

B'S'D'
INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYECHI - 5761

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From: RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY
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MillStink

A fascinating incident takes place in our parsha, as revealed in the Gemara (Sotah 13a). Yaakov's children all ascended to Eretz Yisrael to bury him. It was a heavy, emotional task; Yaakov was revered by all.

Finally, they came to Chevron and approached the Me'aras HaMachpelah (Cave of the Patriarchs), anxious to pay their final respects to their father. Standing outside the cave, however, was an old, red, hairy fellow, brandishing a sword -- Esav. "Where do you think you're going?" asked Esav.

"We're going to bury our father in the cave," they replied.

"Oh no you're not! The cave belongs to me!"

"But Uncle Esav, don't you remember that you sold the birthright to our father!"

"I never sold my portion of the cave. Yaakov buried Leah in his portion. The rest belongs to me!"

"But you did, Uncle Esav. You even signed on a deed!"

"Oh yeah? Where is it? I'm not moving till you show it to me!"

"Well, we didn't bring it with us. We didn't think we would need it during the funeral. We left it back in Egypt."

"So send someone to get it. Meanwhile, I'm not moving!"

The brothers elected Naftali -- who swiftness resembled a deer's -- to run back to Egypt to retrieve the deed.

In the meantime, one of Yaakov's grandsons, Chushim ben Dan, became aware of what was happening. He was called Chushim because he lacked a very important sense: He was deaf. Unable to follow the dialogue, Chushim wondered what was going on. The brothers somehow conveyed to him that good old Uncle Esav was holding up the works until Naftali returns from Egypt.

Chushim exclaimed, "And until Naftali returns, grandfather's body will lie here in disgrace?" This was too much for Chushim to bear. He took a stick and unceremoniously knocked off Esav's head, whereupon they proceeded to bury Yaakov in the cave.

Asks Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar 5731 p. 165): Why was it specifically Chushim who worried about Yaakov's honor? What about the rest of Yaakov's family? Why were they willing to put up with Esav's shenanigans?

Explained Rav Chaim: Here we behold the human capacity to acclimate to any situation. When the brothers first encountered Esav, they assumed that after their first argument Esav would relent. Thus, in order to get past the first argument, they had to "swallow" their deep desire to bury their father, albeit temporarily. But Esav did not yield, and they had to go through the same process again. After each stage of the dialogue, the brothers gradually acclimated to a previously extremely uncomfortable situation. Consequently, they took no action.

Only Chushim, who was not involved at all in the arguments, retained his original aversion his grandfather's disgrace. Accordingly, only he acted.

As a small child, I once accompanied my father who was then a

real-estate broker, as he showed a house to a potential buyer. The house was directly across the Penobscot river from the James River paper mill. Unaccustomed to the vile stench, I burst out, "Dad, it stinks here!" Dad gave me a look, and the house remained unsold.

Years later, I befriended a person who lived right next to the mill. "How do you stand it?" I asked him. "Stand what?" was his honest reply. The "MillStink" (as they affectionately referred to it) had ceased to bother them. Indeed, it barely registered on their olfactory nerves. They had acclimated.

A similar phenomenon has been manifest throughout the so called "Oslo peace process." I remember when the Israeli government first announced the donation Gaza and Jericho to the Palestinian cause. "Gaza and Jericho first," it was dubbed. There was a major uproar. Homes within a fifty mile radius drastically declined in value. No one I knew thought that it could really happen. But it did, and people acclimatized.

When they spoke about giving guns to arm the Palestinian "policemen", people were up in arms. But it happened, and people moved on. When Chevron, and many other cities were given over, again people were upset, but they got used to it.

Then the shooting began. Somehow, when the shooting was far away, people were able to tolerate it. It didn't affect them personally. But when the Arabs began shooting at the Yerushalayim neighborhood of Gilo, everyone (even leftists) proclaimed, "No more! That's were we draw the line!" Yet the shooting continued, and people eventually adapted. The lesson to be learned: There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that a human being cannot get used to.

And this brings us to the point. Because all of this simply pales in comparison with the type of acclimation of which we are all guilty. Once a year, during the holiday season (Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur), we take a good look at ourselves. We ascertain our shortcomings and make sincere "new year's resolutions" to improve. But what happens in practice? The first week we are pretty meticulous regarding our behavior. But, ever so subtly, we regress. Either we don't realize it, or we choose not to. In either case, the negative behavior ceases to stink, or we cease to notice it.

And so are we guilty of the same flaw when we fail to make those ever-necessary adjustments. Teshuva means never acclimating; never succumbing to complacency. Rather than make peace with the MillStink, it behooves us to remove the source of the stench.

Only then will we come out truly smelling like a daisy!

p.s. My wife just gave birth to a beautiful baby girl! May we all share one another's simchos!

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From: Kollel Iyun Hadaf [SMTP:kornfeld@netvision.net.il] Subject: Insights to the Daf: Sotah 13-15 INSIGHTS INTO THE DAILY DAF brought to you by Kollel Iyun Hadaf of Yerushalayim daf@dafyomi.co.il, <http://www.dafyomi.co.il> SOTAH 13 - dedicated by Larry and Marsha Wachsmann I'luy Nishmas their aunt, the late Mrs. Rachel Potack (bas Rav Moshe) Z"L -- a true "Eshes Chayil" and "Ba'alas Midos" -- who passed away b'Seivah Tovah in Yerushalayim on 2 Kislev 5761. *** Please send your D.A.F. contributions to : D.A.F., 140-32 69 Ave., Flushing NY 11367, USA
RABBI MORDECHAI KORNFELD
Sotah 13

THE 36 CROWNS ON YAKOV AVINU'S COFFIN QUESTION:
The Gemara says that when Yosef took Yakov Avinu's coffin to Eretz

Yisrael, the kings of the other nations came to meet them, and they placed their 36 crowns upon the coffin until it was adorned like a thorn bush. From where did these 36 crowns come?

