

# RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayeishev for your Shabbos Table  
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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger as a zechus for a refuah shleima for Chaya Esther Tehila bas Arielle Tsiporah and lilui nishmas Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

### We're Here to Work!

Parshas Vayeishev begins with the words וישב יעקב בארץ – “Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father’s residence.” Rashi famously comments that the word וישב implies something beyond mere residence. He writes: קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף – Yaakov, now an elderly man, wanted to enjoy peace and serenity. The word וישב refers to this desire for שלווה, for a calm, tranquil life, the ability to devote oneself to learning and religious growth without hardship and turmoil. This desire was deemed inappropriate, Rashi writes, and so קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף – God brought upon Yaakov the tragic episode of Yosef’s sale as a slave by his brothers.

What’s wrong with the desire לישב בשלווה, to live an easy, tranquil life?

The answer is that, as the *pasuk* in Sefer Iyov (5:7) states, אדם לעמל יולד – we have come into this world to work, to struggle. Our world is not for שלווה, for taking things easy. No progress, advancement, breakthrough, invention or creation was ever made while relaxing on a lawn chair sipping a piña colada. Growth and transformation occur only through hard work and struggle. We have been brought into this world לעמל, to work hard to achieve, and not לישב בשלווה, to have things come easy. Even in *ruchniyus*, in spiritual growth, we can achieve only by exerting effort and overcoming hurdles.

In the previous *parsha*, Parshas Vayishlach (32:29), we read that after Yaakov’s triumph over Eisav’s angel that attacked him, the angel pronounced that Yaakov would now be called ישראל, signifying that שרית עם אלוהים ועם אנשים – “you have struggled against angels and men, and you prevailed.” Significantly, the name ישראל stems from the word שרית – “you have struggled.” We would have assumed that the name of our nation would be ותוכל (“You prevailed”), expressing victory and triumph. But instead, we are known as ישראל, as the nation that struggles. We

are a people that does not seek לישב בשלווה, to take it easy, to remain in our comfort zone, but is rather prepared to work and struggle to achieve, to produce, to build and to move ourselves and our world forward.

It is told that an older man once came to Rav Elyashiv to ask for encouragement and guidance, as he had been struggling with a certain problem throughout his life, without success. He was very distraught, and felt like a failure.

“What’s going to be written on my tombstone?” he said. “Is it going to say: ‘Here lies a man who struggled’?!”

“If I was in a cemetery and saw such an inscription on a tombstone,” Rav Elyashiv replied, “then I would stop and *daven* at this grave. Because somebody who spent his life struggling is a true *tzadik*.”

אדם לעמל יולד. We are here to struggle, because it is precisely through struggling that we grow and achieve.

### We Can Get Along With Each Other – If We Want To

The Torah says that Yosef’s brothers resented him to the point where לא יכלו דברו לשלום – “they could not speak with him peacefully” (37:4).

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Megged Yosef*, finds it significant that the Torah says that the brothers were unable to speak to Yosef peacefully – implying that they wanted to. Their desire was to have a warm, close relationship with him, but they could not. Rav Sorotzkin explains that naturally, people want a close relationship with their family members. This is an ingrained desire that we all have. And so the Torah says that Yosef’s brothers wanted to speak with him peacefully, because he was, after all, their brother, but they were unable to do so.

Many times, however, the inability to speak peacefully with siblings is imaginary, in our minds. Perhaps the brothers were truly unable to speak peacefully with Yosef – but very often, family members who are not on speaking terms could be if they really wanted to.

People sometimes say things like, “I want to be nice to

them, but how can I? We gave their child such a large wedding gift, and look what they gave our child!" "I'm supposed to be nice to them? Look at the *yarmulke* he wears! Look at the way she covers her hair!" "I would love to be close with them – but I refuse to be close to somebody who voted for that candidate, or who was on the other side of the argument in shul!"

