BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table and in the hallway in the back of Epstein.

Two weeks ago we were in the midst of Hanukkah. The Haftorah for Shabbat Hanukkah is Zechariah's vision of a future period with a rededication of the Temple and Menorah in Jerusalem, with a descendent of King David as king (or leader) of Israel. In Zechariah's vision, all the nations of the world will acknowledge Israel as God's chosen people. This Tuesday we observed the fast of 10 Tevet, which always comes a week after the end of Hanukkah, always around the time that we conclude Sefer Bereishis. The fast day also always comes very close to the winter solstice, the time of year with the longest nights in the northern hemisphere. At this point in the Torah, Yaakov dies, and the brothers fear that Yosef will seek revenge on them for enabling him to be sold as a slave many years earlier. Yosef reassures his brothers. Sefer Bereishis concludes with Yosef's death at age 110. He is the first of the brothers to die.

As Sefer Shemot opens, we read that the remaining brothers have died. With the death of Levi, the last of the brothers, in year 2332, Paro begins the process of enslaving the Jews. God frees B'Nai Yisrael and takes them out of Egypt in 2448. This chronology, from Chabad, indicates that the period of slavery lasted for 116 years. With the death of Yaakov, then his sons, and then 116 years of slavery, Bereishis ends and Shemot opens during a dark period of history – appropriate reading during the darkest and often coldest days of winter.

Rabbi David Fohrman explains why we have four fast days involving the Babylonian destruction of the first Temple. Since the dedication of the Mishkan in 2935, for 403 years, King Solomon's Temple was the center and pride of all Jews. Our tradition attributes the destruction to punishment for idolatry and lack of chesed (ignoring the needs of disadvantaged members of society). God sent the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem when Jews ignored the warnings of prophets for many years. On 10 Tevet 3336, the Babylonian army surrounded the walls of Jerusalem and initiated a blockade of the city. By preventing any food from coming into the town, the army created a terrible famine. After two and a half years, on 17 Tammuz 3338, the Babylonians penetrated the city walls. Three weeks later, on 9 Av, the army burnt the city and Temple, slaughtered most of the people, destroyed the town, and took most of the people into exile. The Babylonians appointed Gedaliah to be in charge of the few Jews remaining in Israel. On 3 Tishrei 3339, a fellow Jew and ten of his men murdered Gedaliah and those with him. The remaining Jews fled to Egypt, and there were no more Jews in Israel. In this short period, Jerusalem went from the center of Judaism, the locus of religious observance (korbanot), and the pride of our people, to a wasteland.

Before his death, Yaakov gave a bracha and some insights into the future to each of his sons and to his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim (whom he adopted and gave the status of sons, thereby giving their father Yosef a double portion). For some sons, such as Shimon and Levi, the blessings sound more like rebukes than blessings. This glimpse into the future for the various sons previews the legacy of Yaakov's family, who become B'Nai Yisrael in Sefer Shemot. The path of the Jewish nation has had high and low points, with very long periods of suffering over time. While many other nations have tried to subdue B'Nai Yisrael, over the 3527 years since Yaakov died (in the year 2255), powerful nations have come and disappeared while we Jews are still here. We still have a mandate to represent God's mitzvot and values and to influence our people and other nations to follow God's desires. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan,

z"l, started me on the path to learn more about this legacy, a study that I keep exploring. May we all leave this world a better place than we found it.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayechi: Stand and Deliver

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week the Book of Braishis ends. Yaakov (Jacob) summoned his son Yoseph (Joseph) and discussed final arrangements with him. He asked to be transported to Chevron and to be interred in the same cave as his father, mother, and grandparents. Yoseph returned home and an unprecedented event occurred. Yaakov took ill. He is the first human that the Torah records as getting sick. Yoseph was informed and quickly hurried to his father's bedside. The Torah tells us that when Yoseph was announced, "Israel (Jacob) exerted himself and sat up on the bed" (Genesis 48:2). Yoseph enters the room and Yaakov proceeded to recount major events of his life to him. Yaakov talked about his divine revelations and the blessings that the Almighty bestowed upon him. He discussed the death of Rachel and explained why he buried her in Bethlehem and not Hebron. Then Yaakov proceeded to bless his beloved son Yoseph's children in a unique manner. He designates Yoseph's children as shevatim (tribes) with equal rights and inheritance as his other sons.

One portion of the episode needs clarification. The Torah is usually short on detail. Why then does the Torah tell us that when Yoseph walked in Yaakov exerted himself and sat up in bed? Why is that significant? Who cares if he sat up or lay down? If he was able to sit, why should he not? And if it was very difficult for him to sit up, why did he? And isn't what Yaakov said more relevant than how he said it?

Rashi explains that the seemingly supplementary detail teaches us a lesson. A father whose son has risen to power must show respect. It may have been quite difficult for Yaakov to sit, however it was important. One must show respect for royalty, even if it is his own child who has risen to power. I'd like to analyze the incident from another angle.

American historian Paul F. Boller Jr. relates the following story: At noon on January 1st 1863, the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation was placed in front of Abraham Lincoln. He stared intensely at it as it lay before him on his desk. He picked up his pen to sign it, and was about to dip the quill into the ink when he hesitated and put his arm down. He paused, closed his eyes, and began the process again. Determinedly he picked up the quill, dipped it in the ink, and put it down. With a grim face he turned to Secretary of State William N. Seward and said, "My hands have been shaking since nine o'clock this morning. My right hand is almost paralyzed. If I am ever to

go down into history, it will be for this act. My whole self is in it. However, if my hand trembles when I sign this proclamation, whoever examines it will say hereafter, 'he hesitated.'"

With that, the President mustered his strength, dipped the quill into the ink, and slowly but resolutely signed in perfect form — Abraham Lincoln.

As he lay on his deathbed, Yaakov Avinu was about to perform an unprecedented act. He was about to bestow the title of shevatim, tribes, to his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe. This was an honor only relegated to his own children. Then he blessed them with words that were destined to become the hallmark of paternal blessings for generations to come. "By you shall (the children of) Israel bless their children – May G-d shall make you like Ephraim and Menashe. Thus shall be your children."

Those were not blessings that could be endowed in a prone position. As weak as Yaakov was, he knew that the future of two young tribes lay in the strength of his blessing. He wouldn't give it lying down. Yaakov Avinu knew that any sign of weakness that he would convey in transferring that most important message would be recognized for eternity. He mustered his strength and sat up to give that blessing that would wax eternal. Execution of great actions needs great strength and fortitude. Our forefather Yaakov knew that just as there are things you can't take lying down, there are also many things, namely greatness and blessing, that you cannot give lying down.

Good Shabbos

The Mitzvah to Plan for the Future

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020 *

What does the Torah have to say about a person making concrete plans for the eventuality of her death? Is it appropriate to sign a health care proxy or to make out a will?

There is no better example than our patriarch, Jacob. When this week's parasha, Vayechi, opens, Jacob is getting older and sees that his death is not far off. So, what does he do? He plans for it. He calls Joseph to his bedside, refers explicitly to his impending death ("I will lie down with my fathers"), and makes arrangements for his burial.

G-d willing, we will all live a long, long life — but we will all die eventually. This is not planning for a tragedy; it is planning for an eventuality, for a natural event that is part of G-d's world.

Here's the puzzling thing though: We know this, and yet, we often don't act on it. How many of us avoid signing our own proxies? How many of us avoid talking to our parents about formulating an advance medical directive or choosing health care proxies because we would rather not speak about such unpleasant things or are afraid of upsetting our elders?

We need to do better. Taking such concrete steps like choosing a health care proxy and discussing our wishes, both personal and religious, ensures that our requests are fulfilled in a situation where we cannot communicate for ourselves. It is also a profound act of caring for one's family. It saves those left behind from the agony of not knowing what they should do or if they have done right by us. And it protects families from fighting over the right thing to do.

Talking to one's parents about this can be difficult. We fear the reaction ("So, are you waiting for me to die?!"). But there are ways to have the conversation with sensitivity. Perhaps: "Mom, I love you and I hope you live for many, many more years. But when that time comes, I want to make sure that we are doing everything we can for you, and that it is in accordance with your wishes."

Oftentimes, parents are relieved and grateful for the opportunity to talk realistically about their futures. Elders most fear losing their independence, being a burden, and losing their cognitive capacities, so a dignified opportunity to discuss these fears is very much welcomed. Thus, it may be the adult children who are fearful of facing the natural progression of life and death.

And when it comes to making out a will, we tend not to have the same reservations. Many people do make a will when they got older. But often people feel that there is no need to do this when they are younger, say in their 30s or 40s. And

yet, sometimes people die young. We should not let concerns of considering such unpleasant possibilities get in the way of being responsible and taking care of our family by asking: Whom do I trust to raise my children, and how will they be provided for financially?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was once asked whether a person is allowed to buy life insurance, or whether this would reflect a lack of bitachon, faith in G-d. He responded unequivocally that to buy life insurance is permissible and religiously desirable (Igrot Moshe OH 2:111, 1963). Rav Feinstein draws on multiple midrashic sources to demonstrate that faith in G-d means a belief that G-d gives us the strength, and will continue to give us the strength, to do what we need to do to provide for ourselves and our loved ones. But we must do our part, which includes not only getting a job rather than waiting to win the lottery, but also planning for the future.

In a later responsum (IM OH 4:48, 1965), he was asked to opine on whether a person with limited means should buy term life or whole life insurance. Taking his cue from the provisions in the ketubah (marriage contract) that were instituted by the rabbis to protect the financial interests of a man's wife and children after his death, Rav Moshe concluded that term life is preferable. Whole life is an investment that bears returns during one's life; term life is an insurance policy to ensure that one's family is provided for in case of an early death. For Rav Moshe, a person must not only earn money now, he must also plan for the future and for his loved ones.

Nowhere in either responsum does Rav Moshe raise the concern of ayin hara (invoking the evil eye), not even when he discusses buying theft, fire, or car insurance, events that could be tragic and that are not inevitable. Taking these concrete steps is simply living up to our obligation to take care of ourselves and our families.

After Jacob makes practical plans for his death and burial, he gives out blessings — first to Joseph's children and then to all of his children. If we take care to get our affairs in order, to make sure that our family is provided for and that our wishes for the end are known, then we will have truly left them with a great blessing..

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi Linzer's Dvar Torah was not ready in time for my deadline this week, so I selected an earlier Dvar Torah from his archives.

https://library.yctorah.org/2020/01/the-mitzvah-to-plan-for-the-future/

Stars Shining in the Night

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

Yakov was impressed. Besides the joy that he felt by being reunited with Yosef, he took great pride in Yosef's sons Efraim and Menashe. These were children raised in the midst of Mitzrayim, and yet, they were worthy of being declared children of Yakov and tribes of their own. Yakov chooses to use them as the poster children for Jewish blessings. Jewish parents will bless their children as they say, "May Hashem make you like Efraim and Menashe."

When we consider the unique life journey of Yakov, we notice a precious commonality that he must have felt with Yosef and his children.

Consider that Avraham's life starts in a very scary place; he is discriminated against for his beliefs, and the local regime tried to kill him. But with time and perseverance, Avraham emerges as a leader with thousands of followers. He merits to see his child Yitzchak take over the family legacy in the promised land.

Yitzchak, likewise, lived through his own challenges and growth. He experienced the Akeida, yearned for a child. Eventually he emerged as a sage in the promised land.

Yakov, however, lives an ongoing journey of ups and downs. He deals with Esav, with Lavan, and then with Esav again. When he finally thinks he will be able to settle and complete his life in blessed contentment, he is thrust into yet another life situation with the disappearance of Yosef. Yakov's strength is not seen in his finally ascending to "success." Success

(in the conventional sense) is elusive to Yakov; he ends his life in exile. Yakov's strength is seen in his ability to build and illuminate even in darkness.

Every day as we study the commentary of Rashi, for example, we are reminded of this legacy. From the clear, concise, and lofty language of Rashi, one would think that he was writing from some serene vacation home in the French Riviera. But the reality is that Rashi lived in the dangerous and volatile times leading up to the Crusades. Yet, despite the darkness and challenge, Rashi produced, and he produced mightily. His commentary to Torah and Talmud are classics and indispensable. His grandchildren form much of the leadership for Ashkenazic Jewry and are primary authors of the commentary known as Tosfos.

The legacy of Yakov is that life is not one great, smooth process toward serenity. There are many ups and downs. Sometimes we upsize, then downsize, then upsize again, as the need may be. And throughout it all we must be the best we can be. We must bask in the warmth when it is sunny and illuminate the night when it is dark.

Interestingly, the Parsha, when written in a Sefer Torah, starts without the typical space left between one Parsha and the next. Rashi comments that it is because the hearts of the Jewish family were "closed" due to the upcoming start of slavery. Yet, even as the Parsha is "closed," the name of the Parsha is "Vayichi Yakov," Yakov lived. The legacy of Yakov is to live, no matter what situation we may be in.

In Efraim and Menashe, Yakov saw Yosef's success, like his own. He was able to forge a loyal Jewish family even in conditions that seemed less than ideal. Yakov's blessing is echoed through the generations. May our children be illuminators regardless of the situation they find themselves in.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org. **Teach613 recently started a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information or to join, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Memory, History and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Vayhi

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some time ago, I was watching old home movies that were filmed during the early 1950s. On the screen I saw myself as a little boy. The movies were filled with laughing, dancing, singing relatives and friends — most of whom are no longer alive. I had the surrealistic experience of watching my parents — both long deceased — when I was actually much older than they were at the time when the movies were taken.

Looking at old movies or old photographs has a way of casting a spell on us. It transports us into the past. For a few short moments, we may vividly feel that we've returned to the past, that we are reliving an earlier time in our lives.

Studies of memory have demonstrated that we do not merely remember past events, but we also remember the feelings associated with those events. We smell freshly baked bread — and suddenly we are a child in our mother's kitchen. We hear a synagogue melody — and suddenly we are a little boy holding our father's hand in the synagogue, we are a little girl sidling up against our mother.

Our lives are deeply enriched by the memories of our past. We especially value those precious instants when we seem to be transported into the past, into the world of our memories.

This phenomenon has great relevance for our understanding of our relationship to history. As Jews, and as human beings, we are able to expand our memories far beyond our own personal experiences. By reading and studying, we enlarge our historical memories to include the generations that have preceded us. The more expansive our knowledge of the Jewish past, the more intense and the more vibrant should be our own Jewishness. We see the past not as something distant and impersonal, referring to others; but rather, we experience history as part of our own extended memory. It is personal and immediate. We empathize with and identify with our ancestors, almost as though we are with them.

This week's Torah reading includes Jacob's blessing of his grandchildren and concludes with the words: "and let my name be named in them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Bereishith 48:16). The medieval Italian Jewish commentator, Rabbi Ovadia Seforno, suggests that Jacob wanted his descendants to feel linked to their righteous ancestors, so that they would live their lives so as to be worthy progeny of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were to recall their ancestors not as abstract personalities, but as genuine presences in their lives.
For the Jewish people, history has always been experienced as a dimension of the present. As we go through life, we bring along our ancestors. We carry their names, we feel their presence.

Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, in his book *Zakhor,* makes a distinction between history and memory. History is an academic discipline dedicated to uncovering data from the past. It is cold, objective, dispassionate. On the other hand, memory is warm and personal. Professor Yerushalmi notes a paradox that while modern Jewry has experienced a phenomenal explosion in the field of Jewish history, at the same time the Jewish memory seems to have declined seriously. Jews may know more facts about Jewish history, but they may feel less connected to those facts.

We need to understand without any equivocation that Jewishness lives and is transmitted by means of memory, by feeling a living connection with our past. The study of history should lead us to expand our memories and our identification with our people's past; it should help us to feel that we are part of the long chain of Jewish tradition.

Home movies and old photographs are made of inanimate material. The people in the pictures cannot change. What gives life to the figures is our memory. Likewise, the data of Jewish history can only come alive if we animate them, if we treat them not as abstractions but as real and ongoing presences in our lives, if we can feel — at least at special moments — that we ourselves have re-entered the past.

Our continuity as a people is inextricably linked to our historical memory. We bring the past into the present; we project the present into the future. This is one of the great responsibilities of Jewish parents and grandparents — to imbue the younger generations with a sense of belonging to, and participating in, the history of our people.

This is also one of our great privileges and a source of our deepest fulfillment as Jews.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/memory-history-and-us-thoughts-parashat-vayhi

*** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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Eternal Reward: A Parable *

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A righteous person dies and the soul is brought before the Heavenly tribunal. The Almighty, seeing that this person had lived an exemplary life, gives options.

"In light of your righteousness, you may choose the section of heaven in which to spend eternity. You may opt for your soul to dwell among the great sages of Israel, the finest Torah scholars of all generations.

“I do not choose this.”

Somewhat surprised, the Almighty then offers: “Your soul may dwell among the righteous rulers of the world, those who led their people with honesty and humility.”

“I do not choose this.”

A third offer: “Your soul may dwell among the famous philanthropists who piously shared their wealth with the poor, who financed great institutions for the betterment of humanity.”

“I do not choose this.”

A fourth offer: “Your soul may dwell among famous, brilliant, respected people of all nations who lived righteously.”

“I do not choose this.”

The Almighty then said: “I have offered you wonderful choices and you have rejected them. Where then would you like your soul to dwell for eternity?”

“I would like my soul to be with my parents and grandparents.”

“But they were simple people. They were not scholars; they were not powerful; they were not rich; they were not famous. They were quiet souls who lived quiet lives. I am offering your soul to be in the presence of the souls of much greater people.”

“I would like my soul to be with my parents and grandparents. They lived pure and good lives. They maintained Torah in the face of many obstacles. They did not hurt anyone. They sacrificed greatly to live as pious Jews. They were abused and cheated and disdained; but their faith was strong. Without my parents and grandparents and the millions of other anonymous quiet souls who kept the flame of Judaism alive over all the generations, I would not have been able to live my life as I did. I would like my soul to be with them.”

The Almighty smiled. “You have chosen wisely. It is precisely their section of heaven that is the highest and most blessed. It is precisely due to your parents and grandparents and the millions of other quiet pious souls that I have not given up entirely on humanity.”

And the soul of the righteous person was bound up in eternal life, along with the souls of parents, grandparents and the millions of other quiet pious souls who sustain God’s hope for humanity.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

** Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. This article appears in issue 38 of *Conversations,* the Institute’s journal.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/eternal-reward-parable

Uncommon Common Sense

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

Before Yaakov’s passing, Yosef brings his children, Menashe and Efraim, to receive a blessing from their saintly grandfather. As we do to this day, Yaakov placed his hands on the heads of his grandchildren when blessing them. The physical connection helps to focus our intent, and thereby increases the intensity of the blessing. The dominant hand adds greater focus than the weaker hand. Yosef, therefore, carefully places his older son, Menashe, on Yaakov’s right side in order that Yaakov should place his right hand on Menashe’s head. In this way, the older son will receive the greater impact of the blessing.

Yaakov, then, carefully crosses his hands and places his right hand to his left on the head of Efraim. He explains to Yosef that both children will be great. However, he had seen through prophecy that Efraim's descendants will be greater. Therefore, the greater strength of the blessing should be given to Efraim.

The Torah uses an unusual word to describe Yaakov's action of crossing his hands and says, "Sikeil es yadav" –"he gave intellect to his hands." The Rada"k explains that the Torah is telling us that Yaakov 's actions displayed intellect and wisdom. As Menashe was older, it would have been natural and normal to place his right hand upon Menashe. However, since he knew through prophecy that Efraim was to be given the greater part of the blessing, he chose to divert his right hand to Efraim. In this way, when someone saw how Yaakov's hands crossed over each other, they could see wisdom and intellect through the action of the hands. Whereas, if Yaakov had placed his right hand on Menashe, that would not display intellect or wisdom, as he is simply following the normal way of the world, to place his right hand upon the older child.

When we consider the context of the Rada"k's statement, it does not seem so simple for Yaakov to place his right hand on Menashe's head. The Torah clearly states that Yaakov was blind. Menashe and Efraim had initially approached Yaakov to embrace and kiss him when they arrived. Yosef then pulled them away and carefully arranged their position so that Menashe should be on Yaakov's right side. It would seem to be an act of great wisdom to intentionally put his right hand on either grandson at that point. Yosef had not yet told Yaakov who was standing where, and Yaakov could not see on his own. Why does that Rada"k say that there is no wisdom displayed by placing his right hand on Menashe?

True wisdom is much more than simply understanding and recognizing the world around us and discerning right from wrong. Recognizing and understanding the facts and the issues is only the first step of wisdom. True wisdom is when there are two conflicting concepts and one has to understand how to balance those factors. When Yaakov weighed Efraim's future descendants against the fact the Menashe was older and decided to choose Efraim, that was a mark of wisdom. He had clearly weighed the factors and veered away from the obvious choice. Had he chosen to place his right hand on Menashe, the action would not show any wisdom. No one would be able to see that he had weighed two issues and made a decision. He would have simply made the obvious choice.

There are many situations in life where we feel strongly about issues. We can sometimes feel a certain level of pride in our moral compass and in the strength of our convictions. The Rada"k is teaching us here that feeling strongly about an issue is only the first step towards wisdom. True wisdom requires weighing two important but opposing issues. To do that, we first must see both sides of the issue and feel that both sides matter and have validity. Only then can we begin to weigh the issues against each other. Especially when we feel strongly, we need to stop and consider what other considerations there may be. When we weigh those considerations and see how our strong emotion was in error, that is when we have displayed true wisdom.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Fake Smiles, Chemical Doubt, and Why Swearing (Oath-Making) is Useful

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Can you tell the difference between a smile that has sincerity versus one that lacks it? Or between a smile that assures you the person making it truly feels joy about the situation versus one who has hidden doubts and is only giving a smile to keep up appearances?

Test yourself. See the picture on the top and determine which one looks more "sincere" to you. [sorry, photos not iincluded here]

There is no right/wrong answer, but I would wager that most of us would choose the picture on the right as more sincere. [note: I picked the photo on the right] It doesn't matter if we can explain why. Some type of process happens within us where we recognize that the smile on the left has reservations behind it.

Can you spot the physical differences between the 2 pictures? It might help if you try to smile now. Unless you happen to be feeling full of joy at this moment, you will most likely experienced a forced quality in the smile. What did you feel in

your face? Can you compare it to memories of a real smile you experienced? What muscle memory comes to mind? Do you see more clues in the picture now?

You may have noticed when you "force-smiled" that your lips did most of the moving while the rest of your face stayed still. Whereas in a "real" smile, your cheeks, facial muscles, and corners of the eyes move back towards the back of your head, they do not move as much in a forced smile and can even produce a feeling of strain. Do you see the wider expression of the eyes and the elasticity of the cheeks in the picture on the right? In this smile, there's less doubt inhibiting the intended action so the muscles become free to move.

(You may also notice that your abdomen constricts during a force smile. A less-inhibited smile will produce a feeling of fullness in the abdomen.)

By showing you this, I wish to prove to you that our intentions, desires, doubts and feelings do not just exist in our heads, but also have a physiological basis. We can feel them as sensations. The tension of contradictory intentions or doubts when we're debating on issues such as whether to take on a new responsibility or the proper attire to wear during the day are observable facts of life. We can even measure it quantitatively in a laboratory. (See the postscript for an example.) It's a mind-blowing idea that blows up the imaginary wall between our mind and body.

This extends not just to muscle movement but all the way down to the chemical level.

Dr. Eric Kandel (A Jewish neuroscientist who escaped from Vienna right before the Holocaust) details in his half-science half-autobiographical book *In Search of Memory* about the interplay between the excitatory neurotrasnmitter glutamate and the inhibitory transmitter GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid).

Glutamate's job is to change the resting potential of the end of a motor neuron (post-synaptic cell) from -70 millivolts to -55 millivolts so the action potential or electrical signal can stimulate the next motor neuron. Eventually, this leads to an action like lifting our arms or smiling.

GABA has the opposite job. It changes the resting potential from -70 millivolts to -75. This is useful when we want to stop ourselves from doing something and/or relax. Alcohol can give a calming effect because it binds to GABA receptors.

Chemical "doubt" exists when both GABA and glutamate are in the presynaptic neuron. So usually our neurons will go according to the majority. If there's more glutamate, the action potential will fire. If there is more GABA, it will not. Of course this is only one part in a much larger process, but it is an important marker.

Our desires and intentions can conflict. Let's go back to smiling. Say an intention arises within you to smile perhaps due to a social situation, but also an intention not to smile because personally you don't see anything to smile about. So you now have both inhibitory and excitatory tendencies. Such a conflict will lead to the "forced smile" experience where some muscles engage but not all of them and even then only partially. You can compare this again to a smile with no conflicting intentions where all the muscles engage more readily or to a relaxed, calm, expressionless expression where you have a clear intention to have minimal muscular activity on your face. (After all, it would be uncomfortable to smile 24-7.)

Such knowledge I'm sure can be useful, so feel free to do with it what you will. For now, I will use it to shed some light on our Torah portion of Vayechi.

Yaakov is about to die and had Yosef take an oath that he should bury him in Israel. Why did Yaakov make Yosef swear? Did he not trust Joseph to keep his word? When's the last time you made your child, friend, or co-worker swear to do something?

It seems that Yaakov knew that our inner workings are complex and full of conflicts. Yes, Yosef would surely want to honor his father's wishes. But Yosef had other factors to consider. As Rashi points out, Yosef answered to Pharoah who may not have liked for Yosef to show such an honor to the Land of Israel by making a whole trip there and burying his noble father. There were political and social factors to take into account. Due to these cross motivations, maybe Yosef would have felt a need to compromise. Or maybe he would bury Yaakov in Israel but do it with a half-smile and a half-heart. Perhaps Yosef would have done it under cover of night and not with great pride. What would that show the Jews as far as their connection to the Land of Israel?

So Yaakov made him swear. Yosef would have done the action, but perhaps more GABA than necessary would circulate in his system from the wisps of conflicting intention that surround a man in politics. But now these would be quieted by the force of an oath. When we make an oath we know we can't go back on it. All conflicts melt away in the face of the power of our words. We have to do what we swear to do no matter what.

Is there another way besides oath taking you can think of to clear out the conflicts in our intentions and do more of what we want without inhibition? What do we want anyway? What intention arises within you with minimal conflict? If we get closer to finding that out, maybe we'll enjoy our smiles more.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Moshe Rube

P.S. I loosely took the smiling example from the words of renowned Jewish mentalist and expert on body language Marc Salem (aka Moshe Potwinick).

P.P.S. Suggestions for Further Reading: Konrad Lorenz in his book *On Aggression* analyzes the facial expressions and movement of different animals when their intentions conflict. There's a fascinating photo on p. 92 where he analyzes quantitatively the face of a wolf as it goes from a completely calm expression all the way to a fully aggressive expression with the middle being the most conflicted. I have taken a photo of it below if you want to look. [photo not included here]

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Vayechi: When Great Souls Err

Shortly before his death, Jacob blessed his sons. Some of these blessings, however, were more like reprimands:

> *"Reuben, you are my firstborn... first in rank and first in power. [But since you were] unstable as water, you will no longer be first, for you moved your father's beds."* (Gen. 49:3-4)

According to some opinions, Reuben did not actually interfere with his father's sleeping arrangements.1 He intended to do so, indignant at what he saw as a slight to his mother's honor and her position in the household. But at the last minute, Reuben restrained himself.

How did Reuben succeed in overcoming his intense feelings of injustice and dishonor?

Reuben's Fear of Punishment

One scholar inferred the method Reuben used to master his anger by reversing the letters of the word 'פחז' ("unstable") to 'זחפ' and reading it as an acronym:

> *זָכַרְתָּ — You reminded yourself of the punishment for this act; חָלִיתָ — you made yourself ill over it; and פֵּירַשְׁתָּ — you avoided sin"* (Shabbat 55b).

This explanation is surprising. Was Reuben motivated by the lowest form of yirat Shamayim (awe of Heaven) — the fear of punishment? Was this the only way the tzaddik could prevent himself from wrongdoing? Could such a great individual not take advantage of more lofty incentives, evoking his natural love and awe of God in order to avoid sin?

The Achilles' Heel of Great Souls

Some people are blessed with such nobility of soul that their traits are naturally virtuous and good. Yet even these tzaddikim need to recognize their limitations as fallible human beings. They too may be misguided. Precisely because they rely so heavily on their innate integrity, they may more easily fall into the trap of deluding themselves and making terrible mistakes, inflicting great harm on themselves and those around them.

Truly great souls will avoid this mistake. They carefully examine the source of their moral outrage. Further examination may indeed reveal that their zealous response comes from a sense of true injustice. But if they have any doubts as to the source for their powerful emotions, they can adopt a different approach. Instead of examining the matter in terms of ideals and lofty visions of the future, they will take into account more commonplace moral considerations. Such unpretentious calculations are sometimes more effective than nobler considerations.

Reuben reminded himself that he would be held accountable for disrupting the delicate balance in the family and temporarily usurping his father's position. The simple reminder of the personal price to be paid helped Reuben clear his mind. He was then able to analyze more accurately his true motivations and arrive at the correct moral decision.

The resulting inner turmoil was tremendous. Reuben was accustomed to following the dictates of his innate integrity. The conflict between his sense of injustice and his awareness of the correct response was so great that he felt ill — emotionally, and even physically: "You made yourself ill over it."

This too indicates greatness of soul: the ability to acquiesce to moral imperatives. Truly great individuals are able, like Reuben, to rein in all of the soul's powers when necessary. They recognize the absolute justice of the Eternal Judge, before Whom there are no excuses and no exceptions. They follow the dictum that even if the entire world — your entire inner world — tells you that you are righteous, still consider yourself fallible (see Niddah 30b).

Much good can result from recalling the punishment for wrongdoing, even if this motivation may appear beneath one's spiritual stature. This simple reminder can overcome all the sophisticated calculations — calculations which may mislead even the noblest souls. In this fashion, Reuben succeeded in avoiding sin and retained his moral integrity.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 48-49)

1 After Rachel's death, Jacob moved his bed to the tent of Rachel's handmaid. Reuben, deeply disturbed by what he saw as an affront to his mother's honor, moved his father's bed to Leah's tent (Shabbat 55a.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYEHI63.htm

Vayechi (5771) – Grandparents

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Every Friday night we re-enact one of the most moving scenes in the book of Bereishit. Jacob, reunited with Joseph, is ill. Joseph comes to visit him, bring bringing with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob, with deep emotion, says:

> *'I never even hoped to see your face,' said Israel to Joseph. 'But now God has even let me see your children.'* Gen. 48:11

He blesses Joseph. Then he places his hands on the heads of the two boys.

> *He blessed them that day and said, "[In time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"* Gen. 48:20

So we do to this day. Why this blessing above all others? One commentator (Yalkut Yehudah) says it is because Ephraim and Manasseh were the first two Jewish children born in exile. So Jewish parents bless their children asking God to help them keep their identity intact despite all the temptations and distractions of Diaspora life.

I heard however a most lovely explanation, based on the Zohar, from my revered predecessor Lord Jakobovits of blessed memory. He said that though there are many instances in Torah and Tanach in which parents bless their children, this is the only example of a grandparent blessing grandchildren.

Between parents and children, he said, there are often tensions. Parents worry about their children. Children sometimes rebel against their parents. The relationship is not always smooth.

Not so with grandchildren. There the relationship is one of love untroubled by tension or anxiety. When a grandparent blesses a grandchild he or she does so with a full heart. That is why this blessing by Jacob of his grandchildren became the model of blessing across the generations. Anyone who has had the privilege of having grandchildren will immediately understand the truth and depth of this explanation.