ANSWERS: (a) RASHI explains that 12 crowns came from the 12 Nesi'im of Yishmael (mentioned at the end of Parshas Chayei Sarah). Another 23 came from the Alufim of Esav (mentioned at the end of Parshas Vayishlach), and one crown was the Keser of Yosef.

The SHITAH MEKUBETZES asks that the Alufim of Esav are mentioned in two groups in the end of Parshas Vayishlach: first, the Torah mentions a group of 14 Alufim, and then it mentions a group of 11 (with two repeated, as Rashi points out). However, the two groups cannot be joined together to place their crowns upon the coffin of Yakov, because, they lived during different periods. The first group were the grandchildren of Esav. The others, in the second group, ruled only after the dynasty of Esav lost sovereignty, after the passing of the last of the eight kings who ruled from the line of Esav (as it says in Divrei ha'Yamim; see Rashi to Bereishis 36:40). In addition, when the Torah lists the second group of Alufim, it is not mentioning their names, but rather it is mentioning the places where the Alufim lived (see also RASHASH).

Apparently, Rashi in the Gemara is learning that the Torah is also referring to the Alufim at the end of the Parshah by their names and not by their places, and, furthermore, Rashi maintains that these Alufim remained in power even after the last king of Esav died, while the power of most Alufim of the first group of Alufim waned. (It is not surprising that Rashi here is explaining differently than what he writes in his commentary on the Chumash, because Rashi clearly differs here from what he writes there in other ways, because there (36:5) he writes that there was only one Aluf of Korach and not two.)

(b) TOSFOS SHANTZ here (and cited in the Shitah Mekubetzes in the name of Tosfos ha'Rosh), explains that the 36 crowns included 12 of Yishmael and only 14 of Esav (the grandchildren (the first group of Alufim)). The other 10 were from Bnei Keturah, who are also mentioned here in the Gemara.

When listing the descendants of Keturah, the Torah (at the end of Parshas Chayei Sarah) lists six children of Keturah, two grandchildren from one child (Yakshan), and five grandchildren from another child (Midyan), which totals 13. This, however, brings the total number of crowns to 39 -- or three too many! The Shitah Mekubetzes gives two different approaches how to subtract three of them from the count (see there). (A simple approach might be to exclude the two fathers who had grandchildren, since they passed on their crowns to their children, and not to count 14 from Esav but 13, because -- like Rashi on the Chumash says -- the two Korachs were the same person.)

(c) The VILNA GA'ON (Kol Eliyahu #100) cites the Zohar that explains that the seventy nations of the world are divided into two groups -- those who follow the lead of Yishmael and those who follow the lead of Esav. Perhaps the crowns did *not* include the descendants of Esav, but only those of Yishmael. (Support for this can be found in the Midrash Tanchuma, end of Parshas Vayechi. This is logically sound as well, because Esav attempted to prevent the burial and thus he obviously did not participate cooperatively with it.) Accordingly, 35 crowns came from the nations that follow the lead of Yishmael, and the 36th crown was that of Yosef, like Rashi says.

(d) The KEREN ORAH explains the Gemara in an allegorical sense. He explains that the reason why 36 crowns were placed on the coffin of Yakov Avinu was to hint to his great spiritual attainment. The Sages point out that there are 36 sins which are punishable by Kares. Kares -- being cut off from the Shechinah -- is the lowest spiritual level. Yakov Avinu reached the opposite extreme -- the highest spiritual level. He was on such a high spiritual level that the Gemara says that "Yakov Avinu did not die" (Ta'anis 5b). Therefore, he was crowned with 36 crowns to represent the 36 degrees of Kares which he opposed and from which he

reached the opposite extreme. The word "Keser" (crown) is comprised of the letters that spell "Kares," and this shows that Yakov attained the reverse of the low spiritual level represented by Kares and achieved the "Keser."

CHUSHIM'S REACTION AT THE BURIAL OF YAKOV AVINU QUESTION: The Gemara says that Chushim, the son of Dan, was

hard of hearing. When he saw that the funeral procession of Yakov Avinu was being held up, he asked someone why it had stopped. When he was informed that they were waiting for Naftali to bring the deed of ownership from Mitzrayim, Chushim became very upset and declared, "My grandfather must lie in disgrace until Naftali returns from Mitzrayim?!" He took a staff and struck the head of Esav with it, killing him.

It is clear from the Gemara that the fact that Chushim was deaf contributed to his reaction. What difference, though, did it make that he was deaf? Even those who could hear well would have been expected to act that way when Esav held up the funeral procession!

ANSWERS: (a) The simple explanation is that Chushim thought that Esav was just making a front, finding an excuse to delay the funeral, and that he did not have any valid claim since everyone knew that Yakov had bought the Bechorah from Esav and it was not necessary to bring any document of proof. Had he been able to hear, though, he would have heard that Esav's claim was not for the portion of the Bechorah (the first-born) in the burial grounds, but for the portion due to him as a normal son ("Pashut") of Yitzchak. It was not so well-known that when Yakov returned from the house of Lavan, Esav had sold to him his portion of the "Pashut" as well.

