

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYECHI - 5760

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"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYechi -

Ephraim and Menashe: Role Models For The Jews Of Sioux City
In this week's parsha, Yosef brings his two children to his father Yaakov for a bracha [blessing]. Yaakov gave Yosef's children a tremendous bracha: "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh'" [Bereshis 48:20]. What a bracha! In the future, whenever the Jewish people would bless their sons, they would invoke the prayer that they should be like Yosef's two sons: Ephraim and Menashe.

A very obvious question is asked. Yaakov had twelve illustrious sons. Why didn't Yaakov say, for example, that the perennial Jewish blessing would be "May you be like Yehudah and Yosef" or "like Yissachor and Zevulun"? Why did Yaakov single out these two grandchildren to be the prototypes of blessing?

Several meforshim [commentators] offer the following explanation, which I saw most recently from Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, zt"l. Yaakov saw a special quality in Ephraim and Menashe that he did not have the opportunity to see in his own children. Yaakov's own children were raised in the best of environments. They lived in the Land of Israel, in the house of the patriarch Yaakov, insulated from any bad environment. Granted, it is not trivial to raise good children even in the best of circumstances. However there is nothing novel in the fact that Yaakov's own children turned out well. It is no surprise if a child who is raised in Bnei Brak or Meah Shearim grows up as an observant Jew. However if people raise a child in a city such as Sioux City, Iowa -- where their family is, perhaps, the only observant Jewish family in town -- and the child is subject to foreign influences from all of his surroundings -- and nonetheless, the child turns out a faithful Jew, that is truly a great accomplishment.

The Patriarch Yaakov, perceiving that generations of Jews would spend so much of their time in Exile, formulated the greatest blessing that the Jewish people could give over to their children. "May they be like Ephraim and Menashe". Ephraim and Menashe were raised in the Sioux City, Iowa of their time. They were the only Jews in the entire country! They had to grow up knowing that many things that they saw around them were not right, not the way things should be. Despite this, they turned out just like Yaakov's own children. This is the special blessing that the Jewish people would need -- the ability to be raised in a non-Jewish environment and yet turn out to be good and honest Jews.

Chushim Ben Dan: Seeing An Intolerable Situation For What It Is

The Talmud tells us [Sotah 13a] that when the brothers arrived at the Me'aras HaMachpela [Cave of Machpela] in Chevron to bury Yaakov, Eisav came and protested. There was one remaining plot in the burial cave. The previous burial plots were used for Adam, Chava, Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Rivkah and Leah. Eisav claimed that the remaining plot belonged to him.

The sons of Yaakov responded that Eisav forfeited his right to the plot when he sold the birthright. Eisav counter-claimed, however, that he only sold the "double-portion" to which a first born was entitled. However nowhere in the sale was it implicit that he was selling his own burial plot! The brothers responded that it was included in the sale. Eisav demanded that they produce the document of sale.

B'S'D' The brothers claimed that they did have the document, but that they had left it in Egypt. Eisav insisted on delaying the burial until the brothers produced this deed of sale.

Who were the brothers going to send back to Egypt? This was before the days of Federal Express. They sent Naftali, who was well known as the speediest runner among the brothers.

Chushim ben [the son of] Dan, who was deaf, inquired from someone about the delay and argument in the midst of the burial of his grandfather. Chushim was astounded when he was told what was happening. "Until Naftali returns from Egypt, my grandfather should lie over there in disgrace?" Chushim took a club and hit Eisav over the head and killed him. The Talmud concludes that this was in fulfillment of Rivka's question, "Why should I lose both of you on one day?" [Bereshis 27:45].

This is an amazing passage. Out of Yaakov's twelve fine and upstanding children and out of all the wonderful grandchildren, why was it that only Chushim ben Dan was sensitive to the intolerable nature of the situation? And why did the Talmud emphasize the fact that Chushim was deaf?

The Mir Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, explains that this Gemara teaches us a remarkable fact of life. The difference between Chushim and the other children and grandchildren was that the others, unfortunately, became accustomed to the idea that their father would lie there in disgrace until Naftali returned from Egypt. Why?

The answer is that it started gradually. First there was a claim. Then there was a counter-claim. Next came another counter-argument, etc. Everyone else became accustomed to the idea of the negotiations, without stopping to think that the scene was a world class offense to the honor of Yaakov.

Since they all had time to adjust to this slowly developing situation, they gradually became used to the idea. However, Chushim was deaf and was not involved in the whole dialogue. When Chushim asked what was happening, he had not had the time to adjust. All of a sudden, he was hit by the whole terrible travesty of the situation in a single instant, as if he was hit by a load of bricks. Chushim, thank G-d, did not have time to adjust.

We learn from here a powerful insight into human nature. Human beings can become accustomed to anything. This phenomenon is both a blessing and a curse. People could not live without the ability to adjust. Sometimes we find ourselves in terrible situations and we can not imagine how we will survive. But, thank G-d, people are adaptable and resilient.

However, the terrible downside of this phenomenon is that we can become accustomed to anything -- to murder, to violence, to anything. The first time a soldier kills in war he is terribly distraught. But when one kills for long enough and sees death so often -- even that can be accommodated.

The lesson is that there are times when a person must say, "I'm not supposed to become accustomed to this. I should always react with disgust and revulsion to certain situations."

Many students attend my shiur [class] as their 'last stop' in the Yeshiva. After my shiur, they often go out into the worlds of their professions. I often meet former students, a year or two later, and inquire, "So, how are things going?" They sometimes respond, "Terrible. I can't take the office. I can't take the dirt. I can't take the lewd language. I can't take the innuendoes, I can't take any of it."

I respond to them with a blessing -- "You should always feel like that, because if you become accustomed to it, that is bad." There are some situations in life to which we must always react with disgust. The acceptance of an intolerable situation is itself, the start of the problem.

[Editor's note: Last year, several subscribers asked why Chushim was justified in his act of killing Eisav. No one even criticized Chushim after

he killed Eisav and he did not have to stand trial for murder. Chushim was right, although from a superficial glance we may not understand why. In response to this question, Rabbi Frand offered an explanation of why Chushim was right:

The Ramban on Parshas Vayishlach states that it was permitted for Shimon and Levi to kill the people of Shechem because they certainly were in violation of at least some of the Sheva Mitzvohs Bnei Noach [The seven laws commanded to Noach and his descendants] - Avodah Zarah [Idol Worship], Gezel [Stealing], and perhaps Giluy Arayos. As such, they were all chayav misah [deserving of death].

Perhaps this was the case by Chushim and Eisav. We know from Chazal that Eisav was in violation of several of the Sheva Mitzvohs, including murder. As such, Eisav was chayav misah and could have been convicted by Chushim himself. Also it could be that the very fact that Eisav did not let them bury Yaakov in a plot that he had sold constituted an act of gezel and as such Eisav was chayav for that alone.]

Personalities and Sources Rav Eliyahu Munk (1900-1978) Germany, England. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz (1902-1978); Mir Rosh Yeshiva; Lithuania; Kobe; Jerusalem. Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim dhoffman@torah.org This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway learn@torah.org 17 Warren Road, Suite 2B <http://www.torah.org/> Baltimore, MD 21208 (410) 602-1350 FAX: 602-1351

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BY: YARON LEBOWITZ

After Ya'akov made Yosef swear to bury his father in M'arat Ha'machpelah, Ya'akov bows at the head of the bed. Rashi comments, (47:31) that he did so because his bed (i.e. his children) was complete and it had no evil; although Yosef was king, and had been captured by the nations, he remained a tzadik. At this moment, Ya'akov realized that unlike his forefathers, all of his children would be part of the future nation.