Grandparents bless their grandchildren and are blessed by them. This phenomenon is the subject of a fascinating difference of opinion between the Babylonian Talmud and the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Babylonian Talmud says the following:

> *Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, "Whoever teaches his grandson Torah is regarded as if he had received the Torah from Mount Sinai as it is said, 'Teach your children and children's children,' and then it says: 'The day you stood before God your Lord at Horeb.'"* Deut. 4:10-11; Kiddushin 30a

The Talmud Yerushalmi puts it differently:

> *Rabbi Joshua ben Levi used to listen, every Friday, to his grandson reciting the weekly parsha. One week he forgot this, and entered the bathhouse. After he had begun bathing, he remembered that he had not yet heard the weekly parsha from his grandson, and he left the bathhouse. They asked him why he was leaving in the middle of his bathing, since the Mishnah teaches that once you have begun bathing on a Friday afternoon you do not have too interrupt. He replied, "Is this such a small thing in your eyes? For whoever hears the parsha from his grandchild is as if he heard it directly from Mount Sinai . . ."* Yerushalmi Shabbat 1:2

According to the Bavli, the greatest privilege is to teach your grandchildren Torah. According to the Yerushalmi, the greatest privilege is to have your grandchildren teach Torah to you. This is one argument about which no grandparent will have the slightest difficulty is saying that both are true.

With an exquisite sense of symmetry, just as we begin Shabbat with a grandparent's blessing so we end it, in Maariv, with the words:

> *May you live to see your children's children — peace be on Israel.* Psalm 128:6

What is the connection between grandchildren and peace? Surely this, that those who think about grandchildren care about the future, and those who think about the future make peace. It is those who constantly think of the past, of slights and humiliations and revenge, make war.

To bless grandchildren and be blessed by them, to teach them and to be taught by them – these are the highest Jewish privilege and the serene end of Jacob's troubled life.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. For older Devrei Torah, footnotes are not always available.

https://rabbisacks.org/vayechi-5771/

Vayechi: Be Sent, Not Sold

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer *

In this week's Torah portion, parshas Vayechi, Yaakov passes away after offering blessings to his sons, who would head ten tribes, and Ephraim and Menashe, Yosef's two sons, who remained righteous even in the midst of Egyptian idolatry.

Immediately after their father's death, Yosef's brothers become afraid that Yosef will now exact revenge against them. They worry that Yosef had held his wrath while their father was alive to avoid burdening him with further grief. The Torah

writes, "Yosef's brothers saw the implications of their father's death, and they said to themselves, 'Perhaps Yosef will bear us hatred and he will surely repay us the evil that we have dealt him'" (Bereshis 50:15). Yosef, however, reassures his brothers that he feels no ill will or anger towards them for their actions. Despite being thrown in a pit and sold into slavery, and the many trials he faced in Egypt, Yosef understood that this too was Divine Providence.

Hashem required Yosef to be in Egypt to fulfill his purpose in creation by providing food, substance, and shelter to his family during years of harsh famine. Yosef literally saved their lives. Although fully responsible for their actions, his brothers ultimately acted as conduits for Yosef to fulfill his destiny. As Yosef tells his brothers, "You had planned to do evil to me, yet Hashem planned it to be good…" (Bereshis 50:20). Yosef had a "sent" rather than "sold" perspective. As he explained to his brothers, Yosef knew that, ultimately, Hashem "sent" him to Egypt. Hashem did not permit him merely to be "sold" into slavery.

Although not at all easy, how can we apply Yosef's "sent" vs "sold" approach to our own lives? We often hear the platitude "everything happens for a reason," and ultimately it does as Yosef's story attests, but how do we live in this reality? When we see ourselves as "sold," we allow ourselves to dwell on the pain and hardships in our lives, causing us even more suffering and distress. As modern psychology has taught us, the more we ruminate on our mistakes and problems, the more vulnerable we are to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Also, if we are living in a "sold" reality, we may miss out on the blessings open to all of us: the radiant light of a full moon, the sound of children laughing, the smell of grass during a rainstorm, the lingering taste of the perfect cup of morning coffee.

Sometimes, even in the midst of our suffering, we can see the proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel," but we are so numb with pain that we do not have the strength or the motivation to take the necessary steps to get there. We are solidly stuck in the confines of the "sold" outlook. The title of a pop psychology book published in 2007 by Wayne Dyer is *Change your Thoughts. Change your Life*. This title is very much a Chassidic concept. As chassidim often say, "Tracht gut vet zein gut." Think good and it will be good. This is the "sent" outlook.

When we see ourselves as "sent," we consciously decide to rise above the challenges that life throws at us. Of course, this does not make us immune to pain and sorrow, sometimes deep sorrow, but it gives us the resilience to come back after giving ourselves time to process and grieve. We do not resign to seeing ourselves as pawns in some chaotic, cosmic drama but as active participants in fulfilling our purpose of creation, despite our hardships – and sometimes through our hardships. Part of being "sent" is letting go of victimhood. Nothing happens to us, whether positive and negative, without Hashem's direct hand. It is a difficult task, but we must strive to see beyond those who cause us pain to recognize that the events of our lives, and the players involved, are all parts of a Divine Plan.

We will never experience a trauma or a tragedy, a remarkable joy or a treasured moment, without Hashem's hand. We learn from the story of Yosef and his brothers that we are always "sent," never "sold."

* Dayton, OH, c/o Chabad of Greater Dayton.

The Concealed 'End of Times': An Essay on Vayechi

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

The veiled ketz

Jacob calls his sons and says to them, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what will befall you in the end of days.”1 But in practice, Jacob’s prophecy merely relates to distant times and does not reach the actual end of days.

Rashi’s comment on the subject is well known: “‘Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you’ – he wished to reveal the ketz, the end of times, but the Shechinah departed from him, and he began to speak of other things.” To be sure, after the departure of the Shechinah, Jacob does not suddenly become an ordinary person speaking of ordinary things. After all, his words here are still words of prophecy. Although those “other things” do not relate to the actual end of days, still, they refer to the distant future, hundreds and thousands of years ahead. Thus, the Shechinah does not depart completely; it is still with him to a certain extent.

Jacob attempts to cut through the veil that conceals the events of the future, but he is stopped at a certain stage. Why does this happen to him?

According to the Yalkut Shimoni2 and other midrashim, a great dread falls upon Jacob, as he does not understand why this has happened. Concerned, he asks his sons, “Are you all believers?” They answer him, “Hear, O Israel: God our Lord, God is one.” When the time of the Messiah’s coming was concealed from Jacob, he was overcome with anxiety that perhaps not all the tribes were worthy of blessing. After hearing their answer, he is encouraged, and the Shechinah rests upon him once again.

What emerges from the midrash is that this concealment, the curtain that stands before Jacob, is neither a result of sin nor a result of a defect in his sons or in himself. Jacob faces something else, which does not let him see through to the end of days. This is a phenomenon that we all experience: At one point or another, every person wants to know what will happen in the distant future, but this is always denied him.

Limitations of the audience

Why can’t Jacob reveal the ketz? When a person describes things or situations that lie within the range of his perception, he has words, concepts, and modes of expression for this. But when Jacob must speak of a phenomenon that is beyond his audience’s range of perception, it turns out that he lacks the vocabulary to express himself. How can we explain to someone who has been blind from birth what other people see in the world? How can we explain to someone who is color blind the difference between green and purple? These are things of which the listener has an utter lack of understanding. In such a case, there is a block, a real barrier in communication.

In other words, there are some fundamental gulfs that are impossible to bridge. Nothing can be said to get one’s ideas across; any attempts to do so would be meaningless. The problem of how to talk about the incomprehensible, how to describe what cannot be described, is a problem that has no solution. At the point of transmitting the essence, there is a curtain that blocks the audience’s view. It is not a matter of finding the right words, because the right words simply do not exist.

Consider, for example, the Maaseh Merkavah, Ezekiel’s vision of the workings of the divine chariot. We take for granted that the angels, the ofanim, and the holy chayot are spiritual entities, or, as Maimonides put it, “separate intellects.”3 But when we read Ezekiel’s account, he seems to be describing physical forms, as if these are creatures that one might see at some kind of bizarre zoo. What is happening here? Ezekiel sees the holy chayot, and for some reason he is compelled to describe them in words. Though he sees and feels the reality of his vision, he lacks the right words to describe it. Instead, he settles for the inaccurate language of physical descriptions.

This point is part of the reason that the Shechinah departs when people begin to speak of the end of days. Jacob sees all the way to the true ketz; not just “until he arrives in Shiloh,”4 but even afterward, after the end of the exile. When he tries to tell his sons about this, he discovers that this is a vision that cannot be communicated – not because he is not permitted to do so, but because any attempt to speak about it is irrelevant.

There is a recurring prophecy in Tanach – “every man will sit under his grapevine or under his fig tree”5 – that is meant to describe a condition of wealth and tranquility. Yet there are many people today who, if promised a future in which all they do is sit under a tree, would be completely uninterested – they would rather attend a nightclub instead. The prophecy tries to describe a future of wealth and harmony, but this can only be communicated using the range of concepts that people have. We can make an effort to describe the future using the most beautiful words that exist, but my message will only be successful if it is couched in terms of what is presently meaningful to our audience. When we have to transcend these bounds, anything we say will be incomplete. We are unable to describe things that are not within the range of the human imagination; even if we are able to comprehend these things, the concepts turn out to be meaningless without the proper tools of expression.

No eye has seen

The ability to relate to the end of days is limited not only by short-comings of human nature, but also by something more basic: limitations in the nature of reality. Reality allows us to relate only to things that belong to the plane of being, experience, and action in which we exist. Just as we cannot fit a large object into a small receptacle, we cannot fit anything into a vessel – a concept, a description, or a figment of our imagination – that cannot receive or contain it.

This idea is expressed in the following talmudic passage: “All the prophets prophesied only regarding the days of the Messiah, but regarding the World to Come, ‘No6 eye has seen, O God, but You.’”7 No prophet’s eye has seen what God will do for those who wait for Him; it can be seen by God’s eye alone. The Talmud then asks, “What is it that ‘no eye has seen’? Rabbi Yehoshua b. Levi said, ‘This refers to the wine preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation.’”

Similarly, the Talmud states8 that in the World to Come, the righteous will partake of the Leviathan’s flesh. Both of these rewards for the righteous – the wine preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation and the Leviathan preserved in salt by God even before the creation of man – are things that have never existed in the realm of human experience. These descriptions of the World to Come are beyond our limits as human beings. It is a promise of things that we have never seen and cannot hope to comprehend.

The end of days is a period that “no eye has seen” – it is beyond our perceptual range, beyond the human conceptual ability that exists in the reality of the present day.
When we speak of the ultimate ketz, we refer to what cannot be seen or understood. When we speak of what will happen in the future, we can reach a certain point until we are stopped by a thick curtain. Even those who can see through this curtain cannot bring back a report of what they have seen. They cannot relate what they have beheld, because there can be no point of comparison to it, nothing in their lexicon to describe it.

In our generation, because of the many technological advances we continuously witness, we have a better sense of the gulf between the reality of this world and the reality of the World to Come. Products are invented, the likes of which we could not have even dreamed beforehand, whose existence we could not have imagined.

This also explains a puzzling talmudic statement: “Three come unawares: the Messiah, a found article, and a scorpion.”9 At first glance, this statement raises a question: What does it mean that the Messiah comes unawares? After all, there are always Jews who pray for, talk about, and concern themselves with his coming. The entire Jewish people mentions the Messiah, in one form or another, in its prayers. So how can it be that he will come unawares?

The answer is that the Messiah whom everyone talks about, and whose coming everyone prays for, is not the Messiah who will actually arrive. We have no way of knowing or imagining what will happen when the Messiah comes, because his coming is something that “no eye has seen.” It is inevitable, then, that the Messiah will come unawares, because no one really knows what to expect.

An example of this problem can be seen in the Or HaChayim’s commentary on Parshat Acharei Mot. As a rule, the book is written as a standard commentary, each section according to its particular case. In Parshat Acharei Mot, however, something interesting happens: The author attempts to describe the experience of man’s contact with what is beyond him. Some of the language in the commentary is confusing: It is evident that the author felt and understood certain things that he was unable to communicate with his readers. It is the same block that Jacob encountered when he sought to reveal the ketz, the same block that inherently exists in these matters, and there will be no full solution for it until the end of days.

Developing sensitivity

The inability to define certain things has ramifications beyond esoteric discussions of the divine chariot and the end of days. The expression, “the heart cannot reveal to the mouth,”10 appears in connection with all sorts of subjects, for not everything that a person thinks can be expressed easily in words. There also exists a much more complex and difficult situation, when “the heart cannot reveal to the heart,” that is, that the heart cannot reveal even to itself. These are difficulties that every person experiences at one point or another in his lifetime.

The Talmud11 presents a list of things that are concealed from us: the day of a person’s death; the day of consolation; the full depth of justice; that which is in another person’s heart – and the list goes on. The connection between these things is that they are all impossible to determine.

Why is it impossible to know what is in another person’s heart? Because everything that a person draws from deep inside him he must communicate through an intermediary mechanism, the translation from thoughts and feelings into words. The listener then transfers the matter from those words into his own heart. My contact with another person’s heart is, at best, twice removed from the source; there is no possibility of direct contact, of one spirit truly connecting with another.

We constantly try to solve the difficulty of communicating what is in our heart to the best of our ability, since that is the only way that a person can have an impact on the world around him. We hope that the other person not only hears our words, but is able to translate them back in his own heart while maintaining some of the purity of the original emotion. To be sure, the content of a person's heart is difficult to formulate in words, but if there is true resonance between two people, between two beings who are otherwise entirely separate, then while perhaps it cannot be said that each person knows what is in the other's heart, at least they are on the same wavelength.

There are some skills that are not included in any course of study, yet everyone must learn them. Sometimes a person must dedicate much of his life to these skills. One of these skills is the ability to develop a keen sense for things that cannot be said. Every Jew has his own inner dilemmas, but everyone shares the universal problem of faith – whether it is faith in God, or in other things. In matters of faith, anything that can be studied or articulated in words is irrelevant and unhelpful. If only we had a kind of window that would give us a direct view of God's glory! But there is no such window. What remains is the responsibility to learn to sense, to intuit, that something exists that is beyond our comprehension, beyond the range of man's ordinary perception, and to learn to relate to it. We must reach a point where we have, in addition to the vague awareness that such a thing exists, the maturity to understand that there is more to explore on the other side of the curtain, a continuation of our path. There may be no way to reach it, see it, or explain it, but it is possible to sense what lies on the other side of existence.

Our task, in any form of faith, is to develop an awareness that beyond the place that I know lies a place that I do not know. If we can accomplish this task, we can truly claim to have experienced even that which "no eye has seen."

FOOTNOTES:

1. Gen. 49:1.

2. 157

3. Guide for the Perplexed, I:49.

4. Gen. 49:10.

5. Mic. 4:4.

6. Is. 64:3.

7. Berachot 34b.

8. Bava Batra 74b.

9. Sanhedrin 97a.

10. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:10.

11. Pesachim 54b.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4973842/jewish/The-Concealed-End-of-Times.htm

Unity in Community
An Insight from the Rebbe
by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

In this Parsha we reach the dramatic climax of the chronicle of Joseph. It begins as Yehuda approaches (Vayigash in Hebrew) Joseph in defense of Benjamin. Yehuda's willingness to save Benjamin convinces Joseph that the brothers have repented and risen above their previous jealousy, so he ends the masquerade and reveals his true identity to them.

Unity in Community

Jacob gave them all the blessings that he gave each one individually. (Genesis 49:28)

Although we each have our unique roles in our Divine mission to make this world into G-d's home, we are all involved to some extent in the roles played by others, as well. There are three increasingly effective ways that we can do this:

We all focus exclusively on our personal tasks, but since we are working toward the same goal, we all share in the results of our separate accomplishments. We invite and encourage one another to participate occasionally in the personal activity that we emphasize. When we periodically engage in tasks other than our forte, we immerse ourselves in them just as fully as we do when we engage in our personal task.

Participating in each other's endeavors fosters Jewish unity, making us worthy of G-d's blessings, including—and especially—the ultimate blessing, the Messianic Redemption.

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

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Likutei Divrei Torah

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

When Can We Lie?

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid. Years earlier, when he had revealed his true identity to them, he appeared to have forgiven them for selling him as a slave.[1] Yet the brothers were not wholly reassured. Maybe Joseph did not mean what he said. Perhaps he still harboured resentment. Might the only reason he had not yet taken revenge was respect for Jacob. There was a convention in those days that there was to be no settling of scores between siblings in the lifetime of the father. We know this from an earlier episode. After Jacob had taken his brother's blessing, Esau says, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). So the brothers came before Joseph and said:

"Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. (Gen. 50:16-17)

The text makes it as plain as possible that the story they told Joseph was a lie. If Jacob had really said those words, he would have said them to Joseph himself, not to the brothers. The time to have done so was on his deathbed in the previous chapter. The brothers' tale was what we may call a "white lie". Its primary aim was not to deceive but to ease a potentially explosive situation. Perhaps that is why Joseph wept, understanding that his brothers still thought him capable of revenge.

The Sages derived a principle from this text. Mutar le-shanot mipnei ha-shalom: "It is permitted to tell an untruth (literally, "to change" the facts) for the sake of peace."[2] A white lie is permitted in Jewish law.

This is not the only place where the Sages invoked this principle. They even attributed it to God Himself.[3] When the angels came to visit Abraham to tell him and Sarah that they were about to have a child, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" God then asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18:12-13).

God did not mention that Sarah believed that not only was she too old to have a child – she believed that Abraham was as well (this turned out to be quite untrue: Abraham had six more children after Sarah's death). The Sages inferred that God did not mention it because He did not want there to be bad feeling between husband and wife. Here too the Sages said: it is permitted to change the facts for the sake of peace.

It is clear that the Sages needed both episodes to establish the principle. Had we only known about the Sarah case, we could not infer that it is permitted to tell a white lie. God did not tell a white lie about Sarah. He merely did not tell Abraham the whole truth. Had we only known about the case of Joseph's brothers, we could not have inferred that what they did was permitted. Perhaps it was forbidden, and that is why Joseph wept. The fact that God Himself had done something similar is what led the Sages to say that the brothers were justified.

What is at stake here is an important feature of the moral life, despite the fact that we seem to be speaking of no more than social niceties: tact. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin pointed out that not all values coexist in a kind of platonic harmony. His favourite example was freedom and equality. You can have a free economy but the result will be inequality. You can have economic equality, communism, but the result will be a loss of freedom. In the world as currently configured, moral conflict is unavoidable.[4]

This was an important fact, though one about which Judaism seems never to have been in doubt. There is, for example, a powerful moment in Tanach when King David's son Absalom mounted a coup d'etat against his father. David was forced to flee. Eventually there was a battle between Absalom's troops and David's. Absalom, who was handsome and had fine hair, was caught by it when it became entangled in the branches of a tree. Left hanging there, Joab, captain of David's army, killed him.

When David heard the news he was overcome with grief:

"The King was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Samuel 18:33). Joab was brutal in his response to the King: "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life … You love those who hate you and hate those who love you … Now go out and encourage your men." (2 Sam. 19:6-8)

David's grief at the loss of his son conflicts with his responsibilities as head of state and his loyalty to the troops who have saved his life. Which comes first: his duties as a father or as a king?

The existence of conflicting values means that the kind of morality we adopt and society we create depend not only on the values we embrace but also on the way we prioritise them. Prioritising equality over freedom creates one kind of society – Soviet Communism for example. Prioritising freedom over equality leads to market economics. People in both societies may value the same things but they rank them differently in the scale of values, and thus how they choose when the two conflict.

That is what is at stake in the stories of Sarah's laughter and Joseph's brothers. Truth and peace are both values, but which do we choose when they conflict? Not everyone among the rabbinic Sages agreed.

There is, for example, a famous argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what to say about the bride at a wedding. (See Ketubot 16b) The custom was to say that "The bride is beautiful and graceful." Members of the School of Shammai, however, were not prepared to say so if, in their eyes, the bride was not beautiful and graceful. For them the supreme value was the Torah's insistence on truth: "Keep far from falsehood" (Ex. 23:7). The School of Hillel did not accept this. Who was to judge whether the bride was beautiful and graceful? Surely the bridegroom himself. So to praise the bride was not making an objective statement that could be tested empirically. It was simply endorsing the bridegroom's choice. It was a way of celebrating the couple's happiness.

Courtesies are often like this. Telling someone how much you like the gift they have brought, even if you don't, or saying to someone, "How lovely to see you" when you were hoping to avoid them, is more like good manners than an

By Rene and Rami Isser
in loving memory of Rene's grandfather, Yehudah Ben Gedaliah David, a"h, (12th of Tevet) and Rene's father, Chaim Ben Yehudah, a"h (17th of Tevet)

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attempt to deceive. We all know this, and thus no harm is done, as it would be if we were to tell a lie when substantive interests are at stake.

More fundamental and philosophical is an important Midrash about a conversation between God and the angels as to whether human beings should be created at all:

Rabbi Shimon said: When God was about to create Adam, the ministering angels split into contending groups. Some said, 'Let him be created.' Others said, 'Let him not be created.' That is why it is written: 'Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed' (Psalms 85:11).

Mercy said, 'Let him be created, because he will do merciful deeds.'

Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood.'

Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will do righteous deeds.'

Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he will never cease quarrelling.'

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground.

The angels said, 'Sovereign of the universe, why do You do thus to Your own seal, truth? Let truth arise from the ground.'

Thus it is written, 'Let truth spring up from the earth' (Psalms 85:12).[5]

This is a challenging text. What exactly were the angels saying? What does it mean to say that "God took truth and threw it to the ground?" And what happened to the claim made by the angel of Peace that humans "will never cease quarrelling"?

I interpret it as meaning that humans are destined to conflict so long as contending groups each claim to have a monopoly of the truth. The only way they will learn to live at peace is by realising that they, finite as all humans are, will never in this life achieve truth as it is in Heaven. For us, truth is always partial, fragmentary, the view from somewhere and not, as philosophers sometimes say, "the view from nowhere".[6]

This deep insight is, I believe, the reason why the Torah is multi-perspectival, why Tanach contains so many different kinds of voices, why Mishnah and Gemara are structured around argument, and why Midrash is built on the premise that there are "seventy faces" to Torah. No other civilisation I know has had so subtle and complex an understanding of the nature of truth.

Nor has any other so valued peace. Judaism is not and never was pacifist. National self-defence sometimes requires war. But Isaiah and Micah were the first visionaries of a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3) Isaiah is the poet laureate of peace.

Given the choice, when it came to interpersonal relations the Sages valued peace over truth, not least because truth can flourish in peace while it is often the first casualty in war. So the brothers were not wrong to tell Joseph a lie for the sake of peace within the family. It reminded them all of the deeper truth that not only their human father, now dead, but also their heavenly Father, eternally alive, wants the people of the covenant to be at peace, for how can Jews be at peace with the world if they are not at peace with themselves?

[1] This is the theme of the Covenant & Conversation essay entitled "The Birth of Forgiveness".
[2] Yevamot 65b.
[3] Midrash Sechel Tov, Toldot, 27:19.
[4] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' in Isaiah Berlin, Henry Hardy and Ian Harris, Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. See also the important work by Stuart Hampshire, Morality and Conflict. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983.
[5] Bereishit Rabbah 8:5.
[6] Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. The only person to have achieved a non-anthropocentric, God's-eye-view of creation, was Job in chs. 38-41 of the book that bears his name.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Judah, to you shall your brothers give homage" (Genesis 49:8) The climax of our Biblical portion of Vayechi – and indeed of the entire Book of Genesis – comes in the death-bed scene in which Jacob–Israel bestows blessings upon each of his sons, the future twelve tribes of our nation. The deepest Biblical conflicts arose in the competition for the birthright-blessings. Now we face the question, which son of this last Patriarch will receive the Abrahamic mission- covenant, and why?

God promised Abraham that "through him all the families of the earth would be blessed". To achieve this, Abraham needed to ensure that the bearer of the birthright would have "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Genesis 18:19) as well as profound God consciousness, and a commitment to the land and the mission of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). When our story reaches the third generation, and Jacob is blessed with twelve sons, it seems that another qualification for leadership is added: the ability to unite the family.

Jacob thought that beautiful, brilliant Joseph, first-born son of his beloved Rachel was the perfect candidate. However, Jacob's favoritism began a process of familial dissolution which accelerated when Joseph reported dreams in which the whole family bowed down to him, as though he were their king (Gen 37:3-9). When Joseph brought back tales of his brothers' transgressions to their father, he bred even more resentment in his siblings, alienating them from him and fatefully fracturing the family of Israel.

Joseph is now sold into slavery. Jacob is suspicious of the role the brothers may have played in his beloved son's "disappearance", but he is wary of causing even more familial dissension by voicing his thoughts. The patriarch remains a disconsolate mourner in famine-stricken Canaan-Israel.

When the brothers come to Egypt to purchase food, the siblings are reunited. Joseph is hidden behind the mask of the Grand Vizier, so his brothers are unaware of his presence. But we, the readers, are aware – and we see the potential for family reconciliation. Now Joseph faces Judah, the other candidate for the birthright. Each protagonist has come a long way in developing the traits necessary for leadership. The incident with Tamar has taught Judah the importance of taking responsibility for one's siblings and for familial future, and it has established his credentials as a paragon of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Joseph too, has proven his moral rectitude by escaping the advances of Mrs. Potiphar and developing greater modesty. But will Joseph or Judah succeed in repairing their broken family?

At the end of the portion of Miketz which we read two weeks ago, Joseph seemed to have made a decision. He had given up on the brothers who cast him into the pit, and even on his father whose favoritism had set in motion some of the family struggles. Recalling how Jacob had rebuked him for his dreams and then sent him to find his brothers, Joseph may have even wondered whether the patriarch was part of the plot to get rid of him. Now, he wishes to spend the rest of his life in Egypt with his only true brother, Benjamin, child of the same mother Rachel, who was too young to have had any hand in the near fratricide. To blazes with my family! he thinks. I now have a new Egyptian family!

Initially, Judah thought that God was sending all the trials and tribulations to the brothers coming to purchase food in Egypt because they sinned in having sold their brother Joseph into slavery. But when Joseph rejects Judah's proposal that all the brothers become his slaves on account of the stolen goblet, he wonders why they had been singled out in such a punitive fashion by the Grand Vizier. Who in Egypt might be out to get them? Unless, the Grand Vizier himself is actually Joseph!

Now that Judah thinks that he has uncovered the true identity of the vizier, he understands that he must find a way to bring Joseph back into the bosom of the family. He must effect a rapprochement between Father Jacob and all of his sons, in such a way that everyone will understand the futility of dredging up history

which would only exacerbate personal recriminations.

And so Judah faces Joseph, the Grand Vizier, ostensibly pleading for Benjamin's freedom, but using the opportunity to describe their old father who deeply loved the two sons of Rachel, and still mourns for Joseph who he believes has been killed by a wild beast (44:28). Not only does he disabuse Joseph of any suspicion that Jacob had been linked to the plot, but he also subtly tries to impute guilt upon Joseph for not contacting his old, grieving father. How can Joseph now inflict further pain on the patriarch by keeping him from Benjamin?

By offering himself as a slave in place of Benjamin, Judah is also proving that he, who had initially proposed the sale, had finally learned the lesson of brotherly love. Judah succeeds. Joseph reveals himself and rejoins the family. Jacob-Israel and his children are reunited – by Judah, who has now proven that he is the most worthy recipient of the coveted birthright.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"The Horse Thief"

They called him a horse thief. That was the worst possible epithet that one could hurl at a young man in the early 19th-century shtetl, or village, of Czernovitz. Back then, a horse was a very necessary item, and many of the townspeople spent all of their hard-earned savings to procure one. Losing one's horse often meant losing one's livelihood.

Truth to tell, he really was a horse thief, and he had other "virtues" as well. He desecrated the Sabbath regularly in a community where such desecration evoked horror. He was also a womanizer, a drunkard, and a gambler to boot.

The townspeople regularly attempted to have him expelled from the shtetl. But he had a powerful ally who blocked every attempt that the townspeople made to rid their community of this rascal. That ally was his father.

You might wonder why his father had such an influence in the small town. The answer is quite simple. His father was the Rabbi of Czernovitz, and no ordinary rabbi at that. He was Reb Chaim, one of the earliest Chassidic masters, who came to be known in later generations by the title of his commentary on the Pentateuch, Be'er Mayim Chaim.

One year, on the eve of Yom Kippur, the townspeople had had enough. They approached the three most influential citizens of the town: Yankel, the Chief of the City Council; Berel, the Sexton of the synagogue; and Moshe, the Cantor.

The entire town clamored around the three and insisted that they must confront the Rabbi and demand that he banish his son from the shtetl. The Councilman, the Sexton, and the Cantor had no choice but to proceed to the Rabbi's home and tell the Rebbetzin that they must have an appointment with her husband, even if it meant intruding upon his Yom Kippur spiritual preparations.

The Rebbetzin politely requested that they be seated in the anteroom of the Rabbi's modest study. "The Rabbi is praying to the Creator," she explained. "He will certainly come out to see you when he is through."

The wall between the anteroom and the Rabbi's study was paper thin. Yankel, Berel, and Moshe could not help but overhear every word of the Rabbi's conversation with the Master of the Universe. At first, they were unperturbed and remained adamantly committed to demanding that the Rabbi send his son away.

Then they heard the specifics of the Rabbi's prayer: "Oy, dear Father in Heaven," he cried. "Yom Kippur, the day You sit in judgment, is almost here. I beseech You to have mercy upon the leaders of our little community. First of all, there is Yankel. He is in a position where he is tempted daily to take bribes, and he frequently submits to these temptations. Secondly, there is Berel, who regularly dips into the tzedakah pusha, the charity box, thereby stealing alms from the poor. There is also Moshe. I can't even bring myself to speak about his many misdeeds, any one of which would disqualify him from serving as our cantor. I know that You, dear God, have good reason to expel them from this world and could justifiably punish them severely."

At this point the three gentlemen felt thoroughly ashamed and prepared to retreat from the Rabbi's ramshackle abode one by one.

But then they heard the Rabbi conclude his entreaty: "But remember, dear God, that I, too, have a son who has failed me in so many ways. I have good reason to disown him and chase him from my home. I have not done so because I am a merciful father. Yankel, Berel, and Moshe are Your children, and if I can show mercy to my child, then surely You, the most Merciful One, must pardon them."

You know the rest of the story. The horse thief remained in the shtetl with no further protest from Yankel, or Berel, or Moshe, or anyone else.

I have often felt that Reb Chaim of Czernovitz learned the proper behavior of a good father from the patriarch Jacob in this week's Torah portion, Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26).

In this parsha, the Torah narrates the story of Jacob's final words of blessing to his sons.

Jacob had sufficient cause to withhold his blessing from quite a few of them. Besides Benjamin, they had all participated in the sale of Joseph, deceiving their father and causing him many years of grief and worry. Reuben was far from perfect—just turn back the pages to Genesis 35:22 to recall how he interfered with his father's marital relationships. And Simon and Levi disappointed him greatly with the violent act that they committed, an act he never completely forgave.

Jacob does indeed rebuke them in his words of farewell. But he never rejects them totally. He sends none of them away.

He criticizes Reuben for being as "stable as water" and tells him explicitly, "When you mounted your father's bed, you brought him disgrace."

To Simon and Levi, he directs these words: "Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless."

But the Bible ends the poignant episode of Jacob's parting words to his sons with this assertion: "All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, this is what their father said to them as he blessed them, giving each one his own particular blessing."

He blessed all twelve. He disowned no one. He offered fair words of criticism, but uttered no words of rejection.

Jacob taught a lesson to all parents for all time. Never close the door, no matter what faults you find in your child.

Reb Chaim of Czernovitz learned that lesson, as we saw in the story of that Yom Kippur Eve approximately two hundred years ago.