(b) RAV CHAIM SHMULEVITZ (Sichos Musar 5731:32, 5733:6; see also Chidushei Agados of MAHARAL) explains that those who were able to hear what was going on did not become so upset, because they heard Esav present to them his arguments, and they then had to argue back. As time passed during the argument, they became desensitized to the fact that a terrible injustice was being done. Chushim, on the other hand, who heard none of it as it was happening and then heard about it all at one moment, naturally became very upset and therefore reacted the way he did.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND
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"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYechi
Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R.
Yissocher Dov - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

Yaakov Invokes Heavenly Blessings for His Grandchildren From
"The Angel Who Redeemed Him"

"And he blessed Yosef and said 'the L-rd before whom my fathers walked, the L-rd who has taken care of me until this day, the Angel who redeems me from all evil, He shall bless the young lads...' [Bereshis 48:15-16]. This pasuk [verse] is familiar those who say it with our children at night before they go to bed. However, if we think about the pasuk, we will discover a basic difficulty.

Yaakov began giving this blessing to Yosef by referring to the L-rd (ha'Elokim) with whom his forefathers traveled. We would expect that Yaakov would invoke the help of G-d in the blessing of the children. However, in the middle of the blessing, Yaakov suddenly switched and started talking about "the Angel". Yaakov invoked the blessing of the Angel rather than the blessing of G-d. Wouldn't G-d's blessing be better

than an Angel's blessing?

I saw a beautiful explanation in the Limudei Nissan (Rav Nissan Alpert). There was a very big difference between the relationship that G-d had with Avraham and Yitzchak and the relationship that He had with Yaakov. The first two generations of Patriarchs merited a relationship with G-d that was built upon open miracles. Avraham, even amongst his peers, was crowned: "a Prince of G-d are you in our midst" [Bereshis 23:6]. Everyone appreciated who he was. Likewise, Avimelech initiated a peace covenant with Yitzchak because he realized who Yitzchak was. They merited a treatment by G-d that was apparent to everyone.

Yaakov is the Patriarch who symbolizes the Jew in Exile. He existed and lived in exile and passed on to his children and his descendants the ability to survive in exile. The providence that Yaakov had was one in which G-d always saved him, but the salvation came in a way which was much more hidden than that experienced by Avraham and Yitzchak.

Look at Yaakov's life. He had troubles from Eisav. Then he had troubles with Lavan. Then he had troubles with Dena. Then he had troubles with Yosef. Then he had troubles with Shimon. Then he had troubles with Binyamin. Yaakov literally lived a life of troubles. But G-d was always there. In all of these instances, in the final analysis, goodness sprouted from what was perceived as evil.

The twenty years spent with Lavan were the twenty years in which Yaakov built the future Tribes. The incident with Yosef is what eventually sustained them in the years of famine. All of these things eventually had a silver lining - but as they were happening, they were all highly traumatic situations. It was certainly true that at all times G-d was "pulling the strings", but it was not necessarily apparent that this was the case.

This typifies Jewish life in the Exile (Galus). In Galus, we live a life in which the Divine Face of G-d is Hidden (Hester Panim) from us. This means that G-d is there, calling the shots, but He is behind a cloud. It is often difficult to identify the "Hand of G-d" in that which transpires around us. It is difficult to perceive that what occurs to us is "for the best" rather than sometimes calamitous. This is our life in Exile.

Yaakov is about to bless his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephraim, who are the first Jews born into Exile. Their experience in the Egyptian Exile would foreshadow the Jewish experience in many future countries of exile. Yaakov wanted them to realize that the "Hand of G-d" would not always openly intervene on their behalf. At times, G-d's presence would not be apparent to them at all.

Therefore, precisely for this reason, Yaakov gave them the blessing of "the Angel who redeemed me from all evil..." In Galus, G-d does not deliver the salvation Himself in an open and apparent way as it was with the earlier patriarchs. Rather, "the Angel (Malach) who redeems" delivers the salvation. In Galus, G-d has his representatives (Malachim, literally Angels) who come to deliver salvation.

The entire blessing can be understood in this light. "The L-rd before whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked" - openly basking in His Salvation. "The G-d who shepherds me" - this is the same G-d who is like a shepherd to me. [The sheep do not know that the wolf is lurking in the background, but it is the shepherd who is always there to make sure that nothing happens. This is the type of Providence that I merited to have in Exile.] And this same Providence - that G-d should watch out for you in Exile even in hidden and indirect ways - is my blessing to you: "The Angel who redeems me from all evil, he too should bless these young boys..." And if you can see this hand of G-d in all that occurs and you will remain upright and steadfast, then "... my name will be called upon you, as well as the names of my forefathers..." - eventually you will merit to have the open Providence of G-d which was experienced by Avraham and Yitzchak.

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:

Tape # 265, Yahrtzeit. Good Shabbos!

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Parshas Vayechi

Excerpt from Darash Moshe, by RABBI MOSHE FEINSTEIN.

And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be included under the name of their brothers (48:5-6).

And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be included under the name of their brothers (48:5-6). Jacob's reasoning here is highly puzzling: Why should Joseph's sons born before Jacob's arrival in Egypt be considered Jacob's, while his later-born sons would belong to Joseph? The opposite would seem to make more sense, that those born to Joseph when he was alone in Egypt should belong to him, while the ones who grew up under their grandfather's guidance should belong to Jacob.

