

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PARSHAS VAYECHI - 5756

(c/o CShulman@paulweiss.com)

From: "ATERES@aol.com"
To: CSHULMAN, "dvar Torah@torah.org"
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Subject: Drasha - Vayechi

DRASHA -- PARSHAS VAYECHI -- MIXED BLESSINGS
1/05/96 by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Volume 2 Issue 12

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

B'S'D' 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 have 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. Good Shabbos

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Yeshiva of South Shore 516-328-2490 Fax 516-328-2553

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Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network learn@torah.org

P.O. Box 1230
Spring Valley, NY 10977

<http://www.torah.org/>
(914) 356-3040

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From: "Dovid Hoffman <dhoffman@clark.net>"
To: CSHULMAN, "ravfrand@torah.org"
Date: 1/2/96 10:46am
Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayechi

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayechi -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 37, Establishing Time of Death Good Shabbos!

Parshas Vayechi:

Yaakov Holds "Private" Conferences With Sons In "Public"

In this weeks Parsha, Yaakov Avinu gives brochos to his children before his death. With the exception of Shimeon and Levi whom he lumped together, Yaakov gives each of his children an individual brocha.

It seems strange, therefore, that Yaakov went out of his way to call in all the children together (Bereshis 49:1-2). The Torah mentions twice that he gathered his children together before giving them their individual brochos. What is the significance of this?

It would seem logical that a person on his death bed who wanted to give his children a final message, would call them in privately and speak to them individually.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, zt"l says an interesting thought in his sefer on Chumash: It is true that Yaakov gave the sons individualized brochos and it is true that he explained to each son his own individual strength and weakness. However, while it was important for them to realize that they were blessed with individual strengths, they all had to function as a unit -- as one group.

Even though each had his own destiny in life and each had his own purpose, they had to realize that they were a part of a larger Jewish nation. The only way they could function is by realizing that Yehudah's task is Kingship, and Levi's task is Priesthood, and Zevulun's job is trading, etc., etc. Only then, when they recognized that they were more than just individuals but part of the larger unit called Klal Yisroel,

could they reach their full joint potential.

This is what Yaakov Avinu is telling his children. "Each of you has great strengths and talents, but you must realize that Yehudah is the King. If you perhaps want to be the King, know that that is not your job." Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky points out, that this was the eventual downfall of the Chashmoneans who usurped the job of Yehuda and took over the Monarchy.

They were punished for this, as the Ramba"n explains.

A Klal can only work when everyone pulls his own weight and realizes his personal tachlis, and does not covet or usurp the tachlis of someone else.

Some people would like to be Kohanim. There are perhaps women who envy the role of men. But we all must realize that every person in Klal Yisroel has his own purpose and role. The nation can only function as a unit when everyone realizes his or her own strength and role and the strengths and roles of everyone else.

Shimeon and Levi: "Blessing" or "Curse"

In general, Yaakov Avinu gave all his children blessings. For some, if he didn't give them "brochos," at least he told them what their strengths and weaknesses were. The exception to this was Shimeon and Levi. To Shimeon and Levi Yaakov gives rebuke (mussar) for the incident in Shechem (where they wiped out the entire city in retribution for the violation of their sister, Dina).

At the time of the incident, Yaakov did not directly tell them what his feelings were. Here, however, he tells them that it was improper conduct and was not right. He proceeds and to give them somewhat of a Curse -- "...I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Israel" (Bereshis 49:7) -- their lot and destiny will be that they will be spread out amongst the Jewish people.

Rash"i here cites an interesting interpretation of what this means. He says "There are no poor, and scribes, and teachers of children other than from Shimeon -- in order that they be spread apart -- and Leviim had no property and had to wander from town to town to collect their Terumos and Maasros gifts."

This is amazing! We all know that our future is our children. We all know how much effort we put into our children. But because we don't have the time and/or capabilities, we send them off to Chadorim, Day Schools, and Yeshivas and we give them over to people called "mechanchim" -- they have our most precious commodity.

Who does Yaakov Avinu assign to be these "Melamdei Tinokos"? Shimeon --

the individual that went into Shechem and killed off the people -- the person who society has to be protected from, by making sure that he will always have to wander. What's the best way to ensure that a fellow will have to wander? Let him become a Day School Rebbe! [There is a famous quip -- "Why is it called the Day School Movement? Because no one ever stays in the same town for more than 3 years"].

Where is the logic in taking your "hot-headed son" and cursing him by making him the teacher of school children for future generations?

And what about the other "hot-head", Levi? Put him in the Beis Hamikdash and tell him he has to collect from Terumos & Maasros.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, zt"l, says this Rash"i is teaching us a major point. Rash"i is telling us what it takes to be a Day School Rebbe. Rav Yaakov says in order to be a Day School Rebbe one has to have the Kanaus ('fanaticism') of a Shimeon or of a Levi. Kanaus is not a dirty word. It is the ability to put aside what one wants out of life and to work for a higher ideal. Not everyone is cut out for that. One has to be willing to sacrifice comfort and salary for something grand -- spreading the Word of Hashem, teaching children Torah.

Shimeon and Levi exhibited the attribute of Kanaus. They put themselves at risk and two people took on the entire city of Shechem. Why? Because "such shall not be done" (34:7). It was a Chilul Hashem!

Was that misplaced fanatacism? Yaakov Avinu decided: Yes -- it was misplaced kanaus. It was dangerous and it should not have been done. But Yaakov Avinu did not damn kanaus in general -- only misplaced kanaus.

There is a valid time and place for kanaus.

But when we need a person to teach our children, to take the staff of wandering in his hand and to put up with Boards of Directors that give him trouble, with parents that don't act as they should, and with sometimes chutzpedike kids... then there's only two people that can be called upon. They are Shimeon and Levi, because they have what it takes -- they're kanaim.

And when we need a person to work in the Beis HaMikdash, to give up on his inheritance in Eretz Yisroel, to give up on his land and real estate, who do we call upon? We call upon a Levi, because he has what it takes. He is a kanai. Levi can put aside his benefit, his comfort, his money, his salary, his IRA, his everything...because he's a kanai.

On the contrary, Yaakov did not assign these jobs to Shimeon and Levi because he cursed them. Rather, because he saw in them this great character trait of kanaus -- they were the people who he could trust with the thankless job of being a school teacher because he knew that they will put their job and the Will of G-d above everything else.

Personalities & Sources:

R. Yaakov Kaminetsky -- (1891-1986) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, New York City.

Ramba"n -- R. Moshe Ben Nachman [Nachmanides] (1194-1270); Gerona, Spain; died in Jerusalem. Among other writings and accomplishments wrote one of the classic Chumash commentaries.

Rash"i -- R. Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105); Troyes, Worms, France. "Father of all commentaries" of Torah and Talmud.

Vocabulary:

brocha, (plural) brochos -- Blessings
Klal (Yisroel) -- unit, nation (of Israel)

Kohanim -- Priestly Tribe (descending from Aharon)

Tachlis -- purpose, goal

Terumos & Maasros -- Agricultural gift offerings to Priests and Levites offered from crops grown in Land of Israel.

Chadorim -- plural of Cheder (literally room) -- traditional Jewish school for young children.

mechanchim, melamdei tinokos -- educators, teachers of children

Kanaus -- Religious zealotry or fanatacism

Kanai -- one who embodies kanaus

Chutzpedike -- showing "Chutzpeh", disrespect

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@scn.org

This weeks write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#37).

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From: "Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il>"
To: CSHULMAN, " " Highlights of the Torah weekly port...
Date: 1/2/96 10:50am
Subject: Torah Weekly - Vayechi

* TORAH WEEKLY *

Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshas Vayechi For the week ending 14 Teves 5756
5 & 6 January 1996

Summary

After living 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close, and summons Yosef. He makes Yosef swear to bury him in the cave of Machpela, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov becomes 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 which removes the status of the first-born 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 Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at the age of 147. A tremendous funeral 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 Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones up out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishis, the first of the five Books of the Torah.

Commentaries

WITH OUR EYES OPEN

"And Yaakov lived..." (47:28)

The Parsha of Vayechi is unique in the whole Torah in that it is 'closed' - there is no extra space between the final word of last week's Parsha and the beginning of this week's Parsha. Similarly, the eyes of the children of Yisrael were 'closed' to the spiritual enslavement by the Egyptians, which started imperceptibly with Yaakov's death. Another reason that the Parsha is 'closed' is that Yaakov wanted to reveal to his children the end of the final exile of the Jewish People and the coming of the Mashiach, but his prophetic vision was closed, and he was not able to reveal it. We are living now in the time of "footsteps of the Mashiach." Our Sages teach us that this will be a time of immense confusion, when it will appear that events have gone haywire, and it will seem that Hashem does not, or cannot, run the world. The entire reason for this total hiding of Providential guidance is to test our faithfulness to Hashem; that even when tragic events do occur, we do not, even for a second, question Who is running the world. We live in the final chapter of world history. The gods of materialism and self-centeredness never close their eyes, relentless in their media barrage - Our eyes must never be closed to the vision that every day the Redeemer will come to Zion.

Based on Rashi

WARGAMES

"...with my sword and with my bow." (48:22)

`...with mitzvos and good deeds' (Midrash)

The strategy of a regular war is to attack the enemy first with a long range weapon - like a bow - and if that fails and he gets close to you, to resort to the sword. From the order of the verse - the sword preceding the bow - it is clear that the Torah is not talking about an ordinary enemy, rather a person's life-long enemy - his own yetzer hara (negative drive). The nature of person tends towards self-centeredness. A baby starts life with no other thought than its own gratification and employs all available means to gain its desires. Only after many long years can a person eventually overcome his natural selfishness. In the constant battle with the yetzer hara, one starts off with hand-to-hand combat using the sword at close quarters to oust the natural impulse for selfishness from the heart, but even when the enemy is out of range of the sword, you still need to keep his head down by constantly firing salvos of mitzvos and positive actions from your bow.