He also recorded it so touchingly in his masterwork, Be'er Mayim Chaim, commenting near the end of this week's Torah portion: "Jacob began his blessings with the words, 'Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob. Hearken to Israel your father.' He wanted them to listen well and feel assured that each of them, individually, had the spiritual vigor necessary to absorb and put to good use the blessed rays of light that he conveyed to them from the blessed lights of the Living God."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Do Not Tell Your Father "I Am Doing It for You;" Tell Him "I Am Doing It for Me"

Yaakov made Yosef take an oath (shavua) that he would not allow him to be buried in Egypt but would bring his body back to Eretz Yisrael for burial in the Cave of Machpelah. Yosef's response was, "I will act according to your words." [Bereshis 47:30]. According to the simple reading of the pasuk, Yosef is positively responding to Yaakov's shavua and agreeing to bury him in Eretz Yisrael.

The strange thing over here is that if a parent asks his child to please bury him in Eretz Yisrael, every son would comply with such a request without taking an oath. For some

reason, it seems that Yaakov felt very uncomfortable here, to the extent that he forced his son to take an oath to corroborate this commitment.

I saw an interesting interpretation in the sefer Darash Mordechai by Rav Mordechai Druk, which may be upsetting to us, but unfortunately, sometimes, it can be very true. He cites an observation from his mother. In Birkas HaMazon, we say "V'Na al tazricheinu Hashem Elokeinu Lo l'ydei matnas basar v'dam v'lo l'yedei halva'asm" – We ask that our livelihood come straight from the Almighty and not via "gifts from flesh and blood." Rav Druk's mother asked – why do we use this expression "gifts from flesh and blood" in the Bentching – why not "gifts from man" (matnas Adam)? She answered – this means we should not need to ask for help from our own "flesh and blood" – i.e., our children – to take care of our financial needs. No one wants to be dependent on his children for support.

There is a famous oft-quoted statement: One mother can take care of ten children, but ten children cannot take care of one mother. Lo l'ydei matnas basar v'dam is not referring to "people in general", but specifically to our own flesh and blood, our children. Please Hashem, let it be that I do not need to come on to the largesse of my children for my basic needs.

The Shaloh haKadosh in fact says (and one has to be the Shalo"h haKadosh to suggest such a bold idea) that when Yaakov arrived in Egypt and was greeted by Yosef, Yaakov said "Amoosa ha'Paam" (Let me now die) [Bereshis 46:30]. The usual interpretation was that Yaakov expressed happiness: I can now die a happy man that I have been reunited with my beloved son Yosef. The Shalo"h states that Yaakov was saying "Now that I am going to need to be dependent on my son Yosef to support me and provide for my needs here in Egypt – I would rather die!"

With this thought in mind, we can understand two things. First, we can understand why Yaakov was so nervous about his funeral arrangements that he made Yosef take an oath. Yaakov was very uncomfortable with the whole idea of asking his son for a favor. Second, we now have a new insight into Yosef's response: "I will act according to your words." It does not mean "I am going to go ahead and fulfill your wishes and bury you in the Land of Canaan." Anochi E'eseh kiDvarecha means "I also am going to do as you say. I also want to be buried in Eretz Yisrael!"

Yosef is saying to his father – the reason I am going to fulfill your request is not for your sake. I am going to do it for my sake because I want to be buried there as well! The greatest way of assuring that I will be buried in Eretz Yisrael is that when my children see that I schlepped you back to Eretz Yisrael, I can assume they will do the same for me. Yosef was in effect putting Yaakov's mind at ease. "Dear father, do not consider this a favor you are asking from me. It is in no way an imposition on your son because I am not doing it for you. I am doing it for me!"

Not Why Weren't You Like Yosef? But Rather Why Didn't You Use the Spiritual Power That Is Our Legacy from Yosef?

The Rambam [Yesodei HaTorah 5:10] paskens that if someone violates Torah law without being forced to, but merely as a callous and wanton act of disrespect for the Word of G-d, he has desecrated the Name of G-d (Chillul HaShem). This is not a case of someone who has a strong desire for pork or a lust to engage in promiscuous activity, rather, this speaks of someone who violates Torah law out of spite (l'hach'is). The Rambam continues that if a person does a mitzvah or refrains from doing an aveirah for no ulterior motive (not for seeking honor or reward or fear of punishment) but simply because it is the Will of G-d – he has Sanctified the Name of G-d. He gives as an example of this, Yosef's refraining from sin when tempted by the wife of Potiphar.

If a person sits in the privacy of his home – nobody sees him, nobody watches him, nobody knows what he is doing – and yet he refrains from doing an aveirah simply because the Ribono shel Olam said so, that is a Kiddush HaShem, by definition.

There is a famous Gemara [Yoma 35b]: To the wicked person they say (prior to Judgement in the Next World) "Why did you not engage in Torah study?" If he says, "I was handsome and entangled with my evil inclination," they say to him "Were you any more handsome than Yosef?" They say about Yosef HaTzadik that each and every day the wife of Potiphar would attempt to seduce him with words. It was a daily battle and yet he went ahead and refused her advances – not because of fear or honor but solely to fulfill the Will of the Almighty. We tell the wicked person: "Look at Yosef!" The Gemara concludes that Yosef is me'chayev ha'Resha'im. He is the paradigm of a handsome person who was tempted to sin by beautiful women, and yet he withstood those temptations.

The Sefas Emes asks a question here: We tell a wicked person "Why were you not you like Yosef?" The wicked person can have a quick comeback: "I was not like Yosef because my name was not Yosef haTzadik!" Suppose someone tells me "You know Rav Chaim Kanievsky has this big chumra that he observes – why don't you keep that chumra?" I will tell him "I don't know if you haven't noticed this, but I am not Rav Chaim Kanievesky! I am not on that spiritual level!" How can the Heavenly Court come to a new arrival and ask him "Why were you not like Yosef?" The answer he will give is obvious: "I am not Yosef! Yosef was the classic Tzadik Yesod Olam – what do you want from me?"

In order to understand the Sefas Emes' answer to this question, we must first grasp the implication of a pasuk in this week's parsha: The brothers were afraid of what Yosef might do to them after Yaakov died. He called them and said to them: "Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good: in order to accomplish – ka'yom ha'zeh – that a vast people be kept alive." [Bereshis 50:19-20].

What does the expression ka'yom ha'zeh (literally – like this day) mean in this sentence? The English translation in many Chumashim is "it is as clear as day". But the Be'er Moshe suggests another interpretation which is based on an earlier pasuk in Sefer Bereshis. When Yosef was faced with the seductive temptations of Potiphar's wife, the pasuk says "Va'yehi ka'yom ha'zeh" (and it was like on this day) [Bereshis 39:11]. The Be'er Moshe says the "Ka'yom ha'zeh" in Parshas VaYechi is alluding to the "Ka'yom ha'zeh" in Parshas VaYeshev. Meaning – Egypt was an amoral society, immersed in promiscuity. Not one Jewish woman in all the years of servitude had a willful promiscuous relation with someone other than her husband. Who gave Klal Yisrael the power to do that? It was Yosef HaTzadik. The fact that Yosef HaTzadik withstood the temptation and did not have a promiscuous relationship with Potiphar's wife gave Klal Yisrael the ability to withstand the temptations they would encounter in Egypt until they left over 200 years later!

Just like we all know that the ability to be moser nefer (experience martyrdom) comes from Avraham Avinu and we received so much from the Avos via the principle of Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim, similarly, the ability to withstand the temptations of sexual immorality in Egypt came from Yosef – the fact that he did not commit adultery with Potiphar's wife.

Says the Be'er Moshe: That is the meaning of "Ka'yom ha'zeh". Yosef tells his brothers – It is all part of the Master Plan to keep the people alive – not only alive physically, but alive spiritually as well! Do you know how your descendants will have the power to do that during two hundred years of Egyptian servitude? "Ka'yom ha'zeh". It was because ON THAT DAY I was able to overcome my Yetzer HaRah. The Ribono shel Olam placed me in that compromising position so that I should pass the test and pass on to my descendants the ability to withstand such tests. So too, He placed me in this situation, so that I could provide for your material needs at this time.

If that is the interpretation, we can now understand the answer of the Sefas Emes. The Sefas Emes says that when the Gemara says in Maseches Yoma that a person will be asked "How come you could not control your evil

inclinations?" and they will cite for him the example of Yosef HaTzadik, they are not saying that they expect him to be like Yosef HaTzadik. They are saying "You have as a heritage, as a legacy from Yosef HaTzadik, the ability to do the same thing! That is part of your DNA."

It is not like saying "Why are you not like Rav Chaim Kanievsky? It is more fundamental than that. We are not saying you should be like Yosef. We are saying Yosef did something for the spiritual DNA of Klal Yisrael – that forever after they should have the capability of withstanding such temptation.

This is what the Rambam means in Yesodei HaTorah when he gives the example of Yosef HaTzadik as the classic Sanctifier of the Name of G-d. When Yosef told his brothers "G-d put me in Egypt – Ka'yom ha'zeh – he not only meant to save Klal Yisrael from hunger, but to give them the spiritual power to withstand temptations like he himself withstood 'On that day'."

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

It has no beginning. Every parsha starts at the beginning of a fresh paragraph. There's either a short gap or a longer gap before it. Parshat Vayechi, however, has no beginning. It flows directly on from the end of the previous week's parsha. So why is this the case?

The 15th Century scholar Rav Meir Yechiel of Ostroff gives a beautiful peirush. He tells us that when the 70 souls of the family of Yaakov Avinu came down to Egypt, they didn't know at what point in their journey they were.

Confusion
There was so much doubt, so much confusion. They knew they were going into exile. But how long would it last? Would it be happy? Would it be trying? When would their redemption come? When would they be going back to their land?

Because the beginning, the middle and the end of their journey was not known to them, that's why the beginning of the parsha is not clearly defined.

What was the response of Yaakov Avinu during those challenging times of uncertainty? In a word: Beracha. Blessings.

Yaakov Avinu counted his blessings, and he wanted those around him to do likewise. In particular at that moment he appreciated his family. Coming right at the end of the book of Bereishit – the book of the dysfunctional family – Yaakov Avinu wanted to bring his divided family together, and he showed them how his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, got on so well together – a model for future peaceful domestic coexistence.

Blessings
Berachot, blessings, are what Yaakov Avinu gave to his family. Vayechi is full of them: a blessing for each and every child, a blessing for his grandchildren, charging us to bless our children likewise for all time. Indeed, the blessings of Yaakov Avinu as presented in Vayechi continue to provide inspiration for us to this very day.

Just like Yaakov Avinu, we need to count our blessings. We need to step back and prioritise what is really important in life and like Yaakov Avinu, highlight how crucial our families must be for us all.

In addition we need to bless others, to let them know how much we appreciate them, to give them words of praise and also to invest in the future. The pandemic presents us with many challenges. These are trying times – people are dying, people are ill, people have lost their jobs, people are lonely and there is an increase of mental illness. But together with that, like Yaakov Avinu, let's invest now in our future. And through our actions, our deeds and our blessings, may we provide an inspiration now for all time to come.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Jews Living in a Non-Jewish Society

The classic Jewish blessing on Friday evening by a Jewish parent to a son is "May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe" (Genesis 48:20 and found in prayer books following the Friday evening service). Of all the great people to aspire to, why did the Rabbis choose these two (relatively minor Biblical) personalities, and ignore Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.? One possible answer is that unlike Isaac and Jacob, who grew up in a totally Jewish household in the land of Israel, Menashe and Ephraim were born and raised in the land of Egypt where they were the only Jews in the entire land, and they had to "act Egyptian" as children of the king's viceroy. Nevertheless, they were able to remain good Jews, as they were brought up properly by their father Joseph. This, then, is the hope for all Jewish children. No matter what environment children grow up in, they will be able to remain distinctively Jewish with the right Jewish values. Whether in a total Jewish community or as the only Jews in a country, the hope of parents is to bring up their children so they can withstand the influence of non-Jewish values, and faithfully remain Jewish, even if living in a non-Jewish society.

The other half of the blessing, for girls, can now also be understood in the same light. In the blessing for daughters, the four Mothers of Judaism <u>are</u> mentioned as models, because each one of them grew up in an environment totally alien to Judaism, yet, nevertheless, emerged as Jewish women with the right Jewish values. Sara, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel all had fathers who did not exemplify Jewish values, and each grew up in the most non-Jewish of environments. Like Menashe and Ephraim, they, too were able to withstand the pressures and influences of their environments to develop the right attitudes and values and pass them on to <u>their</u> children.

This is the hope. Whether children grow up in Israel or in the Diaspora today, it is the obligation of Jewish parents to try and instill those values that will last and remain with children when they become adults and will be able to live Jewishly in any environment in the world.

Compelling arguments can be made that being friendly with the surrounding non-Jewish community is something positive and often very necessary. But, at the same time, caution must be exerted because becoming <u>too</u> friendly can easily lead to assimilation. So, there is good reason to keep one's distance and remain separate from the non-Jewish community, but the danger of segregating too much is that it can easily lead to antisemitism. The ideal path probably lies somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Both of these dangers are alluded to in explaining an extraneous phrase in the Torah verse in Genesis (Genesis 32:12). Jacob prays to God to save him from the threat of his brother Esau. In the verse, Jacob says "save me from my brother, from Esau." Since Jacob had only one brother and since no word or phrase can be "extra" in the Torah, according to Jewish tradition, why was the double expression "from my brother" and "from Esau" used – aren't they the same? Rashi explains (Rashi commentary on Genesis 32:12) that Jacob was asking God for protection from two types of threats -- one when Esau, the personification of the non-Jew in the Bible, who acts like Esau, the antisemite. But there is another threat, when Esau, the non-Jew, acts like a brother, when the threat comes from assimilation. Thus, Jacob, the symbol of the Jewish people, was afraid of both possibilities when dealing with non-Jews, both the threat of antisemitism when the non-Jew acted as the antisemite, and the threat of assimilation when the non-Jew acted as a brother.

Remaining Different - The Torah clearly wishes Jews to keep some distance from the non-Jewish community by explicitly commanding Jews not to copy the customs of the non-Jews (Leviticus 18:3). What does this commandment precisely entail and how is it performed? Although this verse seems to be referring specifically to the customs of Egypt and of Canaan, two chapters later, the same commandments is repeated (Leviticus 20:23-24), without a reference to any specific nation or culture, but with an "explanation" that God has made the Jews different from all other nations. The commentaries have emphasized this latter, general concept, and have not restricted this Mitzvah to the customs of any particular non-Jewish society. Maimonides (Hilchot Akum 11:1) in explaining the Mitzvah of not following non-Jewish customs, says that a Jew should be distinguished from non-Jews

through distinctive dress as well as knowledge and understanding.

There are numerous other implications to this Mitzvah-commandment, many of them technical, far beyond the scope of this chapter. Some of the areas discussed are style of haircuts, celebrating Thanksgiving and New Year's (January 1) and various other "Jewish rituals" which have non-Jewish origins. Whatever the technicalities of the Mitzvah, Jews should try to remain different culturally. The Midrash (Hilchot Akum 11:1) points this out in commenting why Jeremiah compared the Jewish people to an olive tree. Just as olive oil and water do not mix, so, too, the Jewish people and the non-Jews should not mix.

Creating Positive Ties - On the other hand, the Rabbis realized that without peaceful coexistence between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, life would be difficult for everyone involved. Therefore, already at the time of the Mishna, it was mandated that Jews should greet non-Jews, by saying "hello" and creating positive social interaction (Mishna, Shevi'it 4:3). The Talmud (Gittin 61a) also says that the Jewish community should reach out to the non-Jewish community regarding certain communal activities. Thus, Jews should visit the sick of non-Jews, even of idol worshippers, bury their dead (in a separate area, of course) and help the poor of non-Jews. Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 10:5) codifies this as Jewish law. There is an additional Mitzvah, ever present for the Jew, to sanctify God's name (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 5:1). This directs a Jew's behavior, even before non-Jews (as well as Jews), to behave in a manner that people will praise God's name and think better of the Jewish God.

Rabbi Soloveitchik (Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Shavuot address to students, 1982) amplified upon this concept when he explained that the Torah was purposely given publicly, before the entire world, so that the non-Jews of the world would be aware of its content and know what Judaism stood for. In reality, the Torah should have been given privately (Rashi commentary on Exodus 34:3) and the reason the Tablets were later inevitably shattered was because it was given publicly. Nevertheless, though He knew the Tablets were to be broken, God understood that the public nature of the Torah giving was necessary and essential for the benefit of the world's non-Jews. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, immediately prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Torah intentionally placed two stories (Amalek and Yitro) involving non-Jews and their interaction with Jews, even though one story was chronologically out of place. The reaction of these two non-Jews became the paradigm for all non-Jewish reaction to Jews over the centuries. While Amalek saw the Jewish experiences and tried to destroy the Jewish people, Yitro witnessed the same experiences and joined the Jewish people. Thus, this interaction with non-Jews is crucial for Jewish existence. Through continued interaction, the non-Jews of the world will eventually embrace Judaism of their own accord.

The tension between interaction and distance continues even today when more non-Jews welcome Jews into their society than ever before. Each society and each community must determine for itself the proper balance, maintaining distance yet creating a relationship. There is no tried-and-true formula, especially after the lessons of the Holocaust. The Jewish community must be cautious, yet open. It is up to the Jewish leadership to set up the proper structure and "ground rules". It also should always be remembered that some non-Jews will always be Amalek while others will be Yitro.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Tears of Suffering and Hope
by Dr. Yardaena Osband

Parshat Vayechi brings the conclusion to the story of Yosef and his brothers. The story occupies 14 chapters of Genesis (chapters 37-50) which is almost a third of the whole sefer. In Vayechi, Yosef's story ends with his father Yaakov's death (Genesis 49:33-50:1) and burial and with one last encounter between Yosef and his brothers where they must confront the consequences of Yosef's sale (Genesis 50:15-21).

In both of these encounters, Yosef cries. But when Yosef's entire story is examined Yosef cries 7 times. All 7 times occur once Yosef is in Egypt and begin when he sees his brothers for the first time. The first three (Gen 42:24, 43:30, and 45:1-2) occur when Yosef meets his brothers the first time when they come to ask for food. Yosef first cries when he hears his brothers discuss if this is a punishment for how they treated him. The second is when Yosef sees his brother Binyamin for the first time, and the third is after Yosef listens to Yehuda's plea to take him instead of Binyamin, and Yosef can no longer control himself, and his cry is heard throughout Egypt (Genesis 45:2). The fourth cry is when Yosef finally reveals himself to his brother and cries on Binyamin (Genesis 45:14) and his brothers (Genesis 45:15). Yosef is described crying for a fifth time when he is finally reunited with his father Yaakov (Genesis 46:29) (the verse here is somewhat ambivalent and it may be describing Yaakov crying but most commentators believe it is to be Yosef who is crying). Finally, in Vayechi, there are the last two times where Yosef cries.

Why does the Torah share over and over again the details of Yosef's emotional state? Certainly there are many other emotionally charged situations described in Tanach, but there is no other character who is described crying as often as Yosef. What emotion do his tears express? Other than when his father Yaakov dies and he cries, which seems to be an expression of grief, it is not clear what Yosef is expressing when he cries.

To understand Yosef's tears it is important to remember that Yosef's mother, Rachel, is the personality in Tanakh most identified with crying. As Yirmiyahu describes Rachel in Chapter 31:15

כֹּה ו אָמַר ה׳ קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל־בָּנֶיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם עַל־בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ׃

Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah — wailing, bitter weeping— Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone.

When Rachel tragically dies during childbirth (Genesis 35:16-20) Yaakov buries her apart from the rest of the Avot and Imahot. The midrash in Bereshit Rabbah 82:10 explains why Yaakov buried Rachel on the road to Efrat:

And Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Efrat, this is Beit-Lechem (35:19) What did Yaakov see that he buried Rachel on the way to Efrat? He had a prophetic vision that the exiles would in the future pass through there, therefore he buried her there, so she would ask for mercy for them – so it is written, "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children … Thus says God: Refrain your voice from weeping… there is hope for your future, etc.

Yaakov understands that the suffering Rachel experienced in her life, like waiting to marry Yaakov and the pain of infertility, sets her apart from the other Avot and Imahot. She becomes the most appropriate voice to plead for mercy to God as the Jewish people suffer when they are exiled. While Rachel's tribulations isolate her, it is after her tearful plea for mercy, when God comforts Rachel, that her suffering has meaning and will be rewarded with hope. Her children will return from their exile and their suffering will come to an end (Jeremiah 31:16-17)

כֹּה ו אָמַר ה׳ מִנְעִי קוֹלֵךְ מִבֶּכִי וְעֵינַיִךְ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֶשׁ שָׂכָר לִפְעֻלָּתֵךְ נְאֻם־ה׳ וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב׃ וְיֵשׁ־תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֵךְ נְאֻם־ה׳ וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לִגְבוּלָם

Thus said the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, Your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor —declares the LORD: They shall return from the enemy's land.And there is hope for your future — declares the LORD: Your children shall return to their country.

Yosef, like his mother Rachel, is always set apart. Beginning with his dreams in chapter 37, where he understands that he is destined to

gain great power over the rest of his family, and even at the end of the story with his brothers in Chapter 50, he remains apart from them. This separateness comes from Yosef perceiving that the suffering he went through was all part of a larger plan of God's. He cries at the moments when more of God's plan is revealed and he can see that, hopefully, his suffering at the hand of his brothers has purpose. This culminates in Chapter 50:19-20 when, after his brothers plead with Yosef to not take revenge on them after their fathers' death, Yosef reminds them:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אַל־תִּירָאוּ כִּי הֲתַחַת אֱלֹקים אָנִי וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹקים חֲשָׁבָהּ לְטֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֹׂה כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַחֲיֹת עַם־רָב:

But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God?

Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.

Rachel and Yosef's tears teach us that even though suffering often makes people feel alone and distant, the experience of suffering need not be meaningless. We must remind ourselves that, where there is suffering, we must still find hope. As the Psalmist writes in 126:5-6:

הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצֹרוּ: הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ ו וּבָכֹה נֹשֵׂא מֶשֶׁךְ־הַזָּרַע בֹּא־יָבוֹא בְרִנָּה נֹשֵׂא אֲלֻמֹּתָיו:

They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.

May we be blessed that all our tears become songs of joy and hope.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

In That Way He Never Died

And Yaakov concluded commanding his sons, and he drew his legs [up] into the bed, and expired and was brought in to his people. (Breishis 49:33)

and expired and was brought in: But no mention is made of death in his regard, and our Rabbis of blessed memory said: Our father Yaakov did not die. — Rashi

Absent from this final account of the life of Yaakov Avinu is the mention of his death. By Avraham and others three stages of death are mentioned. By Yaakov only two are listed. Why? Rashi quotes from the Gemara in Taanis a very strange notion. "Yaakov did not die!" What does that mean? Didn't they bury him? Has he been seen since? What does that mean?

What are the three stages of death? This is not a morbid discussion. Death is a continuation of life as we shall see. Sefer Gesher HaChaim explains that Gviah – expiring means that the vehicle of the soul, the body breaks down. Imagine someone whose car stalls and dies on the highway. Now the driver must exit the car and walk back how. That's exactly what happens. When the body is finished as a functional host of the soul, the soul departs. That's the part that we call death.

The word for death, "MISA" Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. says is related to the word, YAMUSH, to be removed. The removal of the soul is called "death". Then finally the soul which no longer has a place in this world departs and returns to what seems to be a communal family gathering with HASHEM in the world of souls. This is all above my pay grade but that's what the verse usually describes. Why is death not mentioned about Yaakov Avinu?

It's interesting to note the language of the Talmud as mentioned in Rashi. "Our father Yaakov did not die!" That is a hint at the answer. He lives through his children. His mission is continued through the accomplishments of his Klal Yisrael over the many generations. We are still eternally connected. That begs another question. Why then is not the same mentioned with regard to all of the other Avos? Their legacy lives on through us!

Now I am going to venture an answer. I heard from one of my Rebbeim that there are certain Tzadikim that clamor in this world and pine all their days to return and attach themselves to their Creator. There is another rare servant of HASHEM, a different type of Tzadik that remains attached, invested in the activities of this world. The Tosh Rebbe describes how these Tzadikim while they continue to glean merits from those who act on their behalf, do not want to eat from what the Zohar calls "the bread of shame". They don't want something for nothing, so they continue to repay with their merits and bring success and salvation to those who act on their behalf. Again, don't ask me how it works.

The Ribnitzer Rebbe told one of his Gabaim, "I do not remain beholden to anyone." It was understood that he meant that anyone who does actions that benefit his soul, he wishes to repay with yeshuos. The stories continue to pile up about wonders that accrue to those who have prayed at his gravesite. I have my own story to tell but not just now.

Now I am thinking that Yaakov Avinu lost Yosef for 22 years and had to be brought down to Egypt to meet his destiny because he "settled in the land where his father sojourned". Rashi explains there that the whole episode with the brothers hating Yosef arose because Yaakov wanted to settle, retire, so to speak. Rashi says, "Isn't it enough for Tzadikim that they attain tranquility (forever) in the next world!?"

Perhaps Yaakov realized his error after those years of dislocation. He rededicated himself to repair that fault. Therefore he was blessing and commanding his children right up to the very end of his life, and beyond. He did not let go at that point. He remains forever a parent involved with his children. Yaakov Avinu forfeited that tranquility, never departed, and in that way he never died.

BS"D

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from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org>
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subject: Reb Yeruchem - Torah Boot Camp

Reb Yeruchem
By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

To Dedicate an Article click here
Parshas Vayechi
Torah Boot Camp
Parshas Vayechi Torah Boot Camp

He saw that tranquility was good, and bent his shoulder to carry loads, and became a forced laborer.[2]

Did we hear correctly? He really appreciated tranquility, so he took upon himself strenuous labor? Now, we understand that the pasuk is meant as a metaphor for toiling in Torah, but it still reads like a contradiction in terms. If he was looking for quiet comfort, does it make sense that he should seek out the apparent opposite?

Or maybe it does.

The calm and tranquility that grow out of a satisfaction of physical needs can be a recipe for confusion and chaos. When serenity comes from our getting used to a particular set of circumstances and situations, any change in any of those conditions can disturb or completely destroy it. Remove one of the important contributors to that serenity, and we become worried, agitated, flustered. If enough are removed, we can be fully broken.

How is genuine tranquility achieved? Only by maintaining focus on a single goal, one that applies to every and all situations. That constant goal, in the famous words of the Ramchal, is "to clarify and verify what is Man's obligation in this life." One who makes that his only essential preoccupation will not waver from the course he has chosen, no matter what unexpected circumstances come his way. The person, however, whose serenity is dependent upon specific conditions, will rarely hold on to his serenity. The different conditions that he meets up with will pull him in every which direction. Moving from one to another, he can break. Peace is beyond reach.

Soldiers are not readied for battle by pampering them and making them feel comfortable. Quite the opposite. They learn to live under trying conditions, and to make do with less comfort. They learn to maintain stability without the things they are used to.

Before giving us the Torah, Hashem subjected us to similar treatment. There was no five-star hotel for us at Har Sinai, and no van transportation from Goshen. Our ancestors made their way slowly through the wilderness. "He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the mohn that you did not know."[3] Hashem broke them bodily, to create a serenity not affected by the material, but born of a strong purpose and commitment. They needed that kind of serenity to receive the Torah.

Yissachar understood the value of the most complete menuchah – that which comes with achieving a single goal and purpose. He recognized in particular the value of devoting long days to the study of Torah as the best path for him to take to get to the goal. Because of that, he "bent his shoulder to carry loads," knowing that by breaking himself of his physical dependencies, he would experience more tranquility, not less.

The Alter of Kelm used a similar approach to explain the way that the Bnei Yisrael made their hurried exit from Egypt. They could not have been surprised that redemption was coming – they had been waiting for it for centuries. Recent events, including the avodah of the korban Pesach, certainly indicated that it was imminent. Granted that they could not stay an extra minute without becoming irreparably enmeshed with the Egyptians, but they still could have been better prepared by Moshe. He could have told them that they had a half day to bake bread and take provisions, because they were leaving the next morning. Why not spare them the anxiety of leaving with no food in hand for the journey?

The Alter explained: calming their anxiety was precisely not what Hashem wanted! This was their first test. Would they be able to maintain their poise even in the face of the unexpected? If the anxiety would break them, they could not candidates for receiving the Torah. Torah requires a steadfast menuchah that can endure challenges. Without that inner tranquility, they could not receive the Torah, let alone hold on to it for a long, complex future ahead of them and their descendants.

Based on Daas Torah, by R. Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, Bereishis pg. 280-282
↑ Bereishis 49:15 ↑ Devarim 8:3 ↑

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Dec 16, 2021,
Subject: Rav Frand Parshas Vayechi
Chessed, Emes & Anava

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1275 – I Don't Want Hespedim at my Levaya – Must We Obey? Good Shabbos!

The True Chessed Shel Emes

At the beginning of the parsha, Yaakov asks Yosef to swear that he will bring him back to the Land of Canaan and not allow him to be buried in the Land of Egypt. Rashi famously comments that a kindness done with the deceased is a "true kindness" (Chessed shel Emes) because the person extending the favor expects no repayment from the person receiving the favor. The quintessential Chessed shel Emes is the chessed someone does with a dead person. There are no ulterior motives involved in such kindness. Many Chevra Kadisha organizations are known as Chessed Shel Emes societies. The source is this Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Vayechi.

However, a number of commentaries ask on this Rashi, because the pasuk explicitly says that Yaakov was giving Yosef an ulterior motive for rendering this kindness. Yaakov promised Yosef the city of Shechem because he was troubling himself not to bury Yaakov in Egypt! How can Rashi call this the classic paradigm of Chessed shel Emes where no gain or benefit is expected in return?

Moreover, the Gemara says in Kesuvos and other places that the way this world works is that if someone eulogizes others, others will eulogize him, and one who goes to funerals and participates in the burial of the departed will have others do the same for him as well. In other words, there is repayment for people who occupy themselves with burying the dead! Basically, this is a death insurance policy. The premiums are to eulogize and bury others; the payment is that others will eulogize and bury you. So, again we have a question on Rashi's characterization of the matter.

The sefer Avir Yaakov offers the following interpretation: Certainly, when there is a funeral and someone buries a departed friend or neighbor, there can be and there will be a payback. However, the reason why kindness done with the dead is considered a Chessed shel Emes is because the dead person will not feel indebted to his benefactor. Every time someone does someone else a favor—for the purest of reasons—it creates an obligation on the recipient. He feels indebted to the one who did him the favor. It is just human nature. When you give something to someone, he feels indebted.

The favor may have been performed totally altruistically, but inevitably, later on, when you see the person who did you a favor in the street, you are thinking "I owe him something". And this other fellow may very well also be thinking that you owe him something. The only person who will certainly NOT feel indebted after receiving a favor is a dead person. That is why Rashi calls this a true Chessed shel Emes.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mir Mashgiach, always portrayed a situation where Reuven does a favor for Shimon and Shimon is very appreciative and tells Reuven, "Thank you so much, how can I repay you?" Reuven answers "Oh, it was nothing. Forget about it!" Shimon persists "No, no. I really want to repay you somehow. What can I do for you?" Again, Reuvain says "Please, just forget about it!"

People think, Rav Yeruchem said, that Reuven is being very nice and magnanimous. He is not asking for anything in return from Shimon for the kindness he did for him. Rav Yeruchem said that the contrary is true. Reuven is not being nice by not giving Shimon the opportunity to do something for him as repayment. When a person says "What can I do for you in return," it gives him the opportunity to remove the feeling of indebtedness that he must now carry around. When the benefactor disallows the possibility of payment, he is really holding onto the debt for possible collection at a later date.

Therefore, the real true Chessed is only the kindness someone does with the dead, who have no feelings of indebtedness.

Yosef Had to Be Told His Father Was Sick?

There is a Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos in our parsha that comments on the pasuk "And it was after these matters, it was told to Yosef 'Behold your father is sick.' He took his two sons with him, Menashe and Ephraim." [Bereshis 48:1] Yosef hears that his elderly father is on his death bed and goes to see him, taking along his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim.

