seen in earlier generations of the Avos. Perhaps this is answered by understanding the cause for 'sibling rivalry'. Two brothers don't rival each other without cause. It is based on the desire to gain the spotlight in front

Dead Asking Mercy for the Living

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Question: The gemara in Taanis, 16a, states two opinions as to why people visit cemeteries. One opinion is to remind one of his own mortality. The second opinion is so the dead request mercy for us. The gemara states that the difference between these two opinions is that the first applies to even gentile cemeteries, and the latter applies only to Jewish cemeteries. The question is how are we to understand this.

(continued on page 3)

(continued on next page)

Mennashe & Ephraim's Blessings

RABBI BESSER

Transcribed by Moshe Ben-Chaim

(continued from page 1)

of the parent. Children crave attention. Perhaps these two didn't desire attention, as they saw their father preoccupied with running Egypt, they realized this was his focus, and felt emotionally inadequate to compete with "Egypt", to gain their fathers shared attention. This caused them to accept a secondary role of importance in their father's eyes. Thus they abandoned seeking this type of approval. Normally, a mature individual will overcome the rivalry emotion, but Ephraim and Mennashe were faced with conquering this emotion earlier in life. □

family being present. My question is, what does the commandment to honor one's parents mean? My husband will not speak to my daughter (she has now been married for 5 months) and neither my husband nor I will speak to her husband or allow him in our home. He had been warned months before the wedding that he would be considered persona non grata if they married before graduation and I urged my daughter to think about her husband's treatment by us if our wishes, no, demand was not met. The demand was really not so unreasonable and was very important to my husband and me, obviously. The fellow's Orthodox rabbi called one night and informed me that the commandment to honor one's parents did not apply in this situation. Why not? This was the last request that was being made to my daughter in our capacity as her caretakers and guiders. Thank you, in advance, for your response.

Mesora: Clearly, your daughter and son in law did nothing incorrect according to Torah Law, or otherwise. I do not understand the circumstances, but asking a person to wait one and a half years to marry is not something anyone should impose on another. It is cruel and selfish. I would congratulate them both, as they decided to live in accordance with Torah by marrying, and not be tempted to violate Torah law which might occur, had they waited. The Talmud records a story of a sage where he married at the age of 15, and felt had he married at 14, he would have completely controlled his instincts, literally stated, "I would have spat the Satan in the eye." Meaning, had he married even earlier than age 15, he would be doing himself good. Certainly we today should learn from this sage, and not delay marriage. We also learn that the Rabbis teach us to marry by 18 years of age. There are emotional and physical needs which are of the strongest nature, and stifling them only leads one to do wrong.

If two people feel they wish to marry, and the boy in this case was a fine person, as appears from your husband's postponed permission, they should be given the blessings of both you and your husband. You, your husband and your children are now paying the price for a faulty decision, by asking them to wait a unnecessary amount of time.

I urge you and your husband to think through the cause of this decision of excommunicating your son in law. There are no grounds for such behavior, and standing on ceremony is not the way of a righteous individual, especially where no wrong was done. These two children desired only what is good for them. Too many times parents abuse their role in areas they have no jurisdiction, as in this case.

The boy did nothing worse than your daughter, yet you talk with her and banish him. This points to a distortion wherein your perceived "wrong" exists.

Enough time has been lost. Contact them and make amends. You owe a great apology to both your daughter and son in law by placing your demands before your daughter's happiness. □

"I Didn't Know- I'm Not to Blame"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: If torah is the only system through which mankind can attain perfection, what about those who have never been exposed to it? Many people, in the past and present have never had the chance to rationally accept Judaism as they never knew about it. To take it to an extreme, throughout history there were many civilizations - like Africans or American Indians who never knew their existed a Jewish people or a Torah system;

why would God not give them the opportunity to attain perfection like he gave us? Even if we apply to them the tinoch shenishba status, they still get a raw deal because they never could become perfected. How is this an exhibition of God's justice and fairness?

Mesora: I once asked this very question years ago of my Rabbi. He felt that God would at some point in each person's life, offer them the opportunity to live correctly. I assume his reasoning was that God does not place each individual here on Earth, with the capacity for experiencing God's wisdom, without offering each one of us the opportunity to use our intellect.