Ya'akov had known Yosef for some time by now; surely he must have observed that Yosef remained faithful to his beliefs. What was so special about this particular incident? R. Shalom Tandler answered this question in the following way: Ya'akov's request of Yosef was actually a major one. Imagine a head of state leaving his country in order to bury his father elsewhere. What an affront to the nation! It is true that Yosef had already demonstrated commitment to his faith. But here, Yosef proved that his commitment was complete, untainted by his being king of this nation, and untarnished by his having been captured. His true loyalty was with K'lal Yisrael and he was not afraid to show it.

There is an interesting difference in one phrase relating to the mourning of Moshe and that of Ya'akov. Referring to Ya'akov, the Torah writes, (Gen 50:4) "And the days of wailing for him passed..." With reference to Moshe, the Torah writes "And the days of wailing of mourning for Moshe came to completion. R. Tandler quoted a commentary (I believe the source was R. Ya'cov Emden) that explained that when Ya'akov's mourning was over, B'nei Yisrael were just passing from one sad event to another. That is, they still had existed and would continue to live in a state of exile. In contrast, Moshe's death marked the end of an era of wandering in the desert; B'nei Yisrael could now look forward to entering the Land of Israel. Thus, the days of mourning came to a complete stop: Vayitmu.

This interpretation can find further support in the text. When referring to Moshe, the verse ends with the above quoted phrase. The next verse begins by describing Yehoshua bin Nun. That is, Moshe's mourning ends definitively; and the new leadership begins. With regard

to Ya'akov, however, the phrase describing the mourning period comes at the beginning of the verse (it does not even end with an etnachta!) . The verse continues with Joseph asking the house of Pharaoh to relate a message to Pharaoh. The Torah tells of the end of Ya'akov's mourning, and immediately reminds us of the status of B'nei Yisrael: Joseph must ask Pharaoh's permission to bury Ya'akov in Canaan. Another parallel runs through these verses. Yosef was the first of his brothers to go into exile; and despite difficult tribulations, he survived. We are reminded over and over again that this survival related to his faith in God. He was blessed in Potiphar's house by God; he refused to submit to Potiphar's wife because it would be a "transgression to God;" he attributes his skill in dream interpretation to God. Yosef serves as the prime role model to B'nei Yisrael of how to live a life in exile. He says to the brothers, "For survival did God send me before you." (Ber. 45,5). God had sent him before them in order to provide survival, not only food, but to mark the way for their future in exile.

It is clear now why Ya'akov was so elated by Yosef's agreement to his request. Yosef demonstrated that despite his close interaction with the outside world, he remained committed to his people and unashamed of that commitment. This proved crucial in his role as exemplar of survival in exile.

Appropriately, Yosef's bones were not moved to Eretz Yisrael immediately upon his death. Instead, he requested that his bones be taken there when God brings B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt. Yosef's message and example remain with B'nei Yisrael throughout their sojourns in exile.

Thus, just as the verse in Devarim leaves Moshe and moves on to Yehoshuah, so too, the verse in Bereishit leaves Ya'akov and immediately discusses Yosef. As Yehoshuah becomes the new leader in Eretz Yisrael, Yosef represents the new leader exile.

From: RABBI DR. ZALMAN KOSSOWSKY (Zurich, Switzerland) rabbi@icz.org

This Shabbat I have a feeling as if I have come to the end of something. Obviously we have come to the end of the book of Bereshit, and with it to the end of the "pre-history" of our People; we are coming up to the end of the civil year and even the millennium, as our neighbours count time. And I am very conscious that in life, all endings are also beginnings.

As such, it is a good time to pause and reflect on the lessons we can draw from recent events. In this context I recall a story about three blind people and a dead elephant. I do not remember exactly where I first heard the story, but the lesson remains with me always. The story tells how one day three blind people stumbled upon a dead elephant lying on the path that they were walking. Each tried to describe the obstacle lying in front of them to the two others. Each one touched a different part of the animal and then described the elephant based on their own particular perceptions. One compared the elephant to a long, powerful tube. A second portrayed the elephant as an enormous barrel. A third, feeling the elephant's ears, depicted it as resembling large curtains.

What this story teaches us a very important truth, namely, that while each person correctly described what they perceived, this was only accurate as a characterization of part of the elephant, but completely misleading as a representation of the entire animal.

Rabotei, this same discrepancy between what each of us individually perceives and objective reality --recurs everyday. All of us view the world through our own eyes, listen to its sounds through our own ears, and analyze what we see and hear through our own blend of personality, culture and training. It is therefore correct to assert that the world we live in, is literally one of our own making. What we consider to be facts are in reality a filtering of external events through subjective perception, including our collective history and culture.

As a result, we often do not recognize the deeper meaning of events. The truth is that we plan our behavior from our own perspective, and we analyze the consequences from our own perspective. The result is that we often fail to perceive the larger picture.

That same inability to see the larger picture is exemplified by the fears of Joseph's brothers that we read about in today's Parsha. We have read in recent weeks how the entire family -- the Patriarch Jacob and the eleven remaining sons had moved to Egypt upon Joseph's recommendation. They settled in Goshen and busied themselves with shepherding sheep. Throughout this time, Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, treated his family with great honour and love.

But with the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers become terrified that there are no longer any restraints on their powerful sibling. Perhaps, they reason, Joseph was kind to us and protected us for our father's sake, out of respect for his feelings. Now that our father no longer lives, our brother will seek revenge on us for all the evil we did to him. From the perspective of the brothers, what they did to Joseph was certainly unforgivable. After all, they discussed killing him, and only later decided to sell him into slavery. All of Joseph's suffering as a slave in Potiphar's house and in the Egyptian prison was the fault of his brothers back in Canaan. From their perspective, and even from his own, Joseph had every right to be furious with them.

But that is not what happened, and here lies the message for us. Here is where Joseph emerges as a role model. Rather than restricting his perspective to his own subjective position, Joseph struggles to understand what happened from God's vantage point. So he says, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result -- the survival of many people. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children."

According to Rashi, what Joseph is saying is that although his father may no longer be living, the God of Israel still lives, and still commands moral behavior. From the human perspective, Joseph's brothers sold their brother into slavery. From the Divine perspective, they initiated a process that would assure the survival of countless human beings many years later.

Rabotei, thus it is also for us. We cannot know the consequences of our deeds. Like Joseph's brothers, we can only be responsible for our own actions from our own perspective. But like Joseph himself, we also need to look to a higher, more encompassing vision of what life can be. Joseph's response is an important reminder that we do not assign ultimate meaning; only God does.

As we end this civil year and even this millennium, may we be blessed that our perspective reflects God's vision of a world that can indeed be redeemed.

Shabbat Shalom.

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PENINIM ON THE TORAH BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?" (48:8)

Rashi explains that when Yaakov Avinu turned to bless Yosef's sons the Shechinah departed from him because Yaakov saw through Ruach Ha'Kodesh, Divine Inspiration, that wicked kings would descend from them: Yoravam and Achav from Ephraim, and Yeihu and his sons from Menashe. This perception shocked Yaakov to the point that he asked Yosef, "Who are these?" He meant: >From where did these sons, who are apparently unworthy for blessing, come? Yosef assured his father that while his sons would have descendants that would be evil, they themselves were virtuous, pure and worthy of his blessing.