However, we can understand Jacob's claim as a profound lesson in the education a father is required to give his son, or a teacher his student. The responsibility to train children and students in the ways of Torah applies not only while they are at home or in the confines of the beis medrash, when they are relatively receptive to education. A parent or teacher must make sure his charges' training is so firmly rooted that they will continue solidly in the ways they have learned even when they are far away from the father or the rebbe, in distant lands among pagans and atheists. They must strive to equal the training Joseph received from Jacob, a training so fundamental that wherever he went, Joseph saw his father's image before him guiding him in his way, a training so powerful that under its influence Joseph raised the two sons born to him in Egypt to follow in his father's footsteps as if they had been raised by Jacob and not by their father, Joseph.

This is why Jacob claimed them as his own children, as much as Reuben and Simeon. Any later children born to Joseph after Jacob's arrival in Egypt would grow up in the Torah environment created by their uncles and cousins, and thus the impact of Jacob's greatness as seen through his chinuch to Joseph would not be as readily discernible as it was in Ephraim and Manasseh. Therefore he had no claim on them.

Excerpt from Darash Moshe, by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

From: RABBI YITZ ETSHALOM rebyitz@torah.org Subject:
Mikra - Parashat Vay'chi: The Location of Kever Rachel

Parashat Vay'chi

THE LOCATION OF RACHEL'S TOMB

By Yitzchak Etshalom

I GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM

In our Parashah, Ya'akov is elaborating upon his deathbed request of Yoseph to bury him in the Cave of Machpelah, with Avraham, Sarah, Yitzhak, Rivkah and Leah. As a form of apologia, explaining why Yoseph's own mother - and Ya'akov's beloved, Rachel - is not buried in that hallowed spot, Ya'akov explains:

And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the

land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; which is is Beth-Lehem. (48:7).

It is unclear what the tone of this explanation might be (see the Rishonim ad loc.) - if Ya'akov is justifying the road-side burial without even entering the town of Beit-Lechem, or if the larger issue of Rachel's absence from the Cave of Machpelah is the tacit subject here. Regardless, this verse, mirrored by an earlier verse which is part of the narrative itself, seems to pinpoint (more or less) the location of Kever Rachel:

And they journeyed from Beit-El; and there was but a little way to come to Efrat; and Rachel labored with child, and she had difficult labor. And it came to pass, when she was in difficult labor, that the midwife said to her, Fear not; you shall have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Binyamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrat, which is Beit-Lechem. And Ya'akov set a pillar upon her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. (35:16-20)

For the last hundred-plus years, at least, the building commonly known as "Kever Rachel" has been regarded with the sanctity and special feelings associated with this beloved mother of Yisra'el. The beautiful Midrashim (one of which will play a critical role in our analysis) which portray her pleading on behalf of Am Yisra'el are connected with that locus.

As early as the end of the 13th century, Ramban (see his comments at B'reshet 35:16) records his own identification of the place, which is near [present-day] Beit-Lechem. To be sure, we have much earlier reports of Rachel's Tomb being in the proximity of Beit-Lechem - including a first century reference (Matt. 2) These identification are almost assuredly based on older Jewish traditions.

Yet, as we will see, there are significant problems associated with locating Kever Rachel in its present-day location; locations which spring both from Rabbinic literature and from passages in the T'nakh itself.

II THE FIRST CHALLENGE FROM T'NAKH: WEEPING IN RAMAH

In one of the most moving passages in all of T'nakh, Yirmiyah reports that the voice of Rachel's weeping is heard in the Binyaminite town of Ramah (approximately 10 miles north of Yerushalayim; see the map on our website at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra> - the shiur is available in adobe Acrobat format):

Thus says Hashem; A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus says Hashem; Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says Hashem; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says Hashem, that your children shall come again to their own border.

(for an elegant example of how this passage is utilized Midrashically, see Eikhah Rabbah, P'tich'ta #24).

The simple read of this text presents Rachel as being born in the town of Ramah, quite a distance from modern-day Beit Lechem - even north of Yerushalayim.

At this point, we are faced with two difficulties: a) How can the verse in Yirmiyahu be reconciled with the location described in B'reshet? b) How can the verse in Yirmiyahu be reconciled with convention - dating back at least seven hundred years - which places Kever Rachel south of Yerushalayim?

Before attempting to resolve the problem, it is prudent to note that the Yirmiyan association with Ramah is not incidental:

The word that came to Yirmiyah from Hashem, after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all those who were carried away captive from Yerushalayim and Yehudah, who were carried away captive to

Bavel. (Yirmiyah 40:1)

In other words, the captives from Yerushalayim, subsequent to the destruction, were taken away - northwards - and had a "transit stop" at the Binyaminite town of Ramah. This horrifying and desperate circumstance would be an "ideal" opportunity for the exiles to hear Rachel's weeping - and to be told of Hashem's promise to her that they would return to their borders.

Aware of the geographical tangle produced by this passage, classical commentaries have taken several approaches to resolve it. One famous one, first found in the Targum, renders "Ramah" not as a place-name, rather as "heaven" (the literal translation of "Ramah" is "high place" - taken because the city is atop a hill). Rachel's voice is being heard in heaven, according to this take.

This explanation is difficult to maintain within the realm of P'shat. Although we are not as concerned if it rends the attractive connection between Rachel's weeping and the "exilic transit stop" of Ch. 40, that is not enough to defeat the interpretation. There is, however, an inherent problem with explaining "Ramah" as "heaven" here. Besides the fact that such a word is never used - at least not in the prophetic canon - as a cognomen for "heaven", the vocalization doesn't fit. If "Ramah" were to mean "heaven", it would have to be written "Baramah" - "in THE heavens" (compare T'hilim 2:4 - "Yoshev BaShamayim"; indeed, even when referring to the Binyaminite town, "Baramah" is the common usage). The pointing of our text - "B'Ramah" must be translated "in Ramah".