Let us ask a question: If someone is on his death bed, isn't it likely that the son will know about it without needing to be told? What kind of son would not know what kind of condition his father is in and need to be told by others "Behold, your father is sick"?

The Daas Zekeinim infers from this narration that Yosef did not visit his father frequently. Yosef was not there on a regular basis and therefore he did not know Yaakov's condition and consequently, he needed to be informed by others that the end was near. The Daas Zekeinim suggests a reason why this may have been the case: Yosef did not want to spend time with his father alone because he was afraid his father would ask him how it was that he wound up in Egypt.

This is an incredible idea. Yaakov was in Mitzrayim for seventeen years. He had not seen Yosef for twenty-two years prior to that. There was a dramatic meeting between the two of them in last week's parsha. They had been so close during Yosef's youth in Canaan. Can it be thought that now, after their initial dramatic reunion, that Yosef, the "heir apparent" to the patriarchal legacy, does not go back to visit with his father on a frequent basis?

According to the Daas Zekeinim, as hard as it is to imagine, and as difficult personally as it must have been for Yosef, he kept his distance. Yosef feared that moment of privacy with Yaakov when his elderly father would say to him "Yossele my dear son – tell me: what really happened? How did you ever wind up here in Egypt?" The truth would have caused Yaakov great aggravation and anger at his other sons. Yosef did not want to be the cause of that aggravation and family strife.

The sefer Avir Yaakov asks the following question: Yosef did not see his father all these seventeen years when they were both in Mitzrayim. It was painful to Yaakov and it was painful to Yosef. Why? Yosef wanted to avoid the question "What happened to you?" However, there is a simple resolution to this problem. It is called "Lie through your teeth." There are plenty of stories Yosef could have told Yaakov to explain his disappearance without incriminating his brothers. "I was kidnapped by these Yishmaelim" is a very plausible story. It is not true, but perhaps Yaakov would have believed it. If there ever was an example of "one is allowed to extend the truth to preserve peace" (M'shaneh b'ad ha'Shalom) [Yevamos 65b] – this was it!

The Avir Yaakov offers an answer to this question. (If you have a better answer, perhaps discuss it around the family Shabbos table.) He suggests that even though Yosef may have been allowed to lie, he just could not bring himself to deceive his father. Maybe that is because Yaakov personified the attribute of truth more than anything else. If you know your father values truth over every other human characteristic – you just cannot lie to him. Despite both Yosef and Yaakov suffering for all of these years, Yosef could not lie to his father and violate the paramount value in his life.

The Fundamental Qualification for Malchus in Klal Yisrael: Lack of Arrogance

This final thought is from the sefer Chidekel, by Rav Chaim Dov Keller, the late Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Chicago. It is based on a Targum Onkelos, a Targum Yonosan ben Uziel and a Medrash.

Yehudah is actually the first of Yaakov's sons to receive an unadulterated blessing. Reuven, Shimon, and Levi received a "Bracha" that was actually more mussar than bracha. Yehudah's "Bracha" was pure blessing.

Among the five pesukim of Yehuda's bracha, Yaakov said: "The scepter shall not depart from his descendants nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh arrives…" [Bereshis 49:10]. This is a seminal pasuk in all of the Torah. It grants monarchy to the Tribe of Yehudah. All kings must be from his descendants. In fact, at the time of the Chashmonaim, when the Tribe of Levi usurped the monarchy (the Maccabees were Kohanim), they were punished severely despite their righteousness.

What did Yaakov see in Yehudah that made him fit for royalty? The pasuk "Yehudah ata yodoocha achecha…" is commonly translated "Yehuda—you, your brothers will acknowledge" [Bereshis 49:8].

Targum Onkelos translates the pasuk to mean: "Yehudah you confessed (Yoducha from the word Modeh) [when it came to the story of Tamar] and were not embarrassed". When Tamar was taken out to be burnt at the stake and she said, "Whoever is the person who gave me these items is the person who impregnated me," Yehudah said "She is more righteous than I." Imagine the Yehudah's humiliation in making this embarrassing admission.

Targum Yonoson ben Uziel adds a further element in his translation of this pasuk: "Yehudah, you admitted in the story of Tamar. Therefore, all Jews will be called YEHUDim after your name." We are called Jews because of the name Judah in all different languages. The name of our nationality is derived from the name of Yaakov's fourth son! We received our national identity because of the strength of this incident. Being able to admit you are wrong is so fundamental to being a Yid that it is why we are all called Yehudim.

In fact, the Medrash Rabbah says that it was the Ribono shel Olam who made Yehudah the Melech of Klal Yisrael for this one act of humility and his ability to say "I am wrong."

This is an amazing quality that is extremely rare among contemporary politicians—the willingness and ability to announce "I made a mistake" or "I am wrong!" In Klal Yisrael, the fundamental qualification for Malchus is lack of arrogance—the ability to be Modeh al haEmes.

In general, this is a Jewish trait. Rashi illustrates this point several times in Chumash. In Toldos, Rashi says regarding a certain pasuk [Bereshis 28:5] "I don't know what this is coming to teach us." Now obviously, Rashi does not comment on every pasuk in Chumash. Rashi could have easily glossed over this pasuk and not said anything. He could have just skipped it. However, Rashi felt compelled to admit that he was bothered by this pasuk and did not know why it was there.

Likewise, the same phenomenon [e.g. – Bava Metziah 108b] occurs in his monumental Talmud commentary. In the middle of a sugya, Rashi writes "I did not closely follow the words of my teachers (lo dikdakti b'Divrei Rabbosai)." He gives the impression – "Do you know why I don't know complete pshat in this piece of Gemara? It is because I was sleeping during shiur!" Why does Rashi need to say that? It is because he is a Yid! Also see Brachos 25b. There is a Gilyon HaShas there which quotes every single place in Shas that Rashi explicitly writes that he does not understand the Gemara's interpretation. The print is too small and the list is too long for me to count all the places mentioned.

In each of those places, Rashi had the option of not saying anything but he chose not to take that easier option. That would be the less-than-fully-truthful approach. That is not the characteristic of Jews.

Rabbi Keller cites an incident he saw in a sefer that Rabbi Shlomo Loricnz wrote (B'Mechitzasam), describing the various Gedolim he had connections with in Eretz Yisrael.

The Chazon Ish wrote on the entire Torah. He wrote a chapter (Siman 12) in one of his Sefarim about Masechta Kelim. He later regretted having published that Siman. He didn't think what he wrote was correct. He expunged it from his Sefer. In the Chazon Ish's volume on Taharos regarding Masechta Kelim, the chapters skip from eleven to thirteen. Siman 12 was removed in all later editions.

Someone asked the Chazon Ish why he did not renumber the subsequent chapters and make Siman 13 into Siman 12 and so on? "Let there be one less Siman at the end of the Sefer. Why do you need to announce that there is something missing here?" The Chazon Ish said "I want people to know that I had something to say over here. It was originally included but I decided it was wrong so I removed it. That's the way it is."

This is another example of Yehudah – Ata yodoocha achecha. He admitted and was not embarrassed to do so. The ability to confess and say "I'm human, I was wrong, I made a mistake" is highly admirable. In Klal Yisrael, it is a qualification for true leadership. There has never been a dogma in the history of Klal Yisrael that anyone is infallible, as is the case in other religions. This is because people are not infallible. People are people and people are humans, and even the greatest can from time to time err.

The attribute that qualifies the Melech Yisrael for Malchus is the ability to say "I was wrong. She is more righteous than I." That is why Yehudah merited monarchy. It is because a king cannot be arrogant. He has much too much power. Arrogance, on top of having all that power, can be disastrous. The higher up you are, the humbler you must be. Unfortunately, we see the opposite in the world around us.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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From: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Dec 16, 2021, 8:40 PM subject: Kingdoms of Jewish Exile; Support After Infant or Pregnancy Loss; When Can We Lie?
OU Torah Rabbi Sacks on Parsha

When Can We Lie?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid. Years earlier, when he had revealed his true identity to them, he appeared to have forgiven them for selling him as a slave.[1] Yet the brothers were not wholly reassured. Maybe Joseph did not mean what he said. Perhaps he still harboured resentment. Might the only reason he had not yet taken revenge was respect for Jacob. There was a convention in those days that there was to be no settling of scores between siblings in the lifetime of the father. We know this from an earlier episode. After Jacob had taken his brother's blessing, Esau says, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). So the brothers came before Joseph and said:

"Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. (Gen. 50:16-17)

The text makes it as plain as possible that the story they told Joseph was a lie. If Jacob had really said those words, he would have said them to Joseph himself, not to the brothers. The time to have done so was on his deathbed in the previous chapter. The brothers' tale was what we may call a "white lie". Its primary aim was not to deceive but to ease a potentially explosive situation. Perhaps that is why Joseph wept, understanding that his brothers still thought him capable of revenge.

The Sages derived a principle from this text. Mutar le-shanot mipnei ha-shalom: "It is permitted to tell an untruth (literally, "to change" the facts) for the sake of peace."[2] A white lie is permitted in Jewish law.

This is not the only place where the Sages invoked this principle. They even attributed it to God Himself.[3] When the angels came to visit Abraham to tell him and Sarah that they were about to have a child, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" God then asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18:12-13).

God did not mention that Sarah believed that not only was she too old to have a child – she believed that Abraham was as well (this turned out to be quite untrue: Abraham had six more children after Sarah's death). The Sages inferred that God did not mention it because He did not want there to be bad feeling between husband and wife. Here too the Sages said: it is permitted to change the facts for the sake of peace.

It is clear that the Sages needed both episodes to establish the principle. Had we only known about the Sarah case, we could not infer that it is permitted to tell a white lie. God did not tell a white lie about Sarah. He merely did not tell Abraham the whole truth. Had we only known about the case of Joseph's brothers, we could not have inferred that what they did was permitted. Perhaps it was forbidden, and that is why Joseph wept. The fact that God Himself had done something similar is what led the Sages to say that the brothers were justified.

What is at stake here is an important feature of the moral life, despite the fact that we seem to be speaking of no more than social niceties: tact. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin pointed out that not all values coexist in a kind of platonic harmony. His favourite example was freedom and equality. You can have a free economy but the result will be inequality. You can have economic equality, communism, but the result will be a loss of freedom. In the world as currently configured, moral conflict is unavoidable.[4]

This was an important fact, though one about which Judaism seems never to have been in doubt. There is, for example, a powerful moment in Tanach when King David's son Absalom mounted a coup d'etat against his father. David was forced to flee. Eventually there was a battle between Absalom's troops and David's. Absalom, who was handsome and had fine hair, was caught by it when it became entangled in the branches of a tree. Left hanging there, Joab, captain of David's army, killed him.

When David heard the news he was overcome with grief:

The King was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"

2 Samuel 18:33

Joab was brutal in his response to the King:

"Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life … You love those who hate you and hate those who love you … Now go out and encourage your men."

2 Sam. 19:6-8

David's grief at the loss of his son conflicts with his responsibilities as head of state and his loyalty to the troops who have saved his life. Which comes first: his duties as a father or as a king?

The existence of conflicting values means that the kind of morality we adopt and society we create depend not only on the values we embrace but also on the way we prioritise them. Prioritising equality over freedom creates one kind of society – Soviet Communism for example. Prioritising freedom over equality leads to market economics. People in both societies may value the same things but they rank them differently in the scale of values, and thus how they choose when the two conflict.

That is what is at stake in the stories of Sarah's laughter and Joseph's brothers. Truth and peace are both values, but which do we choose when they conflict? Not everyone among the rabbinic Sages agreed.

There is, for example, a famous argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what to say about the bride at a wedding. (See Ketubot 16b) The custom was to say that "The bride is beautiful and graceful." Members of the School of Shammai, however, were not prepared to say so if, in their eyes, the bride was not beautiful and graceful. For them the supreme value was the Torah's insistence on truth: "Keep far from falsehood" (Ex. 23:7). The School of Hillel did not accept this. Who was to judge whether the bride was beautiful and graceful? Surely the bridegroom himself. So to praise the bride was not making an objective statement that could be tested empirically. It was simply endorsing the bridegroom's choice. It was a way of celebrating the couple's happiness.

Courtesies are often like this. Telling someone how much you like the gift they have brought, even if you don't, or saying to someone, "How lovely to see you" when you were hoping to avoid them, is more like good manners than an attempt to deceive. We all know this, and thus no harm is done, as it would be if we were to tell a lie when substantive interests are at stake.

More fundamental and philosophical is an important Midrash about a conversation between God and the angels as to whether human beings should be created at all:

Rabbi Shimon said: When God was about to create Adam, the ministering angels split into contending groups. Some said, 'Let him be created.' Others said, 'Let him not be created.' That is why it is written: 'Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed' (Psalms 85:11).

Mercy said, 'Let him be created, because he will do merciful deeds.'

Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood.'

Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will do righteous deeds.

Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he will never cease quarrelling.'

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground.

The angels said, 'Sovereign of the universe, why do You do thus to Your own seal, truth? Let truth arise from the ground.'

Thus it is written, 'Let truth spring up from the earth.'[5]

Psalms 85:12

This is a challenging text. What exactly were the angels saying? What does it mean to say that "God took truth and threw it to the ground?" And what happened to the claim made by the angel of Peace that humans "will never cease quarrelling"?

I interpret it as meaning that humans are destined to conflict so long as contending groups each claim to have a monopoly of the truth. The only way they will learn to live at peace is by realising that they, finite as all humans are, will never in this life achieve truth as it is in Heaven. For us, truth is always partial, fragmentary, the view from somewhere and not, as philosophers sometimes say, "the view from nowhere".[6]

This deep insight is, I believe, the reason why the Torah is multi-perspectival, why Tanach contains so many different kinds of voices, why Mishnah and Gemara are structured around argument, and why Midrash is built on the premise that there are "seventy faces" to Torah. No other civilisation I know has had so subtle and complex an understanding of the nature of truth.

Nor has any other so valued peace. Judaism is not and never was pacifist. National self-defence sometimes requires war. But Isaiah and Micah were the first visionaries of a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3) Isaiah is the poet laureate of peace.

Given the choice, when it came to interpersonal relations the Sages valued peace over truth, not least because truth can flourish in peace while it is often the first casualty in war. So the brothers were not wrong to tell Joseph a lie for the sake of peace within the family. It reminded them all of the deeper truth that not only their human father, now dead, but also their heavenly Father, eternally alive, wants the people of the covenant to be at peace, for how can Jews be at peace with the world if they are not at peace with themselves?

[1] This is the theme of the Covenant & Conversation essay entitled "The Birth of Forgiveness". [2] Yevamot 65b. [3] Midrash Sechel Tov, Toldot, 27:19. [4] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' in Isaiah Berlin, Henry Hardy and Ian Harris, Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. See also the important work by Stuart Hampshire, Morality and Conflict. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983. [5] Bereishit Rabbah 8:5. [6] Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. The only person to have achieved a non-anthropocentric, God's-eye-view of creation, was Job in chs. 38-41 of the book that bears his name.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig -

Yehuda and Jewish Survival

Yehuda - What's in a Name?

Our people are called Bnei Yisrael in the Torah. In Megillas Esther and since, we are called Yehudim. This change can be explained historically. After the ten tribes were exiled, the tribe of Yehuda comprised the majority of Am Yisrael. As such, all of us are called Yehudim. However, the Targum Yonasan in Parashat Vayechi (Breishis 49:8) offers a different explanation. He explains that Yaakov Avinu blessed Yehuda, "Your brothers will acknowledge you (yoducha)" as their ruler, and that this blessing is a reward for Yehuda's response to Tamar. "Yehuda," the Targum has Yaakov telling his son, "you admitted to the story of Tamar. Therefore, your brothers will acknowledge you ('yodun achayich') and will be called Yehudim after your name." The Targum thus links Yehuda's admission of his sin to his being acknowledged by his brothers, and to the fact that we are called Yehudim.

Perhaps these two explanations, the historical explanation, as well as the pshat of the Targum, can be reconciled. We are called Yehudim ever since the time that the ten tribes were scattered, because most Jews that were left from that time forward descended from the tribe of Yehuda. The reason the tribe of Yehuda is the one that survived is because they admitted to their mistakes. Admitting to mistakes enabled Yehuda himself to be acknowledged as the ruler of the family, and it also enabled his descendants, who followed his example, to survive.

One example of the historical phenomenon of the Jewish ability to admit to our mistakes is found in the very story of Esther. Why did the Jews of that time deserve extinction? According to the Talmud, it was because they partook of the party of the wicked Achashverosh (Megillah 12a). However, they were spared when they repented after Haman's decree (Yalkut Shimoni, Esther, 4:16; see Michtav Me-Eliyahu, Vol. 1, p. 77). Admitting their mistake and repenting enabled the Yehudim to survive and return to Eretz Yisrael by the decree of Esther's son Darius (Rashi, Chaggai 1:1). The ten tribes, by contrast, have not yet returned.

A third association with Yehuda's name, besides that of admission and acknowledgement, is that of thanks. When Yehuda was born to Leah as her fourth child, Leah said "This time I will thank Hashem. Therefore, she called his name 'Yehuda'" (Bereishis 29:35). As Rashi explains, Leah was saying, "This time I took more than my share. Hence I must thank [Hashem]."

Combining these themes of admission, acknowledgement, and thanks, we learn a valuable lesson. Only by admitting one's mistakes and shortcomings can one be in position to give proper thanks. Otherwise, our feelings of gratitude are hindered by a feeling of entitlement. Only by realizing our imperfections and our sins can we express the proper thanks and gratitude and thereby be worthy of acknowledgement by others (see R. Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah 2:5).

Realizing Our Limitations

On the verse in Yaakov's berachah to Yehuda discussed above, "attah yoducha achecha" Targum Onkelus has a very interesting explanation. He explains the pasuk as meaning "Yehuda, you admitted and were not ashamed. [Therefore] your brothers will acknowledge you" (Targum Onkelus, Breishis 49:8). How could Yehuda not have been ashamed to admit to his heretofore unknown paternity? Furthermore, isn't shame, especially in intimate matters, a praiseworthy hallmark of our people (Yevamos 79a)? How was it that Yehuda did not feel shamed?

The key to answering these questions is the realization that we only feel shame when we fall short of our expected standard of behavior. No one is ashamed of their inability to fly. Yehuda, aware of the fact that "there is no person who does not sin" (Koheles 7:20), was thus able to admit his sin without shame. Also, although intimate matters are usually supposed to be kept private, that value is outweighed when one has the opportunity to save someone else from harm. Thus, Yehuda admitted his paternity in an effort to save Tamar's life (Rashi, Breishis 38:25). Asked to recognize his personal effects and admit his paternity of Tamar's unborn children, Yehuda, as Rashi puts it, was called upon to "recognize [his] Creator:' When one recognizes and realizes that it is the will of Hashem to admit when one falls short and sins, the shame of a public confession like the one Yehuda experienced can be eliminated. For these realizations, Yehuda deserved to be a ruler and to have our entire nation called Yehudim.

A Dynasty of Kings

Just as Yehuda's leadership and our people's survival resulted from admitting mistakes, so too was the Davidic dynasty preserved in this manner. Like his ancestor, David Ha-Melech admitted his mistakes immediately (Yoma 22b, see Maharsha and HaRav Y.D. Soloveitchik, Kol Dodi Dofek ("Hachmatzas Ha-Sha'ah"). Shaul, in contrast, did not do so when faced with his mistake in not wiping out Amalek, and his dynasty was discontinued.

The ability to admit mistakes requires humility. Like Yehuda, David possessed humility, which enabled him to confess. "I am like a worm, not a man" (Tehillim 22:7). Humility not only enables one to admit one's shortcomings, but it also allows one to accept rebuke, and even to maintain silence when faced with provocations.

In the haftarah of Parashas Vayechi, David tells Shlomo, "Shim'i ben Gera cursed me a powerful curse" (Melachim I 2:8). In fact, Shim'i had called David a murderer (Shmuel II 16:7) and pelted him with stones (ibid., 6). However, David protected Shim'i from Avishay, who wanted to kill him (ibid., 9-10), explaining: "Hashem told him to curse. Perhaps Hashem will repay me with goodness instead of the curse" (ibid., 11-12). David Ha-Melech, in demonstrating such humility, was in fact following in the footsteps of the greatest prophet and the humblest of men, Moshe Rabbeinu. When Yehoshua told Moshe to imprison the prophets who were prophesying Moshe's demise (Rashi, Bamidbar 11:27-28), Moshe rebuffed him (ibid., 29). David, learning from Moshe's example, was able to demonstrate humility and maintain his silence in the face of provocation. As a reward, Hashem repaid David for his decision to protect Shim'i and elevated David to the heavenly level of the patriarchs, by which David became the fourth wheel in the Divine Chariot (Chafetz Chaim, Shemiras Ha-Lashon, Sha'ar Ha-Tevunah 8).

We know that the Davidic dynasty will culminate in the arrival of Mashiach. Bar Kochba, a descendant of David who was proclaimed Mashiach by Rabbi Akiva in Beitar, in the end fell short of expectations by showing a lack in the qualities of David. Bar Kochba mistakenly thought that Rabbi Elazar Ha-Modai, whose prayers protected Beitar, was a conspirator. In his rage, he kicked and killed him. As a result, Beitar fell and Bar Kochba was killed (Midrash Eichah 2:4). An angry leader, who lacks the humility and forbearance of David, cannot be the Mashiach.

A Dynasty of Torah Leadership

Torah leadership also requires humility. Hillel, a descendant of David, established a centuries-long dynasty of Torah. He famously retained his patience even in the face of outrageous provocation (Shabbos 31a) and Beis Hillel admitted when they made Torah mistakes, and upon realizing them, ruled in accordance with Beis Shammai (Eduyos 1:12, 13, 14). Hillel himself was the personification of humility (Shabbos 30b). Famously, in our practice, the Halachah always follows Beis Hillel because they not only quote Beis Shammai's opinion, but even cite it before their own (Eruvin 13b). Obviously the law is not decided in Beis Hillel's favor simply because of their ethical behavior, but rather, we hold like them because one who humbly listens to, respects, and quotes another's opinion, will likely reach a more proper conclusion in deciding the Halachah (R. Chaim Shmulevitz, Sichos Mussar, Sha'arei Chayyim, Ch. 46).

Keys to Survival Begin at Home

Yehuda was privileged to have our entire nation named after him because he promptly admitted his mistakes. His illustrious descendants David Ha-Melech and Hillel established dynasties of kingship and Torah, respectively, by following the lead of his humility. Thus, the Jews have survived history because of our adherence to the principles of our namesake, Yehuda. Confessing, acknowledging and thanking, the three related verbal

expressions connected with Yehuda himself, are the critical survival skills of our people.

These same concepts are equally critical within a Jewish home and family. The model of Yehuda's own rulership occurred within the context of his own family, and must serve as inspiration for Jewish families forever. The Rambam writes that a husband should be viewed as a king (Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Ishus, 15:20). To deserve this treatment, however, he must fulfill the first promise of the ketubah: "I will cherish you in the manner of Jewish men (Yehudain) who cherish their wives in truth (be-kushta).' He must acknowledge his debt to his wife, thank her constantly, and admit his mistakes in recognition of the truth (see Onkelos, Breishis 42:21).

Acknowledgement of one's personal debt to a spouse and appropriate and sincere gratitude, as well as sincere apologies when one makes mistakes, are crucial elements of a proper Jewish home. The phrases "I'm sorry" and "thank you" are integral for the success, and even the survival, of a Jewish marriage. As a community and as individuals, it is not enough to be called Jews. We must live up to the name Yehudim to survive, thrive, and merit the ultimate Jewish leader, Mashiach ben David, a descendant of Yehuda.

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From: **Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff** <rabbiparkoff@gmail.com> date: Dec 16, 2021, 8:31 AM subject: Rabbi Parkoff's Chizuk Letter - Vayechi - Lokshen, Farfel and Dan

Parshas Vayechi

Lokshen, Farfel and Dan

(Adapted from an article in the **Jewish Observer**, Nissan 5766 by **Rabbi Yisrael Greenwald**, of the Kollel Bais Hatalmud, Melbourne, Australia.)

And the sons of Dan: Chushim. (Bereishis 46:23)

In his youth, Rabbi Raphael Halpern would occasionally accompany the Chazon Ish on his evening walks alongside the Heligman orchard in Zichron Meir. On one of these walks, the Chazon Ish turned to him and said:

"Soup can have either lokshen (noodles), or farfel. If you pick up lokshen with your spoon, half remains in the spoon, and the other half hangs over its edge. You have no idea whether the lokshen will remain in your spoon or slip back into the soup bowl. If however, you take farfel in your spoon, whatever you take remains there. Nothing will fall, nor will anything be added.

"The same is true with man's powers. There is a man whose powers are like farfel – namely, he has certain limitations. What he has is what there is, and one cannot expect more from him. There are no surprises or great changes with him. And then there are people who are like lokshen – namely, who have great powers, but one does not know how these will be used – for good or for bad, whether they will remain or fall – just like lokshen, which may remain in the spoon or fall out.

"You, Raphael'ke, have immense powers and unusual qualities. If you use them properly, you can achieve great things, and if you do not use them properly, Heaven will hold you accountable for not having utilized your great powers." (Twenty Years Beside the Chazon Ish, p. 195)

Among these "lokshen" children, there some who fall into a difficult category. Just as we have some people who are anshei eshkolos – loaded with clusters of strengths and qualities – there are others who appear the exact opposite, a package of problems and inadequacies. These are children who, for example, are impulsive, easily distracted, and may also have a strong tendency toward bad behavior and a natural aversion to authority figures. Naturally, fitting into a traditional school setting may not be among their strongest points. To further complicate matters, these kids may also have poor social skills, and be shunned by their peers as being "out of sync," "in your face," or "weird." If that weren't enough, these kids also tend to have a higher rate of learning disabilities, speech impediments, organizational and audio-processing difficulties, or poor motor coordination, which further isolates them academically as well as socially.

Certainly, the free will of these morally challenged kids is highly circumvented as a result of their deficient personality makeup, which should be viewed more as a medical condition than moral weakness. Still, the constant attention needed to properly guide such children requires enormous emotional resources, which at times can drain even the most well-meaning parents and teachers. And even after all that superhuman effort, they may still fall short of attaining the level of the majority of kids who thrive and grow with relatively little special attention.

Appreciating the "Dan" Child

Perhaps we can find a paradigm of children with a strong negative streak by the careful study of Yaakov Avinu's children. The personality traits of the twelve tribes encompassed a wide gamut of human emotion and endeavor, from the king to the farmer, from the scholar to the seafaring merchant. While all twelve occupied a supernal level of spirituality, one child, relatively speaking, could be termed in some sense "of lesser stature" – Dan. Yaakov compared him to a snake, the arch symbol of the evil inclination. The Tribe of Dan not only traveled in the desert behind everyone else, but were even expelled from the protective clouds of glory due to their spiritual failings. Furthermore, the Midrash Shocher Tov comments that the verse, "Lest there be a family or tribe whose heart turns astray from Hashem," refers specifically to the Tribe of Dan. No wonder the Tribe of Dan was called "ירוד שבשבטים – the lowliest of the tribes."

Dan's only offspring, Chushim, seemed to bear out the difficult struggles that lay in store of their future progeny. Not only was he deaf, but he also possessed other striking physical deformities. According to some commentators, physical blemishes in primal figures are the manifestation of spiritual deficiencies. With so much going against him, the future of the lesser tribe appeared to show little hope and promise.

The Chofetz Chaim would often quote the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 94:9) that relates how broken and dejected Dan felt when he came before his father for a blessing, bringing his single, handicapped son. By contrast, all his brothers brought their large families of healthy, robust children. The Midrash demonstrates how limited and faulty human vision can be. We have no idea what Hashem has in store for the future: "Binyamin, who came before Yaakov with his ten lads, was blessed with 40,000 [descendants in the desert]. Dan, who had only one child, ended up with 70,000."

Dan's miraculous growth and recovery was not only in numbers, but was paralleled in the spiritual dimension, as well. The Torah records that Yaakov's family entered Egypt with seventy members. Commentators point out that if you tally all the names, you will have a total of only sixty-nine. The Kabbalists present a fascinating answer.

The verse records U'venei Dan Chushim – "The sons of Dan [is] Chushim." The grammar seems incorrect. "U'venei" is a plural expression; Dan had but one child. The Kabbalists answer: "Chushim was so distinguished that he counted as two children" and thus brought the total to seventy souls. (Rama Mi'panu, Mei'a Kesita 76). Dan's spiritual weakness was in fact his greatest strength. His affinity for evil put him in the most suitable position for conquering it. It was specifically Chushim who succeeded in decapitating Eisav when he attempted to prevent Yaakov's sons from burying their father in Me'aras Hamachpeila. Another Midrash relates that when Yehudah "roared" when he pleaded his case before the viceroy of Egypt, Dan's son Chushim joined him in his cry. Together, their combined outcry toppled two Egyptian cities.

Of all Yaakov's sons, Dan received a most unique blessing: "For your salvation do I hope, Hashem." It appears that the entire destiny of the Jewish people hinged particularly on the success of Dan's mission. (The Rama Mi'panu points out that Chushim is spelled in the Torah without the letter Vav - חשים - thus comprising the letters of Moshiach.) Why, among all of Yaakov's children, was the lowly Dan the one upon whom Yaakov especially placed all his hope?

Before Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, he first wanted to know how his children would look. The Midrash says that Yitzchak had a vision of two horribly wicked men, both of whom betrayed their people during the time of the Second Beis Hamikdash. But in their final moments, both men gave up their lives in dramatic acts of repentance. Yitzchak then felt assured of the future of the Jewish people, and gave his blessing to Yaakov.

Rav Mendel Kaplan, zt"l, asked: The Jewish people surely did not lack for pious individuals in every generation. Couldn't Yitzchak have found more noble tzaddikim in whose merit Yaakov would be worthy of blessing?

Reb Mendel answered, "If I want to buy a new car, I wouldn't care so much how it looks in the showroom. I would want to see what happens to it after a crash. If it still looks like a car, then it is for me. Before Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, he wanted to know how his children would look – not when they were being righteous, but how they would hold out after a crash. When Yitzchak saw how even the traitors among the Jews demonstrated spiritual greatness, he knew he could give Yaakov his blessings."

Dan represents the lowest spiritual stratum of our people. People of such standing, however, with their capacity to rise above their apparent limitations, are the only true gauge of our success as a nation and the assurance of our future.

Unconditional Love

As Hashem has given us a perfect soul, we naturally gravitate toward all forms of perfection. We appreciate the beauty of music and nature, and even more, our souls feel a kinship when encountering spiritual perfection. It is therefore not hard for us to love the good kids, who excel in school and have wonderful middos. Our "other" child's pure soul is not as readily apparent, as it is often masked by negative behavior. Even if we were to intellectually accept that his mode of conduct is no fault of his own, but due to a chemical imbalance or neurological mis-wiring, there still is a natural tendency to repel, disdain, and even dislike the young person himself. It is therefore no surprise that many gedolim, as well as professionals involved in the field of children at risk, feel that the single most important contribution in helping these young people is to give them our constant, full measure of unconditional love.

In the poignant words of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch*:

The [lesser loved] child may really be less intellectually gifted, so that he is slow to grasp things, does not readily understand, cannot keep pace at school, and even at home the parents cannot do very much with him. Or – and this would be even more painful – it may be a child endowed with a character and disposition that bode ill for his future behavior. At an early age he shows a tendency to depart from the path of truth, honesty, uprightness, modesty, temperance, obedience, and all the virtues which go to make up a man of worth and high character. "Stupid," "wicked" is what the father and mother are disposed to call him. What love do they bear toward him, what love ought they to bear to him?

What love, we say? That is not the question we wish to ask. Their love should from the beginning flow equally and unremittingly to all their children. If parents really understood their relation to their children and the value and meaning their children have for them, to whom should their love be given in the greatest measure? To the gifted child or to he who is less gifted? To the one with a good or a bad disposition?

