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**Chochmat HaLev, Berkeley**  
**Truth Saying and Hearing**

***Opening Drash for workshop entitled “Moving Through Anger to Resiliency and Mindful Communications: Lessons Learned From Working with Israeli Soldiers, Settlers, and Others”***

***Delivered at the Year of Civil Discourse Opening Program 12/12/10***

I speak as mother of IDF soldiers and thus deeply involved and committed to Israel's soul, and as one who is just back from a Rabbis For Human Rights trip to Israel – a heart-wrenching trip in which I was immersed in all that is ugly and all that is good there.

This past week we read of the climax of Joseph and Judah's drama. And during this next week we move into the concluding chapters of Genesis for this calendric cycle. The cycles of victimization and untruths came full circle. The reader feels the anguish of Judah and his brothers as Joseph seemed to extract one last bit of suffering before revealing his identity to them. And despite Joseph's reassurance that his descent to Egypt – that began when his brother sold him into slavery – was a Divine plan so that the family could be rescued from hunger, the brothers never fully trusted Joseph's forgiveness.

As we read the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, we see that both the “victim” and the “perpetrator” suffer. Joseph was the one who went through the process of enslavement; his brothers lived with their actions for 20 years. Both suffered, albeit differently. Joseph, when in the position of power, caused his brothers to suffer. Is this justifiable? Joseph finally was able to see his brothers' suffering and was no longer able to bear being the cause of their suffering. Although we might disagree with his theological stance that it was God's intervention that was the “set-up” of their situation, the poignancy of Joseph's revelation of his identity to his brothers bring us to tears, too, as he sobbed out loud.

Who gets to decide when someone else has suffered enough? We know that Joseph was wronged by his brothers. Yet, we ask, as we read this story in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just how long victimhood justifies mistreatment of those who harmed us. How does one shift from the pettiness of self-interest to the desire for reconciliation? How can we learn Joseph's lesson without having to compulsively relive his drama?

This next week, we will learn of Jacob's uncanny ability to bless his children as he prepares to die – a time of truth seeing and truth saying. The text tells us that each received exactly the blessing he needed **וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם** **אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּבָרְכָתוֹ כִּי־רָךְ אֵתָם**. And not all of the “blessings” are pretty. Does it always require that one sit in the liminal space between life and death to see and speak the truth to those we love? Most often hearing criticism, especially when it is directed to our essential selves, is neither easy nor comfortable. Imagine being Jacob's sons as their father unflinchingly recalled their misdeeds and foretold their futures.

I bless us, as we engage in this process of dialogue and reconciliation – from a place of civility and honor – that we can hear each other's truths without defensiveness; we accept the deep knowing that, like Jacob's blessings, the truth that someone else sees may be very uncomfortable for us to hear and to acknowledge.

Let us create a container of safety so that we can let go of defensiveness and be vulnerable to hearing each other with love. I pray that we learn from this core Torah narrative that sometimes we must just decide to forgive, move on and let go of past hurts so that new solutions can be birthed. Let all those in conflict experience the relief and deepened understanding that comes when honesty and openness bring clarity, honor and kindness to our relationships. This is my blessing for all of us and for our world.