(Based on Kehilas Yitzchak in Mayana shel Torah)

BRIDGING THE GAP

"...In you shall all Yisrael bless, saying 'May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe'." (48:20)

The real 'generation gap' is between the spiritual attainments of one generation and its predecessor. From that moment of supreme encounter at Sinai history has marched to lower and lower spiritual depths. On Friday nights throughout the world the first thing a father does on returning from shul is to bless the children with the word of this verse - "May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe." Why of all our towering spiritual giants, are Ephraim and Menashe singled out to be the paradigm of blessing? Why don't we say "May G-d make you like Avraham or Moshe"? The answer is to be

found in what Yaakov says to Yosef - "Ephraim and Menashe will be to me as

Reuven and Shimon." (48:5) Ephraim and Menashe, although Yaakov's grandchildren, had reached the level of the previous generation, the level of their uncles Reuven and Shimon - they had not descended the spiritual ladder. Thus, on Friday nights, a father blesses his children that they should absorb all the spiritual attainments of the preceding generation and escape that downward spiritual spiral - the generation gap.

Adapted from Rabbi Michael Schoen - 'Prisms'

Haftorah: Melachim I, 2

THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

Just as in this week's Parsha the Torah records the death-bed scene of Yaakov Avinu, so too in the Haftorah David Hamelech takes leave of this world. However, the difference is that Yaakov summons all 12 of his sons - for all of them were righteous, whereas David calls for only Shlomo, for he alone was a comfort to him and worthy to inherit the Davidic line.

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Baruch Hashem Yom Yom - "Blessed is Hashem for each day..."

The two great Talmudic sages, Shammai and Hillel, had different approaches to preparing for the Sabbath. If Shammai found an animal fit for a feast he would purchase it for the Sabbath meals. If a more fitting animal appeared in the market he would purchase it for the Sabbath and consume the first one in the weekdays. Thus all of his meals were in honor of the Sabbath.

But Hillel had another approach, one based on a perfect faith that Heaven would provide him with his needs for the Sabbath without the strenuous efforts made by Shammai. His slogan was King David's praise (Tehillim 68:20) "Blessed is Hashem for each day by day," which expresses the need to thank Hashem each day as we enjoy what he has provided us and to trust that he will provide us with our Sabbath needs as well.

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

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From: "Yeshivat Har Etzion <yhe@jer1.co.il>"
To: DHUEBNER, CSHULMAN, " " Chumash shiur focusing o...
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Subject: PARSHAT VAYECHI

PARSHAT HASHAVUA

PARSHAT VAYECHI

by Menachem Leibtag

DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF CHANA SHULAMIT BAT DAVID.
DEDICATED IN HONOR OF ELAN ZIVOTOFISKY ('93) AND
JENNY BRENNER, UPON THEIR MARRIAGE - MAZEL TOV!

"Bchira", "bracha", and "bchora" are the different types of blessings that punctuate Parshat Va'ychi. As we reach the conclusion of Sefer Breishit, we focus this week's shiur on the distinction between these blessings and their purpose.

BACKGROUND / REVIEW

In our shiur on Parshat Toldot, we differentiated between two types of blessings found in Sefer Breishit:

(1) "bchira" and (2) "bracha".

(1) "Bchira" refers to the Divine Promise to Avraham that his "zera" (offspring) would inherit the "eret" (a national homeland). Later, God conferred this blessing on Yitzchak and Yaakov.

(2) "Bracha" refers to a blessing of personal destiny, such as prosperity or power, given by a father to his sons. An example of such a "bracha" is the blessing of prosperity and leadership which Yitzchak originally intended to bestow upon Eisav, but was 'stolen' by Yaakov.

"Bchira", by its very nature, implies the choosing of one son over another. In contrast, "brachot" can be bestowed upon more than one son, all of whom remain part of the chosen family. Therefore, it is only logical that at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit, we find Yaakov, the last of the Avot to receive the blessing of "bchira", bestowing a "bracha" of personal destiny on each of his twelve sons (49:1-28).

YOSEF'S BRACHA - BCHIRA or BCHORA ?

Although the above introduction neatly explains the nature of Yaakov's "brachot" to his twelve sons and their location at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit, it does not explain the nature of Yaakov's earlier blessing to Ephraim and Menashe. Our discussion begins with an examination of the psukim which describe that blessing.

When Yosef brings his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, to visit his father's death bed (48:1-2), Yaakov bestows a special blessing upon them, which surprisingly is quite similar to the blessing of the "bchira":

[Note: The psukim are quoted in 'Hebrew' in order to highlight

their textual parallels to earlier blessings to the Avot.]

[And Yaakov said to Yosef]: "KEL SHADDAI nirah ay'li b'Luz b'eretz Canaan va'yvarech ot: "hi'nni MAFR'CHA v'HIR'BITICHA u'naticha l'khal amim -v'natati et ha'ARETZ ha'zot, l'ZAR'ACHA acharecha achuzat olam" (48:3-4)

This blessing is almost identical to the blessing of "bchira" which Yitzchak had bestowed on Yaakov prior to his departure from Eretz Canaan (when running away from Eisav):
[And Yitzchak said to Yaakov]: "v'KEL SHADDAI y'varech otcha v'YIF'RCHA v'HIR'BECHA v'hayitah l'khal amim - v'yiteyn lcha et birkat Avraham lcha u'l'ZAR'ACHA itach, l'rishtcha et ERETZ mgurecha... " (28:3-4)

Similarly, it is almost identical to God's 'official' "bchira" of Yaakov upon his return to Eretz Canaan (at Bet El):
[And God spoke to Yaakov saying] "ani KEL SHADDAI, PRE u'RVEH, goy u'khal amim y'hiyeh mi'meka... v'et ha'ARETZ asher natati l'Avraham v'Yitzchak et'nena u'l'ZAR'ACHA acharecha eteyn et ha'ARETZ" (35:11-12)

Could it be that Yosef is to receive the blessing of "bchira" to the exclusion of his brothers? Is our original assumption that the "bchira" process concluded with Yaakov incorrect?

The answer is quite simple. In these psukim (48:1-5), Yaakov is not blessing Yosef WITH the "bchira", rather, he is INFORMING Yosef ABOUT the "bchira". This information is vital for Yosef. It provides him with the necessary background to appreciate the blessing which he is about to receive - the blessing of the "BCHORA", i.e. the position of 'first-born' in the collective family (including the children of all four mothers):

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

In other words, even though all the brothers are chosen, Yosef attains a special status: he receives a double portion ("pi-shna'yim") in relation to his brothers, i.e. both Ephraim and Menashe are considered "shvatim" (tribes), no different from Reuven or Shimon.

Therefore, Yaakov first reminds Yosef of the "bchira" process (48:4). Within that framework (i.e. that all of Yaakov's sons are chosen), Yosef is awarded a double portion (48:5-6). Receiving a double portion, according to Sefer Dvarim (21:17), is the "mishpat ha'bchora" (the fixed-status of the first born).

Yaakov is neither choosing nor rejecting any of his children. He is simply awarding Yosef with the "bchora" prior to blessing all of his children, each with his unique "bracha" (based on their character and potential /see 49:1-28).

The pasuk which follows proves our explanation:

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

Thus, should Yosef have any additional children, their portion must be included within the portions of Menashe and Ephraim. As the family "bchor", Yosef's progeny receive a double portion, but no more, regardless as to how many children may

ultimately be born.

Why should Yosef be considered the "bchor"? After all, despite his high position in Egypt, he is not Yaakov's first born son. In fact, Yaakov later refers to Reuven as his "bchor" (49:3)! Was Leah less of a wife to Yaakov than Rachel? Did not Yaakov request that he be buried next to Leah (whose first born son was Reuven) in Ma'arat Ha'Machpela", while Yosef's mother, Rachel, was buried at a road-side burial site?

WHY WAS RACHEL BURIED ON THE ROAD?

Apparently, Yaakov deals with this uncertainty in the pasuk which follows:

"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)

Yaakov explains to Yosef that Rachel's burial on the roadside (and not 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 the nature of her burial, Yaakov still considers Rachel as having been his 'primary' wife. This is echoed in Yaakov's statement of concern about sending Binyamin, quoted by Yehuda in Parshat Vayigash:

"And your servant, my father, said to us: As you know, MY WIFE bore me two sons, but one is gone... (44:27)

Therefore, even though Reuven is the first born of Leah, Yosef is awarded the FAMILY "bchora", for he is the first born to Yaakov's primary wife, the "ishah" whom he had originally intended to marry.

"HA'MALACH HA'GOEL"

After awarding Yosef with the "bchora", Yaakov blesses Ephraim and Menashe. Considering their new status as bona fide "shvatim" and the fact that they had grown up in an environment cut off from their uncles and cousins, they require a special blessing (48:8-20) which will aid their incorporation into the 'chosen family'.

This backdrop helps us understand the significance of this bracha [which we recite in "kryiat shma al ha'mitah"]:

"ha'malach ha'goel oti" [who saved Yaakov] "m'kol ra'ah" [from all evil], "y'varech et ha'na'rim" [i.e. He should bless these children to help them 'blend in' with the chosen family, in order that:]
"v'yi'karey ba'hem shmi u'bshem avotai Avraham v'Yitzchak..." (48:17)

In other words, in order that Yosef's two sons will become identified with Yaakov's family name - the name of the forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak - Yaakov blesses them with special Divine providence, the same providence which helped Yaakov survive his confrontation with Eisav and Lavan.