There is another way to reconcile Yirmiyah 31 with the "southern theory" of the location of Kever Rachel, one that lacks nothing in elegance and may easily be maintained as P'shat, one advanced by Ramban in B'reshet 35:16. Note that the text doesn't say that Rachel's voice is heard "from Ramah"; rather, it is heard "in Ramah" - in other words, the exiles in Ramah are hearing her voice (from wherever it might be) weeping over their absence.

In short, the verse in Yirmiyah does nothing to establish or challenge the location of Kever Rachel.

There is, however, a Midrash which employs this passage to explain Ya'akov's choice of burial locations for his beloved Rachel which will demand a response if we are to maintain the conventional location of Kever Rachel:

Why did our father Ya'akov see fit to bury Rachel on the road to Efrat? He saw, through Divine inspiration, that the exiles will eventually pass by there; therefore, he buried her there so that she should beg G-d's compassion for them, as it says: "A voice is heard in RamahB" (B'reshet Rabbah 82:10)

The author of this Midrash seems to accept as a fait accompli that Rachel is buried somewhere north of Yerushalayim, as that is the route taken by the exiles on their way to Bavel.

We will yet return to this Midrash in our defense of the "southern theory".

Before moving on to the most difficult passage, there is another rabbinic source marshaled by those who would belittle the popular identification of the location of Kever Rachel - and it is not an easy source to elude:

R. Meir states, [Rachel] died in the her son's territory (i.e. Eretz Binyamin). (Sifri B'rakhah #11).

Remember, from the earliest passage in B'reshet, that Rachel gave birth, died and was buried all in one spot. If she died in [what would later become] Binyaminite land (parenthetically, that means that not only was Binyamin the only son to be born in K'na'an, he was born in the territory that would be named after him and inherited by his descendants) then she was buried there. How do we sustain a southern location with this identification - after all, doesn't Binyamin's land extend only as far south as Yerushalayim (see Yehoshua 18:16)?

We will yet return to this passage, as well as the Midrash about

Rachel's placement as a sentinel for the departing exiles.

III THE SECOND CHALLENGE FROM T'NAKH: "SHA'UL'S SIGNS"

BACKGROUND The book of Sh'mu'el is devoted to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. After 7 chapters describing the birth and career of Sh'mu'el, the text shifts its focus to the preparation for a king. In chapter 8, the people, noting Sh'mu'el's advancing age and his sinning sons (who would, presumably, take over his role as leader), as him for a king. At the end of this chapter of "Mishpat haMelekh", Sh'mu'el sends the people home, promising them a king.

At the beginning of Chapter 9, we are introduced to Sh'aul, a Binyaminite, who lives in Giv'ah. Sh'aul, a strapping young man with a great sense of filial loyalty, is trekking through the land of Binyamin to find his father's donkeys who have strayed. At some point, his "valet" suggests that they visit the local "seer" who might be able help them find the donkeys. Sh'mu'el, in the meantime, is told by G-d that the awaited-king will be arriving on the morrow. When Sh'aul, seeking prophetic guidance to find his father's donkeys meets Sh'mu'el, looking for the new leader of the people, there is a soft of dialogic dissonance; Sh'aul does not believe Sh'mu'el's words: "Am I not a Binyaminite, of the smallest of the tribes of Yisra'el? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Binyamin? Why then do you speak so to me?" (I Sh'mu'el 9:21)

After Sh'mu'el invites Sha'ul to be seated in the place of honor at the feast, he escorts the young Binyaminite and his valet out of town - and then:

Then Sh'mu'el took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because Hashem has anointed you to be captain over his inheritance? When you part from me today, then you shall find two men by K'vurat Rachel in the border of Binyamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, The donkeys which you went to seek have been found; and, behold, your father has ceased to care about the donkeys, and has become anxious about you, saying, What shall I do about my son? Then shall you go on forward from there, and you shall come to Elon Tavor, and there you shall be found by three men going up to G-d to Beit-El, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine; And they will greet you, and give you two loaves of bread; which you shall receive from their hands. After that you shall come to the Giv'at ha'Elokim, where the garrisons of the Philistines are; and it shall come to pass, when you have come there to the city, that you shall meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a lute, and a tambourine, and a pipe, and a lyre, before them; and they shall prophesy; And the spirit of Hashem will come upon you, and you shall prophesy with them, and shall be turned into another man. (I Sh'mu'el 10:1-6)

Sh'mu'el gives Sh'aul three signs, intended to demonstrate (it would seem) the truth of his prophetic powers such that Sha'ul should accept the mantle of leadership similarly foretold.

The difficulty, from our perspective, lies in the first sign - Kever Rachel is clearly placed in the land of Binyamin. The attached map clearly marks Sha'ul's journey home from Ramah; he will walk due south, ending well north of Yerushalayim. This verse seems to militate against identifying Kever Rachel as being in the district of Beit-Lechem, south of Yerushalayim.

It should be noted that there are a number of scholars who, ignoring most of the historic evidence cited above (they may argue that local traditions were based on an errant reading of text), favor the "northern theory" and maintain that Rachel was, indeed, buried north of Yerushalayim. How they interpret the two passages in B'reshet is a matter for a different shiur - one which we hope to present at a later date.

If we are to remain faithful to the strict reading of the verses in B'reshet and to the historic evidence (and conventional belief), we must address the passage in Sh'mu'el, as well as the two Midrashim cited

above, all of which seem to strongly challenge the present-day location of Kever Rachel.