But I would add that your question is not only on cultures subsequent to the giving of the Torah who were ignorant of it. Your question must be asked equally on generations throughout the 2448 years prior to the Torah. Where is God's justice then?

We see from Abraham - a young man steeped in idolatry - that with reasoning alone he examined reality and arrived at true, logical conclusions, with no Torah. This extreme example offers an insight into the abilities we each have. God's plan was not to give the Torah at the commencement of civilization. God gave each of us the abilities necessary for living the perfected life as He wishes for each member of mankind. Perhaps from Adam, naming the animals and being involved in all areas of wisdom, we learn that all was present, undistorted, and available for man to acquire love for his Creator. Only subsequent deviations from the search for knowledge led many astray, initiated by the very free will God endowed us with to use in the search for truth. God won't step in and force man to use his free will for good or truth. God's will is that man use his free will to earn his reward. And if he so chooses, man may choose not to use his mind and search for truth, as so many cultures did, and still do today. □

Degree of Parental Honor

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I am not Orthodox but my daughter is and her husband is, so I am writing to understand something. Before they were engaged to be married, my daughter's now husband told my husband (my daughter's father) that he wanted to propose to my daughter and that he wanted my husband's blessing. My husband told the young man that to get his blessing, the couple would have to wait a year and a half to marry, when they had both graduated from school. The young man said he planned to wed in 6 months and that there was no reason to wait. My husband and I were very hurt. My daughter and her intended married in Hebron without a single member of her

Gentiles Following Reason and the Commandments

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: There is one problem which I have not been able to resolve, and which pertains to all rationalist interpretations of the Torah: Reason is non-denomination - anyone who has ever used it understands this - and so an interpretation which is rationally persuasive must be so to all. This means that the laws of the Torah, if rational, should appeal and apply to all. To be sure, this can be qualified - certain festivals and Eidim (I like Hirsch's classification of the laws) need only apply to Jews since they testify to particular events in our national history alone. Yet, with respect to other laws, one would believe that they apply to non-Jews as well. From Kashruth to Taharath Hamishapahah, if these are reasonable, especially given some of the reasons proposed by our commentators, they should be adopted by non-Jews. Note that I am not questioning the potential of non-Jews to convert - they need not accept the Torah in its entirety; they could adopt our Hukkim, Mishpatim, Torah, and Mitzvot etc., while not accepting the Eidim or any law which is clearly relevant to Israel alone. Yet, Judaism is not an expansionist religion and does not seek to impose any of its laws upon non-Jews, who are expected to abide by the Seven Noahide laws alone. The non-Jew who lives up to these laws has fulfilled his role, and merits reward and favour in God's eyes - the Talmud often refers to righteous Gentiles, who merit a place in the World to Come. Rather, our Sages describe a non-Jew (not a convert) who accepts our laws upon himself, claiming to have received them at Sinai, as worthy of death. How can this apparent conflict be resolved?

Thank You, Tyron (South Africa).

Mesora: I am not familiar with your last quote about "Gentiles being worthy of death", but it would not be true to say that a Gentile received the Torah at Sinai. That statement alone is riddled with potential and actual destructive sentiments. Any lie is. This would seem to be the concern of the Rabbis. Allowing such a lie would damage the credibility of the Torah, Moses, and God, as it distorts the perfect events orchestrated by God for imbuing mankind with His ideals, and setting up the unique distinction of the Jewish nation. In order to insulate the Torah system for the meticulous adherence to God's goals, a nation was formed with highly stylized and precise laws. These laws are to be studied, interpreted and taught only by those sanctioned by the very command of the

Torah, I mean the Rabbis. These Rabbis are to be the scholars and the teachers of the Torah to all mankind. Even if a Gentile would not claim to have received the laws at Sinai, but would keep them as a Jew - without converting - this again dilutes the role of the Jew, as he is no longer the sole source of Torah dissemination. Others will be misled by the fully, Torah observant Gentile who did not convert, thinking there are other Torah authorities. The Torah system is built with protective laws empowering only select individuals with the proper Rabbinical tutelage to lead the masses. The observing Gentile is not one of these select individuals, or authorities.