A TIME WILL COME...

Yaakov concludes his blessing to Yosef by reminding him that a time will come and the 'chosen family' will return to the Land of their Forefathers:

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

Considering that Yosef has been appointed the family "bchor", 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 pass on this tradition to THEIR children, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared to meet their destiny.

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

And Yosef told his brothers, behold I am about to die, "v'Elokim pakod yifkod etchem" [God will surely remember you] and bring you up 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, see further iyun section!]

As explained in last week's shiur, these psukim help form the link between the themes of Sefer Breishit and Sefer Shmot. Iy'h we will return to them in next week's shiur.

THE BLESSINGS OF PERSONAL DESTINY

Now that the family "bchora" has been awarded to Yosef, Yaakov summons all of his sons together (49:1) in order to give each their personal blessing. Although each son receives what the Torah describes as a "bracha" (see 49:28 / "ish k'birchato bay'rach otam"), not all of these "brachot" appear to be what one would call a 'blessing'.

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 ..." (49:6-7)

On the other hand, Yehuda and Yosef are blessed profusely with both prosperity and leadership. Other brothers receive blessings, a bit less promising than Yosef and Yehuda's, but not as negative as Shimon and Levi's.

What is the meaning of these "brachot"? Do the individual traits of the brothers pre-determine the fate of their offspring? Are we to learn from Yaakov's blessing the principal of determinism and negate the concept of "bchira chofshit" (free will)?

When Yaakov blesses his children, he is acting not only as a prophet, but more so as a father. As a parent and the last forefather of God's special Nation, he must blend the goals of his family destiny with the realities of his life experience. His blessings, therefore, reflect the potential he finds in each of his children.

In order to fulfill a goal, a person must recognize his potential, both the good traits and the bad. Yaakov, recognizing the traits of his children, blesses them according to their capabilities and capacities. This blessing does not necessarily guarantee the final outcome. Rather, it guides the son in the

proper direction.

When Reuven, Shimon and Levi are warned, it is NOT in order that this reprimand come true, it is in order that they recognize their weakness of character and improve it. As in the case of Levi, this rebuke can later turn into a blessing, should that shevet return to the proper path (see Dvarim 33:8-12!).

Similarly, Yehuda and Yosef possess a potential for leadership that should be recognized by their offspring in order that it be exploited properly. However, even the House of David must be constantly cognizant of their deeds, in order that they be worthy of exercising their leadership (see Yirmiyahu 22:1-5!).

[In this manner, one can understand most blessings (even Birkat Kohanim!). A "bracha" comes to remind a person of his potential, in order that it be channelled in the proper direction. One's parent or teacher (or even a neighbor or friend) can recognize this potential (for good or for bad), and 'bless' accordingly.]

Undoubtedly, the "brachot" of Yaakov contain additional prophetic and metaphysical significance, yet, they do not override the basic principal of "bchira chofshit".

UNITY OR HARMONY

Why is it necessary that Am Yisrael consist of twelve distinct "shvatim"? Wouldn't it be better to be one homogenous society? Would this not be a more appropriate framework through which the ONE God is represented? Why must the friction between Yosef and Yehuda continue, as seen throughout Tanach?

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 serve as a catalyst in leading all Seventy Nations towards a theocentric existence. Towards this purpose, Avraham Avinu was chosen and towards this purpose, the existence of "shvatim" becomes crucial. Let's explain:

Man, by his very nature, tends to group into distinct societies, each people with its own 'flag'; its own character, personality, goals and aspirations. These societies eventually evolve into nations which may at times fight over opposing goals, or cooperate for the attainment of common goals.

Through His agent, Am Yisrael, God hopes that all nations, while remaining distinct, will recognize the common purpose for the creation of man, and cooperate for the achievement of that goal.

As we see in Yaakov's "brachot" to his sons, each "shevet" possesses its own special character, whose traits can be harnessed towards a common good. As God's model Nation, the cooperation between the 'Twelve Tribes of Israel' towards the fulfillment of their Divine and national goals can serve as an archetype which the Seventy Nations can follow. Through the harmony of cooperation and the unity of a common goal, the Nation of Avraham becomes a 'blessing' to all nations (see 12:1-3). Mankind realizes its potential, and Am Yisrael fulfills its Divine destiny.

chazak chazak v'nitchazek
shabbat shalom

menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. "PAKOD YIFKOD" AND SEFER SHMOT

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

Nevertheless, it seems as though Bnei Yisrael felt that it was their Divine destiny to stay in Egypt. Most likely, this was because of God's statement 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, together with 48:21 and 50:24, and the psukim of Brit Bein Ha'tarim (15:13-19), to the content of God's revelation to Moshe Rabeinu at the "sneh" in Shmot perek gimmel.

2. Make note of God's Name in the various psukim noted above in Sefer Breishit, 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.?

[That should prepare you for next week's shiur.]

B. In his blessing to Ephraim and Menashe, "ha'malach ha'goel...", Yaakov mentions that there was a "malach Elokim" who consistently saved him from all "ra'ah" (evil).

1. Compare this with 31:7,24,29!, (note the use of the word "ra'ah"), to explain the meaning of Yaakov's statement.

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

C. THE MITZRIM AND ERETZ CANAAN

The story of Yaakov's burial contains two puzzling details: (1) Why is Yosef fearful that Pharaoh may not allow him to bury his father in Eretz Canaan?

(2) Why doesn't the official Egyptian funeral procession and ceremony actually enter Eretz Canaan?

1. Note that "Goren ha'Atad", where the "ayvel" took place, is located on the EASTERN bank of the Jordan River, not in Eretz Canaan (50:10)! Use a map to show that the Mitzrim are intentionally avoiding entering Eretz Canaan (it would have been much shorter to travel directly to Chevron)!

2. Why do only the brothers carry their father to Maarat Ha'Machpala? Why don't the Mitzrim?

3. Read 43:32. Explain why the Mitzrim must eat separately.

How does this help explain the above questions.

4. What appears to be opinion of the Mitzrim regarding the people of Canaan? (relate to Vayikra 18:1-3,& 27!)

D. HA'TACHAT ELOKIM ANOCHI?

I wanted to share with you a nice 'vort' which I heard from Rav Danny Berlin, "ish Karmeit Tzur".

After Yaakov's death, the brothers plead to Yosef that he

forgive them for their sin. Yosef assures them that they need not worry, for he is not God; therefore, it is not his responsibility or right to punish them. [This is the simple and standard explanation]. Yet, if we examine those psukim carefully, there is additional meaning to Yosef's choice of words when he answers - "ha'tachat Elokim anochi?". Let's explain:

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

"Forgive the offense and guilt of your brothers... Please forgive the offense of the SERVANTS OF THE GOD of your father..." (50:17)

Immediately after making this statement, the brothers, in lieu of their punishment, offer themselves as SLAVES to Yosef. Yosef refuses this offer by explaining:

"Do not fear, for am I the SUBSTITUTE OF GOD?"

Yosef's answer responds directly to the brothers' statement. The brothers first call themselves the SERVANTS of GOD, therefore they should be forgiven. Then, they offer themselves as SERVANTS to YOSEF. Yosef answers them accordingly: In their offer to become his servants, they will no longer be servants of God. Therefore, Yosef tells his brothers - "ha'tachat Elokim anochi?" - should he consider himself a replacement or 'substitute' for God. The brothers must remain God's servants, not the servants of Yosef!

From: "Yeshivat Har Etzion <yhe@jer1.co.il>"
To: NDIAMENT, CSHULMAN, " " Sichot of the Roshei Yes...
Date: 1/4/96 8:01am
Subject: SICHOT: PARSHAT VAYECHI

PARASHAT VAYECHI
SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon

Dedicated in honor of elan zivotofsky ('93) and Jenny brenner, upon their marriage - mazel tov!

"All these are the tribes of Israel, twelve of them; ...each according to his blessing he blessed them." (Bereishit 49:28)

Two factors combine to form a person's character. On the one hand, the individual must see himself as part of the community - "All these are the tribes of Israel, twelve of them." On the other hand, each individual has his own destiny, his own personality - "each according to his blessing he blessed them." There is no standard model that applies to everyone.

The Or Ha-chayyim explains that Yaakov blessed his children each according to his innermost spiritual characteristics. Early psychologists and the deterministic psychology that they expounded, following the ideology of the

French Revolution, held that we are all born equal - each like a blank page. Chazal never accepted this theory, and instead believed that each of us has inborn characteristics, and hence a unique destiny. Modern psychology, too - le-havdil - agrees with this assessment.

A person needs to recognize what is special about himself and to develop himself accordingly. At the same time he needs to remember that he is part of a society, and therefore if he is capable of directing his life towards several different goals, he should choose his direction based on the needs of society.

An orchestra is made up of strings, woodwinds, percussion, and horns. If all the musicians had chosen the same path for themselves and all ended up, for instance, in the strings section, the potential of the orchestra would be greatly diminished.

The same applies to learning. The Jewish world would not have been any richer had the Radak been another Rabbeinu Peretz. The Radak specialized in Tanakh, and his teachings are very valuable to Am Yisrael. It must be remembered, though, that the basis must always be retained - "all these are the tribes of Israel;" in our case - the tradition of Rava and Abbaye. Gedolei Yisrael, whether they specialized in Tanakh, philosophy, etc., were also well-versed in the study of gemara.

It is only once a person has built his foundations that he can branch off onto the route for which he is destined.

(Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Vayechi 5753..)