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, zl, notes a profound lesson to be derived herein. Yehoshua and Gideon also descended from Yosef's sons.

Both of these men were Torah leaders for whom Hashem had wrought miracles. Yet, Yaakov did not observe these individuals through his prophetic vision. They were obscured by the overwhelming evil of Yoravam and Achav. The forces of evil are so overpowering that they manifest the ability to conceal the positive effects of good. Imagine, Yehoshua was the successor to Moshe Rabbeinu as leader of the Jewish People. He was a man who challenged the meraglim, spies, and exposed their lies about Eretz Yisrael. He was a tzaddik for whom Hashem stopped the sun. Yet, the evil of Yoravam, who also descended from Ephraim, albeit much later, was able to overshadow this image of good. What an incredible lesson for us all! For those of us who have thought the good that we do compensates for the bad, we have just learned otherwise.

But Yisrael extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger and his left hand on Menashe's head...and Yosef said to his father, "Not so, Father, for this is the firstborn...But his father refused, saying, "I know, my son, I know." (48:14, 18, 19)

The last pasuk, "I know, my son; I know," seems to be redundant. Yaakov could just as well have said, "I know." Why does he add "my son" and reiterate "I know"? Horav Yosef Siegel, zl, explains that when Yaakov heard the words, "Not so, Father," emanating from Yosef, he was slightly taken aback. It sounded like Yosef was reproving his father for his error. Halachically, this is wrong. A son may never challenge or correct his father. Even if the father is transgressing the Torah, the son is only supposed to "call attention" to the fact that the father's action is not consistent with the Torah! One is never, however, permitted to critique a parent.

Yaakov sensed this slight infringement upon his kavod, respect due from his son, and responded in turn, "I know, my son; I know," meaning: "I hear from your comment that you, like many of today's youth, think you know more and understand better than your elders. This is not true. You are mistaken. First of all, "I know, my son," - whatever you know, I also know. I am fully aware of who is the firstborn and who is not. Furthermore, "I know" - there are things of which you are not aware of that I have in my mind. Therefore, you have no reason to think that my behavior regarding the blessings is not well thought out."

Yaakov told Yosef two things: First, I know what you know. Second, I know things that even you do not know. Yaakov was aware that although Menashe preceded Ephraim in birth, he would supercede him in spiritual success. Regrettably, the attitude that many of us manifest towards our elders has not changed considerably.

By you shall Yisrael be blessed saying, "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Menashe." (48:20)

We must endeavor to understand the uniqueness of Ephraim and Menashe, which causes them to be considered the paradigm for blessing. While it is true that they remained virtuous and G-d fearing in the land of Egypt, are we to ignore Reuven, Shimon, Levi, etc.? I recently heard the following exposition: Klal Yisrael has been subjected to pain and suffering at the hands of our "host" nations. Indeed, many have said that the only way to avoid affliction is to acculturate, to assimilate our Torah way of life and become like "them." Suppose, one were to react to these people saying, "Repent! Raise your children according to the derech ha'Torah, Torah way of life; let them be like Yaakov's sons, Reuven, Shimon, or Levi. The likely response would be, "How can you expect us to raise such "frum," religious, children in contemporary society? We have to be out in the community. Ghettoization is a thing of the past. If we have to live with the gentiles, we have no recourse but to follow in their ways."

We cannot ignore this rationalization. Yaakov raised his sons in a utopian, spiritual environment. They were never exposed to the harmful effects of the "street." They were never compelled to live among people who were morally degenerate and spiritually deficient. How can we

expect these people to raise a "Reuven" or "Shimon"?

It is specifically for this reason that Yaakov Avinu chose Ephraim and Menashe as his paradigms for blessing. They were two young men, raised in Egyptian society and culture. They probably dressed and spoke in contemporary style. Nevertheless, they were Bnei Torah, virtuous, pious and totally committed to the way of life of their grandfather. They demonstrated that one could be observant even in Egypt! Klal Yisrael can maintain a Torah lifestyle and adhere to mitzvah observance "b'mlo muvan ha'milah," "to the full meaning of the word." We observe this from Yosef's sons who virtually stood on the same spiritual plateau as Yaakov's sons. Ephraim and Menashe have given hope to parents throughout the millennia who have been challenged to raise children in the filth of galus, exile.

How did Yosef do it? How was he able to raise such G-d-fearing sons amidst the moral depravation that permeated Egypt? We suggest there is only one way: Yosef lived in Egypt; Egypt did not live within Yosef! While he was compelled to leave his home to "work" in the halls of Egyptian society, his home was rendered impervious to the street. Yosef's home was replete with the same kedushah and taharah, holiness and purity, that imbued Yaakov's home. The "old world" values and ideals that had been infused in him in his childhood were a critical factor in the manner in which he raised his children. The medium that was the vehicle for carrying Egyptian filth into the homes did not enter his home. Egypt ended at his doorway. We should realize that the blessing of "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe" could only take effect if we raise our children like Yosef did.

Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good: in order to accomplish...that a vast people be kept alive. (50:20)

Yosef attempted to calm his brothers' fears concerning his attitude towards them. We must endeavor to understand why Yosef feels he must allay his brothers' concerns so many times. He had reiterated a number of times in this parsha that he was not angry at them, that it had not really been their own initiative, but rather Hashem's Will, that he come down to Egypt; they were His agents. Why should they think that Yaakov's death might catalyze a resurgence of Yosef's anger? Furthermore, when Yosef spoke of the past to his brothers in an attempt to ease their fears, why did he add, "Although you intended me harm?" Is this statement supposed to produce a calming effect? If anything, Yosef inferred that he knew that they really had wished him harm. He was apparently opening up old wounds. Why?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cites Targum Yonasan who has a completely different approach to understanding Yosef's dialogue with his brothers. In an attempt to assuage his brothers concerns, Yosef asked them, "Why do you think that I harbor enmity towards you? Is it because I am not sitting at the head of the table, eating together with you, as when our father was alive? My brothers, it is not because of you that I have changed my place. I sat there only out of respect for our father. Now that he is gone, I do not feel comfortable sitting "up front." You should know that G-d intended it for good, so that a vast people be kept alive. If I am to help others then I cannot accept kavod, honor, for myself." In order for an individual to serve as a conduit, as a vehicle for transmitting chesed, kindness, to others, he cannot be obsessed with his own personal glory!

Incredible! Yosef told his brothers that he had a goal in life; he had a G-d-given mission: to sustain a world. In order to accomplish this objective, he had to forget about his own glory. Personal kavod and chesed to others do not mix well together. To paraphrase Horav Schwadron: If one wants to help others, he should not seek glory for himself. Leave the mizrach vont, eastern wall (an inference to the place where people of stature usually sit in the synagogue). If you are to help Klal Yisrael, then you must not dwell upon your own glory.

Yosef died at the age of one hundred and ten years. (50:26)

So ends Sefer Bereishis. With the death of Yosef, the book devoted to creation, to the beginning of the world, the Avos, Patriarchs, and the various stages of the early families' development, comes to a close. Interestingly, in the beginning of Sefer Shemos, pasuk 6, the Torah repeats the fact that Yosef died. Why? He died once; why record it twice? Also, when Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov for his blessing, the Torah says, "Va'yevarech es Yosef," "He blessed Yosef." What was Yaakov's blessing to Yosef? The only blessing about which we read is the one Yaakov gave to Yosef's sons. Rabbi Yossi says that the word "es" denotes something extra, indicating that Yosef was also blessed together with his sons. What was this blessing?