Your statement that reason applies at all times is of course accurate. But this does not mean that reasonable laws given to a Jew, are to be followed by a non-Jew. Knowledge does not equate with obligatory observance. Yes, the Gentile may observe and realize the same perfection as the Jew by observing the Torah laws, and he may convert if he is so moved. But he is not commanded as is the Jew. You may ask why God commanded the Jew alone, but God's ways are not man's, and our intelligence cannot fathom His. So even though laws may be reasonable to the Gentile - may this be - he is no more obligated to follow them by such understanding. A wise Gentile will of course see the perfections of the laws just as a wise Jew would, and is certainly free to live his life in accordance with his reason. □

The Snake's Punishment

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Recently a question was asked on a discussion group I am a member of, I have no idea what the answer would be, could you enlighten us, please? Here it is: "Can you tell us what the snake (discussed in Genesis in connection with Adam and Eve) being cursed, and being forced to move on its belly, and eat dirt all its days are suppose to mean?"

Mesora: The snake itself was a real creature, as stated once by a Rabbi. The Rabbi taught that if we are to take the snake metaphorically - as some commentators do - then what prevents us from taking Adam and Eve literally? Perhaps they too are metaphors, and we see clearly, this would destroy the entire Torah. Such an interpretation gives license that anything in the Torah could be understood as a metaphor; including Moses, Abraham, and even God and His actions. Based on the

very fundamentals of Torah, we do not accept this path. But the same Rabbi taught that the understanding of a literal snake, does not obviate deeper ideas disclosed in the Scriptural account connected with it.

I will offer my own suggestion. As the snake was the precipitant of sin, it may also allude to the workings of his emotions - i.e., that which caused sin. Perhaps as a rectification of the emotional makeup of the snake, God addressed two factors: 1) "Going on its belly" may imply the slow down of the emotions, as crawling is a much slower process than walking. (We learn from Rashi that the snake's legs were amputated.) Emotions have no other function than to seek gratification. They are not the apparati which perceive right and wrong, and they cannot function outside of their design, therefore they continually seek satisfaction with no cessation. Such a path leads to destruction, so a slower 'movement' of the emotions allows other positive forces to kick-in, and hopefully steer the creature back on the right path. 2) Additionally, even if the emotions with their slower state are in fact successful at achieving wrongful desires, "eating dirt all the days of its life" may teach that one other change was made to the snake: It was also given less satisfaction when desires were obtained, so "eating dirt" may allude to the 'sour taste', or the lessened satisfaction realized by the being - even when it achieves the very same, poor goals as before. Again, this minimizing of satisfaction hopefully steers the being away from only seeking emotional goals. □

Dead Asking Mercy for the Living

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

Mesora: Rashi states on this point that "if a place (a gentile cemetery) doesn't have Jewish dead to request mercy on themselves, certainly they cannot request mercy on us." The Ran adds that this question about the custom if visiting the dead was cited in the gemara because there is no Mishna or Braissa establishing a halacha to this effect, and being such, the gemara desired to understand why people were following this custom.

To strengthen the question as to how this is, that the dead can request mercy for the living, Rashi states (Gen. 48:7) that our matriarch Rachel was buried where she was by the word of G-d, in order that when the Jews in the future will be exiled by Nevuzadran, and they would pass by this

area, and Rachel will exit her grave and request mercy for us. Additionally, we see that Calev, (Num., Rashi, 13:22) during the rebellion of the spies, had visited the graves of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

I believe Rashi in both cases points to the interpretation. The concept of "requesting mercy" via one who is dead must be understood. It means that by visiting the dead, it represents an appreciation by the visitor for this dead person's values. This act of visiting the dead then underlines the visitors true virtues, as he identifies with the lifestyle of the specific dead person visited. This is the reason for mercy being shown to the visitor. He reinforces his commitment to the true life of Torah, represented by this dead person. As he does this, he reunites with the correct philosophy, and is shown grace by G-d.