From: "Mordecai Kornfeld <kornfeld@jer1.co.il>"
To: CSHULMAN, " Torah insight by Mordecai Kornfeld <p...
Date: 1/3/96 4:33pm
Subject: Parashat Vayechi 5756 - "The Aramaic origin of the Kaddish Prayer"

The Weekly Internet
P * A * R * A * S * H * A - P * A * G * E
by Mordecai Kornfeld
kornfeld@jer1.co.il

This week's Parasha-Page has been sponsored by a reader anonymously, to the merit of his wife, Miriam bas Sarah -- may she give birth B'sha'ah Tova U'mutzlachat!

Would you like to dedicate a future issue of Parasha-Page and help support its global (literally!) dissemination of Torah? If so, please send me an email note.

Parashat Vayechi 5756

THE ARAMAIC ORIGIN OF THE KADDISH PRAYER

The Kaddish prayer ("Yitgadal V'Yitkadash Shemei Rabbah..."), unlike most of our other prayers, is not written in Hebrew. It is written in Aramaic, the popular Hebraic dialect that was spoken by the Jews of the Roman and Babylonian Empires during the Talmudic era (~200-900 C.E.).

Why the unusual choice of language for this prayer? Why didn't our Sages compose the Kaddish in Hebrew, as they did for the rest of the liturgy? Tosafot (Berachot 3a) addresses this question.

1. The first explanation that Tosafot brings is what he refers to as the "common explanation" for this variation in the liturgy. It is claimed, says Tosafot, that the Kaddish prayer was written in Aramaic due to its unusual holiness. The Kaddish is such an eloquent testimony to Hashem's divine glory, that were we to recite it in Hebrew, it might arouse the jealousy of the angels in heaven! We therefore say this praise in Aramaic, a language that, according to the Talmud (Shabbat 12b), the heavenly hosts do not "recognize." (The angels do not heed what is said in Aramaic, since Aramaic was not usually reserved for prayer but for mundane, everyday conversation -- see Tosafot Shantz to Sota 33a; T'mim De'im #184 in the name of Rav Yehudah bar Yakar.)

Tosefot, however, does not accept this explanation. We have plenty of beautiful prayers, and they all are in Hebrew! Why should this prayer arouse the jealousy of the angels more than any other?

2. Tosafot therefore suggests an alternate solution for the Kaddish mystery. Kaddish was recited not only during the daily prayers, but also at the conclusion of the public sermons that were normally delivered on Shabbat. The broad audience that attended these sermons included many unlearned folk who were not accustomed to the Hebrew language (i.e. they didn't even pray regularly. It is interesting to note that until today, people who do not pray regularly still come to the synagogue to recite the Kaddish prayer). It was for the benefit of these people that Kaddish was composed in the vernacular, rather than in the Holy Language that was usually reserved for such matters.

3. T'mim De'im (ibid.) offers another suggestion. The Gemara (Shabbat 12b) tells us that we should only pray in Hebrew (as opposed to Aramaic, or the vernacular) in order that the angels of heaven, who don't recognize Aramaic, should be able to bring our prayers before the Almighty. Without their help, it is apparently much harder for our prayers to accomplish their goals. (A more in depth discussion of this point will have to wait for another occasion.) The Gemara (Sota 33a), however, presents an exception to this rule. Prayers offered by a group (of ten or more Jewish men) are immediately accepted even without the intervention of the heavenly hosts.

This, suggests the T'mim De'im, is why the Kaddish was written in Aramaic. All prayers that are sometimes prayed alone, were instituted in Hebrew, the language that the angels recognize, so that the angels can be involved. Prayers that are always prayed in groups, and are not appropriate for the individual for one reason or another, were composed in Aramaic as well. The Kaddish prayer, although recited by an individual, is always said in the presence of a group. Therefore, it is considered to be a "group prayer," and may be recited in Aramaic.

Is there any way to defend the "common explanation" (1) that Tosafot quotes? Why should the angels get more upset over Kaddish than over other

beautiful prayers? A beautiful answer to this question is presented by the book "Ve'Imru Amen" (Rav Yehoshua Alter Wildman, Jerusalem 1929, vol.

II

#59 -- pp.90-91), in the name of Rav Menachem Mordechai Frenkel of Jerusalem.

II

The keystone of the Kaddish prayer is the chorus that the entire congregation answers in unison, "Yehe Shemei Rabbah Mevorach L'Olam U'Olmay Olmaya" -- "May His great Name be blessed, now and for all eternity!" Let us take a look at the background of this prayer.

Yakov called his children and said, "Gather around, I wish to tell you what will befall you in the end of days!"

(Bereishit 49:1)

Yakov was about to reveal to his children the time when Hashem would redeem their descendants from exile [with the coming of the Moshiach], when the Divine Presence suddenly withdrew from him. "Perhaps one of my children isn't worthy?" wondered Yakov. His children answered him, "Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" -- "Hear, our father Yisrael, the Lord is our G-d; the Lord is one!" Our hearts are united in the service of Hashem. At that point, Yakov exclaimed, "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto Le'olam Va'ed"

-- "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity!"

(Gemara Pesachim 56a)

The first people to announce their faith with the phrase "Shema Yisrael..." and Baruch Shem... -- phrases that we all repeat morning and evening in the daily prayers -- were Yakov and his sons.

The Targum Yerushalmi (a verse by verse Aramaic translation and Midrashic commentary on the Torah) to Bereishit 49:1, brings a slightly different version of the Aggadah that we quoted above from Pesachim. According to the Targum, instead of proclaiming "Baruch Shem...", Yakov declared "Yehe Shemei Rabbah..." -- the phrase from the Kaddish prayer!

This discrepancy, however, can be easily explained. The Gemara in Pesachim (which tells the story in Hebrew) quotes the Hebrew version of Yakov's reply. This is "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto Le'olam Va'ed." The Targum, though, tells the story in Aramaic. Perhaps "Yehe Shemei Rabbah ..." (May His great Name be blessed, now and for all eternity!) is simply an Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew "Baruch Shem..." (Blessed be the Name of

His glorious kingdom for all eternity!). The slight difference between the two is acceptable. Targum [= an Aramaic rendering] is not meant to be a *literal* translation, but rather it is meant to convey the idea contained in the Hebrew phrase (Gemara Kiddushin 49a -- see Tosefot ad loc.).

III

With this in mind, we may return to our original question. The phrase "Baruch Shem..." that we recite twice daily, is always whispered. It is not uttered audibly, as the rest of our prayers. The background of this custom is discussed in the Midrash:

When Moshe was in heaven (to receive the Torah), he heard the angels praising Hashem, "Baruch Shem..." . When he returned, he taught this praise to the Bnai Yisroel.

Why don't we say this praise out loud? Rav Assi said, "It can be

compared to a man who stole jewelry from the king's palace. He gave it to his wife and told her, "Don't wear this in public, so that the king should not find out that you have it. Wear it only in the house!"

(Devarim Rabba 2:25, quoted by Tur Orach Chaim #619)

Perhaps this, then, is why we want to "hide" the Kaddish prayer from the angels' ears. As we noted, the seminal point of the Kaddish prayer is the chorus "Yehe Shemei...". This phrase is an Aramaic rendering of "Baruch Shem..." -- the praise that Moshe "stole" from the angels, and that we utter inaudibly in order that the angels shouldn't catch us with "stolen goods." (Further discussion of this "theft" and what Chazal are alluding to by the Moshe and the Yakov stories, will have to be left for another occasion.) Perhaps it is for this reason that the Kaddish praise too must be recited in Aramaic -- the language that the angels do not recognize!

IV

Perhaps this is why our Sages stress that "Yehe Shemei..." should be answered more loudly than the rest of our prayers (Tosafot Shabbat 119b, from the Pesikta Midrash). Normally we must say "Baruch Shem..." quietly. Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity! When we have the opportunity to say it out loud without arousing the wrath of the angels, we ought to take advantage. We make up for all the times that the praise is whispered in Hebrew, by announcing it in Aramaic loudly and clearly!

From: "Rafael Salasnik <rafi@brijnet.org>"
To: CSHULMAN, " daf-hashavua@shamash.nysernet.org"
Date: 1/3/96 11:26am
Subject: daf-hashavua Vayechi 5756/1995

Vayechi-5756

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This edition is dedicated to the memory of Rev Dr. Barnett Joseph, of Hackney Synagogue

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VAYECHI: Israel - his burial
by Rabbi Sidney Silberg, Hendon Synagogue, London

Seventeen wonderful years had passed since Jacob arrived in Egypt. They were unworried years of comfort, affluence and honour. He lived in Goshen, in close proximity to his beloved Joseph, whose presumed death he had mourned for 22 years. Joseph was not only alive and well, he was the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph was both protector and provider for the whole of Jacob's family. They were the best years of his life.

Suddenly Jacob felt that Vayikrevu yemei Yisrael lamut "The days of Israel were drawing closer to die". The change of name from Jacob to Israel in this context is meaningful. The new found affluence and status of his family - as brothers of the ruler posed a threat of assimilation into Egyptian culture, and Jacob was very much afraid that the name ISRAEL, given to him only after an intensive struggle for his life and beliefs - "You wrestled with G-d and with men and you succeeded" - was under threat. Israel his hard-won name of distinction was in danger of dying midst the luxuries and successes his sons were enjoying in this Egyptian exile. Not only the man Jacob was nearing the end of his life in his 140th year - Israel and the beliefs that name symbolised was also, he thought, threatened with extinction. His grandchildren were already indistinguishable from the Egyptians in garb and language, and no doubt behaviour; we always absorb the culture and lifestyle of our domicile - wherever we are - and the children are the first to succumb.