IV ELITZUR'S SOLUTION: LITERARY ANALYSIS PROVIDES GEOGRAPHICAL ACCURACY

My teacher and friend, Dr. Yoel Elitzur (Sinai #92, Fall 1982, pp. 35-45) points out several difficulties in the "signs" given to Sha'ul, the resolution of which not only maintains the popular location of Kever Rachel, but also provides added insight into the significance of that special place. The rest of this essay is a synopsis of Dr. Elitzur's article.

There is one particular textual problem in the geographic marker used for the first "sign" - When you part from me today, then you shall find two men by K'vurat Rachel in the border of Binyamin at Zelzah.

1) If the location of Kever Rachel was known at the time, why add the other geographic landmarks (the border of Binyamin, Zelzah)? If, conversely, the location of Kever Rachel was not well-known at the time (or to Sha'ul), why incorporate it at all?

There are several general problems which emanate from these six verses: Whereas many commentaries have understood them to be "wonders", in the sense presented above (to wit, three such odd things will happen exactly as the prophet foretold, thus fortifying his prophecy about the monarchy). This is difficult on several accounts:

2) The word "Ot", as opposed to "Mophet", generally means "indicator"; i.e. a wondrous event which has an inherent or symbolic connection to the event it purports to confirm. 3) The signs are not presented as ancillary to Sh'mu'el's anointing of Sha'ul; they flow directly from his declaration and seem to be a part of the consecration of the new king. 4) The overabundance of details (geographical and other) which are found in this foretelling of Sha'ul's walk home is highly unusual and does not fit the common style of the T'nakh narrative.

V THE LITERARY ANALYSIS

In order to understand the literary structure of the three signs, we will first analyze the last two - and return to our point of departure - Kever Rachel.

Each sign shares some components:

A: Location (Elon Tavor, Giv'ah); B: Number of people (3, group) C: Description of people (going up to Beit El one with Band one with Band one with B, coming down from the altar with a lute and a tambourine and a pipe and a lyre) D: Interaction with them (and they will greet you, and give you two loaves of bread; which you shall receive from their hands, And the spirit of Hashem will come upon you, and you shall prophesy with them)

We would expect the first sign to follow this pattern, but it seems to deviate; instead of there being a brief notation about the location where Sha'ul would meet them, there is an overwhelming amount of information in that regard (by K'vurat Rachel in the border of Binyamin at Zelzah); yet there is no description given of these men, unlike the pilgrims and prophets described in the second and third "Otot", respectively.

Without fully solving the "component imbalance" of the first sign (which we will do forthwith), a pattern begins to emerge which demonstrates the significance of these signs and their sequence.

Note that each sign is introduced by Sha'ul's progress - When you part from me today B then shall you go on forward from there B after that you shall come to B

First he meets 2, then 3, then a whole group of people.

First "you shall find", then "you shall be found" and then "you shall encounter"

First "they will say to you" (Sha'ul is passive), then "you shall receive from their hands" (Sha'ul is active) then "you shall prophesy with them" (total enjoining).

We now see that we are not dealing with "wonders" (Moph'tim), rather with signs which are indicative of the spiritual ascendance and progress of Sha'ul. We also understand that the signs are part of the

anointing of Sha'ul. Sha'ul grows from a "donkey-seeker" to a man imbued with G-d's spirit. The final phrase - and [you] shall be turned into another man - is not part of the third sign; rather, it is the goal and summation of the entire process.

VI BACK TO KEVER RACHEL: SOLVING THE FIRST SIGN

As noted above, the first sign seems to deviate from the pattern of details found in the other two - there is too much geographic detail (and, in any case, the mention of Kever Rachel seems to be of no help or else should be sufficient) and no description of the 2 people he will meet there.

The Tosefta in Sota provides an answer which seems, prima facie, to be a "weak" defense of the southern theory:

Brather, [Sh'mu'el] said to him: Now, as I am speaking to you, they are at K'vurat Rachel. You are walking and they are coming and you will find them at the border of Binyamin at Zelzah. (Tosefta Sotah 11:7)

Having concluded our literary analysis, we see that this statement is not merely a defense of the popular location of Kever Rachel; it is also an astute observation about the three signs. The mention of K'vurat Rachel in the first sign is not a "geographic marker" - rather, it is the description of the two men, as follows:

Sign	Number	Location	Description	Interaction
2	Zelzah	At K'vurat Rachel	They will tell you	B 2 3
Elon Tavor	Ascending to Beit-El	You will take from them	3	
Group Giv'ah	Descending from the altar	You will join them		

The current presence of these men at K'vurat Rachel is not a way for him to find them - for they won't be there (south of Yerushalayim) when Sha'ul meets them; rather, they will be coming north, from K'vurat Rachel, and Sha'ul will meet them at Zelzah.

We can now place the final piece into the puzzle of the signs of Sha'ul: The progression is not only in number of people met, not only in the level of Sha'ul's interaction with them, but also in the quality of the spiritual experience in which they are engaged. The final, ultimate experience is prophecy; a pilgrimage to a Sanctuary is also a spiritual experience, although one that falls short of prophecy. The visit to Kever Rachel, while not on a par with a visit to an altar, also has religious and spiritual implications and dimensions.

We now understand the great attention paid to detail in these verses; each component serves to fill out the sequential growth of Sha'ul, until his spirit is captivated by prophecy.

Kever Rachel is, as indicated in B'reshet, a few miles north of Beit-Lechem; the challenge verse from Yirmiyah was rather easily answered. The more difficult challenge, from the prophecy of Sha'ul's return home, was not only resolved, but we gained a deeper appreciation of the relationship between the three signs given Sha'ul and his development into the first Melekh Yisra'el.