The quote from Rashi, "if a place (a gentile cemetery) doesn't have Jewish dead to request mercy on themselves, certainly they cannot request mercy on us." means, if the dead person is not a Jew, there will be no identification by the visitor. The first part of Rashi, "If this dead person is not one who can request mercy on himself" means that this dead person is not one who will be remembered as a Jewish role model - via which, we euphemistically say "he gains mercy". If he was a role model, and people visited him, then this is a merit to his lifestyle, and as if he gained mercy. It doesn't change him now, but it is an endorsement of his life. That is what is meant by "request mercy on himself". The dead person is not actually requesting mercy, it is a form of speech which carries an idea. Similarly, Rachel does not exit her grave, but rather, her lifestyle acts as a reminder to the exiled Jews as they pass, and this can cause them to repent, as if "she actually exited her grave and prayed for them." Calev also visited the dead, but I believe it was because his specific circumstance was one where he had to reinforce his concept of G-d's promise of the land. So Calev went to the graves of those with whom G-d had initiated the promise to.

With this interpretation, we do not have to come upon a difficult literal explanation.

Note: A reader wrote in the following support, "A good proof against the people praying to the dead can be found in mesachtet Sotah 14a in Hagaha Habach where R Cham bar Chananiah said the reason why G-d hid the burial place of Moshe was maybe people would feel that when Moshe was alive, G-d listened to his prayers. So they will go to Moshe's grave and pray to him and Moshe would pray on their behalf and annul the decree against them. So G-d hid his burial in order to avoid this idolatry." □

Parshas Vayeche

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And he said, 'Swear to me.' And he swore to him. And Yisrael bowed towards the head of the bed." (Beresheit 47:31)

Yaakov realizes that he is approaching death. He summons his son Yosef. He asks Yosef to assure him that he will return him to the land of Israel for burial. Yosef agrees. Yaakov asks Yosef to vow that he will fulfill this request. Yosef complies. Yaakov then bows. There are various explanations of Yaakov's bowing. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra provides the basic interpretations. One opinion is that Yaakov bowed to Hashem. The other opinion is that Yaakov bowed to his son, Yosef. Seforno adopts the explanation that Yaakov bowed to Hashem. He elaborates on the reason for Yaakov's action. The bow was an act of giving thanks to the Almighty. Yaakov realized that it would require Yosef's influence for his removal from Egypt for burial. He knew that Yosef had achieved authority through the providence of Hashem. Yaakov thanked Hashem for His guidance over Yosef's life. This was appropriate. Yaakov was now benefiting from this providence.

The second interpretation of Yaakov's bow is more difficult to understand. Why would Yaakov bow to his son Yosef? He was asking Yosef to perform a kindness. However, this was an appropriate request. Yosef was obligated to comply with his father's wishes. Why would Yaakov thank Yosef for doing his duty? Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra answers this question through asserting that Yaakov was not thanking his son. Instead, he was demonstrating respect. Yosef was the ruler of Egypt. Yaakov felt obligated to demonstrate his respect for Yosef's position of authority.

Gershonides offers another explanation for Yaakov bowing to Yosef. He maintains that Yaakov was thanking Yosef. Why would Yaakov thank Yosef for performing his duty towards his father? Gershonides posits that there is a basic ethical lesson taught through Yaakov's action. We are obligated to appreciate any kindness done for us. Our right to expect this kindness is irrelevant. Therefore, Yaakov was ethically bound to demonstrate his appreciation to Yosef. True, Yosef was only agreeing to fulfill a reasonable obligation. Nonetheless, the kindness required acknowledgment.