Jacob's family had adapted comfortably to their new environment - Vayeachazu

Bah - they were firmly entrenched "and they prospered in business and social relations". Jacob felt uncomfortable and worried. That he would die soon was inevitable, but that Israel might die, sent a shiver down his spine.

Jacob begs his son Joseph "Do not bury me in Egypt" al na tikbereini bemitzraim "Do not let the name Israel sink without trace here in Egypt....because I can see it happening." He decides to make the whole family sit up and think how far down this path will they travel, he wants to remind them who they are and where they come from, and they must never forget it. His dying wish and command to Joseph, to be obeyed at all costs, is that on his death, his body shall be taken back to Canaan and buried in the Cave of Machpelah, the family tomb in Hebron. Rashi suggests that he did

not want to be buried in Egypt lest the Egyptians turn him into an object of worship, into a deity. They believed he had divine powers, because on his arrival in Egypt the threatened years of famine stopped immediately after two years, and he knew it with prophetic insight that the latter five years of famine would start again, as soon as he died and be completed. But more important to him was the lasting impression his funeral at the cave of Machpelah would leave on his sons and grandchildren. If Jacob could not find his resting place in Egypt, they did not belong in Egypt either. If only the earth of Canaan could receive him, then that is where they also belonged. He prayed that this would be their conclusion.

Jacob knew that his dying wish would not be easy to fulfil, that the Egyptians would place obstacles in the way. He realised that he was venerated by the Egyptians and that they would want his remains to stay in Egypt. It might also appear very strange to them that he should forgo an honoured and distinguished burial place in Egypt for a simple cave burial in

uncivilised Canaan.

But that was exactly his aim...that not only his family but the Egyptians also should accept that the Israelites' stay in Egypt was of a temporary nature and would let them go home. He wanted to leave the impression that they did not want to become more attached to the country by the burial of the Patriarch. The Jewish cemetery throughout the millennia of the dispersion has always meant the permanence of the Jewish community. Jacob was desperately trying to avoid this. His message, though not spoken, was clear. No matter how successful their life in Egypt, they had no inheritance here. Canaan was their real home.

And why did he command Joseph rather than Reuben, his firstborn, or Judah, the potential tribe of the monarchy? The Midrash answers simply because Joseph was the only one with the power and authority to cut through the bureaucracy of regulations, which already restricted the movement of people in and out of the country. Another Midrash has a more poignant explanation, "It was for you Joseph that I came down to Egypt and left Canaan" said Jacob "It is therefore your responsibility and duty to see to it that I return to the land of my fathers when I die."

Hai Gaon by Rabbi S. Coten, Kingston & Surbiton Synagogue

The last major head of the Babylonian Jewish academy, Hai Gaon (head of the Talmudic academy of Pumbedita) was born in 939 and died in 1038. His extraordinary father, Sherira, trained him for a position of leadership. When he was 44 he became joint 'Av Beit Din' with him. He was then the most important personality in the Jewish world. Despite Babylonian Jewry's decline he maintained its position as a centre of learning and authoritative halachic rulings.

He was put into prison, for a short time, on a false charge by his enemies. However, he was appointed Gaon in 998, a position he held for 40 years. He was a popular choice and the poets Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel HaNagid both wrote poems in praise of him. Students flocked to his Yeshivah from many foreign countries.

He is chiefly remembered for his Teshuvot (Responsa) and he gave many decisions regarding all aspects of life in the Diaspora. He answered questions from Germany, France, Spain, North Africa, India and Ethiopia. He had questions from a large number of great Jewish leaders. Many of his Teshuvot are in Arabic since he answered questions in the language in which the question was asked. About a third of all geonic Responsa are his. However, only a few of his 800 Responsa are preserved. He based his decisions on the views of the Talmud, the opinions of his predecessors and contemporary customs. He occupies a major link in the history of halachah. Later generations regarded him as the supreme authority and they stated that "he, more than all the goenim propagated the Torah in Israel" (Abraham Ibn Daud).

In addition to Responsa which he answered, he wrote on civil and religious matters where he organised the dispersed Talmudic material into topical sections. These were written in Arabic and subsequently translated into Hebrew. Only fragments of his Talmudic commentary have survived. He also wrote a work on the messianic period as well as many liturgical poems.

As well as Rabbinical wisdom, he knew Persian and Arabic, but was very much opposed to the study of philosophy, criticising his scholarly father-in-law, Samuel ben Hophni, "and others like him who frequently read the works of non-Jews". Hai Gaon continued to teach into his hundredth year giving answers to questions which were submitted to him.

He was eulogised by Samuel HaNagid, "During his lifetime he acquired all the choicest wisdom, though he left no child, he has in every land, both in east and west, children whom he reared in the Torah".

From: "listserv@lubavitch.chabad.org (W-2 LIST Chabad-Lubavitch)"
To: CSHULMAN
Date: 1/2/96 10:46am
Subject: Torah Studies - Vayechi

B"H
Torah Studies
Adaptation of Likutei Sichos
by
Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

VAYECHI

We read in our Sidra that Jacob twice called his sons to gather round him and listen to his blessings and prophecies. The Rabbis infer that these were two separate events, though they followed each other closely in time.

What he said on the second occasion is narrated in the subsequent verses. But as to what happened on the first, the Torah is silent.

The Rebbe discusses the Rabbinic explanation of this event, in which Jacob tried to reveal to his sons "the end of days," and concludes with a searching investigation into the meaning of "the end of days" for our own time.

WHAT JACOB DID NOT SAY

"And Jacob called to his sons and said: Gather yourselves together and I will relate to you what will happen to you in later days."

The Rabbis comment on this verse, that "Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the end of days, but the Divine Presence (the Shechinah - which gave him his power of prophecy - departed from him."

But what forces the Rabbis to make this interpretation?

The literal reading of the verse on the face of it would be to understand Jacob as referring to the blessings which he was to give his sons, and which are mentioned later in the chapter.

Some commentators explain the Rabbis to be concerned with the phrase, "in later days," which elsewhere in the Torah has the meaning of "at the end of days." But this is difficult to accept.

Firstly, because "in later days," does not always have this meaning.

For example, when Balaam says to Balak, "I will announce to you what this people will do to your people in later days," Rashi takes this as a reference to the time of King David.

Secondly, even if we accept that Jacob wished to speak about the end of days, why should we say that he wished to "reveal" to his sons when this would be? It seems closer to the literal sense of the verse to say he merely wanted to tell them what would happen then - as he proceeds to do later in the chapter.

And thirdly, even if we accept the Rabbinic interpretation it surely is not the literal reading of the verse. And yet Rashi himself cites it, and Rashi is avowedly concerned only with the literal meaning.

THE TWO MEETINGS

The explanation is that there is an apparent repetition in the text of the Torah.

First, Jacob says "Gather yourselves together, and I will relate to you...." and then he says, "Assemble yourselves and hear."

Since the Torah contains no redundant passages, it follows that there must have been two separate occasions when Jacob brought his sons together.

The second gathering is continued in the chapter. But the first remains a mystery. Why are we not told what Jacob intended to say, and why he did not say it? This is why the Rabbis explain that he "wished to reveal to his sons the end of days" but he could not, because "the Divine Presence was removed from him." And this is why he gathered them a second time, with a word (hikabtzu: "Assemble yourselves") which did not have the implication of preparing to hear words emanating from the Divine Presence (as did he-asfu: "Gather yourselves together").

But something is missing from this explanation.

Granted that the text of the Torah forces us to realize that Jacob brought his sons together wishing to tell them something which in fact he failed to do; nonetheless, perhaps this was merely some additional information about what would happen to them in the future - and for some reason he was prevented from doing so. Where is the evidence that

he wished to reveal "the end of days?"

THREE KINDS OF COMMUNICATION

We can go further in our understanding by means of a distinction made in the Zohar between three kinds of speech: "speaking," "saying" and "relating."

"Speaking" is a merely verbal act. "Saying" comes from the heart. But "relating" is the voice of the soul.

A difference between them is this:

Speaking and saying come from the surface, not from the depth of the soul. The mouth can sometimes speak what the heart does not feel. Even what the heart says can be at odds with what the man truly wills in his soul. Sometimes, in his heart, a Jew can desire what the Torah forbids. But in his true inwardness he never seeks to separate himself from G-d's will. The eye sees, the heart desires, but the innermost soul never assents to a sin.

But "relating" comes from the depths of a man's being. Aggadah, the inward part of Torah, means, literally, "relating." And the Rabbis said about Aggadah: "You wish to recognize He who spoke and brought the world into existence? Learn Aggadah, for in it you will find G-d."

In other words, through the part of Torah called "relating" you encounter the inwardness of G-d.

And what Jacob at first wished to do was to "relate" to his sons, to disclose to them the "end of days" when the inwardness of the soul and of G-d would be revealed through the inwardness of Torah.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE DEPARTS

But why were the Rabbis insistent that the Divine Presence (Shechinah) was removed from Jacob as he was about to "relate?" Why not say, more simply, "the end of days was hidden from him?"

In particular, since immediately afterwards, in his blessings to his sons, Jacob makes many prophecies, implying that the Divine Presence was still with him.

The reason is that Jacob wished to reveal the "end of days" to his sons, thinking that after they had "gathered themselves together" (after they had united themselves, in the deepest sense of the word, in preparing to receive this revelation), they would be capable and worthy of such a disclosure.

But they could not receive the Divine Presence: It could not become present in them. And so it departed. Not from Jacob, who could still see "the end of days" and could still prophesy. But from his attempt to "relate" it to his sons.