Horav Mordechai Miller, Shlita, cites Chazal who say that when Yaakov blessed the shevatim, tribes, he also blessed Yosef. This blessing, however, was different in that Yosef was not included among the shevatim. There were two separate units: the shevatim and Yosef. Sefas Emes explains this in the following manner: When a father blesses his sons with the blessing, "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe," he refers to Yaakov's statement, "Ephraim and Menashe will be like Reuven and Shimon to me." In other words, the father hopes his son will grow up to be like the shevatim. Why, then, does he emphasize Ephraim and Menashe? Why does he not simply say, "May you be like the shevatim"? Sefas Emes explains that Ephraim and Menashe were of a different generation than the shevatim. Yaakov's blessing elevated their status to the "shevet" level. They, too, were now included among Bnei Yaakov, the sons of Yaakov. When a father blesses his son with the hope that he will become like Ephraim and Menashe, he is referring to the unique ability granted to them, the capacity to connect with the previous generation of Yaakov, to become part and parcel with the "Shivtei Koh." This is the hope of all Jewish parents for their sons.

Yosef's sons became shevatim. Hence, Yosef, their father, became an Av, Patriarch. Yosef achieved patriarchal status as a result of his sons' blessing. Thus, the blessing to Ephraim and Menashe also served as a blessing for Yosef - one that elevated him to a greater spiritual plateau. Yosef merited two designations: As Yaakov's son he was one of the "Shivtei Koh;" and as Ephraim and Menashe's father, he achieved the status of an "Av."

We now understand Yosef's blessing and the significance of his sons' blessing. We turn to explore why the Torah records Yosef's passing twice. In his preface to Sefer Shemos, the Ramban distinguishes between Sefer Bereishis, and Sefer Shemos. Sefer Bereishis is the Book of Creation, the book that addresses chidush haolam, the formation of the world and the creation of everything in it, such as the Avos, Patriarchs, founding fathers of our People. Sefer Shemos, on the other hand, addresses the future, the progeny of the Avos, including their trials, challenges and achievements. Sefer Bereishis is the book of the Avos, while Sefer Shemos is the book of the shevatim. Yosef's death is thus mentioned twice, since he functioned in two roles: that of shevet and that of Av. His "av-like" attributes earned him a position in closing Sefer Bereishis. His death is repeated in Sefer Shemos together with the deaths of his brothers. Their deaths marked the commencement of the Egyptian exile.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, addressed the individual persona and achievement of each of the Patriarchs. Avraham Avinu was the first "ger," convert to Judaism. He is, thus, called the "Av hamon goyim," Father of Nations, as he was the one that initiated his own entry into Judaism. Yitzchak Avinu was the first Jew to be born into kedushas, holiness, of Yisrael. He was the first to be circumcised at the age of eight days old. Yaakov Avinu is characterized as "mitaso sheleimim;" his bed was perfect, meaning his children were all devout and committed to their father's religion. How was the first Jew to set the rigid parameters of Judaism? One who is born into the fold can never leave. To paraphrase Horav Hutner: Avraham is "der ershter gevorener," first to become. Yitzchak is "der ershter geboirener," first to be born; Yaakov is "der

ershter farfaliner," first to be compelled with no way out.

Yosef completes the equation. Chazal tell us that Yaakov is compared to a fire and Yosef to a flame. Together, they have the ability to triumph over Eisav. Yosef is viewed as the hashlamah, completion, of Yaakov Avinu. Horav Hutner explains that while Yaakov symbolizes the concept of "once a Jew, always a Jew," the acute danger of extreme assimilation through intermarriage is to be noted. We turn to Yosef to stem the tide of assimilation, to ward off the attack against kedushas Yisrael. The Torah says that when Potifar's wife attempted to seduce Yosef, he ran out of the house. Chazal have thus described Yosef as one who runs away from sin. He imbued Bnei Yisrael with this quality: the ability to resist temptation, to overcome the challenges to our strong morality. As a flame carries the force of the fire beyond, so, too, does Yosef represent the ability to infuse the generations that have descended from Yaakov with the holiness and morality of Yisrael. He spreads the kedushah. He is, therefore, considered Patriarchal in nature and accomplishment.

Klal Yisrael did not assimilate in Egypt. They maintained their morality, language, Jewish names, and distinct manner of dress in accordance with the laws of tznius, modesty. This all stemmed from Yosef, who infused Klal Yisrael with the strength and virtue of morality. Yosef reaches out across the generations, inculcating the patriarchal values and ideals into their descendants. Let us hope that the flame, which represents the morality of our People, will never be extinguished.

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MIDEI SHABBOS BY RABBI ELIEZER CHRYSLER Parshas Vayechi

HASTY LIKE WATER

Reuven, as Ya'akov's firstborn son, says the Targum, was due to receive the birthright (a double portion in the inheritance), the Kehunah and the Kingship. These are all hinted in the three expressions "bechori", "se'eis" and "oz" respectively. Why did he lose them all?

The Kli Yokor explains that the three reasons are all hinted here: "(Because) you are hasty like water (in everything that you do), you will not gain". A king's major responsibility is to establish justice, and justice requires careful consideration, not haste; so he lost the kingship.

"... because you went up on (moved) your father's beds" - the function of the Kehunah is to bring the Shechinah down to the Beis ha'Mikdosh, which is called "the bed of Your Father in Heaven" (see Rashi, Shir ha'Shirim 1:13 and 3:7). But on account of what he did with Bilhoh, he proved himself unworthy of the Kehunah.

"Then you desecrated my bed ... ". At that time, he desecrated Ya'akov's bed too, in order to prevent him from having more children. He did this, explains the Ramban, so that ultimately, he would inherit a larger chunk of his father's property - that explains why, measure for measure, Ya'akov punished Reuven by depriving him of the birthright, giving it instead to the open-handed Yosef, who generously provided for his father and his brothers in Egypt.

The implication of the posuk is that Reuven did not receive a blessing at all, only a rebuke. But how can that be, asks the Kli Yokor, seeing as the Torah concludes "He blessed each one with his own special blessing"?

In fact, he explains, Ya'akov's b'rochah to Reuven was exactly the same as that of Moshe, as we shall soon see.

Quoting the Mahari, he explains that since Reuven would later go into battle at the head of the troops (together with Gad), Moshe blessed him with the b'rochah "Reuven shall live and not die". Elaborating on this, the Kli Yokor goes on to explain that this b'rochah incorporated the physical strength to play the role required of him, whereas the

continuation of the b'rochah "And his men will be (so many that they need to be) numbered" refers to the large numbers of troops with which they were blessed (the qualitative and the quantitative blessing of strength, as expressed in the two features mentioned in 'Al ha'nisim' - 'You handed the strong into the hands of the weak, and the many into the hands of the few').

And that is precisely what Ya'akov Ovinu said to Reuven "Extra numbers and extra strength you will not gain", referring (aside from the Kehunah and the Kingship, of which we spoke earlier) to the double portion of numbers and strength that he would have received as the first-born, but which he now lost. This implies however, that the single portion of numbers and strength that he should also have had to forfeit on account of his sin, he would still receive, due to Ya'akov's b'rochah; as Rashi explains, he would at least be counted among the tribes (even if he would not exceed them). In this context, that too, is a b'rochah.