Which child is more in need of love; for which is parental love almost the only anchor, the only lever that might raise him from stupidity to intelligence, from moral perversity to moral purity and perfection? With which child has Divine providence set parents a greater task, or given them a greater token of trust? Is it not precisely with the one who is less gifted intellectually and whose moral character is not so good?

A bright and intelligent child will, even without your help, ultimately distinguish himself by his understanding and knowledge; if he is naturally good, he will, even without you, grow up honest and sincere. But the child who is intellectually less gifted, and above all, the child whose moral character is shaky – can you not see how such a one is peculiarly entrusted to your love, how he requires your most devoted and tireless love, so that you may fulfill the highest task of a parent, that your parental love may through the child achieve its greatest triumph..., to have saved a soul that was in danger of going astray for a life of moral purity.

We know the self-sacrificing devotion with which the parent's love unfolds to tend a child who suffers physically, who is weak and infirm of body. We know the passionate care and tenderness with which a father and mother will nurse and tend a weak and ailing child, and with what pride a mother will think to herself, "Without care, without uninterrupted vigilance and devotion, this weakling would long ago have withered away and been buried, while now, instead, he is healthy and flourishing and looks forward smilingly to a happy life."

And is the child who is sick and suffering in mind or nature less unhappy, less deserving of sympathy and compassion? Above all, is he less completely ruined if the father or mother's love is withheld from him? For the physically sick child, love is only the nurse. But for the child who is ill mentally and, still more, morally, love is the healing medicine itself. The absence of love is poison, and the father and mother who deny their love to the delinquent child deny him the medicine that could cure him; they themselves plunge him into a hate-ridden atmosphere in which his vicious disposition inevitably blossoms into moral corruption.

*Judaism Eternal, p. 250-251; Collected Writings, Vol. 7, pp. 330-331. It is interesting to note that Rav Hirsch had to deal with this problem already in his days close to 200 years ago. While Rabbi Hirsch speaks of a parent's relationship towards his morally challenged child, it would extend equally to our responsibility towards these young people on the communal level as well.

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Dimensions in Vayechi Inbox

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Vayechi here DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH Parshas Vayechi "Yaakov our father never died" Concept: The Worlds of Pshat and Drash

Introduction: A Mystifying Exchange The Gemara in Maseches Taanis[1] records the following exchange between two sages of the Talmud, R' Yitzchak and Rav Nachman: אמר ליה הכי אמר ר' יוחנן, יעקב אבינו לא מת אמר ליה מקרא אני דורש, ?ליה וכי בחנם ספדו ספדנייא וחנטו חנטייא וקברו קברנייא שנאמר: "ועתה אל תירא עבדי יעקב נאום ה' ואל תחת ישראל כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק ואת זרעך מארץ שבים," מקיש הוא לזרעו, מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים He [R' Yitzchak] said to him [Rav Nachman]: Thus said R' Yochanan: "Yaakov our father never died." [Rav Nachman] said to [R' Yitzchak]: "Was it for nothing that the eulogizers eulogized [Yaakov] and the embalmers embalmed him and the buriers buried him?" [R' Yitzchak] replied: "I am expounding a verse, as it says: 'And you fear not, My servant Yaakov, says Hashem, and do not become broken, Yisrael, for behold I will deliver you from afar, and your descendants from the land of their captivity."[2] [We see that] the verse equates him [Yaakov] and his descendants: Just as his descendants are living, so too is he living." The above exchange is most perplexing. With all due respect to R' Yitzchak's exposition, he appears to have entirely sidestepped Rav Nachman's objection that the simple meaning of the verses indicates that Yaakov died! Pshat and Drash Teachings Rav Tzaddok Hakohen of Lublin[3] explains the matter by taking us in to the methods of interpretation we call pshat and drash. These are not simply two ways of deriving messages from the verse. Rather, they often represent two different types of messages, reflecting two entirely different realms: In the same way as pshat represents that which is openly stated and clearly visible to the reader, it likewise reflects the situation as would be visibly apparent to the onlooker. Conversely, just as drash involves looking beneath the surface of the Torah's words, so too, the message it communicates reflects aspects of that situation which are "hidden" and not readily apparent. Here, too, when Rav Nachman challenged the teaching that "Yaakov our father never died" from the fact that he was embalmed, eulogized and buried, R' Yitzchak responded

by saying "מקרא אני דורש – I am expounding a verse." With this, he was indicating that the realm to which his teaching refers was not the one apparent to the onlookers and reflected by the pshat reading of the verse, but to a more hidden realm, whereby Yaakov, although physically dead, lives on in his descendants. Dead Maidens Walking This fundamental idea is already discussed in earlier sources. In the course of the Torah's description of Pharaoh's daughter going to wash in the Nile, where she would meet the baby Moshe who had been set afloat there by his mother, the verse relates: "וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ הֹלֶכֹת עַל יַד הַיְאֹר – and her maidens were walking on the side of the Nile."[4] Commenting on these words, Rashi cites the following Midrash: ורבותינו דרשו "הולכות" לשון מיתה... הולכות למות לפי שמיחו בה Our Sages expounded the word "going" [here] as an expression of death… they were "going" to die because they protested her [taking the child].[5] The Maharal[6] explains that, here too, the midrash does not mean to say that these maidens dropped dead at the side of the Nile when they protested. Rather, it means that they found themselves somehow unable to prevent Pharaoh's daughter from taking the child. This lack of ability was the result of their strength being withheld from them from On High, and it is to this the Midrash refers when it says that they "died", since their connection with life in the higher realms was diminished. The Maharal's words confirm Rav Tzaddok's principle that a message derived through the medium of drash reflects an inner or higher reality beyond that which is readily visible to the onlooker. In Conversation The above idea regarding pshat and drash also relates to the midrash's expositions on people's words in the Torah. In the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, when Yehuda approaches Yosef to plead for Binyamin's freedom, he prefaces by saying, "כִּי כָמוֹךָ כְּפַרְעֹה – for you are like Pharaoh."[7] Rashi, commenting on these words, cites no less than four interpretations, starting with the pshat and from there proceeding to drash: ומדרשו: סופך ללקות עליו בצרעת כמו שלקה פרעה על .חשוב אתה בעיני כמלך, זהו פשוטו דבר אחר: מה פרעה גוזר ואינו מקיים, מבטיח ואינו עושה, אף אתה כן .ידי זקנתי שרה אחר: אם תקניטני אהרוג אותך ואת אדוניך. You are as important in my eyes as a king, this is the pshat meaning. The midrashic meaning is: your end will be to be afflicted with leprosy just as [the earlier] Pharaoh was afflicted on account of my ancestress, Sarah. An alternative explanation: just as Pharaoh decrees and does not fulfill, promises and does not act, so too, do you. An alternative explanation: if you antagonize me, I will kill you and your master.

In this instance, the midrashic explanations seem to not only differ from the pshat meaning, but also contradict it! If the pshat says that Yehuda's words meant to convey his respect for Yosef, how can the drash then say that in fact, they meant to indicate criticism and even threats of a most extreme nature? R' Yaakov Kamenetzky[8] explains that here too, the pshat and drash interpretations reflect the overt meaning and implicit messages within Yehuda's words. The outermost layer was undoubtedly one than expressed respect, and that is the pshat. However, people often accompany a straightforward message with additional undertones, insinuations and implications. Together, these form a composite or blended message. It is these added messages that the drash draws out from a deeper analysis of Yehuda's words. After all, for a person in his position, standing accused both of spying and of theft, to state that the second-in-command is like the king himself is at best redundant and at worst potentially dangerous. Additionally, the words "כִּי כָמוֹךָ כְּפַרְעֹה" literally translate as: "for like you like Pharaoh," indicating further layers of comparison between the two personalities. R' Yaakov concludes that this is a major idea when learning Midrashim such as these, whereby the interpretations of pshat and drash in the verse reflect the "pshat" and "drash" within the person. A Level Deeper: Hidden Elements within Revealed Events Taking this discussion one stage further, there are times when the hidden or inner element identified by the drash refers not to the event itself, but to its role within the episode being described in the Torah. An example of this is in the episode of the golden calf, where the verse states, "וַיַּרְא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו – Aharon saw, and built an altar before him."[9] The verse does not explicate exactly what Aharon saw that led him to build the altar for the people. Rashi cites the explanation of the midrash that Aharon saw that Chur, who protested the making of the calf, was killed by the people. Aharon reasoned that if he, too were to protest, the people would kill him too, rendering their sin so grievous so as to be beyond any hope of rectification, and therefore, he made the altar. In this instance, this discussion takes place in the realm of drash, not because Chur was murdered in a hidden or inner way, but because that murder constituted the inner reason why Aharon acquiesced to the people's demand to make the altar.[10]

This example demonstrates the latitude we sometimes need to take with this idea, when we come to consider which aspect of the element identified by the drash was hidden from open view at that time. In Halachah In light of the above, let us conclude by considering the relative roles of pshat and drash in halachah, where seemingly, their relationship with visible reality appears to be reversed, i.e. it is reflected specifically in the interpretation of drash and not of pshat. A classic example if this is the famous verse in Parshas Mishpatim, "עַיִן תַּחַת עָיִן – an eye for an eye."[11] The simple meaning for this verse is that a person who takes someone's eye out is punished by having his eye taken out. As we know, based on the midrashic exposition of the verse, the halachah does not require this, but rather he pays monetary compensation equal in value to the victim's eye.[12] In this case, we see that the visible reality is as indicated by the drash and not by the pshat! How is this to be understood in light of their relative roles, as discussed above? Here, too, the "apparentness" expressed by the pshat is that the literal penalty of and eye for an eye is what we would expect to be the verdict. The actual punishment of financial restitution is the product of deeper considerations, as expressed by the Talmud in its discussions of this matter, and hence is reflected in the drash. All of this is certainly food for thought and should give us much to contemplate as we seek to further develop our understanding of the worlds of pshat and drash. [1] 5b. [2] Yirmiyahu 30:10. [3] Takanas Hashavin, maamar 6. [4] Shemos 2:5. [5] The simple understanding of the basis of this exposition is the fact that the word "הֹלֶכֹת" is written "deficiently" i.e. without either letter vavs, indicating a deficiency in the state of the maidens themselves, see Pachad Yitzchak, Pesach maamar 52. [6] Gevuros Hashem chap. 17. [7] Bereishis 44:18. [8] Emes le'Yaakov Bereishis ibid. [9] Shemos 32:5. [10] From a conversation with R' Beryl Gershenfeld shlit"a. [11] Shemos 21:14. [12] See Bava Kama 83b-84a.

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The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT Vayechi 5782

**To be like Menashe and Ephraim **

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Dec 20, 2018)

In this week's Parsha, we have a few very famous lines. One of them is what all Jewish fathers use to bless their sons every Shabbos—Va-yivarcheim ba-yom ha-hu ley-mor, becha yivarech Yisroel ley-mor, yesimcha Elokim ke- Ephraim ve-che-Menashe. To this very day, a thousand years later, when a Jew wants to bless his son, he says yesimcha Elokim ke-Ephraim ve-che-Menashe—may Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Menashe. Netziv points out that without a doubt, Ephraim and Menashe were good Jews. But so were Yissachar and Zevulun, Zerach and Peretz, Chetzron and Chamul, and lots of other brothers. Why do we bless our kids to be davka like Ephraim and Menashe? We have mentioned other answers in previous years, but Netziv says that the other brothers in the Torah basically did similar things. However, Ephraim and Menashe represented different models of success. Rashi says here that Ephraim haya ragil lifnei Yaakov be-Talmud. Who was Ephraim? He left Yosef's Palace and sat in front of Yaakov as an avreich and learned all day. But Menashe doesn't seem to have taken the same path. First of all, when Rashi says that

Ephraim haya ragil lifnei Yaakov be-Talmud, that implies that Menashe was with Yosef in the palace. And in Parshas Mikeitz, when the pasuk says: Ki hameilitz beinosam, Rashi says: this is Menashe. He worked as an interpreter in his father's court. Also, Chazal say that the "Ish asher al beis Yosef" was Menashe. He was the Interior Minister in Yosef's government. And Netziv says that they both represent excellence. Ephraim shteiged away as he sat and learned Torah all day, and Menashe made a Kiddush Hashem by being out there in the world, by being involved in the government and politics, etc., as a Ben Torah. Says Netziv, we say yesimcha Elokim ke-Ephraim ve-che- Menashe—davka like Ephraim and Menashe—because one role is not necessarily good for everyone. He talks about a kid who was just born. How do you know how he will grow up? You can't say that you should grow up and be an avreich and learn Torah your whole life—because that's not right for everyone. That's not everyone's tafkid. Some people are cut out for this, but not others. Neither should we say to him: You should be successful. You should go out there and mekadesh Shem Shomayim. You should be a communal leader and involved in politics, business, etc., and help the Jewish people. Not everyone is cut out for that either. So we say: You should, be'ezras Hashem, become like Ephraim and like Menashe. They are different models of how you can grow up. Everyone should choose what's right for them. There are different drachim, and not just different philosophical drachim. Even within the same philosophy, there are various personal tafkidim that Hashem has for everyone, depending on what talents and personality and what kochos He gave them. That's why, he says, early on in children's life we tell them that they don't have to fit any particular role. You don't have to be exactly like this for me to be proud of you or to give you a brocha. Yosef had two sons, both founders of Klal Yisroel, and Yaakov used them both as examples in his brocha—even though they fulfilled different roles in Klal Yisroel. You should find a role in Klal Yisroel that is good for you. One interesting detail, though, which Netziv himself points out, creates added layers of depth to the whole drama of sikel es yadav. Va-yishlach Yisroel es yamino, va-yoshes al rosh Ephraim ve-hu ha-tzair ve-es smolo al rosh Menashe; sikel es yadav ki Menashe ha-bechor. Yaakov switched his hands and placed his right hand on the head of younger Ephraim instead of Menashe, who was the bechor. Netziv points out that he could have switched Ephraim and Menashe le-gamrei, but no, Yaakov firmly wanted Menashe to be on his right side, while Ephraim would get his right hand. Because in some ways, Menashe was greater, and in other ways, Ephraim was greater. But ultimately, what does he say to Yosef? Ve-ulam achiv ha-katon yigdal mimenu—however, the younger one will be greater. Ultimately, in the history of Klal Yisroel, what's the core, what ensures survival, to be our first priority through the generations? Yes, we must have all the Jews, each one doing avodas Hashem in the way they are cut out for. But ultimately, the core is: Es Yehuda shalach le-fanav le-takein sham beis talmud. Ultimately, the core needs to be a masorah of learning Torah. We must have Torah learning! Without gashmius, the Torah learning will survive. But it will be very, very diffcult, and Klal Yisroel will not be able to succeed kemo she-tzarich. However, without Torah learning, Klal Yisroel would be lost le-gamrei, chas ve-shalom. And therefore, even though there are different roles in Klal Yisroel, we should be proud of every kid, no matter what they do. However, ultimately, we need to know and ensure that Torah learning is the kiyum of Ki heim chayenu ve-orech yameinu. That is the yesod of what keeps Klal Yisroel going through the generations. And once we have that core of Torah learning, once we have the yeshivas, the people can be influenced and inspired by Torah, go out into the world, and do what they need to do. But first and foremost, you need that basis of Torah. Shabbat Shalom.

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Watch Where You're Going!

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

On a recent trip to Israel, I visited an old friend of mine whom I hadn't seen in almost thirty years, although we had been in some contact, of late, through Netvort. At dinner, his wife asked me a question that she had raised in a Chumash shiur on parshas Vayechi and had not received an answer to. The question was, when Ya'akov's sons carried his remains from Egypt to Chevron to be buried in the cave of Machpeilah, why did they take a circuitous route and go to 'Eiver HaYarden,' (see Bereishis 50:10) which we generally understand to mean the eastern side of the Jordan River, before they went to Chevron? Wasn't this completely out of the way? I had to admit that I did not know the answer to this question, but we did find that the Netziv, in his commentary Ha'amek Davar discusses the issue, and offers an explanation, which we will discuss further on. Subsequently, I discovered that medieval commentators already discussed this question, and not all of them agree that 'Eiver HaYarden' here refers to the eastern side of the Jordan. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in his short but excellent notes to his Torah translation, The Living Torah, mentions the opinion of the Chizkuni, who says that the term refers to the western side of the Yardein, and the opinion of Rabbeinu Meyuchas, who says that it refers to the west side of the Yardein. Interestingly, more recent writers have taken either side of the issue as a given, without mentioning these earlier opinions. Rabbi Jacob Hertz, in his commentary to the Pentateuch, cites a nineteenth century American Hebraist, W.H. Green, as saying, " This cannot mean east of the Jordan, as it is unthinkable that in going to the cave of Machpeilah at Hebron the company would take the circuitous route round the Dead Sea. All diffculties disappear when we remember that to Moses and the Israelites in the land of Moab, he words 'beyond Jordan' meant west of Jordan. This phrase therefore is another incidental confirmation of the Mosaic authorship of the Torah." This explanation is similar to that of Chizkuni, except that Chizkuni explains the term Eiver HaYardein to be from the perspective of the people of Sichon and Og, who observed the funeral procession. Rabbi Nosson Dovid Rabinowich, on the other hand, writes, in a recent article entitled "Are We Teaching Chumash Correctly to our Children?" which is published in the journal Hakira, that the Torah is referring to the eastern side of the Yardein, and notes that this was the identical route taken by the Jewish people when they left Egypt and traveled to Eretz Yisroel. This approach accords with that of Rabbeinu Meyuchas, who also says that this route prefigured the route later taken after the exodus from Egypt. Rabbi Menachem Kasher, in his Torah Shleimah to this verse, has a lengthy footnote in which he mentions a discussion among nineteenth century experts on the geography of Eretz Yisroel regarding this entire issue, and expresses his amazement that they did not mention the opinions of the medieval commentators. More recently, Yehudah Kil, in his commentary to Bereishis, which is part of the Da'as Mikra series published by Mossad HoRav Kook, has a lengthy discussion of this issue, to which the interested reader is referred. I would like to focus on the opinion of Rabbeinu Meyuchas that the Torah is referring to the eastern side of the Yardein, and try to understand why this circuitous route was taken. Rabbeinu Meyuchas, as we have seen, explains that the circuitous route taken in burying Ya'akov was the same route that would later be taken when the nation left Egypt and traveled to the Holy Land. The Torah tells us, in the beginning of parshas Beshalach, that God did not lead the people by way of the land of the Pelishtim, "because it was near, for God said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt. And God took the people around toward the way of the Wildrness of the Sea of Reeds (Shemos 13:17-18). One way, then, of explaining the reason for taking a circuitous roué in burying Ya'akov could be to say that the burial party simply wished to avoid war, just as God wished to shield the nation from war when they left Egypt. However, a reading of Rabbeinu Meyuchas does not seem to yield this explanation of his words. More likely, he is saying that the route taken by the burial party was a prefiguration of the later path taken by the nation as a whole. Interestingly, Rashi, in his commentary to a later verse (Bereishis 50:13) cites a midrash which says that Ya'akov's sons

carried his coffn in the same arrangement for traveling that would later be used by the tribes when they left Egypt and traveled in the wilderness. Thus, according to the midrash, the manner in which the tribes carried Ya'akov from Egypt to his burial place paralleled the manner in which they were to travel during the redemption process. According to Rabbeinu Meyuchas, the path they took, as well, would follow the pattern that would later be followed by the nation as a whole. What was the purpose of carrying Ya'akov to Eretz Yiroel in the same way and on the same path that would be taken by the nation in the future? Perhaps it was a way of paving the way for the nation to be able to make the trip, in the sense of the Ramban's principle of 'ma'ase avos siman lebonim.' Rav Aharon Soloveichik zt"l explained this to mean that the deeds of the forefathers paved the way for those of the children, giving them the ability to accomplish what they needed to in order to achieve their goals as a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Another intriguing possibility emerges from a look at a Mechilta at the beginning of Beshalach that Rabbi Rabinowich refers to in a footnote to his article. The midrash there says that the reason God took the people on a circuitous route is that the Cana'anim had destroyed the crops in Eretz Yisroel when they heard they were coming, and, therefore, God wanted to give them forty years to replant them. This midrash suggests that the nation was destined to travel in the wilderness for forty years even before the sin of the spies. The Ibn Ezra also suggests this, in a different way, in his commentary to parshas Beshalach (Shemos 14:13). He writes there that the reason the nation was afraid of war was that they had been slaves for so many years that they did not have the courage to do battle. Therefore, a new generation had to arise, born in freedom and able to meet the challenges that would face them. According to the Ibn Ezra's approach, in conjunction with Rabbeinu Meyuchas' opinion that the funeral procession took the path it did in order to pave the way for the path of the nation from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel, it follows that it was the divine will for the nation to have a slave mentality when they left Egypt, and to develop a more courageous mind-set over a forty year period. Perhaps the reason behind this was to avoid the development of an arrogant attitude once the nation entered their land. Since the new generation, ready to battle, if necessary, with the Cana'nim, emerged only as a result of God's leading them in the wilderness for forty years, it would have a sense of humility and be less likely to attribute its success to its own efforts. The Netziv offers a different explanation for the circuitous route taken by Ya'akov's funeral procession. He says that the reason Yosef took this route was in order include among the mourners many people from Moav and Cana'an, who dwelled near the Jordan. He then cites a Mishnah in Kelim (1:7), which says that it is the custom for a funeral procession to take a circuitous route. The Netziv explains that the purpose of this practice is to increase the honor of the departed. If we combine this explanation of the Netziv with the explanation of Rabbeinu Meyuchas, that the circuitous path taken was a prefiguration of the path that would be taken by the nation when they left Egypt and traveled to Eretz Yisroel, we emerge with the opposite conclusion than we reached in our previous expansion of Rabbeinu Meyuchas' explanation. Instead of preparing the nation for future wars and giving them the ability to wage them without developing a sense of arrogance, it would seem that, following the Netziv in conjunction with Rabbeinu Meyuchas, the reason the nation stopped on the eastern side of the Yardein was for the other nations to give honor to Ya'akov, and pave the way for these nations to honor the Jewish nation, as God's chosen people, when it would leave Egypt after their redemption. Following this approach, Ya'akov's funeral procession was directed in a way that would avoid war with other nations not simply because the Jewish nation avoided approaching sensitive areas, but because the other nations of the world recognized the greatness of the Jews and their God, just as they recognized the greatness of Ya'akov and his God when they honored him after his death. Although the two ways of viewing the explanation of Rabbeinu Meyuchas that we have suggested, the first in conjunction with the commentary of Ibn Ezra, and the second in conjunction with the Netziv, appear to be conflicting, perhaps they are not. When the Jews first left Egypt, the nations did respect them, and were not planning to attack. In parshas Beshalach, Rashi writes that before Amalek attacked, the nations were too much in awe of the Jewish nation to attack, but once Amalek waged war against them, due to their complaints against God, the door was open for the other nations to attack, as well. However, apparently, after the events at Mt. Sinai, the respect of the other nations was restored. The Torah, in parshas Beha'aloscha, describes the pattern in which the different tribes were to be arranged - following the pattern that Ya'akov prescribed for his funeral procession - as they began their journey to Eretz Yisroel. Moshe then spoke to his father-in-law, Yisro, and said "We are traveling" (Bamidbar 10:29). Rashi there explains that, at that point, the nation was scheduled to enter the land in three days, but the sin of the murmurers against God prevented that from happening. Apparently, the respect that nations had for the Jewish people diminished as a result of their spiritual failings, and the possibility of attack was now a reality. The nation therefore needed to resort to arms, and the scenario described by Ibn Ezra took hold. By taking a circuitous route and stopping on the eastern side of the Yardein in their funeral procession for Ya'akov, his children were paving the way for both contingencies in the nation's future.

From: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <rmk@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: drasha@torah.org date: Dec 16, 2021, 6:19 PM
subject: Drasha - Mixed Blessings Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayechi Mixed Blessings

People usually learn from their mistakes. It seems, albeit on the surface, that our father Yaakov does not.

The Talmud in Shabbos 10b explains: "As a rule, one should never differentiate between children. For it was due to Yaakov's favoring Yoseph that led to our exile in Egypt." The Talmud, of course, is referring to the tragic chain of events that were spurred by the special display of love shown to Yoseph. Jealousy ensued amongst his brothers. Eventually they sold him to Egypt, and the spiral of events led to a 210-year exile in that land. We would think that Yaakov would have resolved never to favor one child over another. He doesn't. This week the Torah relates to us that Yaakov blesses Yoseph's children, Menashe and Ephraim. In addition to singling out those grandchildren for a blessing, he does another provocative act. He switches the order of their blessings, as he blesses Ephraim, Yoseph's younger child, before Menashe, the older one.

There are two points we must analyze. Why did Yaakov, still reeling from the terrible ordeal he endured due to favoring Yoseph, overtly display his preferences towards the next generation? Was he not fearful of evoking jealousy among all his grandchildren who were first cousins of Menashe and Ephraim? Also, why did he switch the first and second child in the same family? Was he not fearful of, once again, evoking jealousy among brothers?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l had one steadfast rule subsequent to delivering his daily lecture at Yeshiva Kol Torah in Jerusalem. After he finished discussing a particular sugya (Talmudic topic), and proceeded to the next sugya, no one was allowed to ask a question about the previous one. This approach would prevent confusion among the many students in attendance. It was therefore to the amazement of all the pupils when Rabbi Auerbach entertained a question from an otherwise very quiet student on a topic he had finished discussing twenty minutes prior. He proceeded to backtrack to the earlier topic and reexamined the entire thought process in intricate detail. All the students were astounded. They had distinctly remembered their Rebbe explaining everything clearly the first time. After the lecture a few of the older students approached the sage to question his favoring the younger student with his departure from an otherwise sacred rule.

Suddenly they realized that the student in question had been at the Yeshiva for almost a year without ever asking a question in the middle of a discourse. Today was the first time he mustered the courage to ask. Had the Rosh

Yeshiva dispensed with the question as normal procedure would have dictated, he may never had asked again. Rav Auerbach departed from protocol and fear of invoking jealousy to give the young student a new confidence that would help him emerge as a true scholar."

My grandfather zt"l, once explained to me that there are certain actions that must be taken without fear of invoking jealousy. Certain children need more attention, more care, and more encouragement. You must do what is correct in certain circumstances and hope that the other siblings will understand. Yaakov's grandchildren all lived under his tutelage in the relative security of a traditional society. There were scores of cousins, uncles and aunts whose presence lent an atmosphere of ancestral observance. Yoseph's children were unfortunately raised in a society wrought with idolatry. Their only link to tradition was the steadfast memories that Yoseph brought with him in his sojourn. Thus, Yoseph's children needed special blessing.

Reb Yaakov continued, "Yaakov Avinu also understood that even in Yoseph's family there was a difference in the children. Menashe, the first-born was thus named as a grace to Hashem who allowed Yoseph to forget the terrible hardship he endured both in Egypt and in his father's household. Ephraim, on the other hand, is so named as a recognition of Yoseph's prosperity in a difficult land.

"Menashe represents the memories of the 'Old World.' As long as there is an attachment to that world, perhaps there is less need for the blessing of the sage. But if the child represents the prosperity of the 'New Country,' it is very likely that he may cast off his heritage and seek a totally new culture and inheritance. That child needs special warmth and blessings — before any other child"

There are times when conventional protocol is out-of-place. When dealing with special needs, special conduct must overrule the norm. One must weigh the needs of the individual and the reactions of others. The proper decision will benefit both.

The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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from: **Joshua Kruger** <genesis@torah.org> to: **parsha-halacha**@torah.org date: Dec 16, 2021, 5:58 PM subject: Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table - The Bedtime Prayer - Hamapil Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table

By Joshua Kruger

To Dedicate an Article click here

Parshas Vayechi

The Bedtime Prayer - Hamapil

The silly boy in the following story makes at least six mistakes. Can you find them? Can you think of how the story is connected with the parsha?

The Story:

In the city of Balagan, on a street named Gevalt, lived the Mevulbal family. This family was nice and funny and very very very mixed up.

"Reuven, it's time for you to go to bed!" said Mr. Mevulbal to his son.

"Can't I stay up for just 10 more years, Daddy?"

"Sorry son, we tried that last week and you were very tired the next morning." his father replied.

Reuven proceeded up the stairs to his bedroom. He took off his pajamas, dressed in his tuxedo, and brushed his teeth.

He thought to himself "I'd better sleep well tonight. Tomorrow I'm having a bubble gum blowing contest with my friends and I need all my strength".

He lay down in his bed on his back and began to recite the words of the keriyas shema al hamita. When he reached his favorite part, he began to sing "Hamelech ha-goel oti mikol rah…".

After finishing the tefilah he opened up his night table drawer and pulled out a chocolate donut, which he quickly devoured.

"Reuven" his mother entered his room. "I'm making your lunch for tomorrow. Would you prefer fish or chicken?"

Reuven pointed to his closed lips and then his siddur.

"I see" said his mother "You've already said keriyas shema al hamita and can't talk. I'll just go with chicken".

As Reuven lay in his bed, he thought about his day and remembered how he had accidentally dovened the amidah of minchah l'shabbat instead of shacharit l'chol. "Oh well" he told himself "Nobody's perfect. Now's not the time to think about the mistakes I've made. It's time to think of all the presents that I want for my birthday."

Answers

1) Reuven's reasons for going to sleep (to win the bubble-blowing contest) are wrong. A Jew should have in mind that the purpose of sleeping is to gain the energy needed to serve Hashem the next day (Piskei Teshuvot 239:3). The Aruch Hashulchan recommends that this statement be said aloud (Aruch HaShulchan 236:1).

2) It is not proper for Reuven to recite the keriyas shema al hamita lying down, particularly on his back. One should recite the tefila sitting or standing (Mishna Brurah 239:6).

3) The words are "Hamalach Ha-go'el oti" (The angel that redeemed me).

4) In general, after we recite a beracha we must immediately perform the action associated with the beracha. There should be no hefsek. The beracha of ha-mapil is about sleeping. This means that immediately after saying the beracha we should go to sleep. So it isn't proper for a person to eat, drink, or talk unless it's absolutely necessary (Mishna Brurah 239:4, Rema 239:1). A donut is certainly not necessary.

Note that if someone realizes that they need to use the bathroom after saying keriyas shema al hamita, they certainly may do so and many poskim instruct that the berachah of asher yatzar should be said, though it does create a hefsek for the beracha of ha-mapil (Shut Pri Ha-Sadeh Vol. 1, no. 93; Shut Hitorerus Teshuvah Vol. 1, no. 125; Halichos shlomo Chap. 13, note 14; Shut Tzitz Eliezer Vol. 3, no. 27; Shut Be'er Moshe Vol. 1, no. 62).

5) As stated above, there is a concern that someone who speaks after saying keriyas shema al hamita and before sleeping is performing a hefsek. However, the mitzvah of Kibbud Av VeEm is more important (Yalkut Yosef vol 3, 665). Reuven should have answered his mother, when she spoke to him.

6) Before a person goes to sleep they should think about the mistakes that they made during the day, and make a goal to not make those mistakes again (Mishna Berura 239:9).

Connections with the Parsha:

The famous words of tefilas hamapil "hamalach hago'el oti…" come from Yaacov Aveinu's blessing for Menashe and Ephraim in parshasVayechi.