Despite this, however, the Rabbis still said that the Divine Presence departed from him - from Jacob. Because the fact that his sons could not accommodate the Presence within themselves caused a failing in Jacob himself.

But if so, why did the Presence depart only when Jacob wished to

reveal "the end of days?" His sons were then as they had been. If Jacob was at fault because of his sons, then he was so beforehand.

There was no sudden change, that the Divine Presence should have been within him until now, and just at this moment depart.

The answer is that even though his sons had been beforehand unworthy of the revelation that Jacob intended to relate, so long as he was uninvolved with them and their situation, he was not affected by it.

But when he tried to relate to them, he was affected, and the Presence departed.

Today and the End of Days

The Torah is eternal.

It is addressed to every Jew, and therefore what it relates involves every Jew. And the continuing effect of Jacob's actions is this: In saying, "Gather (unite) yourselves together and I will relate to you" he gave to his children and to their descendants until "the end of days" the power to reach by their service to G-d, a revelation of that end, albeit in a way that they cannot inwardly accommodate in its completeness.

This has an important implication.

Someone reflecting on the state of the world might say: How can this age and this orphaned generation be prepared for a revelation of the future redemption, a revelation for which even generations of great stature were unworthy?

Against this, the Torah teaches that through Jacob's act of seeking to grant this revelation to his sons, every Jew has the power at all times - even when the "Divine Presence departs from him," even when it has concealed itself, as now, in double shrouds of darkness - to reach in a single bound the "revelation of the end," the true, complete redemption.

Indeed, the very fact that we feel that our time is unworthy of redemption is itself proof of Messianic nearness.

For the Rabbis say: "The Messiah will come when he is not expected" (literally: "When the mind is turned elsewhere"). And an age like ours which cannot find a place for the possibility of redemption, is evidence against its own beliefs, and a sign that redemption is imminent.

This does not mean that we are right to despair, so as to ensure that the Messiah is unexpected. On the contrary, it is a principle of Jewish faith that "each day I wait for him to come."

It means rather that, without regard for the fact that our minds cannot envisage it, we have a faith which goes beyond rational expectation. And this faith itself will speedily bring the redemption of "the end of days."

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. X pp. 167-172)

From: "Jeffrey Gross <75310.3454@compuserve.com>"
To: CSHULMAN, " "Halachic Topics Related to the
Weekl...
Date: 1/3/96 6:25am
Subject: Parshas Vayechi

SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS VAYECHI

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

"Jacob...said to Joseph..please do not bury me in Egypt" (47:29).

Burial in Eretz Yisroel

QUESTION: Is it a Mitzvah to be buried in Eretz Yisroel? How much effort and money is proper to expend in order to be buried in Eretz Yisroel?

DISCUSSION: It is commonly accepted that being buried in Eretz Yisroel is a noble aspiration. Both Yaakov Avinu and Yosef Hatzadik, who died outside of Eretz Yisroel, had this concern uppermost in their minds before their deaths. Consequently, many people, following in the footsteps of our forefathers, spend vast sums of money and spare no effort in order to be buried in Eretz Yisroel(1).

Harav Y.E. Henkin(2), however, rules differently. The following is a loose translation of his responsum:

"Concerning sending the Aron [of a the deceased] to Eretz Yisroel, actually it is totally not to my liking, and regarding this it is said in Chovos Halevavos that "a bonus is not given unless the debt is paid." For great Talmidei Chachamim who are world renowned for their meticulous observance of Mitzvos, both the "easy" ones and the "harder" ones, it is fitting and proper to bring them to burial in Eretz Yisroel, as were Yaakov and Yosef... but in this case, I tend to think that it is arrogant (Yuhara). In addition, it is a waste of the money of middle-class widows and orphans, since it entails a tremendous expense, and the widow and orphans are [sometimes] embarrassed to object... I think that [this could be considered] stealing from the widow and the orphans. This [responsum] is for someone who asks advice on this matter. However, if one wants to be buried in Eretz Yisroel, we cannot stop him, because the Poskim seem to allow reinternment to Eretz Yisroel..."

Rav Henkin does not reveal the Halachic reasons behind his ruling. But a careful analysis of the sources reveals that Chazal were not unanimous in their endorsement of transporting bodies to Eretz Yisroel for interment. The Talmud (Kesuvos 111a) quotes Rav Anan as saying that whoever is buried in Eretz Yisroel is considered as if he is buried under the Altar. But the Talmud also quotes the critical view of Rav Elazer, who declares that entering Eretz Yisroel only after death (in order

to be buried there) is not comparable to living and dying there. Indeed the Rambam (Melochim 5-11) includes both of these views in his ruling. He says: "The sages have taught that whoever resides in Eretz Yisroel, his sins will be forgiven... whoever is buried in Eretz Yisroel would be forgiven and it is as if his burial plot is an Altar... But entering Eretz Yisroel after death is not comparable to entering Eretz Yisroel during one's lifetime. Nevertheless, the greatest rabbis had their dead buried there, go and learn from Yaakov Avinu and Yosef Hatzadik". The Rambam, albeit hesitantly, seems to endorse the practice(3).

The Zohar, however, says that those who live outside of Eretz Yisroel, yet have their bodies brought to Eretz Yisroel for burial, are considered to be contaminating Eretz Yisroel. According to the Zohar, then, it would be undesirable to bring a deceased person into Eretz Yisroel. Seemingly, there are various, somewhat conflicting views among Chazal on this subject(4).

According to Rav Henkin's ruling, however, all the diverse views can be resolved. A person of great stature, one who is recognized for his fear of G-d and for his meticulous observance of the Mitzvos, is indeed welcome in Eretz Yisroel even after death. Should he still require a small measure of atonement(5), it will be effected through his burial in the Holy Land. A man of lesser stature, however, who did not spend a lifetime immersed in the study of Torah and Avodas Hashem (the category which includes most people), may not be welcome in Eretz Yisroel after his death. It may be "arrogant" for him to think that he is worthy of such an honor. Those people should rather move to Eretz Yisroel while they are still alive, since one cannot compare the merit of living in Eretz Yisroel to merely being buried there, as the Rambam rules.

Thus, it is presumptuous for the average person to compare himself to Yaakov and Yosef. They, indeed, were unique and unparalleled for their piety and fear of G-d, and clearly deserved to be buried in Eretz Yisroel(6).

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FOOTNOTES:

- 1 See Ramban (Torah Haadam, Kevura) who implies that there is an additional advantage in being buried in Yerushalyim.
- 2 Written responsum published in Am Hatorah Vol. 1. #15.
- 3 The Rambam discusses this issue also in a written responsum, see Shu"t Rambam (Freiman) 372.
- 4 See Shu"t Mahr"i Ben Rav 38, Shu"t Ralbach 63 who understood there to be conflicting opinions on this subject.
- 5 Since, after all, "There is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins" (Koheles 7:20).

6 Indeed, the Rambam explicitly says that only the "greatest rabbis" were buried in Eretz Yisroel, which seems to exclude all others. See also Shu"t Radvaz 2206. For a dissenting opinion on this entire matter, see Tzitz Eliezer 11:75.

From: "Zev Itzkowitz <zev@shamash.org>"
To: CSHULMAN, " A Byte of Torah
<bytetorah@shamash.ny...
Date: 1/3/96 10:49pm
Subject: A Byte Of Torah V,XII Vaychee
---- V A Y C H E E ----
---- Editor : Zev S. Itzkowitz ----

"Naphtali is like a deer sent,

he delivers words of beauty." (Genesis 49:21)

What does Naphtali's blessing foretell? Naphtali's future portion of land included the Ginosor Valley. Just as a deer is swift on its feet, so did the fruit of this valley ripen before all other regions of Israel (Rashi). As a result, not only were they able to honor kings with their fresh ripened fruit (Bereishis Rabbah), but also this produce brought fame to them and their land. People would say with wonder: 'We passed through Naphtali, and unbelievably their fruits and flowers are already ripe, beautiful, and the choicest available' (Bechor Shor).

Another possibility is that Naphtali's blessing refers to his prowess in battle. Naphtali's warriors were light and swift on their feet during combat, like the deer. After the fight, because of their speed, they were the first to return and to deliver the good news that the people of Israel were victorious (Rashbam).

Alternatively, Naphtali's territory was blessed with a special commerce. The kings in the Land of Israel employed swift deer for the speedy communication of good news. These deer were bred and raised in Naphtali's portion. Therefore, when people would see these deer, they would know in advance of receipt of the message, that very good news was being rushed to them (Ramban).

Mussar of the Week

"...from the Hands of the elevating power of Jacob, which from there shepherded the stone of Israel." (Genesis 49:24)

Why does Jacob refer to Hashem as the "Hands of the elevating power of Jacob"? By considering Joseph's and his own life experiences, Jacob recognized just how much Hashem influences our lives so that they go right. Hashem clearly arranged to have both Jacob and Joseph elevated from the level of paupers and slaves to the level of rulers. Jacob now asks of Hashem that not only should Joseph and he be recipients of this divine intervention, but any and all worthwhile people who have been ridiculed and downtrodden unjustly (R. Hirsch).

From: "kollel@mcs.com"
To: CSHULMAN, " haftorah@torah.org"
Date: 1/4/96 7:48pm
Subject: Haftorah - Vayechi

MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH: PARSHAS VAYECHI

Melochim1 2:1
by Rabbi Dovid Siegel, Dean of Kollel Toras Chesed

This week's haftorah records the last moments of Dovid Hamelech's life and the parting charge which he delivered to his son, the newly anointed King Solomon.

Dovid told his son to be strong and in full control of his emotions and to guard all the precepts of the Torah. Dovid assured Shlomo that if he and his successors walked wholeheartedly in the path of Hashem they would be guaranteed the eternal position of royalty amongst the Jewish nation.