"Unstable as water, you will not longer be first. This is because you moved your father's beds, committing a profane act. He moved my bed." (Beresheit 49:4)

Yaakov addresses his sons before his death. He rebukes or blesses his various children. He begins by addressing his oldest son, Reuven. He tells Reuven that although he is the first-born, he will not be granted the privileges identified with this birthright. He tells Reuven that this is a consequence of his previous sin. The pasuk does not clearly indicate the sin committed by Reuven. Yaakov limits his rebuke to an allusion. He criticizes Reuven for moving his father's bed. The Chumash discusses the incident very briefly in Parshat VaYishlach. The Torah explains that Reuven slept with Bilhah, Yaakov's concubine. The Talmud explains that the statement should not be understood

literally. It is an allusion to a complicated incident. After the death of Rachel, Yaakov moved his bed into the tent of Bilhah. Bilhah had been Rachel's maidservant. She had been given to Yaakov as a wife. Reuven felt that this preference for Bilhah degraded his mother, Leya. He decided to unilaterally correct the situation. He moved Yaakov's bed into Leya's tent. Other commentators offer alternative explanations of Reuven's motivations. Some provide completely different explanations of the incident. Rashi, based upon the Sifri, maintains that Yaakov did not rebuke Reuven prior to this point. He waited until the end of his life. Why did Yaakov postpone his comments until this time? Rashi explains that Yaakov was concerned with Reuven's reaction to the rebuke. He feared that this criticism might drive Reuven away. Reuven might turn to Esav. Rashi further explains that Moshe also waited until the end of his life to thoroughly rebuke Bnai Yisrael. He was motivated by these same considerations. He did not wish to risk alienating Bnai Yisrael. These comments are very difficult to understand. In order to appreciate the problem they present, a brief introduction is needed.

Maimonides explains in his Mishne Torah that we are each responsible for our fellow Jew's conduct. This means that should we observe a person acting improperly, we are obligated to address the person. We are to point out the sinfulness of the behavior and attempt to redirect the errant individual. We cannot discharge this obligation with a single comment. We are required to be persistent. We must repeat the rebuke until we are heard. It is difficult to reconcile Yaakov's behavior with this principle. It seems from Maimonides that the obligation to provide criticism is urgent. Postponement is not appropriate. How could Yaakov and Moshe ignore this pressing obligation until the moments before their deaths? The answer to this question lies in recognizing that there are two types of rebuke. The first is related to a specific action. In this form of rebuke, we point out a particular wrongdoing. For example, we tell our friend that he or she has been unkind to another. Perhaps, we criticize our friend for eating something that was not kosher. In these cases our criticism is limited to the specific act. We are not evaluating the overall values or conduct of the individual. The second form of rebuke is far more penetrating. In this second form, we move beyond the specific behavior. We criticize a character trait or value of the individual. We are criticizing the person not the specific behavior. An effective teacher or parent recognizes the difference between these two forms of criticism. It is relatively easy and safe to criticize an action. A teacher can tell a student that an assignment is late or requires improvement. A parent can safely explain to a child that his or her bed is not made. The second form of rebuke is far more dangerous and tricky. Once the teacher or parent addresses the substance of the person there is a risk of alienation. This occurs when a teacher tells a student that he or she is lazy. A parent telling a child that he or she is a slob is engaging in a more risky form of criticism. In order to be effective, the criticism must be delivered with sensitivity and care. Delivered carelessly the rebuke may result in a negative outcome.

We can now reconcile Yaakov and Moshe's behavior with the teaching of Maimonides. Maimonides is discussing rebuke directed to a specific sinful behavior. This criticism can and should be provided immediately. This is because such criticism is relatively safe. Yaakov and Moshe were providing more extensive criticism. Moshe did not limit his comments to specific sins committed by the nation. He dissected the behavior of the people. He analyzed their motivations, morals and values. Yaakov also was engaging in this type of critique. He criticized a character trait of

Reuven. He told Reuven he was impulsive. He acted without due consideration and judgement. This was the intent of his comparison of Reuven to water. This type of rebuke should not be delivered offhandedly.

Both Moshe and Yaakov waited until their death to utter these more serious criticisms. They knew that such personal rebukes could estrange the recipients. However, they understood that their impending deaths provided an opportunity to provide valuable insight. They used their last moments to counsel and help others in matters that were previously difficult to fully discuss.