These are all imaginary obstacles to דברו לשלום. People sometimes say that they can't get along with their siblings, but the truth is that they can, if they want it strongly enough.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

### What Hashem Wants – and What We Should Want

Yaakov sent Yosef to Shechem to check on his brothers, who were there with their flocks. Yosef went searching for them, and he met a man (identified by *Chazal* as an angel) who asked him, מה תבקש – "What do you seek?" (37:15).

Yosef replied, את אחי אנוכי אבקש – "It is my brothers that I seek" (37:16).

The *Divrei Yisrael* of Modzitz suggests reading the word אנוכי in this *pasuk* as an allusion to אלוהים – Hashem Himself. He explains that what אנוכי מבקש – what Hashem wants from us, is אחי – that we act toward one another as brothers, that we live together in peace, harmony and unity. This is, ultimately, the primary expectation that Hashem has of us.

This is not only what Hashem wants of us, but also what we should want of ourselves.

The Kotzker Rebbe explains the man's question – מה תבקש – as one which is directed toward each and every one of us. We should always ask ourselves, "What do I want? What are my goals? What are my aspirations?" We can learn a great deal about a person from his ambitions, from what he pursues, from what he feels he is lacking in his life. And so we should be asking ourselves these questions, to find out who we really are. The proper response to the question of מה תבקש is את אחי אנוכי מבקש – that we should aspire toward unity and fraternity, peaceful relations with other people. We need to make this a priority, a goal that we pursue. We should not be looking to instigate conflicts and sow tension and divisiveness; to the contrary, we should seek את אחי, loving, peaceful relationships with our fellow Jews.

## DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

### Absurd Loyalty

The Torah interrupts the story of Yosef with the story of Yehuda and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. After the untimely death of Tamar's husband – Yehuda's oldest son – she married the second son, following the law of *yibum* (levirate marriage). But the second son also passed

away, and it was expected that Yehuda's third son, Sheila, would marry her. Yehuda, however, was afraid of allowing Sheila to marry her, and so she remained alone. Finally, she posed as a prostitute and stood along the road when Yehuda was traveling, in order for him to solicit her services, so she would conceive and bear children from her husband's family member. This union resulted in the birth of twins, one of whom – Peretz – would turn out to be the ancestor of King David, and thus of *Mashiach*.

Rav Soloveitchik noted the remarkable trait that Tamar bequeathed to us, on account of which she was chosen to be the mother of *Mashiach*:

*Tamar was a heroic woman, a great woman. God gleaned and gathered beautiful things from throughout the world—gems, noble emotions, heroic capabilities. What could Tamar do that others could not? She could wait; she possessed the heroic ability and patience to wait without end...*

*Tamar waited many years. She was lonely, forsaken, forgotten by everyone. Seasons passed. All her friends married, reared families; all contact with them came to an end; people treated her with ridicule and contempt. Shelah married; Judah had forgotten her. And yet she waited and never said a word. Wasn't she the incarnation of Keneset Yisrael, which has waited for her Beloved hundreds and thousands of years under the most trying circumstances? Did not Tamar personify the greatest of all heroic action—to wait while the waiting arouses laughter and derision?*

*...Tamar showed the strength of waiting and hoping, of having faith even when she became the subject of mockery. She sat as a widow in her father's house, waiting for Shelah. Tamar remained faithful and loyal. In her simplicity and naivete, she instinctively trusted Judah. She could not tear herself away from him; something fateful, incomprehensible, tied her to him. Something larger would come of it... The strength of absurd loyalty is the... foundation of the concealed world of the kingdom of the House of David, of the idea of the Messiah.*

Tamar's example is what has given *Am Yisrael* the strength, resolve, courage and faith to wait and retain our trust in Hashem throughout centuries of bitter exile. Just as she waited patiently for Yehuda, without betraying her trust, so has *Am Yisrael* continued to wait for the Almighty. We, like Tamar, have been ridiculed and scorned for our "absurd loyalty" for all these years, but we ignore the mockery and the contempt and remain faithful and confident in our ultimate redemption.

This, Rav Soloveitchik explains, is why Tamar is the matriarch of *Mashiach* – because she teaches us about the unbridled faith and unlimited patience that is needed for us to realize our dream of Hashem's ultimate return to us.