The Or ha'Chayim, explaining why Ya'akov gave the birthright to Yosef and not to Yehudah or one of the older brothers, quotes the Zohar, who says that the birthright really belonged to Yosef anyway, because the night that Ya'akov married Leah, he thought he was marrying Rochel, and so his mind was set on Rochel that entire night. And in the higher realms, it is the thought that accompanies the action which creates the deepest impact. Indeed, he says, it was that 'confusion' on the night that Reuven was conceived, which implanted the 'spark of evil' in Reuven, causing him in turn to 'confuse' the beds of Ya'akov. And because he did not repress the urge to give vent to that spark, he lost the birthright to Yosef, the one who rightfully deserved it in the first place.

The kingship went to Yehudah, the Or ha'Chayim adds, because he was the first to confess to having sinned (when he publicly declared that Tomor was righteous and that he was the man from whom she was pregnant). And it was his confession that prompted Reuven to follow suite and do likewise. Certainly, Reuven was the first true ba'al teshuvah (to repent without external pressure), explains the Or ha'Chayim, but it was from Yehudah that he learned to add the vital ingredient of confession to his teshuvah (as the Gemoro writes in Bovo Kama 92a - see also Tosfos there). And that is why Yehudah merited the kingship in place of Reuven.

The Kehunah, he concludes, lay in abeyance until one of the tribes would prove themselves worthy of it. And that tribe would later turn out to be Levi, who earned that right following the sin of the Golden Calf, when they were the only tribe to remain totally loyal to Hashem, as the Torah writes in ve'Zos ha'Brochah.

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From: Ohr Somayach[SMTP:ohr@virtual.co.il]

Simcha's Torah Stories Parshat Vayechi 5760

THE BEST PRIZE

Avi, did you see the sign hung up in the hallway of the school?

No, Chaim.

There is a contest to see who can memorize the most Mishnayos.

The top prize is a set of books.

Wow, that's a great prize. I had better start memorizing. I want to win.

On the way home from school, Avi meets another friend.

What do you have there, Yitzzy?

This schoolbag is a prize that I won for coming on time to school for one month straight.

Wow, that's great Yitzzy.

Avi arrives at home.

Mom, I'm home!

Shalom Avi! How are you? How was school?

Great, Mom.

Everyone come to the table to eat lunch. The first one to wash gets a

cookie.

Avi thinks to himself, "Everything has a prize. A set of books, a schoolbag, a cookie."

Mom, can I ask you something?

Of course, Avi dear.

Why does everything have a prize? The school runs contests to help us learn or come on time. They give out prizes. When we come home to eat, you give out prizes. Does everything have to have a prize?

Avi, dear, you are so perceptive. Prizes are a good thing if used properly. They can be a big encouragement to do better. They can help us form good habits. But they are not the whole story. We are really striving for something beyond that.

That is what I thought, Mom. I knew it in my heart.

This week's parsha, Avi, tells about a request that Yaakov Avinu, our father Yaakov, made of his son Yosef, the ruler of Egypt. Yaakov asked Yosef to do chessed v'emes (kindness and truth) for him and not bury him in Egypt (Bereshis 47:29). The great Bible and Talmud commentator, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, who is known to us as Rashi, comments that the chessed that one does with the deceased is true kindness because one receives nothing in return.

Mom, isn't there a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos about this subject?

Excellent Avi! It is in the very first perek. Antigonos Ish Socho used to say, "Don't be like servants who serve the Master on the condition of receiving a reward. Rather, be like servants who serve the Master unconditionally." The highest level of doing a mitzvah is without a reward. So you see, Avi, prizes are only a step along the way. They are to encourage us to do better. But the real goal is to do the mitzvah without any prizes.

Great, Mom! Give me a mitzvah to do. And don't give me a prize! Avi, you are tops. You are the best prize that a mother could ever have.

Simcha's Quiz Question of the Week A word I know, Six letters it contains, Subtract just one, And twelve is what remains.

Answer to last week's quiz question: What goes around the world and stays in a corner? Answer: A postage stamp.

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From: Yated USA[SMTP:yated-usa@ttec.com] Halacha Discussion:
RECITING SHEVA BERACHOS - LAWS AND CUSTOMS
BY RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT

Basic requirements Sheva Berachos are recited only after a meal which requires Birkas ha-Mazon and in which Elokeinu is recited when the Zimun takes place(1). Therefore: -At least ten adult males, including the chasan, must be present and partake of the meal. -At least seven people must eat a k'zayis (approx. 1.1 fl. oz) of bread(2). -The remaining three do not have to eat bread but must eat at least a k'zayis of any food, or drink a r'evi'is(3) (approx. 3.3 fl. oz.) of any beverage except water(4). [These three people do not have to be present throughout the meal. As long as they ate or drank at any time during the meal(5), even if they ate or drank when the other seven were no longer eating, Zimun with Elokeinu and Sheva Berachos is recited(6).] -Both the chasan and kallah must be present at the meal. Even if they arrive late and miss much of the meal, they are considered as present for the meal. If they did not eat bread, Sheva Berachos should not be recited(7). If the chasan and kallah must leave before Birkas ha-Mazon, Sheva Berachos are not recited(8). -If there will not be a minyan without him, an aveil (mourner) may be counted as one of the ten men required for Sheva Berachos(9).

Requirement of panim chadashos Sheva Berachos cannot take place unless at least one(10) of the adult male participants is a panim

chadashos, lit., "new face"; i.e., he was not present at the wedding dinner or at a previous Sheva Berachos for this couple. If a panim chadashos is not present, Sheva Berachos are not recited but the final blessing, Asher Bara, is(11). Preferably, the panim chadashos should make hamotzi and remain for the entire meal. If that is difficult to arrange, he may partake of anything served at the meal(12). According to many poskim, even if he did not eat at all, and even if he came after the meal was over but before the Sheva Berachos were recited, he can still qualify as a panim chadashos(13). The panim chadashos must, however, be present when the Sheva Berachos are recited. Accordingly, if he partook of the meal but left early, the Sheva Berachos are not recited(14). When Sheva Berachos take place at either one of the first two meals of Shabbos or Yom Tov (both days), there is no need for an additional panim chadashos. We consider the Shabbos and Yom Tov themselves to be eminent "guests" who fulfill the role of panim chadashos(15). For the third meal(16) (Seudah Shelishis) panim chadashos are required unless formal Divrei Torah will be delivered(17) at the meal(18).

Who is considered a panim chadashos? According to some opinions, a panim chadashos is more than just a "new face"; rather, it is a person whose presence adds a new dimension to the celebration(19). Accordingly, a panim chadashos should be a person who is well-known to the chasan or kallah or their parents, and whose presence adds to the degree of simchah. Alternatively, a panim chadashos could be a dignitary or a respected talmid chacham whose distinguished presence enhances the meal even though he is not a personal friend of the couple or their families(20). But if such a person is not available, any acquaintance may be called upon to serve as a panim chadashos, provided that he is not a complete stranger(21).