Dovid then digressed and reminded Shlomo about two powerful men who could never be forgiven for their unacceptable behavior. Each of them humiliated and disgraced Dovid Hamelech through their public conduct. Shimi Ben Geira cursed the king and hurled stones at him when Dovid fled from his own son Avshalom's conspiracy. Yoav ben Tzruya executed two opposing generals after Dovid Hamelech had warmly accepted their gestures of peace. Dovid, now on his death bed, instructed his son Shlomo to be politically astute and secure the execution of these two powerful leaders. Dovid said, "And do as your wisdom dictates and do not permit him to die an old man." After completing this unpleasant instruction, Dovid passed away with those last words of revenge on his lips.

This final episode of Dovid Hamelech's life is quite puzzling to us. Although we recognize that these powerful individuals deserved their sentence the timing of this instruction remains quite disturbing.

Couldn't the aging Dovid Hamelech choose a more appropriate moment for this discussion? Wasn't a gentle climate in order for Dovid's parting words with his precious son? It almost seems as if Dovid intentionally reserved this instruction to serve as the impressionable image by which to be perpetually remembered in the mind of his son Shlomo!?!)

In search for an understanding we focus on a light request which Dovid Hamelech inserted in the middle of these harsh execution commands. Dovid says,

"And you shall act kindly towards the Barzilai children and they should eat at your table for they were close to me when I fled from your brother Avshalom."

The Barzilai family had been very gracious to Dovid Hamelech when he fled from his son. They provided him food and shelter and deserved to be repaid for their kindness. As long as he lived, Dovid Hamelech maintained the Barzilai family at his table and now it was Shlomo Hamelech's responsibility to perpetuate this kindness. Before parting, Dovid conveyed to Shlomo that his life should serve as an extension of his father's and that any kindness which Dovid began should be continued by his son, Shlomo. It seems that this

kind request was most peculiarly inserted in the midst of the harsh execution commands to place them in a proper perspective.

Apparently, Dovid Hamelech sought to charge his son with the responsibility of perpetuating his name and honor. He sought to instill in Shlomo the sense of perfect continuity, that Shlomo follow closely in the path of his revered father. It is in this spirit that Dovid commanded his son to execute Shimi and Yoav. They had caused Dovid much humiliation and indignation and certainly deserved their execution. However Dovid had not deemed it

appropriate to respond to their actions during his lifetime and left this matter an unfinished affair. Now that Dovid was leaving this world it became Shlomo's responsibility to act on his father's behalf. Dovid saved this difficult command for his parting words to demonstrate to Shlomo his true role

as king. He hoped that Shlomo would fashion his life according to the perfect ways of his father. He therefore chose to part from his son with this perfect image of continuity. His parting message to Shlomo was to perpetuate his father's ways and establish himself as an extended image of his father. Dovid instructed his son to begin his reign by completing what his father couldn't and to continue in this role of perpetuating his father's honor and accomplishments.

Indeed, Shlomo accepted his father's challenge and fulfilled his mother's blessing mentioned earlier that, "My master the king should live forever." (M'lachim 1 1:31) The Malbim (ad loc) explains that this refers to the perpetuation of Dovid's reign through his son Shlomo. This is clearly demonstrated through the concluding words of our haftorah which give an account of the forty year span of Dovid Hamelech's reign. It then closes immediately with the following verse, "And Shlomo sat on the throne of his father Dovid and his kingdom was firmly established." The Ralbag and Malbim see this as a reference to the remarkable phenomena that Shlomo, like his father, ruled for exactly forty years. He followed so closely in his father's footsteps that he actually merited a perfect resemblance to his father with a similar reign of exactly forty years. Dovid's dream was realized and Shlomo did become the extended image of his perfect father.

This lesson runs parallel with the parting blessing which our patriarch Yaakov conveyed upon his son Yosef. Moments before Yaakov Avinu left this world he gathered together his children and blessed them, identifying each one's individual qualities and future role amongst the Jewish people. But he showered all of his blessings on one particular son, Yosef. The extent of these blessings is expressed by the Torah in the following words, "Your father's blessings which superseded all of his ancestors' blessings... shall rest upon Yosef's head, the premier amongst the brothers." (B'reishis 49:26) Rashi (ad loc) develops Yosef's blessing in relation to his indescribable levels of self control and morality. Rashi quotes the Talmud in Mesichta Sota (36b) which reveals the secret source of Yosef's inner strength. Rav Yishmael taught that at the crucial moment of temptation the image of Yaakov Avinu appeared before Yosef and reminded him of his illustrious future. Yosef personified his father Yaakov and always viewed his life as an extension of his father. This perspective served as a constant reminder to Yosef to follow carefully in his father's footsteps.

Following this formula, Yosef, like his father Yaakov reached indescribable levels of sanctity and self control. Rabbeinu Avrohom Ben HaRambam explains that it was this outstanding merit of piety and sanctity which earned Yosef these special blessings from his father. Upon reflection it can be said that

Yosef, the son who viewed his life as a complete extension of his father's, truly deserved all of his father's blessings, unlimited potential for fortune and success forever.

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel, Rosh Kollel (Dean), Kollel Toras Chesed of Skokie, West Dempster, Skokie, IL 60076 (708)674-7959
fax (708) 674-4023 e-mail: kollel@mcs.com
URL:<http://www.mcs.net/~kollel/> Rabbi siegel's lectures are available on tape

through the kollel's Tape of the Month Club

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The author is Rosh Kollel of Kollel Toras Chesed of Skokie
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From: "Project Genesis <genesis@j51.com>"
To: CSHULMAN, " Project Genesis LifeLine
<lifeline@to...
Date: 1/5/96 10:07am
Subject: * PG LifeLine - Vayechi

Project Genesis LifeLine

"It is a tree of life to all who cling to it."

D'var Torah and News from Project Genesis - learn@torah.org
Volume III, Number 14

GENESIS 5000: FROM 50 SUBSCRIBERS TO 5000, CHANUKAH 5754 -
CHANUKAH 5756...

This week's LifeLine is dedicated in memory of Nachman ben Zelig Fishel
a"h,
Norman Fisch of Bradley Beach, NJ, who passed away last week.

In the blessing given to Yehudah, Yaakov says "His eyes will be red from
wine, and his teeth white from milk." [49:12] The direct meaning is, of
course, that Yehudah and his children would be blessed with an abundance of
good things.

Rabbi Yochanon in the Talmud (end of Kesubos, 111b), offers a lesson by
changing one of the vowels in the text. The new reading is, "and to whiten
his teeth, from [meaning: is better than] milk." He says: To whiten one's
teeth to another - meaning to offer a warm smile - is better than giving him
milk.

Too often, we think of charity as something to give to the poor, the sick,
and the miserable - as if they were all the same. Is it necessary to be poor
or sick in order to be miserable?

Certainly not - and our generation may have an abundance of material goods,
but we also have an abundance of therapists. Many people today are lonely,
sad - and in need of a warm smile. Yes, it's possible to give to a less
fortunate person without writing a check! You can give to others every day -
and find that many of them will give to you in return.

CHANGES: Two list changes to report this week. First, "Gossip" has been
renamed "HaLashon." As participants in the class already know, the ethics of
forbidden speech go well beyond a simple prohibition against gossip - though
that's an important part. HaLashon, meaning "the tongue" or language, covers
the full range of ethical teachings concerning talking about others - what
we can say, and what we must not say.

The second new development is the creation of our newest list, "Drasha." For
the last several weeks, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky has been presenting his

weekly thoughts via our DvarTorah list, and we are honored to have him now
directing a Project Genesis class of his own. To subscribe to Drasha, send
mail to majordomo@torah.org with the text "subscribe drasha" .

HAVE WE HELPED? Project Genesis is continuing to show up in Jewish
papers and magazines, and even the larger, secular press. Look for us in
Thursday's Rockland Journal-News or the upcoming Northern California
Jewish Bulletin among others.

For an upcoming article, one reporter has asked to hear from those of you
who have found Project Genesis to be especially helpful. Over the Internet,
we can't "see" the impact we've had unless you tell us! And we haven't asked
this question for over a year - but I remember being pleased and touched by
many of the letters received the last time around.

ALSO, someone asked: "Is there any way to contribute \$ to this torah.org?"

Few have asked this question! Usually, it's the other way around. We DO
need
your support. Your Jewish CyberCenter continues to grow because various
people invest what they can - time, energy, and/or money. At our current
growth rate, we will definitely need our own server, additional paid staff
just to keep up with administrative demands - to say nothing of the new
programs we have in mind. Please keep _us_ in mind for your
(tax-deductible)
contribution! And be in touch with dedications, requests, and any questions
you might have.

Good Shabbos, Rabbi Yaakov Menken

From: "Seth Ness <ness@aecom.yu.edu>"
To: CSHULMAN, " Yeshiva University s weekly devar
Tor...
Date: 1/5/96 10:07am
Subject: enayim l'torah - vayechi

vayechi Enayim LaTorah
Publication of Student Organization of Yeshiva University

Science and Torah by Rabbi Dr. Michael Katz

The Abarbanel remarks that the seven blazing candles of the
menorah symbolize the seven chochmot of the world, and the menorah
itself represents the Torah. This brings to mind the Talmudic passage: If
one will say to you the Torah exists among the nations of the world,
don't believe him. Obviously this raises the question, what is the
difference between chochma and Torah?

Chochma may be defined as the wisdom attributed to
materialistic concepts and values. It examines the profound aspects
experienced by the mind which finds its application in worldly concepts.
On the other hand, Torah emphasizes the spiritual, moral, and ethical
qualities of human existence. Torah is the wisdom of the soul.