"And Yosef had Bnai Yisrael swear saying, 'G-d will remember you and you will take up my bones from here'". (Beresheit 50:25)

Yosef approaches his brothers. He tells them that he will die in Egypt. He does not want to be buried in Egypt. They will be redeemed by Hashem and brought to the land of Israel. At the time of their redemption, they should remove his body from Egypt and bury him in the land of Israel. The brothers agree to Yosef's request. They swear that they will fulfill his wishes.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Z"L asks an interesting question. Why did Yosef turn to his brothers for assistance? Yosef had his own children. He knew that his own descendants would be rescued from Egypt. Why did Yosef not ask his own children to accept responsibility for fulfilling his wishes? In order to understand Rav Soloveitchik's answer to this question, we must review an earlier episode in the parasha. Immediately prior to this incident, the Chumash discusses Yaakov's death and the brothers' reaction. The Torah tells us that the brothers were troubled by their relationship with Yosef. They were afraid that Yosef still harbored ill feelings towards them. They suspected that Yosef had deferred acting on these feelings during Yaakov's lifetime because of his love for his father. Now that Yaakov had died, perhaps Yosef would seek to punish them. Yosef assured his brothers that did not resent them and would continue to support care for them. Yosef realized that his brothers did not completely accept him. Their suspicion was based on distrust. He was troubled by this relationship. He knew that Bnai Yisrael must be a single unified nation. His descendants must live in peace with the children of his brothers. How could he bring about a more total reconciliation? Rav Soloveitchik explains that Yosef identified the underlying cause of the friction between himself and his brothers. The tension was caused by his superior status. The brothers were dependent upon him. They had been forced to bow to Yosef. They had reluctantly accepted Yosef as their leader. This stratification was a source of resentment and distrust. Based on this evaluation, Yosef devised a plan to place his brothers at ease. The essence of Yosef's plan was to demonstrate that they were all mutually dependant upon one another. The brothers needed him. But he also needed the brothers. In order to create this mutual dependence he asked his brothers to accept responsibility for his interment in the land of Israel. He placed his fate in their hands. In this manner he demonstrated his trust in his brothers and created mutual dependency. ■

□

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 47:31. □

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 47:31. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 47:31. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 254. Sefer Beresheit 35:22. Mesechet Shabbat 55b. □ Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:3. □ Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot De'ot 6:7. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Yemai Zicaron (Jerusalem, 1986), p 19.

Forgiveness - Selicha

RIVKA OLENICK

"...nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people." Leviticus 19:18.

"If your brother has wronged you in your property, forget it at once even if he has not asked you to do so; what he took was not yours, and he did not take anything from you. Where injury has been done to your person or honour, be easily appeased as soon as your brother asks for forgiveness and desires to be reconciled. He who soon forgives is soon forgiven. If you are really good, if humility is one of your qualities, you will forget hurts and insults without pardon being asked of you; like the well known chasid, you will never lie down to sleep without being reconciled with the whole world, all of which God covers with the wings of His peace." Samson Raphael Hirsch from Horeb.

In order that we can to "return to God" Who covers the whole world with the wings of His peace there must first be a genuine desire for selichah, forgiveness from those we have sinned against and to those who desire our forgiveness. Asking to be forgiven by God must be rooted in love and fear of God and love for our fellow Jew. Doesn't that make sense? Shouldn't we try much harder to realize that we are really one nation, designated to be His holy nation, chosen by Him? In asking for God's forgiveness shouldn't we be aware that we have lost our way, and that only through the process of tshuvah can we find our way back to the Master of the World? Tshuvah itself is not so difficult, being humble and admitting we are wrong is difficult. God commanded us to do tshuvah because we are capable of it just as we are capable of facing the truth about our flaws and asking for forgiveness.

But before we ask God to forgive us for the sins we commit against each other shouldn't we first reflect on the purpose of our lives? If we don't understand the purpose of our life why should it matter that God

forgive each of us? Why should we want our fellow Jew to forgive us? Are we really sincere when we ask for each other's forgiveness? Are we asking for His forgiveness in order to truly return to Him, or is it just "lip service." Are we trying to get through another day, month or year, to try to make it "under the wire" with the hope that our fate will be sealed with life or that God hears our daily plea of repentance? Do we really try to reflect at the end of our day and ask ourselves: How did I act, what did I say or do, or didn't say or do that might have harmed myself and/or another person? Can I really go to sleep in peace with the whole world?