A panim chadashos is a person who did not participate in any part of a previous meal that was held to celebrate this couple's marriage. Therefore: -If he was present at the chupah but not at the wedding meal, he can still be counted as a panim chadashos -If he ate at a previous Sheva Berachos meal but had to leave before Sheva Berachos were recited, he can no longer qualify as a panim chadashos. -If he heard the Sheva Berachos recited at the wedding meal or at a previous Sheva Berachos meal, even though he did not partake of the meal, he can no longer qualify as a panim chadashos(22).

Reciting Sheva Berachos There are three opinions concerning who may recite Sheva Berachos. Some hold that only those who ate bread may do so(23). Others allow anyone who ate anything at all, even if he ate no bread, to recite Sheva Berachos(24). Still others hold that even one who ate nothing at all may be honored with reciting a berachah(25). The chasan should not be honored with any of the Sheva Berachos(26). Some poskim hold that the fourth, fifth and sixth berachos should be recited by one person and not be divided among three people(27). The custom, however, follows the opinions who hold that all of the berachos may be split up among the participants. It is proper that anyone honored with a berachah pay careful attention [and remain silent] as all the other berachos are recited(28).

1 While there are various opinions on this issue (some hold that it is sufficient to have just three people eating bread), the common practice today - based on safek berachos l'hakel - is as stated above. 2 Or enough cake that would require a Birkas ha-Mazon. See The Weekly Halachah Discussion, vol. 2, pg. 478-480 for details. 3 B'dieved, even rov rev'i's (1.7 fl. oz.) is sufficient. 4 Mishnah Berurah 197:12. Some poskim equate soda and lemonade with water while others hold that they qualify as a "beverage" concerning Zimun (see V'zos ha-Berachah, fifth edition, pg. 130 who quotes both views). 5 "Any time" means before the participants decide not to eat any more or before they wash for mayim acharonim; Rama O.C. 197:1 and Beir Halachah (s.v. matzu). 6 Many people assume that a Zimun necessitates eating together - the participants must actually eat together at least a bit, either in the beginning or at the end of a meal. The halachah is clear, however, that as long as the meal is still in progress and the participants could eat [even a morsel of food; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 197:2], even though they are no longer actually eating anything, there is Zimun. 7 Tzitz Eliezer 13:99; Yabia Omer 6:9. See dissenting opinion in Sova Semachos 1:19. 8 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Beis Chasanim 9:10). 9 R' Akiva Eiger (Y.D. 391). He may also qualify as a panim chadashos; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Pnei Baruch, pg. 459). 10 According to some opinions two panim chadashos are required (Ben Ish Chai, Shoftim 15, based on the view of the Rambam). Many Sefaradim follow this view (Yabia Omer 3:11). 11 E.H. 62:7. 12 Based on Sova Semachos 1:9. 13 Rama E.H. 62:7; Kitzur

Shulchan Aruch 149:5. Sefaradim should not rely on this leniency. 14 Sova Semachos 1:12 quoting several poskim. 15 According to many poskim, Seudas Purim, too, is considered a panim chadashos. 16 Even on Yom Tov (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 59, note 38). 17 Preferably, the Divrei Torah should be said by the chasan (Chachmas Adam 129:5), but if he cannot, then any formal drashah of Divrei Torah is sufficient (Based on Aruch ha-Shulchan 62:30). 18 E.H. 62:8. Note that Divrei Torah may be used as a substitute for panim chadashos only for Seudah Shelishis. During the week, or at any additional meal on Shabbos or Yom Tov (beyond the mandatory three meals), panim chadashos are required. 19 E.H. 62:8. 20 Harav M. Feinstein (Oholei Yeshurun 4:2). 21 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 149:5; Sova Semachos 1:7. 22 Sova Semachos 1:11. 23 Yabia Omer 3:11; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Beis Chasanim 12:6). 24 Harav M. Feinstein (Oholei Yeshurun 5:9) Harav Y.Y. Teitelbaum (quoted in Be'er Moshe 2:118) and other poskim. 25 Sova Semachos 4, note 74 quoting Harav E.Y. Finkel. Many people conduct themselves according to this lenient view (ibid. 72). 26 Minchas Yitzchak 3:114. 27 Sha'arei Efraim, Pischei She'arim 9:19; Har Tzvi O.C. 44. This is because the fifth and sixth berachos do not begin with the words Boruch atah... which makes them a berachah hasmucha l'chaverta. 28 Igros Moshe E.H. 1:94; Tzitz Eliezer 6:2; Sova Semachos 1:44.

From: Yated USA[SMTP:yated-usa@ttec.com] Parsha Perspectives
PARSHAS VAYECHI-PRAYERS LIKE ARROWS
BY RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

There is an interesting Midrashic interpretation of two words in this week's parsha brought down by both Targum Unkeles and Rashi. In fact on the surface both interpretations seem to contradict the simple meanings of these words! Yaakov blesses Yoseph's children and then tells Yoseph, "as for me I have given you Shechem " one portion more than your brothers which I took from the Emorite with charbi and kashti, my sword and with my bow." Rashi explains that after the brothers attacked the city of Shechem, in response to the assault on their sister Deena, the Emorites, a neighboring country tried to conquer them. They, too, were miraculously defeated. But Rashi, and Targum Unkeles who is widely known for his mostly literal translation of the Torah both deviate from their traditional interpretative methodology, and translate the words bow and sword in a totally different light. Rashi explains that "charbi" and "kashti" mean wisdom and prayer; the Targum explains the words as two form of supplication. The allegory is understandable. Tefillah is, like a sword, strong and sweeping affecting all that it strikes. Other prayers are similar to arrows reaching one specific point from a far distance. The question is, however, we know Yaakov davened. Of course he prayed! Yaakov's prayers are documented in every aspect of his life. He prays throughout every encounter with his adversaries. Surely he davened in this battle! Yet this time he chose to talk about his sword and bow. Why then, translate his expression of implements of war as those of prayer?

Perhaps this story, said often, and perhaps apocryphal, that may shed some light on the explanation. The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yoseph Kahanaman was renowned for his efforts in rebuilding Chayei Torah from the ashes of the Holocaust. He established the jewel in the crown of the Torah city of B'nai Brak with the building of the Ponovez Yeshiva and its myriad affiliate institutions. He built a Yeshiva for teenagers, another for young men, and a kollel for married talmidai chachomim. He built the Batei Avos, a huge housing complex with hundreds of subsidized apartments for needy families. He built schools for orphaned boys and girls in B'nei Brak and Ashdod, and in numerous cities across the State of Israel. Often, he would visit wealthy patrons in the United States, Canada, South Africa and Europe, appealing to them to make contributions to the Ponovezer Institutions. One particular donor once confronted him in jest. "Why is it Rabbi Kahanaman," he wondered, "that all the other Rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva who visit me, never mention money? All they talk about is Torah, and mitzvos. But you come here and appeal to me and don't talk about Torah or Mitzvos. Your appeal is direct and to the point. You come here and say that you need one hundred thousand dollars to finish a girls school in Ashdod. Why don't you also give me a speech about Torah, mitzvos and continuity?" Rabbi Kahanaman did not draw back. He took the man's hand and looked him in the eye. Then he told him a profound statement. "You know me well. Many fund raisers talk, "Torah, Torah, Torah," but they mean money, money, money. I talk money, but I mean Torah, Torah,

Torah."