Our generation is controlled by science. Many exclaim that
science is everything and man is nothing. Ethics and morality are
expressed in terms of atoms and molecules. Human morality is
challenged by nuclear inventions which threaten to destroy our very
existence. Civilization's greatest fault is that it refuses to recognize the

fact that a world built upon mechanistic theory alone attempts to dethrone the Torah, and thus uproots morality and ethics.

To meet this awesome challenge, the Torah proclaims that man cannot exist on a foundation of madah alone - the wisdom of the world. Man's existence must be based upon a combination of both madah and Torah - the wisdom of the soul, the spirit of the heart.

An incident related in this week's parasha, elucidated by my father Hagaon R. Reuven Katz zt"l, will further clarify the distinct difference between Torah and chochma. Yaakov laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, who represents Torah, symbolizing his superiority over Menasheh, the representative of chochma. Menasheh, as explained by the commentators, served as administrator of Yosef's house. He was the interpreter when Yosef met his brethren; he was fluent in numerous languages and an expert in political and military affairs. In contrast, Ephraim was the student of Torah who studied with his grandfather Yaakov. Therefore, when Yosef presents Yaakov with his sons, Yaakov declares that the birthright must be given to the student of the Torah. He proclaims, "I know how to evaluate the importance of chochma. Menasheh will also become important; but his brother is of primary importance. It is the ben-Torah who will eventually protect and save Judaism."

In order for Judaism to survive, the combination of the wisdom of the heart and mind must be cemented into one unit. After all, the pasuk in BeHa'alotcha says that the seven candles which represent chochma must be directed towards the menorah, which represents Torah. Only by uniting chochma with Torah can we create a Gan Eden in which all humanity can walk in peace and security.

From: "Dovid Green <dmgreen@skynet.net>"
To: CSHULMAN, " Dvar Torah <dvtorah@torah.org>"
Date: 1/4/96 10:32pm
Subject: Vayechi

With Chanukah just behind us, we might endeavor to take at least one lesson of the holiday with us. As we previously mentioned, we can learn from the miracle of the oil that everything that occurs in "nature" is really miraculous. There really is no such thing as "nature". It is a term we use to refer to amazing observable "laws" over which we have little or no control. There is a beautiful Midrash to that effect in Parshas Vayechi.

Many blessings are given in the parsha. Among them are the special blessings Yaakov gave to Efrayim and Menashe. Many of us have heard the words "HaMalaach HaGoail Osi etc." (The angel who redeems me, etc.). However, these words are not the beginning of the blessing. It really begins with the previous passage (Genesis 48:15-16) The G-d...is the G-d who has been my shepherd...until this day. May the angel who delivers me...bless the children etc. The first of these two verses refers to G-d as a shepherd, One Who sees to all of Yaakov's daily needs. The second verse refers to a seemingly higher level of providence, redemption from all evil. However, the Midrash notes the Juxtaposition of these two verses. It states as follows: Just as redemption is miraculous, so too is "parnasa" or livelihood, the fulfillment of our everyday needs.

The meaning of this statement is that just as we see the hand of G-d in occurrences where nature has been defied (the Sea of Reeds splits), His hand is there equally in maintaining the sequence of "natural" events. We expect all things to follow their nature. Nevertheless, this midrash teaches us that the laws of nature are just a series of miraculous occurrences which

happen with predictable regularity.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller points out the miracle, for example, in bread. First of all, the grain must be produced. The seeds must be planted, germinate, grow, be pollinated, and produce grain. Seeds are programmed with millions of commands, and are more complicated than any computer which exists. All generations of a species depend on its internal "software". It must produce grain with exactly the same "programming" to secure its continuity. Rabbi Miller conjectures that if there were only one seed left in the world, people would pay money and stand on long lines to see it! One can see the wisdom that goes into the seed, and how subtly the wisdom was hidden in "nature" to the extent that it can go unnoticed. What a shame it is, though, to have it go unnoticed.

The midrash enlightens us with the knowledge that we live with miracles constantly. To see the miracles one need but focus on the wisdom and design which is observable in the universe. It is both a cause for joy and serious contemplation to come to the realization that G-d does it all for us.

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Shiur HaRav on Parshas Vayechi

"Then Israel said to Joseph 'behold I am about to die and Gd will be with you and he shall return you to the land of your forefathers. And I have given you Shchem, as an additional portion above and beyond your brothers, which I had taken with my sword and my bow'" (Breishis 48:21-22). Targum Unkelos translates "Charbi U'vKashti" as "Tzlusey Uvausey", my prayers and my supplications. The Rav asked: why did Unkelos ascribe an interpretation of prayer to these words instead of the straightforward one of implements of war, the sword and bow?

The Rambam is of the opinion that the original sanctification of Eretz Yisrael that was performed by Joshua and the returnees from the Egyptian exile, was a transient one and was nullified with the destruction of Eretz Yisrael, the first Beis Hamikdash and their associated exiles (Hilchos Bais Habechirah 6:16).

This is based on the midrash (see Yalkut, Parshat Nitzavim 30:3) that ascribes the verse in Devarim 30:3 to the comparison between the Aliyah of Joshua and that of Ezra and the second temple: Joshua and his generation were the conquerors and absolute rulers of the land. Ezra and his followers were subject to Cyrus King of Persia yet they still were able to sanctify the land. The generation of Joshua was not obligated in Trumot and Maasrot until the completion of their conquest of the land and the division among the tribes (14 years), however the generation of

Ezra was obligated immediately in these laws upon their return to the Holy Land.

This midrash can be explained in the following way: the original sanctification of the land by Joshua was based on military conquest. In order for the sanctification to take root, they had to conquer all of the land. It could not be done piecemeal. This sanctification process was fundamentally different from Ezra and his generation. The latter sanctified the land through Chazakah, settling of the land and the assertion of property rights over the land. This sanctification was an incremental one: additional pieces of Eretz Yisrael became sanctified as they were settled by the returnees from the Babylonian exile. This process ascribed perpetual sanctification to Eretz Yisrael (Kidsha L'Shaatah V'kidsha L'Asid Lavo) and was thus superior to the original conquest of Joshua.

The Rambam (Bais Habechirah 6:16) is of the opinion that the sanctity of the temple that was built by King Solomon is eternal (Shechina Aynah B'Tayla), however the original sanctification of Eretz Yisrael as performed by Joshua was nullified by the conquest of the land by the Assyrians and Babylonians. However the second sanctification of the land in the time of Ezra is eternal because it was achieved through "Chazakah". Chazakah is a difficult word to define, however the second sanctification was outstanding in that it was achieved through exceptional sacrifice and perseverance on the individual and communal levels. This overshadowed the original sanctification of Joshua and can never be nullified.

The Rav explained this further based on an interpretation of the Haftorah for Shabbos Channukah (Zechariah 4:1-7) in the name of Reb Chaim ZT'L. Zechariah relates a discussion between the angel and himself, where the angel asks him to describe the vision of a menorah. Zechariah professes to not understand the significance of the menorah and what it represents. There is a give and take between the angel and Zechariah as to whether Zechariah understands the vision or not. What is the significance of this discussion between the angel and Zechariah? The answer is that Zechariah realized that the menorah was symbolic of Ezra and his rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash. However Zechariah lived in a period where the Jewish People suffered from abject poverty. He understood the symbolism of a golden menorah, which represented splendor and wealth, however it in no way matched the existing state of poverty and deprivation among the Jewish People.

They were so poor that the menorah of Ezra was made of lead, they were ruled by foreign powers, the high priesthood was subject to corruption and purchase by the highest bidder. They were so poor that they could not afford wine for Havdallah and had to institute the Takannah of making Havdallah within Tefilat Arvit. Zechariah could not understand how a golden menorah could symbolize the situation that Ezra and the Jews of his time faced in rebuilding the temple.

The angel replied to Zechariah that the vision he sees is not limited to Ezra, but refers to the coming of Moshiach as well, as the sanctification performed by Ezra is eternal. The sanctification of the land by Ezra planted the seeds and began the process that ultimately will culminate with the coming of the Melech Hamoshiach. The angel explained to Zechariah the significance of Ezra. "Not through great armies and not through great strength" the angel told Zechariah. The sanctification of Ezra will be different from the previous one done by Joshua. Joshua's sanctification was done through great armies and a show of strength. The second sanctification will be through the simpler, less obvious ways of Hashem, through Chazakah, through the dedication and self sacrifice of the Jewish People. Yet this sanctification will be greater than the previous one as it will

begin the era of the ultimate redemption and will endure eternally. Zechariah might think that the future looks as bleak as an insurmountable mountain. The angel tells him that through the sanctification of the land by Ezra that mountain will be rendered as flat and unobstructed as the level plains (Mi Ata Har Hagadol Lifnay Zerubavel Lmishor, Zecharia 4:7).

The sanctification of the land by Ezra required a preceding sanctification by Joshua via conquest. That is why Jacob said that he took Shchem through his sword and his bow.

The direct hint is to the conquest of the land by Joshua that would be through physical conquest using the standard tools of battle. Unkelos explains that Jacob also was referring to the second and final sanctification that was achieved in the days of Ezra. This sanctification will come not through the strength of an army but rather through the prayers and supplications of Bnay Yisrael and their willingness to sanctify the land through their self sacrifice and dedication, both physically and spiritually, Tzelusey Uvausey. This Kedusha will last forever and will eventually herald the coming of Moshiach and the third Beis Hamikdash. At that time the golden menorah that Zechariah saw will shine brightly in regal splendor.

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