VII POSTSCRIPT

As noted above, there are two Midrashim which seem to support the "northern theory" - and R. Me'ir's statement that Rachel was buried in her son's territory and Ya'akov's decision to bury Rachel on the road to be a sentinel for the exiles who would pass by.

R. Me'ir's statement, when examined closely, is not an attempt to "relocate" Kever Rachel north of Yerushalayim; rather, it is an "expansion" of Binaymin's borders to include the area of Beit-Lechem. The dispute in the Sifri is not about the location of Kever Rachel; it is about the location (in which tribe's territory) of the Beit haMikdash.

The second Midrash would seem to present a problem; as noted above, the exiles to Bavel were taken northward from Yerushalayim on their way to Bavel.

The Ba'alei haMidrash who flourished in the shadow of the destruction of the 2nd Beit haMikdash often utilized verses referring to the first exile and destruction (586 BCE) as references to the persecutions of their own times. See, inter alia, the Petich'ta of Eikhah Rabbah.

Jerome, the early Church father and historian, writes (commentary to Yirmiyah 31) that after the quashing of the rebellion associated with Bar-Kosiba, the captives were taken by order of Hadrian, to the great fair north of Hevron; where they were sold as slaves. Perhaps the Midrash in question is alluding to this tragedy - for, indeed, they passed by Kever Rachel on the way to being sold into slavery.

How remarkable is it, then, that the P'sikta (2:3) has a slightly different version of our Midrash:

I buried her there. Why? It was known to Ya'akov, that ultimately the Beit haMikdash would be destroyed and his children would go into exile, and they would go to the patriarchs [in Hevron] begging them to pray for them, and they won't help them. Once they will be on the road, they will come and embrace Kever Rachel and she will stand and beg G-d's compassion

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THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH DAVID KAHN

This week's portion opens with our Patriarch Jacob's request to Joseph that he be buried in Canaan next to his forebears. Later we read how Joseph fulfills this request -- "And [Jacob's] son's carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham purchased with the field for a possession of a burying-place from Efron the Hittite before Mamre" (1). Abraham's purchase is well documented in the Bible (2); so much so that our sages say it is one of three places that clearly belongs to the Jewish people (3). In the city of Hebron there is a centuries-old massive building, made from large Herodian-style stones, purportedly on the site of the cave of Machpelah. This article hopes to shed some light on the authenticity of this claim by examining early eyewitness accounts and more recent archeological finds. The substantiation of our claim to the cave of Machpelah is very important; our sages compared it with the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments (4).

<Scholars differ as to who built the building on the site. Rabbi Ishtori HaParchi (Kaftor VaFerach) mentions a tradition that the huge stones were taken from the site of the Temple at the time of King Solomon (5). Many historians claim that the building was built by Herod, due to the fact that the stones bear a striking resemblance to the stones of the walls surrounding the Temple Mount (i.e. Western Wall) presumably built by him (6). B.Z. Luria argues that Herod built the Temple itself, of which no stones remain, but not the walls surrounding the Temple Mount. In addition, the historians of Herod's time do not attribute such a building to him, although many other buildings are mentioned. Luria asserts that other walls built with the same style stone (i.e. the palace of Hyrcanus ben Joseph of Beit Tuvia in modern-day Jordan; approx. 8 km west of Amman) predate Herod by at least 150 years (7) and posits that the building was built by Edomites around the beginning of the second century BCE (8).

<These scholars concede that the building existed at the time of Herod. A difficulty then arises when we read Josephus' description of the Patriarchs' tombs -- "Their tombstones can be seen in this city until today. They are made of beautiful marble..."(9) -- without any mention of the magnificent wall surrounding them. J. Braslavi offers as possible explanations that Josephus himself never visited Hebron and based his description on others; or that he forgot to write about it; or that a scribe

copying the manuscript inadvertently omitted it (10). Much more difficult is the story in the Talmud concerning Rabbi Banaah who went to mark the graves of the Patriarchs as a warning to Kohanim and others to avoid coming too close and thereby becoming ritually impure (11). As R. Banaah was of the later Tanaaim, over 200 years after Herod, of what need was there to mark the graves when they were already clearly marked by the present building surrounding them? R. Ishtori HaParchi solves the problem by emending one letter in the text (me'ayein instead of metzayein); he went to inspect the graves, not mark them (12). Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (RIF) writes that R. Banaah experienced the story recounted in a dream (13) and all dreams have inaccuracies (14).

<The earliest written description of a building on the site is by an anonymous traveler from Phlaketinus (570 CE) who describes a basilica with four rows of columns or gates. There were two separate entrances for Jews and Christians.(15)

<Caves do exist under the building and we have many reports of people who have entered them. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (1171) reports "A man went down steps with a lit candle in his hand; he went down into one cave, where there was nothing, then a second, until he came to a third and behold there were six graves." Rabbi Pesachya of Regensburg visited ten years later and reported that the second cave was locked with heavy iron. Thirty years later (1210) Rabbi Shmuel ben R. Shimshon states that there were three tombstones in the lower cave. Dovid HaReuveni (1523) and R. Gershon ben R. Eliezer (1624) entered the upper cave and were blocked from the lower cave by an iron gate. Other rabbis of the 18th and 19th centuries reported seeing entrances into the upper caves.(16)