Our Chazal, who understood the essence of Yaakov's being; who saw his deep faith in running from Esav, in fighting with the angel and confronting the tragedy of Shechem, and the travail of Lavan, understood quite well what his bow and sword represented. They were very comfortable with the greatness of Yaakov's persona; one steeped in an immense spirituality deeply connected to his Creator. They understood that when Yaakov said sword, he could only mean the swift and sharp result of prayer; and when he said bow and arrow, he meant the piercing cry of supplication. Every word, even the mundane words, of our leaders are filled with spiritual meaning. It is when we, as temporal beings, preach prayer and faith, that we must be suspect. Do we really mean tefillah? Do we speak of emunah and bitachon but feel we must rely on ourselves? Are we talking tefillah but actually thinking arrows?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Associate Dean of Yeshiva South Shore and author of the Parsha Parables series.

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Parashat Vayechi - 5760 - OU TORAH INSIGHTS Project Parshat
Vayechi December 25, 1999
RABBI YAACOV WASSER

The focal point of this week's parsha is the passing of Yaakov Avinu, the last of the Avos. The Torah states, "When Yaakov finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet onto the bed, he expired and was gathered to his people." Rashi, quoting the Talmud, comments, "It does not say that he died.... He lives forever." On the one hand, we can interpret this statement homiletically: Yaakov lives on through later generations. As long as his descendants, the Bnei Yisrael, are alive and following his legacy, Yaakov lives on. However, Rabbi Yochanan, in the Talmud, insists, "Our father, Yaakov, did not die." Rabbi Nachman asks, "Did the mourners eulogize him and the embalmers embalm him for nothing?" Rabbi Yochanan quotes the verse in Yirmiyahu: "Have no fear, my servant Yaakov...for behold I will save you from afar and your descendants from the land of return." Just as his descendants are alive, so, too, is he. Rabbi Leib Chasman, in his sefer, Ohr Yahal, wonders how Rabbi Nachman accepted this answer. The Torah explicitly states that Yaakov was embalmed and buried. He answers that every verse in the Torah must incorporate the words of our Sages, even when logic dictates otherwise. When Rabbi Yochanan states his interpretation, it is not just a homiletic exercise, but a mesorah going back to Sinai. It defines the meaning of the verse: his embalment must be understood in that context where he only appeared to be dead. This concept is integral to understanding all of Chumash: to read the Torah without seeing it through the prism of the commentaries is dangerous. The Talmud states that the ammorah, Rebbi, appeared regularly at his home after his death, until he was spotted by a neighbor. He would recite Kiddush for his family on Shabbos. This must mean that he was obligated to make Kiddush, or else his family could not discharge their obligations either by listening to his recitation. Similarly, we are all familiar with the tradition of Eliyahu Hanavi appearing at various times throughout history (and every year at the Pesach seder). One of the ammorah Eim was shocked to see him in a cemetery, for Eliyahu is a kohein, and his death did not excuse him from performance of mitzvos. The primary lesson for us concerns the boundary between life and death. The more a body and soul are in harmony during the life of an individual, the less traumatic is their separation at death. When body and soul achieve total harmony, as they did in the case of Yaakov Avinu and Eliyahu Hanavi, the concept of death is not relevant. "Yaakov avinu lo meis." It should be easy for us to understand that there is eternal life, where the soul exists unfettered by a human body. This knowledge ought to provide us with great consolation, knowing that the death of an individual does not mean that

they are gone forever. Rabbi Yaacov Wasser Rabbi Wasser is rabbi of Young Israel of East Brunswick, in East Brunswick, New Jersey.
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From: RABBI NOSON WEISZ Nweisz@aish.edu
Mayanot - Vayechi - Soles of the Soul
PARSHAT VAY'CHI "And lived B"
"SOLES OF THE SOUL" BY NOSON WEISZ

In this Torah portion we find Jacob on his deathbed and blessing his sons. There is a most curious aspect to these blessings that merits closer examination.

Let us examine the blessing given to Judah:

Judah -- you, your brothers shall acknowledge. Your hand will be at your enemies' nape; your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you B The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a law giver from among his descendants, until Shilo arrives, and his will be an assemblage of nations B [Genesis 49:8-11]

Thus Jacob blesses Judah with kingship over Israel.

But it would appear that this bequest is far more than a blessing -- it also constitutes empowerment.

Nachmanides, while commenting on this passage, relates the story of the Hasmonean kings of the Second Temple period.

The Hasmonians were a clan of priests -- descendants of the tribe of Levi, not of Judah -- who led the Jewish rebellion against the Syrian Greeks. They managed to drive the Greek armies of Antiochus out of Israel against great odds, to purify the Temple, and reestablish the Jewish kingdom. As they were clearly the leaders of the Jewish people at the time, both physically and morally, they were elected to fill the office of monarch by popular acclaim.

But, according to Nachmanides, this was the cause of their downfall. In the space of a few generations the entire clan was wiped out, leaving no trace or remnant. Their sin was the violation of Jacob's last will and testament. Had they appointed a king from the line of David -- that is from the tribe of Judah -- they would surely have prospered for many generations on the merits of their heroic self-sacrifice and great moral stature.

It is clear that Jacob's blessing is to be understood as being much more than the encouragement and support of certain tendencies among his various sons. His blessings actually constitute the conclusive delineation of powers among the tribes.

But what gave Jacob the authority to decide who is to rule Israel a thousand years after his death in the face of the popular will of the Jewish people, and in the face of the conditions that prevailed at the time?

To answer that question we have to look at one of the more misunderstood commandments of the Torah -- the commandment to honor one's parents.

It is written: "Honor your father and mother." [Exodus 20] And it is written: "Honor God from your youth." [Proverbs 3]. The Torah equates the duty to honor one's parents to the duty of honoring God. It is written: "Man should hold his father and mother in awe." [Leviticus 19], and it is written, "You should be in awe of the Lord your God and serve Him." [Deuteronomy 6] The Torah equates the awe of one's parents to the awe one must have towards God. It is written: "One who curses one's mother or father must die." [Exodus 21] And it is written: "Whoever curses God must bear his guilt." [Leviticus 24]. The Torah equates cursing one's parents with cursing God. B and this is fitting because they are all partners in his creation. [Talmud, Kidushin, 30b]

Most of us are fortunate enough to have very nice parents whom we love very dearly and to whom we are very grateful. But very few of us have parents whom we hold in such awe that we would compare our feelings towards them to the awe we feel for God. How can we relate to being commanded to hold them in such awe?

According to the Maharal of Prague, the commandment to honor our parents stems from the understanding that it is through our parents that we are spiritually attached to God.

Israel is like a tree with a trunk and twelve main branches. The trunk is planted in Heaven and represents the patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Out of this main trunk emerge twelve main branches for the tribes, and each branch further subdivides into sub-branches for the main families, and these further subdivide until we reach the level of individuals. The connection to God is only through the tree. To connect properly, each of us must trace ourselves back to the roots in Heaven of the tree of Israel.

It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy. [Psalms 3:18]

This concept of the Maharal is not merely philosophical, and the proof lies in its very practical application in the laws of conversion.

Tosephos explain that a non-Jew can convert to Judaism by attaching himself to

the tree of Israel through Abraham, and thus obtain a spiritual connection to God. [Baba Basra, 81a] This is possible only because of Abraham's appointment by God as mankind's universal father: 'As for Me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be a father of a multitude of nations. Your name shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.' [Genesis 17:4-5]

When Jacob uttered his blessings, he allocated and apportioned the tribes their location on the trunk of Israel. He knew the spiritual significance of each location, and he was thus able to bless each tribe in accordance with the spiritual powers granted them.