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer of the Instituted for Dayanim, and based in part on his article entitled "Interrupting After Hamapil" http://www.dinonline.org/2012/12/05/interrupting-after-hamapil/ and the following article from halachipedia.com: http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Bedtime_Shema)

From: Project Genesis <genesis@torah.org> Date: Tue, Dec 14, 2021 at 11:38 AM Subject: Weekly Halacha - Medications On Shabbos To: <weekly-halacha@torah.org>

Weekly Halacha

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

To Dedicate an Article click here Parshas Vayechi

Medications On Shabbos

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Behold your father is ill (48:1) Until Yaakov fell ill, no one was sick…(Bava Metzia 87a)

One of several Rabbinical decrees that our Sages enacted in order to guard the sanctity of Shabbos concerns the use of medications. In the opinion and experience of the Rabbis, easy access to medicine may lead to the transgression of Shabbos Labors such as "grinding" (when preparing certain medications) or "smoothing" (when applying certain medications). While issuing the decree, however, the Rabbis were bound by the halachic principle of being as lenient as possible with those suffering pain or distress. Thus, they established guidelines for determining when it is permitted to take medication on Shabbos and when it is not. In the following discussion, we will list several common conditions which normally require medication and how they are dealt with on Shabbos.

HOW TO USE THIS LIST:

Our discussion is limited to non-life threatening situations. When in doubt whether or not a situation is life-threatening, consult a rav and/or a doctor.

Whenever we mention that an act may be done "with a shinui", it means that the act may be done in a manner different from the normal and usual. For example, dialing a telephone with the knuckles instead of the fingers is considered a shinui.

Our discussion applies to healthy adults and children over three(1). Children under three, and certainly infants and babies, are treated (for the most part) as "patients not dangerously ill", and will be discussed elsewhere.

A separate area of discussion concerns a healthy person who takes medication for preventive purposes or in order to strengthen himself. Those laws are not discussed here.

LIST OF AILMENTS AND CONDITIONS:

ABSCESS – may be opened to relieve pressure from pus, even if some blood is secreted in the process(2).

ALLERGIES (mild) – medication may not be taken.

ANGINA – all medications are permitted.

ASTHMA – all oral and/or breathing medications may be taken(3).

ATHLETE'S FOOT – all medications are prohibited.

BACK OR NECK BRACE – may be put on or removed(4).

BEDRIDDEN(5) DUE TO PAIN – ALL ORAL MEDICATIONS MAY BE TAKEN.

BEE STING – the stinger may be removed and the area may be washed with ice water, lemon juice or vinegar, etc. The area may not be soaked, however, in those liquids(6).

BLEEDING (SLOW) – pressure may be applied to a cut to stop bleeding. Sucking or squeezing out blood is prohibited(7).

BROKEN BONE – a non-Jew may be asked to do anything necessary, e.g., make a phone call, drive a car, take x-rays or put on a cast. [If a non-Jew is not available, some poskim permit a Jew to do these actions with a shinui(8).]

COLD (RUNNING NOSE) – medication may not be taken.

COUGH – medication may not be taken. If the cough may be an indication of pneumonia or asthma, medication is permitted.

CUTS AND ABRASION (minor wounds) – may be washed or soaked in water. Hydrogen peroxide may be poured over a cut. It is not permitted, however, to soak absorbent cotton or paper in such a solution and then wash the wound with it. The wound may be covered with a non-medicated band-aid(9).

DIABETES– all oral medications may be taken.

DRIED (OR CRACKED) LIPS– It is prohibited to apply chapstick or any other medication, liquid or otherwise.

DRIED (OR CHAPPED) HANDS – It is prohibited to rub them with either oil, ointment (vaseline) or lotion. One who regularly uses a pourable, liquid lotion or oil on his hands (whether they are chapped or not) may do so on Shabbos, too, even if his hands are chapped(10).

EAR INFECTION – all medications are permitted. Cotton balls may be inserted(11). Even if the infection is no longer present, the prescription begun during the week must be continued until finished in order to avoid a relapse

EYE INFLAMMATION – eye drops (or ointment) may be instilled in the eye. If the eye is not inflamed but merely irritated, no medication is permitted(12).

FEVER – all oral medications may be taken. A conventional thermometer may be used(13). If a person is suffering from high-grade fever, a non-Jew may be asked to do whatever the patient needs in order to feel better(14). If the cause of the fever is unknown, a doctor should be consulted.

HEADACHE – medication may not be taken. If the headache is severe enough so that one feels weak all over or is forced to go to bed, medication may be taken. One who is unsure if he has reached that stage of illness may be lenient and take pain relieving medication(15).

HEARTBURN – Foods which will have a soothing effect may be eaten. Some poskim permit taking anti-acid medication while others are more hesitant. In a severe case, one may be lenient(16).

INSECT REPELLENT – liquid or spray repellents may be used(17).

MIGRAINE HEADACHE – all oral medications may be taken.

NOSEBLEED – the bleeding may be stopped with a tissue or a napkin. If none is available, a cloth napkin may be used(18).

RETAINER – may be inserted and removed(19).

RHEUMATISM – It is prohibited to bathe in therapeutic hot springs(20).

SCAB – it is permitted to remove a scab as long as blood is not drawn from the wound(21).

SORE THROAT – medication may not be taken. Gargling is prohibited(22). Drinking tea or any other hot drink, or sucking a candy, is permitted even if the intention is for medicinal purposes(23). See also 'strep throat'.

SLEEP DISORDER – There are conflicting views among contemporary poskim whether it is permitted to take sleeping pills or no-doze pills(24). One who is weak all over or is bedridden may take these pills. Cotton balls may be used as ear plugs. It is questionable if it is permitted to use pliable ear plugs, which are made from a wax-like material thst must be spread to fill the cavity of the ear(25).

SPRAINS – If the patient is not experiencing severe pain, nothing may be done. If the patient is experiencing severe pain, medication may be taken and a massage may be given. A makeshift splint may be applied, provided that no Shabbos Labors are transgressed.

SPLINTER UNDER THE SKIN(26) – May be extracted with the fingers, or with tweezers or a needle. If, unavoidably, a little blood is secreted in the process it is of no consequence(27).

STITCHES a non-Jew is allowed to stitch any wound(28), even if the stitching is done only for cosmetic reasons(29).

STOMACH CRAMPS – Unless one is in severe pain, it is prohibited to take a laxative or castor oil. Prune juice or any other food or drink is permitted. A hot water bottle is permitted when one experiences strong pains(30).

STREP THROAT-all oral medications may be taken. Even if the infection is no longer present, the prescription begun during the week must be continued until finished in order to avoid a relapse.

SUNBURN (ORDINARY) – medications are not permitted.

SWEATING – it is permitted to sprinkle baby powder on those parts of the body which are perspiring(31).

SWELLING – It is permitted to press a knife, etc. against the skin to prevent or minimize swelling(32). It is permitted to wash or soak the swollen area in water(33). It is permitted to place a compress(34), ice (placed in plastic bag) or any frozen item over a swollen area(35).

TOOTHACHE – a slight toothache may not be treated with painkillers, but one is permitted to drink whiskey, etc., provided that it is swallowed immediately(36). A severe toothache (to the point where one feels weak all over) or gum infection may be treated with oral medication. If the tooth needs to be extracted, a non-Jew may be asked to do so(37).

WEAK ALL OVER -all oral medications are permitted to be taken.

GENERAL NOTES:

It is commonly accepted among the majority of poskim that the Rabbinical restriction against taking medications on Shabbos applies to Yom Tov as well(38). The poskim agree, however, that on the second day of Yom Tov(39) and on Chol ha-Moed(40) it is permitted to swallow any medication, even for the most minor of ailments. No shinui is required.

On Shabbos, a pill may be split in half(41) (even on a dotted line(42)) ground into small pieces(43) or dissolved in a cup of liquid(44).

One who suffers from two conditions – one for which he may take medication on Shabbos and another for which he may not – may take medication only for the former(45).

Sometimes (as described above) a medication may not be taken on Shabbos, but not taking it could lead to aggravating a condition to the point where the medication would become necessary and permitted. In such a case, one is allowed to take the medication in order to avoid this eventuality. For example, one who has a headache which, if untreated, tends to escalate to a migraine, may take medication before the migraine sets in(46).

When ointment needs to be applied on Shabbos, it should, preferably, be prepared before Shabbos on a gauze square and then placed on the skin on Shabbos. If this was not done, the ointment may be squeezed directly from the tube on to the wound and a bandage placed over it. Whatever shinui can be made should be employed, so as to serve as a reminder not to inadvertently spread ointment on the skin ("smoothing"), which is prohibited. If this is impractical, there are sometimes other methods that may be followed. Consult a rav.

FOOTNOTES 1. There are different opinions as to when a child is no longer treated as a "patient not dangerously ill". Some (Chazon Ish O.C. 59:4; Harav S.Z. Auerbach in Nishmas Avrohom 328:54; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv in Eis la-Ledes, pg. 57) quote the age of 2-3; others (Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-12) say six, while yet others (Minchas Yitzchak 1:78) are lenient till the age of nine. The poskim agree, however, that in the last analysis, it all depends on the strength and maturity of the child. 2. O.C. 328:28. 3. See The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society # 6, pg. 47 for a full discussion of how to treat asthma on Shabbos. 4. Based on ruling of Harav S.Z. Auerbach in Tikunim u'Miluim 34, note 111. 5. Even if he is capable of getting out of bed and walking around, but presently he is in bed due to his pain, he is considered as bedridden – Aruch ha-Shulchan 328:19. 6. See Mishnah Berurah 328:141,142. Obviously, one is allergic to a bee sting must do everything necessary to avert danger. 7. Mishnah Berurah 328:147. 8. This is the view of Shulchan Aruch Harav 328:19 and Eglei Tal (Tochen 18). Some poskim (Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33, note *17) rule that one may rely on this view, especially when there is "danger to a limb". Note, however, that Mishnah Berurah and Aruch ha-Shulchan and the majority of the poskim do not agree with this leniency. 9. Some poskim (oral ruling by Harav M. Feinstein, Harav S.Z. Auerbach in Tikunim u'Miluim, pg. 58; Harav C.P. Scheinberg, quoted in Children in Halachah, pg. 88; Az Nidberu 7:34,35) permit removing the protective tabs from a band-aid, while other poksim (Minchas Yitzchak 5:39-2; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv, quoted in Machazeh Eliyahu 70) are stringent. It is proper to prepare band-aids for Shabbos use by peeling off their protective tabs and re-sealing them before Shabbos. Once they have prepared in this fashion, they may be used on Shabbos (Tzitz Eliezer 16:6-5). 10. Based on O.C. 327:1. 11. It is prohibited to tear cotton balling on Shabbos – Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 35:19 and Tikunim u'Miluim; Minchas Yitzchak 4:45. 12. O.C. 328:20. See also Eglei Tal (Tochen 17). 13. O.C. 306:7. Before using it, the mercury may be shaken down. 14. Mishnah Berurah 328:46, 47. 15. See Ketzos ha-Shulchan 138, pg. 100; Minchas Yitzchak 3:35; Be'er Moshe 1:33; 2:32. 16. See Ketzos ha-Shulchan 138, pg. 98; Tzitz Eliezer 8:15 (15-21); Az Nidberu 1:31; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34:4. 17. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 14:31; Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 179. 18. Mishnah Berurah 328:146. 19. Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34:29. See Tikunim u'Miluim for the reason that it is not considered mesaken. 20. Mishnah Berurah 328:137. 21. O.C. 328:22 and Mishnah Berurah 90. 22. O.C. 328:32. 23. O.C. 328:37. 24. See Minchas Yitzchak 3:21, Tzitz Eliezer 9:17, Be'er Moshe 1:33 and Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 176 for the various views. 25. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Tikunim u'Miluim 14:39) permits their usage while Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 179) and Az Nidberu 3:21 do not. 26. If the thorn or splinter is under a fingernail, it may be considered dangerous. 27. Mishnah Berurah 328:88 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 63. 28. See Nishmas Avrohom, vol. 4, O.C. 340 who quotes Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S. Y. Elyashiv as ruling that stitching a wound may be a Biblically prohibited activity. Accordingly, only a non-Jew may do it, unless it is a life threatening situation. 29. Ibid. See also Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33, note 23 and 35, note 62. 30. Mishnah Berurah 326:19. 31. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34:12. 32. Mishnah Berurah 328:124. 33. Tzitz Eliezer 8:15 (15-12). 34. In order to avoid several possible prohibitions, only paper towels or napkins should be used and care should be taken not to squeeze them. 35. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Tikunim u'Miluim 34, note 87); Be'er Moshe 1:33-18. 36. O.C. 328:32. It may not be retained in the mouth longer than usual, nor may one rinse his mouth with it and then spit it out. 37. Rama O.C. 328:3. See Tzitz Eliezer 9:17 (2-11). 38. Mishnah Berurah 532:5. There is a minority opinion that permits taking medications on Yom Tov, see Tzitz Eliezer 8:15 (16) who quotes their opinion and rules that when in distress one may rely on this view. 39. Mishnah Berurah 496:5. 40. O.C. 532:2. 41. Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33:4. 42. Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Nishmas Avraham, vol. 5, pg. 225. 43. Rama O.C. 321:12. 44. See Mishnah Berurah 320:34,35. 45. Igros Moshe O.C. 3:53. 46. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34:16.

Parashat Vayechi: A Family Becomes a Nation

By Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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This week's parasha closes Sefer Bereishit (Genesis). As we prepare to close the book on this sefer, it is important to briefly review its broad themes.

SEFER BEREISHIT: A QUICK LOOK BACK:

TZELEM ELOKIM:

Bereishit's earlier parshiot recount the events which lead to the creation of a special group of people meant to maintain a close relationship with Hashem. At first, it appears that Hashem 'hopes' to establish a close relationship with all of humanity; all people are created in the "image of God" ("tzelem Elokim"). We noted that the Torah implies that humanity's being patterned after the image of God is not simply a description of human nature, but a tripartite *mission*:

* Humanity is to emulate Hashem's creativity by procreating.
* Humanity is to emulate Hashem's mastery by mastering the created world.
* Humanity is to emulate Hashem's moral perfection by behaving morally.

"Tzelem Elokim" is not handed to us on a silver platter, it is a mission. Humanity is granted the basic potential to achieve mastery, creativity, and morality, and is charged to actualize this potential. We are not born "images of Hashem"; we are born as mirrors, so to speak. The choices we make determine whether we will stand before Hashem, reflecting His image, or face in other directions, and therefore reflect things other than His image.

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT:

If "tzelem Elokim" is a mission, then it can be failed. Indeed, humanity begins to disappoint early on. Adam and Hava's older son, Kayyin (Cain), murders his brother, failing as a tzelem Elokim (as demonstrated from the text). Kayyin's descendants readily absorb his example of readiness to murder, clearly a basic moral failure. Kayyin and his "line" are eventually replaced by Shet (Seth) and his descendants.

As humanity grows beyond the proportions of a single family, its moral failure becomes epidemic. Humanity successfully exercises mastery and creativity, inventing crucial industrial processes, musical instruments, and agricultural methods. But morally, humanity has failed. Hashem 'regrets' having created humanity and destroys all of the failed "tzelem Elokim"s along with the animal kingdom, saving only the righteous Noah and his family.

The destruction of the world "uncreates" creation, reversing the step-by-step process of creation with a parallel step-by-step process of destruction. But the seeds of recreation are planted before destruction: Hashem commands that all species be preserved in preparation for the step-by-step recreation of the world. In reestablishing the world, Hashem repeats to Noah and his family the three-part "tzelem Elokim" mission, this time stressing the prohibition of murder in order to address humanity's past failure to achieve the moral part of the "tzelem" mission.

A NEW PLAN:

Hashem's "disappointment" leads Him to change the original plan of maintaining a close relationship with all of humanity. Consequently, the next major event the Torah reports is the appearance of Avraham. Until this point, we hear nothing of "special" nations and "special" lands, of Hashem's being "the God" of a particular nation. Avraham's appearance changes all this. Hashem has decided that while humanity at large has failed the tzelem mission, a special group of devoted individuals can achieve this mission (and perhaps eventually lead the rest of humanity closer to this goal).

SELECTION: AVRAHAM:

At this point, we began to focus on the selection of the Avot and the rejection of various figures along the way. The Torah presents the greatness of the Avot as emerging from their successfully meeting the challenges with which they struggle. The strength the Avot display as they develop is what makes them Avot. We traced the growth of Avraham's trust in

Hashem from his initial uncertainty of Hashem's promises, to the breathtaking faith he manifests at the Akeida (Binding of Isaac). Along the way, we learned about Avraham's struggles for justice (saving Sedom), his courageous self-sacrifice (saving Lot from captivity), and other lessons too detailed to sacrifice to synopsis. We also examined the rejection of Yishmael for his vicious, cynical sniggering.

A HOLD ON ERETZ YISRAEL:

We paused at Hayyei Sara to look at the perspective of the Avot on Eretz Yizrael as a place to *live,* not merely a place to make "posthumous aliyah." Avraham's purchase of the Cave of Mahpela focused our attention on his insistence on establishing a permanent personal hold on a piece of the holy ground and his joy at being able to establish permanent *residence* there (not merely permanent *decedence* there). The same pattern appears later with regard to other Avot, who consistently stress the *field* of Mahpela -- the place of fruit-bearing, living trees -- and do not focus only on the cave, the place of burial. As we will see shortly, this theme recurs as Sefer Bereishit comes to a close.

YA'AKOV, "ISH TAM":

We turned our attention to the development of Ya'akov, through his deception of his father and brother, his development under Lavan's careful "tutelage," and his heroic self-transformation in facing Hashem's angel and his brother Eisav. His triumph arrives when he merits the blessings of spiritual destiny which Yitzhak had given him in potential twenty years before. The change of Ya'akov's name to Yisrael signifies a change in his character, in his approach to challenges. We also noted the rejection of Eisav aqs leader of God's future nation and found text-grounded justification for this rejection.

YEHUDA AND YOSEF:

We next turned to the development and selection of Yehuda and Yosef as leaders among Ya'akov's sons. We first traced Yosef's development from self-centeredness and immaturity (noted by Hazal and criticized freely by them and medieval commentators) to Hashem-centeredness, maturity, generosity, and greater mastery of the complexity of leadership. Next, we examined Yehuda's development, pinpointing his greatness in his ability to courageously admit wrongdoing and learn from it, and his capacity for self-regeneration in taking responsibility for his brothers and protecting his vulnerable father's feelings. In this context, we briefly touched upon Re'uvein's mistakes (Hazal refer to him as a "bekhor shoteh," a "foolish first-born"), which, despite his courage, spell his rejection as leader of Ya'akov's sons.

Most recently, we traced Yosef's manipulation of his brothers in his effort to see if they have done teshuva (repented) for selling him and learned the lessons of responsibility necessary for the family to reunite and continue to grow toward its destiny as a nation.

TAKE IT PERSONALLY:

In all of these discussions, our aim has been to understand the Torah and to try to take "personally" all of the lessons these stories offer us in conducting our own lives.

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PARASHAT VA-YHI: TRANSITION

When you write a coherent essay, you make sure (or you ought to, anyway) to structure your paragraphs so that the paragraphs "hold hands" -- you embed transitions in the end of each paragraph and the beginning of the next paragraph in order to communicate to your readers that you are "shifting gears," shifting focus to a new idea, and in order to draw them with you as you move on.

Parashat Va-Yhi is just such a transition. Sefer Bereishit follows the relationship between Hashem and humanity from its universal beginnings to its focus on a small group, and then through the process of the selection of great individuals ("Avot") to found and lead that group. Sefer Shemot develops a different theme: the creation of a national consciousness and national character (see also Abravanel's introduction to Sefer Shemot, which expands on this theme). Parashat Va-Yhi is the transition between the "individuals" theme of Bereishit and the "nation" theme of Shemot.

Imagine that you didn't know that Sefer Bereishit ends with Parashat Va-Yhi. What signs of transition to a new theme could you find in the parasha?

"NO JEW WILL BE LEFT BEHIND" (apologies to MBD):

Sefer Bereishit follows a pattern of selection and rejection of sons: Yitzhak is chosen and Yishmael rejected, Ya'akov is chosen and Eisav rejected. In contrast, Parashat Va-Yhi confirms all of Ya'akov's sons as members of the future nation, participants in the destiny promised to Yisrael by E-l Shad-dai (recall Parashat VaYishlah). Although some sons are singled out in our parasha for criticism or praise, the fact that no one is rejected despite his flaws shows that Hashem (and Ya'akov) has decided that this entire group will found the nation. Since the theme of Sefer Bereishit is the selection of founders for the nation, and since this process of selection seems to have reached completion, the Sefer is complete.

INTERNAL DIVERSITY:

This brings up an important observation: our discussions of Va-Yeishev, Mikkeitz, and Va-Yigash have shown that the sons of Ya'akov are highly diverse people. Re'uvein, Yehuda, and Yosef, for example, are all leaders, but their personalities and leadership styles are clearly divergent. The centerpiece of this week's parasha -- Ya'akov's blessings to his sons -- confirms and deepens this observation. Each of Ya'akov's sons faces different challenges and brings different strengths to bear on them. The fact that no one is rejected from participating in creating the Jewish nation indicates that all of these different strengths are necessary. Besides combining the legacies of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov, the nation needs the internal diversity of different perspectives in order to adequately achieve its mission.

To illustrate with just one example, the different strengths of the various shevatim (tribes) have provided leaders whose characteristics enable them to successfully lead in the diverse places and times in which we have needed leadership. Bringing a nation out of enslavement and facilitating the nation's communication with Hashem at Sinai (Moshe, Shevet Leivi) demands a different set of leadership characteristics than does leading a nation into a new land, conquering it, and apportioning it (Yehoshua, Shevet Ephrayyim). Unifying a splintered, tribally organized nation and establishing a permanent dynasty (David, Shevet Yehuda) demands a different set of leadership capabilities than does leading the exiled nation through a time of critical emergency with wisdom and faith (Mordekhai, Shevet Binyamin). There are dozens of such examples; despite Yehuda's basic hold on the monarchy, different circumstances have demanded leadership from other tribes as well. The leadership resources provided by this internal diversity have enabled us to succesfully face challenges of all kinds. Hopefully, Hashem will continue to provide us with leaders to help us deal with the challenges we encounter in the present and future.

[Of course, as Jewish history demonstrates, the "down side" of this internal multiplicity is that separate entities can work not only with each other, but also against each other.]

NATIONAL THEMES:

As mentioned above, Sefer Shemot develops themes of our national development. These themes first begin to resonate in a number of specific contexts in our parasha. Of course, the basic idea that the Avot will produce a nation has been clear since as early as Parashat Lekh Lekha, when Hashem promises to make Avraham into a "great nation." Yitzhak and Ya'akov also receive promises of nationhood. But national themes have slipped into the background in more recent parshiot: VaYeishev, Mikkeitz, and Va-Yigash focus largely on events within Ya'akov's family and make little or no mention of the national aspect. But Va-Yhi brings national themes back into focus in two different ways:

1) Specific mention of the future nation or national institutions such as laws and tribes.

2) Mention of the eventual return to Eretz Cana'an (after the Egyptian exile), or restatement of the family's / nation's significant connections to Eretz Cana'an.

NATION, INSTITUTIONS, AND LAND:

Parashat Va-Yhi is not only where familar national themes ("I will make you into a great nation") begin to reappear in the

text, it is also the place where some national themes appear for the first time. When Ya'akov repeats to Yosef the blessing he received from E-l Shad-dai, he is repeating a theme we know well:

BEREISHIT 48:3-4 --

Ya'akov said to Yosef, "E-l Shad-dai appeared to me at Luz in the Land of Cana'an and blessed me. He said to me, "I shall increase you, multiply you, and make you into a throng of nations; I shall give this land to your children after you as a permanent possession . . . ."

But when Ya'akov turns to Shimon and Leivi and curses their anger for their massacre of Shekhem, his words evoke the picture of a nation established on its own land:

BEREISHIT 49:5-7 --

"Shimon and Leivi are brothers; weapons of violence are their wares. In their council shall my soul not come; in their gathering shall my soul not rejoice, for in their fury they killed men, and by their will they uprooted oxen. Cursed is their anger for its strength, and their fury for its hardness; I shall split them up among Ya'akov and scatter them among Yisrael."

Shimon and Leivi must be scattered throughout the national homeland in order to guarantee that they do not once again come together and wreak violence out of measure. Sefer Yehoshua reports that indeed, Shimon receives a portion of Eretz Yisrael surrounded by the portion of Yehuda, whose job is apparently to control Shimon. And the Torah tells us many times that Leivi never receives a portion of Eretz Yizrael, and receives only individual cities scattered thoughout the land. (As we will see, Leivi's "punishment" turns out much different than Shimon's!) In terms of our theme, what is clear for the first time is that each of Ya'akov's sons will be part of a nation, that this nation will conquer and occupy Cana'an, and that each son's descendants will receive a portion of the land (except Shimon and Leivi). This already suggests the tribal arrangement of Kelal Yisrael which we know from later on in the Torah, but its appearance here is unprecedented.

Ya'akov's mention of Ephrayyim and Menashe's growth into nationhood is also not a "new" story -- they are merely being included in the destiny of Ya'akov's children -- but what Ya'akov says to Yosef just after blessing the two boys sounds a theme which will occupy the first half of Sefer Shemot: redemption from Egypt and return to Cana'an:

BEREISHIT 48:21 --

Yisrael said to Yosef, "I am going to die; Hashem shall be with you and return you to the land of your fathers . . . ."

Ya'akov's blessing to Yehuda also sounds a theme which telegraphs "national institution" as a basic assumption. Not only will Yehuda be the acknowledged leader of his brothers, as Ya'akov predicts as he begins the blessing to Yehuda, but Yehuda's authority will continue far into the future:

BEREISHIT 49:10 --

"The staff ["shevet"] will not be removed from Yehuda, nor law-making authority ["me-hokek"] from between his legs, until Shilo comes, and to him is the gathering of nations."

The mefarshim (commentators) debate whether "Shilo" refers to David, the Messiah, or some other personality or event; they also debate the meaning of "yik'hat amim." But it seems clear that Yehuda is being given broad authority to rule and to make or enforce laws -- a promise which can refer only to a polity governed by laws: a nation.

TRIBES:

One other very important term which appears for the first time in our parasha is the term "shevet" -- literally, "staff." In fact, this term appears only three times in all of Sefer Bereishit -- all three in our parasha: 49:10 with regard to Yehuda's authority, 49:16 with regard to Dan, and 49:28 with regard to all of the sons of Ya'akov. Note that this word is used here in different ways, since "staff" can symbolize a number of things. With regard to Yehuda, "shevet" refers specifically to leadership (the leader carries a special staff, similar to a scepter, as we see later in the case of Moshe); with regard to

Dan, "shevet" seems to mean something very similar to "shofet," "judge"; and when used to refer to all of the sons, "shevet" means what we mean when we refer to the "Twelve tribes" -- each tribal leader carries a staff ("shevet") representing his authority and separate identity from the other tribes, and this term is borrowed to refer to the entire tribe itself.

Although many of us are used to thinking of the sons of Ya'akov as the "shevatim" ("tribes"), the fact is that until now, they have been only individuals, not founders of tribes which comprise a nation. As our parasha looks forward through Ya'akov's blessings into the distant future of the nation and anticipates the national themes of Sefer Shemot, the parasha begins to suggest the notion of tribes.

A LOOK BACK AT THE LAND:

We have already noted that our parasha anticipates the themes of exodus and redemption in Ya'akov's assurance to Yosef that Hashem will eventually return the family to Cana'an. Yosef also assures his brothers before his own death that Hashem will "remember" them and eventually return them to Cana'an. But our parasha also directs our attention to the dual connections established by the Avot with Eretz Cana'an:

1) Hashem's promises to the Avot that they / their children shall inherit the land.

2) Avraham's purchase of a permanent personal "foothold" in the land -- the Field of Mahpela.

Ya'akov brings us back to a familiar theme (if you were with us for Parashat Hayyei Sara) when he commands his sons with his final words to bury him in the Cave of Mahpela:

BEREISHIT 49:29-32 --

He commanded them, saying, "I am to be gathered to my nation [=die]; bury me with my fathers in the *CAVE* in the *FIELD* of Efron the Hittite; in the *CAVE* in the *FIELD* of Mahpela which is before Mamre in the Land of Cana'an, the *FIELD* which Avraham bought from Efron the Hittite as a possession. There they buried Avraham and Sara his wife; there they buried Yitzhak and Rivka, his wife; and there I buried Le'ah -- [in] the purchase from the Hittites of the *FIELD* and the *CAVE* in it."

The Torah echoes Ya'akov's language in reporting the burial itself:
BEREISHIT 50:13 --

His sons carried him to the Land of Cana'an and buried him in the *CAVE* of the *FIELD* of Mahpela, the *FIELD* which Avraham had bought as a grave-possession from Efron the Hittite, [which is] before Mamre.

Ya'akov's request to his sons seems very repetitive and wordy -- he mentions the field and the cave three times, mentions twice that the field and cave were bought from Efron the Hittite, mentions unnecessarily that Avraham was the one who bought the field, and goes through the entire list of the people already buried there. What is so important about these details?

If Ya'akov's only intention is to give his sons directions to the field and cave, it should hardly be necessary to list the current occupants of the cave, or who originally owned it and who bought it, or to mention "field" and "cave" so many times. Why such formality, detail, and repetition in describing this piece of real estate? And why does the Torah repeat some of these details in narrating Ya'akov's burial?

If you recall our discussion of Parashat Hayyei Sara (or our brief review of it above), you will remember that we understood the complex and somewhat bizarre negotiations between Avraham and Efron the Hittite as an unspoken struggle on the part of Avraham to buy a piece of land as a personal foothold in Eretz Cana'an, and on the part of the Hittites to prevent him from gaining such a foothold. The "fierce politeness" of the Hittites and the "insistent obsequiousness" of Avraham betray this struggle, hidden beneath a veneer of genteel gentile generosity and gracious but firm Abrahamic refusal. Avraham avoids accepting a free grave-space among the grave plots of the Hittites and succeeds in purchasing not only a grave plot of his own, but a field to go with it; not simply a place to go once he is dead, but also a

place to live! And indeed, as the Torah tells us on several occasions subsequent to this sale, the Avot do live in Hevron, the city of the Field of Mahpela (and in which the Cave is located).

Why is Avraham so eager to buy a plot in Eretz Cana'an? Avraham has been promised by Hashem that he will receive Eretz Cana'an. But as he grows older and sees that no process seems to be unfolding which will grant him the land, he begins to wonder whether Hashem intends to fulfill His promise. Eventually, he asks Hashem directly: "How do I know that I will inherit it?" (15:8).

Hashem responds by correcting Avraham's misunderstanding of the promise: Avraham himself would not inherit the land; he would "join his fathers in peace," dying without participating in the struggle for the Land. After four generations of exile and enslavement in a foreign country, his descendants would return to conquer and inherit Eretz Cana'an. Avraham places complete faith in this promise, but he is somewhat disappointed that he himself will not inherit the land. Shortly afterward comes his opportunity to gain a personal stake in the Land: the death of his wife and the chance to use the search for a grave for her as a lever to manipulate the "people of the land" into selling him a plot of his own (since they cannot get away with outrightly refusing to give a burial place to the bereaved Avraham). [For the full development of this theme, our discussion of Hayyei Sara is available those interested.]

YA'AKOV TAKES THE LONG VIEW:

Ya'akov recognizes the danger facing his sons as they settle into Egyptian life and raise their families under Yosef's providence and protection: that they will forget about Eretz Cana'an and their connection to it, that they will not maintain the hope of returning to their land. In order to guard against this, he communicates to his sons the message of return: Hashem will eventually bring them back from Egypt to Cana'an. To reinforce their memories of the land and the importance it holds for the family, he paints a vivid snapshot of one important piece of it -- the family home and burial plot in Hevron:

1) He reminds them of the story they all know well of Avraham's cleverness in negotiating with the crafty Hittites, his insistence on buying his own burial plot, and his unblinking willingness to pay an exorbitant sum for it, a story which reminds them how important Eretz Cana'an was to their great-grandfather Avraham.

2) He reminds them that what Avraham bought was not just a burial place, but also a field, a place of life (the same emphasis on the field that appears in our parasha features prominently in the original account of Avraham's purchase; that account stressed that the field was full of trees, certainly a symbol of growth and vitality in Tanakh), where Avraham and Yitzhak lived and where they themselves were raised by their father.