"Who can discern one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults" said King David in his Psalms 19:13. We can help each other to discern our errors and faults by pointing out to each other with compassion when we are doing wrong and what we are doing wrong. We are each obligated to rebuke with kindness and concern for each other's well being. In doing, so we enhance the potential for greater perfection that we each have by helping each other move closer to it. It is easier to be objective concerning other people's flaws, if we do this with genuine thoughtfulness and not harsh judgment. At the same time, we should look more closely at our own flaws and weaknesses and honestly ask: "How am I living my own life?" instead of judging other people's lives negatively. It is much easier to point our finger at others, but what do we gain from that? Nothing. When we constantly do that, there is no growth, we continue to live in denial and never use the potential that was given to us as a gift from God. It is a gift, even though most people are convinced they themselves create their own potential.

Truthfully, most people waste their lives by pursuing things that will never utilize one's real potential! Think about it. A Jewish person

cannot afford not to do tshuvah. No one can afford to miss or ignore the opportunity to repent at any time, only a fool would choose not to. How many of our brothers and sisters have we lost to the vile, filth of Arab nations who call themselves servants of God. Who have absolutely no fear of God, and no love for His divine Torah, but who want to destroy every trace of His chosen people. They refer to Jews many times in their corrupt book, Koran as infidels and non-believers. We, the Jewish people were designated as the "true servants of God." It is our job to make every effort possible, with our heart, our soul and with all our might as we say daily in the Shema. Our purpose is to demonstrate continuously to the world what our purpose is, which is to be an eved Hashem, a servant of God. We are supposed to be "the light" unto the nations but pathetically we still are "the target" of the nations. Every single day we have the opportunity to talk to God through real prayer, prayer that we merit only because of the Avos, the Fathers. Prayer that God hears, that He listens to. The so-called prayer of the non-Jew is not listened to when he prays to a non-god. It is the tefilos of the Jew who prays to the true God - Hashem - that is heard.

In the Selichot prayers we say: "Thy people and thy heritage hunger for thy goodness, thirst for thy kindness, and long for thy salvation; let them know and understand that mercy and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God." We are asking God through our tshuvah to forgive us individually and as a community to restore us as the Klal, His "holy" nation. We beg Him to answer us as He answered Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, our Forefathers at the Red Sea, Moses at Horeb, Aaron, Phineas, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Hezekiah, Hannaniah, Mishael and Azariah, Daniel, Mordecai and Esther, Ezra, the righteous, the pious, the perfect and the upright. He answers the poor, the broken-

hearted, the widow, the orphan, the lowly in spirit, yes He does answer!

Do not pass up any opportunity to save your own life at any time by engaging in the process of tshuvah, and to be written in the Book of Life - what could be more important? Start now with doing tshuvah. Read Selichos and continue during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. A person can do tshuvah all year and strengthen the opportunity so that at the designated time when God is closer to us, one's fate will be sealed. Every day in the Shemona Esrei we say the blessing for repentance, "hashivenu Avinu l'Torahtecha", bring us back, our Father to Your Torah. We ask God to bring us back, but we can make much greater effort to return, too! Give Tzedaka that brings justice to those people who benefit from what you give. So that our fellow Jews do not feel abandoned, visit the sick and sit and listen to them with your heart. Look into their eyes and say that you care and will include them in your tefilos and will help them in whatever way you can. Honestly look into yourself with the serious intent to work on your flaws by admitting to them, and then move forward and begin to remove those flaws. Attach yourself to learning and be more involved in thought, because this is what we were created for. The Torah has all the tools and instruction needed in order to live in line with the will of The Creator. Be optimistic in your goals and be strong in your commitment in the process of tshuvah, and just "do it."

"Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving the created beings and bringing them closer to Torah." Pirkei Avos. "Lord in heaven, we entreat thee, as a slave entreats his master. We are oppressed, and dwell in darkness; our souls are afflicted with much distress. We have not the strength to propitiate thee, O Lord; do it for the sake of the covenant which thou didst make with our forefathers." Selichos. ■