Coming from a completely different location by virtue of their birth into the tribe of Levi, the Hasmonean kings were unable to attach themselves as monarchs to the root of kingship, which belongs to the tribe of Judah on the Israel tree. Lacking the spiritual nourishment provided by the roots of the Tree of Life, they literally withered on the vine. A Jewish king who is not connected spiritually to God in his capacity as monarch is obviously not viable.

We live in a world that teaches us how all men are created equal. Everything is open to anyone who has enough initiative, and who has the talent and vigor to seize the day. We are taught that the best man always wins, because success crowns him with the title of being the best.

This vision of equality is based on certain assumptions about the spirit, for in body we can clearly see that we are far from equal. Some people are tall and others short, some are born brilliant whereas others are of below-average intelligence. It is in our cultural vision of man that all spirits are of equal weight, even though we are totally blind to the world of the spirit.

But what if we could see the spirit? And what if it turned out that some spirits were tall and others short, some brilliant and others of average intelligence? Would we still declare with the same confidence that all men are created equal?

That is what Jacob is teaching us when he blesses his sons. Not all tribes are equal. Indeed, they are different, with different missions in the world -- missions that are not interchangeable. The "best man" cannot be elected king by popular acclaim; only the one whose spiritual mission is to be king is, in reality, the best man for the job.

Judaism does, in fact, believe that all men are created equal because all men are created in the image of God, but that is not to say that this equality translates to the same mission or the same potential.

The assumption that all men are created equal -- and anyone can be anything he chooses to be given enough initiative -- is a projection of the body and a distorted view of how things really are in the world of the spirit.

We get some insight into the body-spirit dichotomy in Moses's encounter with God at the burning bush: God called out to him from amid the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses B Do not come closer to here, remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground.' [Exodus 3:4-5]

R'Chaim of Volozhin, the student of the Gaon of Vilna, basing himself on the Zohar explains why God asked Moses to take off his shoes here.

The body is called the shoes of the soul, because it is with the aid of the body that the soul can inhabit the physical world. God asked Moses to step out of his shoes, because He wanted to converse with Moses without the distortion that the body injects.

Such distortion is the inevitable consequence of the fact that man inhabits the physical world, and his body, which is itself a living entity, gets in the way.

God wanted to make sure that there would be no distortion between the prophetic vision that was received by the Moses' soul at the source, and the one that was experienced by the Moses' soul in his body. In other words, the aspect of his soul in heaven and the aspect of his soul in his body would not be separated by the presence of the body.

The special distinction of the prophetic power of Moses over other prophets stems from his ability to step out of his shoes and converse with God as a pure spirit.

Despite our claim that all men are created equal in spirit, we pay little attention to the message of the soul in our world and in fact are much more influenced by the message of the body.

We have a tremendous amount of knowledge of the physical world that the ancients didn't possess, and we therefore tend to adopt a somewhat patronizing attitude to what they had to say. How could they possibly understand anything better than we do, when we know so much more than they did? But we must not forget that we are only experts on the body, which is to say, we are only experts on shoes!

Jacob had no interest in such knowledge. His life was dedicated to spiritual ends and he wasn't willing to waste a minute on figuring out how to polish his shoes. He invested all his intellectual resources in discovering the laws that

governed his soul.

If we all could be like Jacob -- focused on our spiritual mission in this world -- we would not waste any mental energy worrying whether we were the equal of anyone else, we would just go about fulfilling our own unique task.

Elijah taught: The world (as we know it now) will stand for six thousand years; two thousand years of bewilderment, two thousand years of Torah, and two thousand years of the days of the Messiah. [Talmud, Sanhedrin, 97a] The Jewish people throughout history are likened to a single individual. The people at the beginning of this history, who had a clear vision of it and understood it, is likened to the "head." Our generation, which is near the end is likened to the "heels."

Ours is generation is known as the "heels of the Messiah." We are at the end of the 2000 years of the Messianic days referred to by Elijah. As the heels of the Jewish people we are entirely enclosed in shoes and have no vision at all of spirituality.

The feet never know where they are going. The head tells the feet where the destination is, and the loyal feet faithfully deliver the body to the correct place. If the feet were to tell the head to go away and determine the destination on their own, there is no telling where the person would end up.

The earlier generations could see higher than their shoes and knew the direction we should take. They could not impart their vision to us, but they gave us detailed instructions to follow so that, even lacking our own spiritual vision, we would still reach the correct destination.

This Torah portion ends the Book of Genesis. These essays have attempted to convey that the spiritual connection of the world to God was part of the creation process. Because this part of creation was accomplished by man, it took much longer than the seven days God needed to create the physical world. The giants of this spiritual creation are the patriarchs and matriarchs, and their contribution to us, as their descendants, is the establishment of a firm basis for our relationship with God.

We must recognize, however, who they were and who we are. We have to accept the fact that our connection to our origins is only through them. But, as long as we follow their instructions to us we can be confident of carrying out our mission in life and actualizing our potential.

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From: Yated USA[SMTP:yated-usa@ttec.com]
KORTZ UN SHARF- SHORT AND SWEET PARSHA VERTLACH
BY SHAYA GOTTLIEB

"Vayechi Yaakov B'ereitz Mitzrayim" and Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim 47: 28 Yaakov represents the middoh of emes, "titayn emes l'Yaakov." Only with Yaakov, with emes, can one survive Mitzrayim; the maytzorim, the most harrowing situations and difficulties. -Chidushei Harim

Why is this parsha 'closed'? Because when Yaakov was niftar, the eyes and hearts of Klal Yisroel were closed due to their suffering and enslavement. The meforshim ask: Their enslavement did not begin with Yaakov's passing, but many years later, when Levi, the last of the Shevotim, was niftar. So what connection did it have with Yaakov's passing? The physical enslavement had not yet begun, but the spiritual slavery began. The true inner core, the pnimiys, was diguised, and only the outer shell of falsehood remained. -S'fas Emes

The sons of Yisroel were forced to ask Pharaoh for the favor of allowing their father to be buried outside of Mitzrayim. This act of appealing to the monarch made them feel the 'taam' of slavery.-Orchos Chaim

The reality of 'nistimu einyehem', that the eyes and hearts of Klal Yisroel were blocked, was must worse than the actual enslavement. When one ceases to see and feel the pain, and becomes accustomed to the dedgration, that is enslavement of the worst kind.

Rashi: Another p'shat, Yaakov wanted to reveal the 'keitz', and it was hidden from him. Why did Yaakov want to reveal the time of the geulah? Because when one knows that the end is near, the suffering is easier to bear. However, it was hidden from him min hashomayim so that the golus should be a difficult one. -Rav Bunim of P'shischa

When Yaakov foresaw the tzoros that Klal Yisroel would be forced to endure during Ikvesa D'mshicho, he fell into atzvus, and the Shechina departed because "Ayn haShechina shoro mitoch atzvus." -Rav Naftoli Ropschitzer

Because Yaakov wanted to reveal the keitz, he found it necessary to censure his sons for their actions. As our Chazal say, "Horishonim shenisgale avoynom nisgale keitzom" In order to pave the way for the geulah, the generation must first be appraised of their sins and shown how to improve, not have them shoved under the rug and hidden. -Toldos Yaakov