3) He reminds them that this plot of land also connects them to the Land by virtue of its status as the family burial ground: Avraham and Sara, Yitzhak and Rivka, and Le'ah are all buried there. We all understand the deep emotional connection people maintain to the places their parents or earlier ancestors are buried; Ya'akov is trying to strengthen this connection.

These strategies highlight two aspects of our relationship to Eretz Yisrael (which we discussed at Hayyei Sara):

1) "The Field": Our connection to the Land as our living homeland, our place to live our lives, serve Hashem, raise our families.

2) "The Cave:" Our connection to the Land as our ultimate homeland, the place where our dead are buried. Even if we are not able to live there, it is the place we acknowledge as our homeland, the place to which we return to bury our dead because we want them to rest at home.

Unfortunately, the "Cave" gets much more press nowadays than the "Field" -- it is much easier to make a casual touristy visit to the touchstones of Jewish history in Eretz Yisrael (Kotel, graves, archaeological sites, museums, etc.) than it is to make a personal commitment to the "Field" (living in the land, spending time learning in yeshiva there, etc.). But the fact remains that the "Cave" connection serves an important function today as it did then: to maintain our connection to the land even when we have no access to the "Field."

This may explain why Ya'akov is so insistent on being buried in Eretz Cana'an and why Yosef later displays the same

desire. Besides his own personal desire to be buried with his wife, parents, and grandparents, Ya'akov also knows that for his sons, bringing his body back to Cana'an for burial will also be a powerful experience which will renew their connection to the land and refresh their desire to return to it. The procession to Cana'an is not merely a funeral, it is also a pilgrimage to the family home.

Yosef understands this, and therefore, when he reminds his brothers that Hashem will eventually return them to Cana'an, he makes his brothers swear that they will bring his bones up with them. This promise not only expresses Yosef's desire to be buried in Cana'an, it also guarantees that Bnei Yisrael will not forget their connection to the land.

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PREPARATION FOR SEFER SHEMOT:

This may sound extreme, but the best way to prepare for learning through any book of Tanakh is to lightning-read the entire Sefer. This is the first step in my own preparation, and I consider it valuable for the following reasons:

1) It quickly reminds us of all the things we think we remember but really don't. This is especially true of books of the Humash besides Sefer Bereishit, since Bereishit is nearly all stories, which are easier to remember than the legal portions of the Torah. Do you, for instance, recall much of the content of Parashat Mishpatim? How about Parashat Tzav? Parashat Shofetim? Got the picture?

2) It helps us overcome the "snapshot" effect: we tend to fall into the trap of looking at Humash in a disjointed way if we look at only one parasha at a time. It is crucial to merge the "snapshots" into a "movie" by taking a quick read through the Sefer (preferably in Hebrew),

a) feeling the momentum of the story line,

b) tracing the development of characters over long stretches of text (which we miss if we look only at "snapshots"), and

c) recognizing the major themes of the Sefer.

As you cruise through the text at high speed:

a) Note questions and patterns which seem significant.

b) Write an outline of the major events/sections of the text and consult it as you prepare each week so that you maintain that sense of bird's-eye view which the lightning-read gives you.

c) Ask yourself why the Torah includes particular events and leaves out others.

Shabbat shalom

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PARSHAT VAYECHI

Blessings - we find so many of them in Sefer Breishit, particularly in Parshat Vayechi. What are they all about?

In our shiur, we will first distinguish between three different types of blessings that we have encountered thus far in Sefer Breishit ('bechira', 'bechora' and 'bracha'). Based on these distinctions, we will then attempt to better understand what transpires when Yaakov blesses Yosef in the first chapter of Parshat Vayechi.

INTRODUCTION

Recall (from our shiur on Parshat Toldot) that we identified two categories of blessings to explain the nature of Yitzchak's blessings to Yaakov and Esav. Those were: (1) 'bechira' and (2) 'bracha'.

We used the name 'bechira' to classify God's special blessing to Avraham Avinu that his offspring ('zera') would inherit the 'promised' land ('eretz'). God first bestowed this blessing upon Avraham Avinu at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha (see 12:1-3) and subsequently repeated it numerous times not only to Avraham, but also to Yitzchak and Yaakov. By tracing these blessings, we were able to show how the 'bechira' process emerged as a primary theme in Sefer Breishit.

In contrast, we used the more general term 'bracha' to classify a blessing of personal destiny bestowed by a father onto his son [or sons]. As examples, we cited Noach's blessings to his three sons (see 9:26-27), and Yitzchak's blessing of prosperity and leadership that were intended for Esav, but 'stolen' by Yaakov [see chapter 27].

Now, in Parshat Vayechi, as the 'bechira' process nears its conclusion, we find how Yaakov bestows blessings of prosperity and success upon his children. Even though these would seem to fall under our category of 'bracha', when we take a closer look at these blessings, we will need to add an additional category to better appreciate their meaning.

YAAKOV'S BLESSING TO YOSEF - BECHIRA or BECHORA?

Before Yaakov blesses all of his children in chapter 49, he first bestows a special blessing upon Yosef and his two children, as described in chapter 48.

To understand the purpose of this special blessing, we must consider not only its content, but also its context.

We begin our study by examining Yaakov's opening statement to Yosef, when he arrives with his two sons (see 48:1-2). We quote this pasuk in Hebrew in order to highlight its textual parallels to earlier blessings to the Avot:

> [And Yaakov said to Yosef]: "KEL SHAKAI nir'ah eilai [appeared to me] be-Luz be-eretz Canaan va-yevarech oti, va-yomer eilai, [and blessed me saying:]
> 'Hineni MAFRECHA ve-HIRBITICHA u-netaticha li-khal amim, ve-natati et ha-ARETZ ha-zot le-ZAR'ACHA acharecha achuzat olam'" (see 48:3-4).

At first glance, this blessing appears to resemble the blessings that we have defined thus far as 'bechira'. To show how, let's quote the almost identically blessing of 'bechira' that Yitzchak had bestowed upon Yaakov prior to his departure from Eretz Canaan (when running away from Esav):

> [Textual parallels are highlighted by CAPS.]
> [And Yitzchak said to Yaakov]: "ve-KEL SHAKAI yevarech otcha ve-YAFRECHA ve-YARBECHA ve-hayita li-khal amim - va-yiten lecha et birkat Avraham lecha u-leZAR'ACHA itach, le-rishtecha et ERETZ megurecha... " (see 28:3-4).

Similarly, we find an additional parallel blessing when God officially confirmed this 'bechira' (to Yaakov) upon his return to Eretz Canaan (again at Bet El):

> [And God spoke to Yaakov saying] "ani KEL SHAKAI, PREH u-RVEH, goy u-khal amim yhiyeh mi-meka... ve-et ha-ARETZ asher natati le-Avraham u-leYitzchak lecha etnena, u-leZAR'ACHA acharecha eten et ha-ARETZ" (35:11-12).

Considering these parallels, Yaakov's opening statement to Yosef in Parshat Vayechi would appear to convey this same message, i.e. that Yaakov is now bestowing the blessing of 'bechira' upon Yosef - and hence, possibly to the exclusion of his brothers! [If so, this would be quite problematic, for it implies that the 'bechira' process will now continue only through Yosef.]

However, when we consider the context of these psukim (i.e. 48:3-5), it becomes quite clear that Yaakov is not blessing Yosef with the 'bechira'. [Recall that only God can confirm 'bechira', and not the Avot themselves.] Rather, Yaakov first **informs** Yosef about his own 'bechira' as background for the new blessing that is about to bestow - a blessing which we will now categorize as 'bechora':

'BECHORA' - TO THE SON OF RACHEL

To explain this point, let's take a careful look at what Yaakov now states concerning the status of Yosef's two children:

> "Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt... shall be mine; Efraim and Menashe are to me like Reuven and Shimon" (48:5).

For some reason, Yaakov decides to grant Yosef a special status. Indeed, all twelve brothers are 'chosen'; nonetheless Yosef receives a DOUBLE portion ("pi-shnayim"). Efraim and Menashe are to be considered 'shvatim' (tribes) - a status equal to that of Reuven and Shimon. In 'Torah terms', we conclude that Yaakov has awarded Yosef the 'bechora' - for "pi-shnayim" [the double portion] is the special Biblical rights of the firstborn son. [See Devarim 21:17 re: 'mishpat ha-bechora'.]

This neatly explains why Yaakov prefaces this blessing of 'bechora' by first quoting God's blessing of 'bechira'. Before bestowing the 'bechora', Yaakov must first explain to Yosef that his special status of 'bechor' is being granted within the framework of the 'bechira' process (see 48:4). It is because the 'bechira' process has reached its completion (with God's choice of Yaakov and all of his children), that it is now incumbent upon Yaakov to grant the 'bechora' to one of his twelve children.

Yaakov thus neither chooses nor rejects any of his children. He simply awards Yosef with the 'bechora', even though Reuven was born first. In essence, Yaakov has chosen the first-born child of Rachel over the first-born child of Leah.

To prove that Yaakov's blessing is 'bechora' (and not 'bechira'), simply note Yaakov's next statement:

> "But children born to you after them shall be yours; their inheritance shall be included under the name of their brothers" (48:6).

Should Yosef have any additional children, their portion must be included within the portions of Menashe and Efraim. Had Yosef been the only chosen son; then all of his children should have received special status. However, since he has now become the family 'bechor', he receives a double portion, but no more. Any other children that he may have must be included within this double portion.

[See Rashbam 48:5 & Ibn Eza 48:4-6!]

A 'FLASHBACK' FROM PARSHAT VA'YISHLACH

This interpretation also neatly explains the reason for Yaakov's next statement concerning Rachel's death (which otherwise would seem to be totally unrelated):

> "When I was returning from Padan, Rachel died suddenly during that journey, while we were still some distance from Efrata [and thus even farther away from Chevron!], and therefore I buried her on the road..." (48:7).

This mention of Rachel's burial most probably relates directly to Yaakov's choice of Yosef as the 'bechor'. By choosing Yosef over Reuven, Yaakov has essentially chosen Rachel over Leah as his primary wife. However, this may come as a surprise to Yosef, for not only was Reuven born first, but Yosef's own mother (Rachel) was buried along the roadside, while Reuven's mother Leah was buried in Ma'arat Ha-Machpela - in the same burial spot where Yaakov himself wishes to be buried! [See 47:29-30.]

Therefore, Yaakov now explains to Yosef that Rachel's burial on the roadside (rather than in Ma'arat Ha-Machpela) was due to unforeseen circumstances, and thus should not be interpreted as an indication of a lower status. On the contrary, despite Rachel's somewhat disrespectful burial, Yaakov still considers her as having been his 'primary' wife.

[Note then when Yaakov had earlier expressed his concern about sending Binyamin to Egypt, he had made a similar statement: "And your servant, my father, said to us: As you know, MY WIFE bore me two sons, but one is gone..." (Yehuda quoting his father in 44:27).]

Therefore, even though Reuven is the firstborn of Leah, Yosef is awarded the **family** 'bechora', since he is the firstborn of Yaakov's primary wife, the "isha" whom he had originally intended to marry.

A 'FLASHBACK' FROM PARSHAT TOLDOT

At this point in the narrative (i.e. after 48:7), we find an interesting transition. Now that Yaakov has completed bestowing the 'bechora' upon Yosef, the focus of his blessing now shifts to his grandchildren, Efraim and Menashe - who consequently have now attained the status of 'shvatim' (tribes). As such, they also deserve blessings of personal destiny from Yaakov (i.e. 'bracha'), just as he will later bless all of the tribes (in chapter 49).

However, when we read how Yaakov grants these blessings (in 48:8-20), we find several rather obvious 'flashbacks' to the blessings of Yitzchak in Parshat Toldot (see chapter 27).

For example, both narratives describe an aging father who can barely see (48:10 vs. 27:1), and the 'switching' of blessing between two sons to the consternation of their father (48:17-19 vs. 27:6-9). Furthermore, in both narratives, we find the use of many similar verbs.

One could suggest that the manner by which Yaakov grants these blessing to Menashe and Efraim reflects his own traumatic experience, when he was instructed by Rivka to 'steal' the blessing that Yitzchak had intended for Esav. Even though Yaakov understands that Efraim may reach higher levels than Menashe, he insists upon blessing both of them together. Yaakov does not want these slight differences between Efraim and Menashe to cause strife between them in the future (as was the case between Yaakov and Esav). At this initial stage, he places both children together, bestowing upon them a joint blessing, while providing a small indication (by switching his hands) regarding the potential prominence of Efraim. Despite their different destinies, Efraim and Menashe will need to work together, as they will be part of the same nation, and Yaakov would like this unity to begin already at this initial stage.

'HA-MAL'ACH HA-GOEL'

Now that we have discussed the general framework of Yaakov's blessing to Efraim and Menashe, let's take a closer look at the blessing itself (familiar to us from "kriyat shema al ha-mita"). To appreciate this blessing, we must consider the fact that Efraim and Menashe had grown up with no contact with their uncles and cousins. To facilitate their integration with the rest of the family, Yaakov adds a special blessing:

"ha-mal'ach ha-goel oti mi-kol ra - yevarech et ha-nearim"
[God's angel who protected me (Yaakov) from all those who wanted to harm me, He should bless these children (to help them 'blend in')],
"ve-yikare ba-hem shmi, ve-shem avotai - Avraham ve-Yitzchak..."
[And they should be known by my name, and by the names of Avraham and Yitzchak (for they are part of the chosen family.]
"ve-yidgu la-rov be-kerev ha-aretz"
[and they should multiply within the land...]
(see 48:15-16).

Yaakov very much wants Yosef's two sons to be identified with the rest of his family name; he therefore blesses them so that God should look over them with the same providence that helped Yaakov survive his confrontations with Esav and Lavan.

A TIME WILL COME...

Yaakov concludes his blessing to Yosef by reminding him that a time will come when the 'chosen family' will return home:

"And Yisrael said to Yosef: I am about to die, but God will be with you and return you to the land of your fathers..." (48:21).

Now that Yosef has been appointed as 'bechor', it becomes his responsibility to inform the future generations of this Divine promise. Yaakov is not sure how long it will be until God will lead them back to Eretz Canaan. Nevertheless, his children must transmit this tradition to THEIR children, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared to meet their destiny.

It is precisely this message that Yosef repeats to his brothers and family on his deathbed, at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit:

"And Yosef told his brothers, behold I am about to die, 've-Elokim pakod yifkod etchem' [God will surely remember you] and bring you from this land to the land which He promised by oath to give to Avraham, Yitzchak..." (50:24).
[Compare with 48:21, 46:3-4 & Shmot 13:13-22.]

Yaakov concludes this blessing with one last 'cryptic' statement to Yosef (that obviously requires some explanation):

"And I am granting you one - SHCHEM - over your brothers, that I [will] have taken from the Amorites with my sword and bow" (see 48:22).

The commentators argue in regard the meaning of the word SHCHEM in this pasuk. Some understand that Yaakov is now giving the city Shchem to Yosef as an inheritance, but most explain that 'shchem' in this pasuk refers to an extra portion of inheritance that will be given to Yosef AFTER the conquest of the land.

According to the latter interpretation, this final blessing forms an appropriate conclusion. After mentioning that God will one day return his offspring to Eretz Canaan (fulfilling 'brit bein ha-btarim' - 48:21), Yaakov explains that when that time comes, Yosef will receive an extra portion in the inheritance of the land, for the simple reason that he is the 'bechor' - congruent with the opening section of this blessing to Yosef.

THE BLESSINGS OF PERSONAL DESTINY

As the family 'bechora' has been awarded to Yosef, Yaakov now summons his entire family (see 49:1) in order to give a personal blessing to each of his sons. Although each son receives what the Torah describes as a 'bracha' (see 49:28 / "ish asher ke-virchato beirach otam"), not all these 'brachot' appear to be what one would call a 'blessing'.

For example, Reuven is told: "You are unstable as water, you shall no longer excel..." (49:4).

Shimon and Levi are rebuked: "Let not my person be included in their council... For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen. Cursed be their anger..." (see 49:6-7, note that Yaakov is cursing their anger, not his sons!).

On the other hand, Yehuda and Yosef are emphatically blessed with both prosperity and leadership. Other brothers also receive blessings, albeit less promising than those of Yosef and Yehuda, but blessings nonetheless, as opposed to the sharp criticism hurled upon Shimon and Levi.

What is the meaning of these 'brachot'? Will the personal traits of the brothers predetermine the fate of their offspring? Do Yaakov's blessings reflect the principle of determinism and negate the concept of 'bechira chofshit' (free will)?

One could suggest that Yaakov assumes the role of a 'father' (in his blessings to his children) more than the role of a 'prophet'. Let's explain:

As a parent, and the last forefather of God's special Nation, Yaakov must blend the goals of his family destiny with the realities of his life experience. His blessings, therefore, reflect the potential he sees within each of his children.

The fulfillment of life-long goals requires a person to recognize his potential by considering both his good qualities and shortcomings. As Yaakov recognizes his children's varying strengths and weaknesses, he blesses them according to their individual capabilities and talents. Although these blessings do not necessarily guarantee the final outcome, they form a guide that can provide each son with a proper direction that can help achieve his potential.

Yaakov does not intend his harsh castigation of Reuven, Shimon and Levi to result in ultimate condemnation. Rather, he hopes that they will recognize their weakness of character and work towards its improvement. [Note that Yaakov curses Reuven's **anger**, but not Reuven himself.]

Similarly, Yaakov's sharp rebuke of Levi turns later on into a blessing, as the Tribe of Levi later assumed an important leadership position (see Devarim 33:8-12!).

In contrast, Yehuda and Yosef possess a potential for leadership that should be recognized by their offspring. However, this blessing does not guarantee that every descendant of Yehuda or Yosef will become a great later. Even the kings of the House of David must be constantly conscious of their conduct, in order that they be worthy of exercising their leadership (see Yirmiyahu 22:1-5!).

[This idea can help us understand most blessings (even 'birkat kohanim'!). A 'bracha' is not a simply mystic chant that determines a future set of events, rather it serves as a reminder to a person that he carries the potential to achieve a certain goal.]

Undoubtedly, the 'brachot' of Yaakov contain additional prophetic and metaphysical significance as well. Nonetheless, they do not negate the basic principle of 'bechira chofshit' [freedom of choice].

UNITY OR HARMONY

In conclusion, our discussion can help us understand the underlying reason why God wanted Am Yisrael to consist of twelve distinct tribes. After all, if this nation's goal is to represent the ONE God, it would have been more logical that there be simply one tribe - thus forming one homogenous society! Furthermore, why must there continue to be friction between Yosef and Yehuda throughout the entire Tanach?

To explain why, recall our explanation of God's purpose in choosing a special nation (in wake of the events at Migdal Bavel). It was God's hope that this special Nation would lead all Seventy Nations towards a theocentric existence. For this purpose Avraham Avinu was chosen, and for this purpose the existence of 'shvatim' can serve as a model. Let's explain why:

People, by their very nature, tend to group into individual societies, each developing its own national character, personality, goals and aspirations. These societies eventually develop into nations who may occasionally fight over opposing goals, or cooperate in working towards the realization of common goals.

Through His agent, Am Yisrael, God hopes that all nations, while remaining distinct, will recognizing God's purpose in His creation of mankind - and hence cooperate with each other towards the achievement of that goal.

As we see in Yaakov's 'brachot' to his sons, each 'shevet' possesses its own unique character and singularity. The composite of all these qualities can be harnessed towards a common good. As God's model Nation, the cooperation between the 'Twelve Tribes of Israel' in the fulfillment of their Divine and national goals can serve as an archetype for the Seventy Nations to emulate. Through harmonious cooperation and the unifying force of a common goal (and with help of some good leadership), the Nation of Avraham becomes a 'blessing' to all nations (see 12:1-3). Mankind thus realizes its potential, and Am Yisrael fulfills its Divine destiny.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In his blessing to Efraim and Menashe, "ha-mal'ach ha-goel...," Yaakov makes reference to a "mal'ach Elokim" who consistently saved him from all 'ra' (evil). Explain this reference in light of 31:7,24,29! (note the use of the word "ra").

Why do you think that this blessing is appropriate specifically for Efraim and Menashe (based on the above shiur)?

Modern commentators have suggested that the word 'ra' in this blessing may actually be alluding to the Egyptian god "raah" - If so, then Yaakov is stating that Hashem who has saved him during these final years of his life from the influence of this primary Egyptian god named 'ra' should bless these 'grandchildren' Efraim & Menashe in a similar manner, and save them from Egyptian influence, to the point that they should be known a Yaakov's offspring, and not as Egyptian princes [hence "v'yikareh bahem shmi, v'shem avotei..."]!

B. HA-TACHAT ELOKIM ANI?

After Yaakov's death, the brothers beg Yosef to forgive them for their animosity towards him. Yosef assures them that they need not worry, for whereas he is not God, he has neither the responsibility nor the right to punish them. [This is the simple and standard explanation]. Yet, if we examine those psukim carefully, we may uncover an added dimension to Yosef's response, "ha-tachat Elokim ani"? Let's explain:

When the brothers ask Yosef's forgiveness, they explain that their father instructed them to say as follows (50:17):

"Forgive the offense and guilt of your brothers... Please forgive the offense of the SERVANTS OF THE GOD of your father..."

Immediately thereafter, the brothers suggest their own punishment, that they be SLAVES to Yosef. Yosef refuses this offer by explaining, "Do not fear, for am I IN THE PLACE OF GOD?" Yosef's answer responds directly to his brothers' comments. First, they ask to be forgiven on account of their being the SERVANTS of GOD. Then, they offer themselves as SERVANTS to YOSEF. Yosef answers them accordingly: should they become his servants, they will no longer be servants of God. Therefore, Yosef tells his brothers - "ha-tachat Elokim ani?" - should he consider himself a replacement or 'substitute' for God? The brothers must remain God's servants, not Yosef's!

C. "PAKOD YIFKOD" AND SEFER SHMOT

An obvious question that arises when studying Parshat Vayechi is, why didn't Yaakov's family return to Eretz Canaan once the famine ended? One could suggest that although they could and should have returned, they opted instead for the 'good life' in Eretz Mitzrayim (see the story of Avraham and Lot, 13:4-14). One could even suggest that their enslavement in Egypt was a punishment for this 'unzionistic' attitude.

Nevertheless, it seems as though Bnei Yisrael felt it their Divine destiny to stay in Egypt. This conception most likely evolved as a result of God's promise to Yaakov prior to his departure to Egypt: "Do not fear going down to Egypt, for you will become a great nation there. I will go down with you, and I will bring you back..." (46:3-4).

1. Compare these psukim, as well as 48:21, 50:24 and the psukim of Brit Bein Ha-btarim (15:13-19), with God's revelation to Moshe Rabeinu at the 'sneh' in Shmot perek 3.
2. Note God's Name in the various psukim in Sefer Breishit noted above, and relate it to Shmot 3:13-22.
3. At what point did it become unrealistic for Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt and return to Eretz Canaan? Had they returned, to what area would they have returned? Who owned the land, etc.?

D. Between Reuven and Yosef

It is interesting to note that Yaakov himself later refers to Reuven as his 'bechor' - see 49:3), even though he had earlier granted the

'bechora' to Yosef (as we explained in our shiur above). To support our conclusion, there is a pasuk in Divrei Ha-yamim Aleph (see 5:1-2), that explains that Reuven was supposed to be the 'bechor' but because of his sin (when he took his father's 'pilegesh') - he lost his special status. Within the family of Leah, that status was given to Yehuda, but in regard to the entire family of Yaakov, the status of bechor was granted to Yosef. If you have time, I recommend that you see those psukim inside.

Parshas Vayechi: May God Make You as Ephraim and Menasheh

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. EPHRAIM AND MENASHEH

"They are the sons God has given me here," Yoseph said to his father. Then Yisra'el said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." Now Yisra'el's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Yoseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them. Yisra'el said to Yoseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." Then Yoseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Yoseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Yisra'el's left hand and Menasheh on his left toward Yisra'el's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Yisra'el reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Menasheh's head, since Menasheh was the firstborn. Then he blessed Yoseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." (B'resheet [Genesis] 48:9-16)

This famous deathbed scene is etched into our consciousness and is replayed in Jewish homes every Friday night when we bless our children:

"May God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh."(ibid. v. 20)

Upon close inspection, there are a few anomalies regarding this narrative which are worthy of our attention:

1) Why did Ya'akov embrace and kiss his grandchildren before blessing them? - we don't find him doing this with his own children in the subsequent blessing scene (Ch. 49).

2) Why does it matter which hand is used to bless the "more deserving" child?

3) If Ya'akov wanted to raise the position of Ephraim over that of Menasheh, why didn't he insist that they switch positions - why cross his hands? (This question is exacerbated by the end of v. 14 - he crossed his arms since Menasheh was the firstborn - why is Menasheh being the firstborn a reason for crossing his arms?)

4) Why did Ya'akov prefer Ephraim to Menasheh, giving him the greater (right-handed) blessing? When challenged by Yoseph, his response was:

"I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." (v. 19); however, this response is enigmatic and puzzling. If Ya'akov had indicated that Ephraim was more worthy, more saintly or otherwise more deserving, we could understand. His answer indicates anything but that; it seems that Ya'akov has elected to "go with the winner" and support the son who is destined for greatness - what can we make of his response and his thinking?

5) What was the blessing with which Ya'akov blessed his grandchildren while he had his hands on their heads? The text indicates that as he placed his hands on their heads, he blessed Yoseph (regarding their well-being) - but not them!

II. FLASHBACK: YITZCHAK'S BLESSING

Even a cursory reading of our text quickly brings to mind another blessing scene in B'resheet: Yitzchak blessing Ya'akov in the guise of Esav, followed by the actual blessing received by Esav. (I suggest a quick review of Chapter 27 before continuing).

In both scenes, the bestower of the blessing (Yitzchak, Ya'akov) suffers from poor eyesight, he embraces the recipient(s) of the blessing - and the text of the blessing is not mentioned in the text (see 27:23 and v. 27 carefully). More accurately, each scene includes two blessings (v.23 and 27; 48:15 and 20), neither of which is explicitly presented in the text.

There are several questions to be asked about the narrative in Chapter 27 (in addition to the parallel questions we have already raised from Ch. 48) - the resolution of which will help us understand Ya'akov's behavior with his grandsons:

6) Why was Rivkah so concerned that Ya'akov get that particular blessing, even at the risk of his being cursed instead?

7) What is the relationship - if any - between Ya'akov's purchase of the b'khorah (right of the firstborn) at the end of Chapter 25 and his deceptive taking of the blessing in Chapter 27?

[parenthetic note: the first episode of Ya'akov's life, the purchase of the b'khorah, involves an oath. After Esav agrees to sell his rights to Ya'akov, Ya'akov makes him recommit to that sale through an oath. The final scene of Ya'akov's life, beginning at 47:29, involves his request of Yoseph to be buried in the Land. After Yoseph commits to personally fulfill the request, Ya'akov makes him take an oath. Interesting bookends...but beyond the scope of this shiur.]

8) To paraphrase Esav's question (27:38), did Yitzchak have only one blessing to bestow? Why couldn't their father have repeated the same blessing - or given one of equal worth - to Esav?

III. THE B'KHORAH - WHERE DID IT GO?

I'd like to ask one more question before beginning to decipher our text.

As we see from Ya'akov gift of a double portion (Ephraim & Menasheh) of land to Yoseph, he was given the financial benefits of the b'khorah (see D'varim 21:17). The verse in Divrei HaYamim states:

The sons of Re'uven the firstborn of Yisra'el. He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Yoseph son of Yisra'el, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Yehudah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Yoseph. (Divrei HaYamim I 5:1)

Besides the financial benefits of the b'khorah (double inheritance), there seems to be a second component inherent in the b'khorah - political power. The verse indicates that although the financial rights of Re'uven's b'khorah were bestowed to Yoseph, the political component was given to Yehudah, who became prominent among his brothers. The Midrash (Aggadat B'reisheet #83) adds a third dimension to the b'khorah - Kehunah (priesthood). (This is further demonstrated by the "switch" of these rights and responsibilities to the Levi'im [Bamidbar 3:41] - where it is clear that representation at worship was the duty of the b'khorot -see also Targum Onkelos on B'resheet 49:3).

In other words, until Sinai, the firstborn in a family would inherit three rights:

Double inheritance,

Political control over the family and

Representation of the family at sacrificial rites.

On his deathbed, Ya'akov gave the financial-b'khorah to Yoseph and the political-b'khorah to Yehudah - but who received the worship-b'khorah?

IV. KEHUNAH - THE LEGACY OF EVERY FAMILY

We know that the families of Avraham and Yitzchak did not follow the ideal pattern for Jewish family life; in each case, only one son was chosen to carry on the tradition of the family and the rest were sent away. The conventional understanding is that the first proper family within our tradition was that of Ya'akov - 12 sons, all included and all maintainers of the tradition. We therefore expect the firstborn (Re'uven) to be accorded the usual rights appropriate for that position - and are surprised to see them taken away from him.

I'd like to propose another way of understanding Ya'akov's family. Just as Avraham and Yitzchak's job was to raise one son to follow in their respective footsteps, similarly Ya'akov had the responsibility to raise twelve sons to build upon the tradition he received. In other words, he was not raising one family - with the eldest occupying the conventional position of b'khor; he was raising twelve families, each of which would have their own b'khor. [Although Re'uven is called b'khor Ya'akov (e.g. B'resheet 35:23), this may be referring to simple birth order, not to position within the family.] This explains how Ya'akov

"transferred" the b'khorah to Yoseph - something which is forbidden in Sefer D'varim - (see 21:17 again). He wasn't eliminating a b'khor - he was simply appointing the family headed by the financial wizard among the sons as "Chief Financial Officer" of his estate (Eretz Yisra'el). In the same way, he appointed Yehudah, who had earned the allegiance of his brothers, as the family that would rule over the other families - but only with regard to those issues which affect all twelve as a unit. Within each family, the b'khor would hold both financial and political rule. Regarding the Kehunah - the spiritual b'khorah - that remained within each of B'nai Yisra'el and became the responsibility of each of their b'khorot.

V. S'MIKHAH - EMBRACE AND TRANSMISSION

The S'forno (B'resheet 48:18), in explaining the importance of the right hand in Ya'akov's blessing, states:

Since S'mikhah with the hand focuses the spirit toward the object upon which it is placed, like he placed his hands upon him [referring to Mosheh's s'mikhah of Yehoshua - Bamidbar (Numbers) 27:23] and the right hand is [generally] stronger than the left, therefore the s'mikhah of the right [hand] will focus more than the s'mikhah of the left.

S'mikhah is a Halakhah which first appears in the beginning of Vayyikra:

v'Samakh Yado (He shall lay his hand) on the head of the burnt offering.. (1:4)

The Halakhah of s'mikhah requires that in the case of any private offering, immediately prior to slaughtering the animal, the owner of the offering must lay his hands on the animal with all of his strength (MT Ma'aseh haKorbanot 3:13). In his explanation of the meaning behind animal offerings, Ramban (commentary to Vayyikra 1:9) suggests that the person bringing the offering should view himself as if he were on the altar. The catharsis of Korbanot is achieved when the owner experiences his own sacrifice vicariously through the offering. S'mikhah, performed immediately before the offering is slaughtered, is the process by which the owner transmits his energy into the animal in order that the offering truly represent him on the altar.

[On the point of s'mikhah with all of one's strength - Think of how powerfully we hug a close friend or loved one at times of great sadness or joy - and think of how we hug a casual acquaintance when the occasion calls for it.]

There is another s'mikhah in Halakhah besides that preceding an offering. As S'forno points out, when Mosheh was preparing to transmit the mantle of leadership to Yehoshua, he performed s'mikhah on Yehoshua, laying his hands on Yehoshua's head. Following S'forno's reasoning, Mosheh was transmitting his energy/self, to Yehoshua, investing him with (at least) a connection to Mosheh's experience atop Sinai. Through the 1400 years when s'mikhah was operative (see BT Sanhedrin 14a), each recipient of s'mikhah was given a piece of the experience of Mosheh at Sinai, along with all of the others in the intervening chain. Each recipient had a direct link to the Revelation at Sinai and to the fount from which the Oral Law springs.

VI. THREE TYPES OF B'RAKHOT

Before Sinai, there were three types of b'rakhot bestowed by people:

a) The conventional well-wishing b'rakhah, (e.g. B'resheet 47:7,10).

b) The designation-b'rakhah, (e.g. Ch. 49, where Ya'akov gave his children a b'rakhah - which was, essentially, his last will and testament.) This designation-b'rakhah was an assignment of duties, properties etc. within the family.

c) The conferral-b'rakhah - which was the model for the post-Sinaitic s'mikhah.

Unlike a well-wishing blessing, in which the person who is most deserving gets the finest "wish", this b'rakhah is a real conferral of power and strength to the recipient. Since this conferral-b'rakhah was a highly charged emotional experience, reflecting a deep connection between the two parties involved, in order for it to be effective, the bestower had to first have a direct connection to the recipient. S'forno (B'resheet 48:10) explains that Ya'akov requested that Yoseph bring his sons close in order to embrace them. The embrace was intended to create the proper emotional and spiritual connection between them to make the conferral-b'rakhah effective.

We can now address those questions we asked about the Yitzchak-Ya'akov-Esav scenario:

Rivkah was aware that Ya'akov had purchased the b'khorah from Esav - meaning that he would be "in charge" of the family affairs, both financial and political. [Yitzchak was evidently unaware of the sale - see 27:19] The person in charge is in the greatest need of support and strength; there are always those who would overthrow him and he has nowhere to go but down. The "underdog", contradistinctively, can only move up. Rivkah was so concerned that Ya'akov receive Yitzchak's strength and power - through the conferral-b'rakhah - that she was willing to risk the possibility of a curse.

When Ya'akov approached Yitzchak, his father embraced him (27:22), attended to his voice (ibid.) - and "blessed" him. (This is apparently a conferral-b'rakhah, as there are no blessing-words provided here). Yitzchak then ate and drank of the venison brought by Ya'akov, embraced him again, smelled his clothes - and "blessed" him again (vv. 25-27). Note that Yitzchak connected with Ya'akov using all four available senses. Subsequent to these b'rakhot, which I am theorizing are both occasions of s'mikhah, Yitzchak stated:

May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you! (27:28-29)

These words are not the b'rakhah - as he has already blessed Ya'akov. Rather, these words represent a verbal version of the strength he has given his son. Not only has he transmitted the ability to receive God's bounty - he has also given this son the strength to rule over his brother!

There is a textual hint to this idea - in 27:37, Yitzchak declares "I have made him lord over you and have given all of his brothers to him as slaves - and with grain and wine s'makhtiv (I have sustained him)..."; note that Yitzchak himself states that he has performed a type of s'mikhah on Ya'akov!

It is no wonder, then, that Yitzchak is "out of blessings" when the real Esav shows up! How can he give the same ruling strength to two people? The best that he can do is to give Esav the strength that "...when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck" (v. 40).

VII. EPHRAIM AND MENASHEH (REDUX)

We can now go back to our Parashah and understand it in a new light:

"They are the sons God has given me here," Yoseph said to his father. Then Yisra'el said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." (48:9)

Ya'akov wanted to confer the strength of leadership on Yoseph's family.

Now Yisra'el's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Yoseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.(v. 10)

In order confer this strength, he had to first connect with these two sons of Yoseph - which he did by embracing them.

Yisra'el said to Yoseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." Then Yoseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. (vv. 11-12)
Here we see that the original embrace (v. 10) was merely a preparation for the b'rakhah, not the b'rakhah itself.

And Yoseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Yisra'el's left hand and Menasheh on his left toward Yisra'el's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Yisra'el reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Menasheh's head, since Menasheh was the firstborn. (vv. 13-14)
Since Menasheh was the b'khor, he would always maintain that status and would be the spiritual leader of that family. Menasheh's position in the family necessitated that he not be switched to the left side - so, in order for Ya'akov to give Ephraim the "stronger" b'rakhah, he had to cross his arms.

Then he blessed Yoseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm may he bless these boys. May

they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." (vv. 15-16)
Note that here he is blessing Yoseph, not Yoseph's sons; this is a well-wishing-b'rakhah, not the gist of the conferral-b'rakhah given to Ephraim and Menasheh.

When Yoseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Menasheh's head. Yoseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." (vv. 17-19)
This (previously) enigmatic response is now clear:

Ya'akov is not "favoring the winner"; he is giving the greatest strength (his right hand, following S'forno's explanation) to the son who will need it most - whose progeny will be more numerous and widespread.

So he blessed them that day, saying, By you Yisra'el will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Menasheh.' " So he put Ephraim ahead of Menasheh. (v. 20)
Again, as in the Yitzchak-Ya'akov story, a second embrace leads to a second conferral-b'rakhah. Ya'akov then verbalizes a consequence of the b'rakhah - that these two boys will be the model of all blessings. This is, however, not the essence of the b'rakhah, which is the conferral of power.

VIII. POSTSCRIPT

The Midrash Tanhuma indicates that his younger brother will be greater than he refers to Yehoshua', who will come from the tribe of Ephraim and will conquer the Land. Interesting, is it not, that this s'mikhah was a forerunner to the first "official" s'mikhah given - as Mosheh lay his hands on the head of Yehoshua' and conferred upon him the mantle of leadership.

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Scrapbook of Eternity

Leafing through an ancient family album, I came across some photos I had completely forgotten about. Moments long-presumed lost smiled up at me from the yellowing pages. Others had not fared so well; abducted from their rightful place in history their memory was preserved by a faded oblong and four browning "photo corners."

History is so selective. This moment survived; this one didn't.

How many photographs do I possess of my parents as young children? Very few. And even fewer of their parents and siblings. A few smiling faces have survived, and so many other smiles captured for eternity will smile no more. And how many of the myriad dedicated pixels of our own life will endure the ruthless editing of time?

And more: when I look back at the photographs of my youth, of my parents' lives in black and white excursions to the Kursaal in Westcliff or Canvey Island, I think the same. How many moments there are that I never saw, of which I will never know, that have vanished!

There are two worlds. The world in which we live each and every moment of our daily lives — and then there are those few moments which will be eternalized as scrapbook memories.

The name of this week's Torah portion is "Vayechi" which means, "And Yaakov lived." You might think the title a bit ironic because it is in this week's portion that Yaakov's dies. In similar fashion, Sarah, the mother of the Jewish People, passes from this world in the weekly portion entitled "The Life of Sarah."

If the word for life in Hebrew is a plural noun. it's not by coincidence. There are two lives. The life we live in this world — and the life that we live in the next world.

This world is called in Hebrew *Olam Hazeh*, and the next world is *Olam Habah*. Grammatically, the corollary of *Olam Hazeh* — "This World" — should be *Olam HaHoo* — "That World." Why then is the next world called *Olam Habah*? *Habah* literally means "that comes."

The World-to-Come is just that — a world that comes as a direct result of what we do in this world. Nothing can exist in the World-to-Come that was not done in this world.

This life is like a factory. A factory has no other purpose than to produce. This life has only one purpose: To produce. To produce the next life. The biggest mistake one can make in this life is to mistake the factory for the product.

The fact that the death of Yaakov and Sarah are found in Torah portions whose titles mention life teaches us a lesson. It teaches us that the essential life of a righteous person is not in this world but in the World-to-Come, for the righteous take every moment in this world and paste it into the scrapbook of eternity.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called "chesed shel emet" — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a "fox in his time" (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. "When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat..." Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Ephraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does "Shechem" mean as used in this week's parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called "the Emori"? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a "strong-boned donkey"?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, "They embittered him..." Who are "they"?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin "will divide the spoils in the evening"?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

Answers

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the Ma'arat HaMachpela.
5. 48:8 - The Shechina departed from him.
6. 48:11 - "I thought."
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When Mashiach will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the aron (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Through the Grapevine

On his deathbed, Jacob prophesied of a time when the Land of Judah will produce plentiful wine, as if a spring of wine flows from their territory. He foretold of so much wine being produced that: "He will tie his donkey to the grapevine (*gefen*), and his jennet to the grapevine (*sorekah*)" (Gen. 49:11). While the word *gefen* plainly refers to a grapevine, the meaning of *sorekah/sorek* is somewhat unclear. Another word coupled with *gefen* is *shdeimah*. On Moses' deathbed, the prophet saw the Jews' not-so-pleasant future as idol worshippers who might share a fate similar to the destroyed societies of Sodom and Gomorrah: "For from the grapevine (*gefen*) of Sodom is their grapevine, and from the *shdeimot* of Gomorrah" (Deut. 32:32). Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino, in his lexicon of Hebrew synonyms *Ohel Moed*, claims that the words *gefen*, *sorek*, and *shdeimah* all refer to "grapevines." This essay explores the possibility of this trio of words functioning as synonyms, and also tries to pin down their respective etymologies and exact meanings.

Let's start from the most common of these words and work our way to the most obscure. Cognates of the word *gefen* appear 55 times in the Bible, making it the most common of the three terms in discussion. In contrast, cognates of the word *shdeimah* appear only 6 times in the Bible (Deut. 32:32, Isa. 37:27, 16:8, Hab. 3:17, Jer. 31:39, II Kings 23:4), and *sorek/sorekah* only appears thrice (Gen. 49:11, Isa. 5:2, and Jer. 2:21).

The early grammarians (i.e., Menachem Ibn Saruk, Yonah Ibn Janach, and the Radak) unanimously trace the word *gefen* to the triliteral root GIMMEL-PEH-NUN, defined as a "grapevine." However, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) — the strong proponent of biliteralism that he is — argues that the root of *gefen* can be traced to the biliteral root GIMMEL-PEH, whose core meaning he sees as "outward protrusion/expansion." In that sense, the word *gaf* refers to the "side" of something that protrudes outwards (see Prov. 9:3), as well as to the "wing" of a bird that likewise protrudes outwards. Accordingly, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *gefen* connotes the wing-like shoots and buds that protrude from a grapevine.

Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim sees as derived from the two-letter root GIMMEL-PEH include: *guf* ("body"), which refers to the outward, physical projection of one's person (as opposed to his soul, which is his inner person); *mageifah* ("plague"), which refers to the sort of disease that "spreads out" via person-to-person contact; and *agaf* ("flank"), which refers to a formation of troops who spread out over a specific area (like the outstretched wings of a bird). In Modern Hebrew, *agaf* refers to a specific "department" within the greater structure of an organized body, such as within a government or a corporation.

By implicitly invoking the interchangeability of GIMMEL and KAF, *Shoresh Yesha* relates the root GIMMEL-PEH-NUN to KAF-PEH-NUN, which means "famine." In doing so, he sees this root-word as an allusion to the Talmudic assertion that drinking wine makes a person hungry (see *Pesachim* 107b-108a). In other words, the very word *gefen* connotes this specific property of the grapevine's foremost product.

Interestingly, in Ugaritic/Canaanite mythological texts, the *gefen* is deified and becomes the name of an idolatrous god named Gapnu, who was understood to be a messenger of Baal.

When it comes to the word *shdeimah*, not everybody agrees that this refers to a "grapevine." For example, Rashi (to Deut. 32:32, Isa. 16:8, and Hab. 13:17) consistently explains that *shdeimah* denotes a field in which grains are grown. However, in explaining Deut. 32:32, Rabbeinu Bachaya (1255-1340) writes that the Torah uses a double verbiage to mean the same thing, arguing that *shdeimah* and *gefen* are actual synonyms. Indeed, Ibn Janach (*Sefer HaShorashim*), Ibn Ezra (to Isa. 16:8), and Radak (in *Sefer HaShorashim* and in his comments to Isa. 16:8) all explain *shdeimah* as a synonym for *gefen*.

Rabbi Pappenheim does not define *shdeimah* as specifically referring to a "grapevine," nor does he follow Rashi in explaining this term as "grain-field." Instead, Rabbi Pappenheim simply explains *shdeimah* as referring to any grounds that are especially conducive for nourishing flora. He traces this word to the biliteral root SHIN-DALET, whose core meaning is "abnormality." Derivatives of this core root can be broken up into three groups:

One group of words includes *shoded* ("pirating" or "commandeering"), which involves accruing property in an unusual way or re-appropriating something for a purpose other than its normal, intended use. Another group of words derived from this root include *sheid* ("demon"), which is an evil spirit that is said to disrupt the natural order. Rabbi Pappenheim also includes the terms *shidah* and *shidot* (Ecc. 2:8) in this category, explaining that they refer to women who were "expert dancers," such that they could move as swiftly as *sheidim*. Thirdly, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *shad/shadaim* ("nipples") to this core root, noting the bizarre nature of the mammary glands that secrete nourishing milk as a departure from the normal function of other body parts.

Rabbi Pappenheim identifies three corollaries derived from this last meaning of the SHIN-DALET root: *shod* (Isa. 16:4, 60:16) and *leshad* (Ps. 32:4) refer to the nourishing nature of mother's milk (also borrowed in reference to manna, see Num. 11:8); *eshed* (Num. 21:15) refers to the convergence of rivers in a way that mimics the convergence of the various fluids that make up human milk; and finally, *shdeimah* refers to a juicy "field" that provides the nourishment needed for plant growth.

Ohalei Yehuda and *Shoresh Yesha* argue that *shdeimah* actually refers to a lower-quality field, explaining the word's etymology as a portmanteau of *sadeh* ("field") and *mah* ("what"), and seemingly invoking the interchangeability of the letters SHIN and SIN. They also adduce the negative aspect of *shdeimah* by noting that the letter MEM can be interchanged with a PEH, thus associating the root SHIN-DALET-MEM with SHIN-DALET-PEH ("wind-blasted"). [A similar point is made by Ibn Janach and Radak concerning Isa. 37:27, but not all instances of *shdeimah*).]

Finally, the last word for "grapevine" is *sorek*. Targum Yonatan (to Isa. 5:2 and Jer. 2:21) translates the Hebrew word *sorek* into Aramaic as *gafna/gefen bechira* — "a choicy grapevine." Ibn Janach (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Radak (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*, as well as in his comments to Isa. 5:2, 16:8) write that *sorek* refers to the choicest type of grapevines, with Radak adding in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Ibn Ghiyyat (1030-1089) that this refers to vines that yield grapes that do not have pits.

Rashi offers two more explanations of the word *sorek*, writing that it refers to shoots of a grapevine that are especially good for planting as trunks in their own right (Rashi to Isa. 5:2), and also writing that it refers to a grapevine's especially long tendrils (Rashi to Gen. 49:11). Elsewhere, Rashi (to Jer. 2:21) seems to follow the approach cited earlier by explaining *sorek* as shoots from a "good *gefen*."

An earlier explanation of *sorek* is proposed by Rabbi Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon (998-1034), who wrote in his commentary to Gen. 49:11 that *sorek* refers to the *softest* branches of a vineyard, noting that this is the meaning of the word *al-sarik* in Syrian Arabic (possibly Sirac/Syrac grapes, which are now known as Syrah/Shiraz grapes).

Menachem Ibn Saruk in *Machberet Menachem* defines the word *sorek* as *sarig*, possibly based on the interchangeability of the letters KUF and GIMMEL. The word *sarig* appears but twice in the Pentateuch (Gen. 40:10, 40:12), both when the Pharaoh's disgraced butler dreamt of a grapevine (*gefen*) that had three *sarigim* ("tendrils"). The word is used one more time in the Bible (Yoel 1:7), and seems to be related to the root SIN-REISH-GIMMEL (used in Iyov 40:17 and Lam. 1:14), which means "entangling." Ibn Saruk also defines *shdeimah* as a *sorek*, so go figure. Perhaps all of these different explanations of *sorek* are somehow actually describing the same thing.

A *srak* tree in Mishnaic Hebrew refers to a non-fruit-bearing tree (*Kilayim* 6:3, 6:5, *Sheviit* 1:3, *Sotah* 8:3, *Bava Batra* 2:7, and *Bechorot* 4:8). In describing the future abundance with which the Holy Land will be blessed in Messianic times, the Talmud (*Ketuvot* 111b) expounds the word *sorekah* (spelled with an initial SIN) in Gen. 49:11 as though it were related to *srak* (spelled with an initial SAMECH). A literal reading of the Talmud as it is appeears before us reads that in the future, even non-fruit-bearing trees in the Holy Land will yet bear fruit. But this has seemingly nothing to do with grapevines, so why is this related to the word *sorekah?*

Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), better known as the Maharsha, explains that in this case the rabbis expounded on the word *sorek* as though it were spelled with a SAMECH in an allusion to a *srak* tree, even though he concedes that the simple reading of the verse that the Talmud expounds speaks about grapevines, not other types of trees. Alternatively, Rashi's son-in-law Rivan (there, see also *Shitta Mekubetzet* there in the name of Rashi) explains the Talmud as saying that even grapevines that would otherwise be considered "barren" will still yield a plentitude of grapes.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 12)

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart."
(Helen Keller)

The third blessing continues: "You alone are the Helper of our forefathers, forever; Shield and Savior for their children after them in every generation... Praiseworthy is the person who listens to Your commandments and takes to heart Your teaching and Your word."

Our blessing describes G-d as being the "Helper" of our forefathers. However, G-d is then described as being the "Shield and Savior" for "their children." Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (1783-1841), one of the most prolific Chassidic Rebbis of his generation, more commonly known as the Bnei Yissachar after his most popular work, explains the reason for the different descriptions. He says that our forefathers were completely righteous and pure, and thus G-d helped them even before they prayed to Him. We, however, "their children after them," are not on such a lofty level, and in order to merit Divine intervention we must first call out to Him to beseech Him, and only then will He intercede. This is why G-d is described as being the "Shield and Savior" — His support comes only after we have asked for it.

The Talmud (*Yevamot* 42a) teaches that when the phrase "their children after them" (or similar variations found in other prayers) is mentioned, it refers to children who follow the spiritual lifestyle of their parents. However, the reference is not just for biological children. Rather, all who accept G-d's Majesty upon themselves and live their lives according to the dictates of the Torah are included in the description of being among the children of the forefathers. For this reason the prayer continues with the words, "Praiseworthy is the person who listens to Your commandments."

Fascinatingly, the word used here for "listen" is not in the present tense. Rather, it is "*sheyishma*," which means "will listen" — in the future. According to Rabbi Shimon Schwab, the inference of the word "*sheyishma*" is that it is indicates a person who currently is not living their life according to the Torah but who has made a commitment to do so from now on.

What is the "word" that is mentioned in the blessing? According to Nachmanides (*Vayikra* 10) the term "word" is not limited to be referring to a specific statement that G-d spoke. Rather, it can also mean that G-d communicates with people through the difficulties they undergo in life. Nachmanides is introducing us to an astonishingly liberating thought. It is precisely during those *darker* moments that we experience G-d connecting with us in the most intimate and personal way possible. Praiseworthy is the person who recognizes G-d's "words" at the most difficult of times. Praiseworthy is the person who can identify within their distress the "word" of G-d being transmitted to them. And praiseworthy is the person who feels G-d's loving embrace in their times of suffering.

But there is more. Our blessing is teaching us that regardless of what a person may have done in the past, the ability to atone is always extant. G-d always awaits our repentance. The infamous Elisha

ben Avuyah, who despite being one of the greatest scholars of his generation in an era that included the greatest scholars in the annals of Jewish history, shocked the Jewish nation by turning his back on his heritage and becoming an apostate. His actions were so reprehensible that he is called throughout the Talmud simply *Acher* ("the other one") so as not to afford him any honor by mentioning his real name. The Talmud (*Chagigah* 15a) relates that on one occasion *Acher* heard a *Bat Kol* (a heavenly voice) say, "Return, wayward sons – except for *Acher*." The inference seems to be that G-d will accept the repentance of everyone — with the exception of *Acher*. However, many Torah commentaries do no accept this inderstanding. The Midrash Rabbah (*Devarim* 2:12) categorically states that the Gates of Repentance are always open. It is a definitive and unconditional statement. The Midrash does not say that the Gates of Repentance are open to everyone except for *Acher*. Accordingly, they explain that if a person shows a sincere and heartfelt desire to repent, G-d encourages them and assists them in their pursuit of atonement. Due to *Acher's* towering stature as one of the future spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation before he reneged, the consequences of his apostasy were extraordinarily far-reaching. So much so that G-d declared that even if *Acher* should reach a moment when he was ready to begin the process of repentance for all he had done, G-d would not help him. *Acher* would have to "go it alone."

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE SPRINGS

The springs say: "The singers and the flutists — all of my wellsprings are for You." (*Tehillim 87:7*)

This song depicts the glory of the offerings in the Beit Hamikdash. Then, the Levites would sing to the music of flutes and other instruments. King David declared about this, "All my wellsprings are for You!" These compositions emerged from his heart, which he describes as an unending wellspring of new praises for the Creator.

Spring water flows upwards, out of the ground, contrary to the usual gravitational effect. So too, one's soul yearns for its source, heavenwards. When it sings to Hashem, it connects with Him.

The more a Jew fills himself with holiness, Torah, and knowledge of Hashem, the more his soul wishes to sing. However, in the same way a spring may be blocked by earth, the soul may be blocked with the earthliness of the body, sin, or of Earth itself. The Beit Hamikdash — "the gateway to heaven" — is a holy place where there is no blockage. Moreover, it is there that one can atone for his sins and remove the barrier between himself and Hashem. Hence, it is there that it is possible for the soul to express itself uninhibitedly.

Our *shuls* are miniature *Batei Mikdash*, as they are similarly sanctified and free of earthliness. It is there that our souls find fulfillment, communing with their Maker and overflowing with His praise.

- *Source: Commentary of verse from Radak*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ta'anit 23-29

Vinegar on Fire

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said, "He (Hashem) Who said to oil to kindle will say to vinegar to kindle."

Our *daf* relates a number of stories involving the Tana Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and the miracles that occurred on his behalf. Perhaps the best known is the case where he saw his daughter's sadness just before candle-lighting time on *erev* Shabbat. He asked her why she was sad. "My oil and vinegar bottles were switched and I accidentally filled my Shabbat lamps with vinegar instead of oil and it's time to light!" Her father said, "Why are you worried? He Who said to the oil that it should burn can say to the vinegar that it should burn." A Tana taught the extent of what subsequently transpired: "That lamp burned throughout the entire night and day until they used it for havdalah."

And here is another story along similar lines that is taught on our *daf*. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa had a neighbor who was building a house, but the roof beams were not long enough to reach from one wall to the other. She came to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and said, "I built my house but my roof beams do not reach the walls." He asked, "What is your name?" She replied, "My name is Ikku." He said, "If so (translation of "*ikku*"), may your beams reach your walls." A Tana taught, "The beams became longer so that that they not only reached the walls but even jutted out a cubit beyond the walls."

However, despite these and other amazing events, we seem to be taught in another story on our *daf* that receiving benefit from the result of a miracle is not necessarily desirable. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's wife said to him, "Until when will we continue to suffer this poverty?" He replied, "What can we do?" She said, "Pray for mercy that something will be given to you from Heaven." He prayed for mercy and there appeared one leg of a golden table. That night, his wife saw in a dream that in the World to Come the righteous will eat at a golden table with *three* legs, but she will be eating at a table with only *two* legs. When she told her husband this dream, he asked, "Are you happy that everyone will eat at a complete table and we will eat at a defective one?" She said, "So pray for mercy that the leg of the golden table should be taken from you."

The commentaries explain the concern of receiving benefit from a miracle here to be that the recipient will be rewarded less in the World to Come as the "price" of receiving a miracle-product in the here-and-now.

Rashi writes a commentary on our *daf* that seems to account for this issue of not getting benefit from a miracle derivative. He states that although the lamp stayed lit until havdalah, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa did not use it directly for havdalah. Instead, he lit another lamp from it. In addition, Rabbi Chanina said that Hashem could have the vinegar kindle in the same manner as the oil not for his personal gain but only in order to alleviate his daughter's great distress.

Many other great Torah commentaries address various aspects of these amazing stories of our shared

history, commentaries that illuminate the path of understanding Hashem's ways in a correct light. Of special note, in my opinion, are the commentaries of Rabbi Yaakov Emden (aka *Yaavetz,* 1697-1776), the ancestor of a treasured personal friend and Torah study partner of my youth. I would also add the commentary of the Ben Yehoyada to the recommended reading list for better understanding our *gemara*.

In conclusion, I would like to share the commentary of Rav Tzadok HaKohen, as I understand it. For most people, nature is nature and miracles are not natural — they are supernatural. Righteous souls, however, fail to see the difference, at least for the most part. The Chazon Ish, for example, describes in great detail the miraculous nature of the human body in his renowned work called *Emunah u'Bitachon.* The blessing of *Asher Yatzar,* which is often colorfully posted above sinks outside our restrooms, reminds us to thank Hashem for the most basic bodily functions essential for life. Do we experience continuous miracles or is it all "just nature"?

Although, of course, the world behaves in what is perceived as following laws of nature, the righteous and wise observers of the Torah see the existence of the Living Creator everywhere. Hashem makes everything seem natural, with noted exceptions such as the splitting of the Red Sea and the Revelation at Mount Sinai. A scientist has words to explain the reason why oil burns. And if water would burn, undoubtedly scientists would find a way to proudly explain that phenomenon as well. But it is all so much simpler. In Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa's famous words, "He Who said to oil to burn can say to vinegar to burn." Everything happens because Hashem wills it to be.

- ***Ta'anit 25a***

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka.

Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People.

Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron.

After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Jewish Monarchy

As Yaakov nears his death, he calls his children together to "tell them what will happen to them at the end of days." However, such information is never imparted. Instead, Yaakov blesses each one in accordance with his characteristic diversity. But in the blessing of Yehuda, the tribe from which King David and Mashiach will descend, a vision of the end of days is alluded to.

He ties his foal to the grapevine, his she-donkey's colt to the choice vine-branch. (Bereishet 49:11) Yaakov envisions the redeemer of mankind riding, not on a horse, but on a young donkey. Whereas a horse represents military might, the donkey, the beast of burden, represents peaceful prosperity. The donkey carries man and property calmly and peacefully.

The purpose and pride of a Jewish king is not his military prowess. This is why the Torah forbids him from acquiring too many horses. In fact, the commandment to appoint a king applied only after complete conquest and settlement of the Land, underscoring that his purpose is not primarily military. Thus, the people at the time of Shmuel were faulted for requesting a king to lead them in defense of the country — this, warned Shmuel, is the province of the Almighty King.

What then *is* the purpose of a Jewish king? The Torah instructs us to appoint a king "over us." (Devarim 17:15) But if his role is not military, and the judicial and executive infrastructures already function without a king, what does it mean for a king to be "over" his subjects? Unlike the ruling bodies of other nations, the Jewish crown does not represent the sum total of the national will. Instead, the king is to ensure that the will of the nation bends to the law of Torah. His task is to be a Jew *par excellence*. In this way, he will be "over" the people — by leading the nation to constant awareness of and steadfast commitment to Torah.

An examination of the root letters of the Hebrew word for king — "*melech*" (*mem-lamed-chaf)* — as compared to the Hebrew word for ruler — "*moshel*" (*mem-shin-lamed*) – leads to a fascinating distinction. Many of the Hebrew letters have a clear meaning by themselves. Thus, the letter *mem* means "derived from" — and when it is added to the beginning of a word it means "from ____." The letter *lamed* means "to" and the letter *chaf* denotes "example" or "model." Thus, the Jewish vision of a king is this: everything comes from him; everything reverts to him, and he is an example and ideal for all. By contrast, *moshel* lacks the letter *chaf* – he is not a personal or moral example. If we were to survey the ruling personalities of the past century, would we put a *chaf* in their title? The very word politician has a derogatory connotation and conjures up memories of schemes and corruption.

We find the final earthly king riding on a young donkey. He arrives as the emissary of peace. Where does he tie his young animal? To a vine! That vine must be at least as strong as a tree to bear the weight and sway of a frisky young foal. This sturdy vine is a sign of great prosperity and abundance. The two symbols of the end of days are the donkey — world peace — and the vine — great abundance.

The prophet Zechariah describes Masiach not as a warrior, conqueror or politician. This king is a *tzaddik*, a righteous man, and he is *a poor man riding on a donkey, on a foal of a she-donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)* His is not the gallop of the mighty horse, but the soft steps of the foal, carrying peace and prosperity on the back of his righteousness.

- *Sources: Commentary Bereishet, 49:11; 10:10; Collected Writings IV, pp. 275-77*

INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5782 – The Rarities Continue...

Throughout the past year in Ohrnet Magazine we have detailed many fascinating and unique calendar occurrences that transpired over the previous year of 5781. Although 5782 does not hold a candle to 5781 in terms of remarkable and rare calendar occurrences, it nonetheless does sport a few. And interestingly enough - unbeknownst to many - two occurred in the same 24-hour period: on Shabbos *Mikeitz* and on its Motzei Shabbos.

On a recent Shabbos that was Rosh Chodesh Teves and Chanukah as well, being that 5782 is also a leap year (with two Adars), at *Mussaf* we added the words "*U'lchaparas Pasha*." The rare synchronization of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Chanukah in a leap year occurs just under ten percent of the time, thus making this specific *Tefillas Mussaf* — with the additions of *Attah Yatzarta* with "*U'lchaparas Pasha*," as well as *Al HaNissim* — the *second* rarest *tefilla* recited, and the rarest possible *tefilla* in Eretz Yisrael.

So, what is the rarest?

According to Rabbi Dovid Heber in his recent *sefer* "The Intriguing World of Jewish Time," the rarest *Shemoneh Esrei* is recited when Motzei Shabbos Chanukah is also Rosh Chodesh Teves — and *V'sein Bracha* is still being said (in *Chutz La'aretz*). In this *Shemoneh Esrei* we say *Attah Chonantanu*, *V'sein Bracha*, *Yaaleh V'Yavo*, and *Al Hanissim*. This can only occur with the rare combination of Rosh Chodesh Teves on a Motzei Shabbos in an extremely "early" year.

Rabbi Heber adds that the first time this specific *Shemoneh Esrei* was recited was in 5413/1652! The last two times it was recited were in 5660/1899 and in 5755/1994, and it is next scheduled to be recited in 5850/2089. This means that this specific rare *Shemoneh Esrei* can only be recited once every ninety-five years (!), thus making it the rarest *tefilla* by far.

However, as noted previously, this can only occur in *Chutz La'aretz*, where *V'sein Bracha* switches over to *V'Sein Tal U'Mattar L'Vracha* on December 4th (or 5th when the following February has twenty-nine days). Yet, in *Eretz Yisrael* this switch is always made far earlier, on the 7th of Marcheshvan, thus making this specific *Shemoneh Esrei* an impossibility and leaving the second rarest *Shemoneh Esrei* – the *Mussaf* on Shabbos Chanukah-Rosh Chodesh Teves in a leap year — the rarest Israeli *tefilla* possible.

As for the second rare calendar event, this is referring to the longest "regular" *Shemoneh Esrei*. Quite remarkably, this occurred that very night, on Motzei Shabbos *Mikeitz*. As it was still Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh, this *Shemoneh Esrei* contained the most additions possible, making it the longest stand-alone "regular" *tefilla*. This *tefilla* contained:

- *Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGashem*
- *Attah Chonantanu*
- *V'Sein Tal U'Mattar L'Vracha*
- *Yaaleh V'Yavo*
- *Al Hanissim*
-

What is even more interesting is that since it was also the 4th of December, all of *Chutz La'aretz* switched over to *V'Sein Tal U'Mattar L'Vracha* on that very night, in that specific *Tefilla*, the longest "regular" *Shemoneh Esrei* possible. Simply fascinating!