<The Italian architect Armet Pierotti described his entrances into the caves. The first was on November 8, 1856. He entered through an underground passageway in the Mosque of Jeulie and saw a cave filled with wooden caskets. He also noticed other natural openings that connected the interior of the cave. The second, on August 25, 1859, is described dramatically. <"I saw how they rolled back a carpet and afterwards opened with a key an iron lattice and the Sheikh went down steps 70 cm. wide chiseled out of bedrock." Pierotti tried to sneak in with the entourage but was discovered and only managed to reach the fifth step before being beaten and removed. He claimed to have bent down and seen tombstones in the northern part of the cave and to have discerned a rock wall on the southern side near the steps that connect the upper cave with the lower cave.(17)

<At the end of November 1917, when General Allenby discovered that Hebron was not being defended by the Turks, he sent a light force, headed by Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, to organize an administrative apparatus there. The Colonel's search for leaders of the community led him to the Cave of Machpelah, which he found deserted. At one point, behind the symbolic monument of Abraham's tomb, he discerned a door slightly ajar at the base of one of the walls. The door was 4 feet (1.2 m) high; inside, the floor was bedrock and slanted downward at a 45 degree angle. At the bottom was a room about 7 yards across. The rock floor was more or less straight with a few cracks in it. The walls, which did not appear to be too straight, were covered with a thick layer of dust and smoke. The impression was one of dirt and neglect. At one end of the room he saw a cement or stone rectangle about 2x1 meters, flanked by four engraved metal pillars, two on each side.

<The archeologist L.H. Vincent has difficulties with Pierotti's account above. At a later date, his associate, E.J.H. Mackay, asked Meinertzhagen to show him the door through which he entered the cave, but they found it sealed. Vincent himself describes two entrances to the caves underneath -- one sealed off near the symbolic monument of Isaac's tomb, the other in the same room at the opposite wall, which separates that room from Abraham's tomb mentioned above. Vincent managed to measure the depth of this second cave -- 4.25 meters. There was a strong wind blowing in the cave and a low doorway on the western

side of the southern wall. Two steps were carved out of the bedrock in the doorway. This fits the description of other ancient Jewish subterranean burial places. (18)

<It should be pointed out that for over 700 years, Moslem control of the site severely limited Jewish or Christian access to the building. Jews were only allowed to enter the southeast entrance and to climb until the seventh step. A hole in the wall at that spot continues into the building and is opposite one of the entrances to the caves below.

<After the Six Day War, General Moshe Dayan sent a thin girl named Michal into the second cave described by Vincent. She measured it with footsteps and took pictures. Dayan publicized this when he was Minister of Defense in 1976. (19) It was also brought in his book, "Chayai Im HaTanach". The entrance leads to a 3x3 m room, which contained Moslem artifacts. On one side is a tunnel which connects underneath the sealed entrance described by Vincent. At the end of the tunnel are 16 steps, which lead to another sealed entrance. In the middle of the tunnel is another entrance, sealed by stones.

<In 1985, archeologist Dr. Zev Yeivin, described in an article more details concerning this second cave. In a recent interview given to Nachrichten aus Israel (News from Israel), a German news agency, Yeivin, former Deputy Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority, explained that in 1980 he entered the cave with others to determine whether or not damage had been caused there. The facts surrounding this entrance were kept secret for political reasons. < They opened a floor plate in the cave and lowered themselves into an oval chamber (3 m diameter) from which a passage led to a second smaller oval room (2 m diameter). The chambers are similar to other burial chambers common at the time of Abraham 4000 years ago. In the larger room they found pieces of a lamp and a clay jug from the Crusader period; this would seem to confirm the report of the Arab traveler Ali El-Harawi that Christian monks entered the caves in 1119, found bones and washed them with wine. In the smaller chamber they found clay shards from the 8th-9th centuries BCE (first Temple period). In the upper cave they found Latin script containing the names Jacob and Abraham.(20)

<From all of the above the following conclusions can be reached. The outer walls of the building considered today to be on the site of the cave of Machpelah are probably over two thousand years old. There are caves under the building which descend more than one level. (21) The cave seems to have been in use at the time of the first Temple. As far as can be determined, recorded history has continuously considered this site to be the traditional burial place of the Patriarchs.

Rabbi David Kahn, JCT Alumnus, is a computer programmer and was Ram in the JCT one-year program for English speaking students from overseas. Notes (1) Bereishit (50:13) (2) Bereishit (23:1-20) (3) Bereishit Rabah (79:7) (4) Bereishit Rabah(58:8) see Matnot Kehuna there (5) Kaftor VaFerach (Chapter 11)[Lunz (p.300); Edelman(p.48)] (6) BT Succah (51b) (7) Josephus, Antiquities (12,11) (8) Sefer Hevron ed. Oded Avishar < [Katav 1970 (p. 273-276)] (9) Josephus, Wars of the Jews IV (9,7) (10) See 8 above (p.286) (11) BT Bava Batra (58a) (12) See 5 above. This answer is supported by the end of the story there that states "He went in, looked ('ayein), and came out". (13)She-alot UTeshuvot HaRif < I (313) (14) BT Berachot (55a) (15)Hebron, LeHaram El-Khalh, L.H. Vincent, E.J.H. Mackay, F.M. Abel, Editions Ernest Leroux Paris, 1923 < (p.157) (16) Igarot Verishmei Bikur (Sha'ar IV) (17) Machpela, Armet Pierotti(p. 95) (18) See 8 (p. 277-284) and 15 above (19) Kadmoniyot, Shana Tet, Choveret 4 [36], 1976 (pg.129-131) (20) Ha-Uma (The Nation - quarterly) "Cave of Machpelah and the Monument upon it", Z. Yeivin, No. 127 - Spring 1997. The article contains a detailed map. Confirmed by oral communication. (21) See 11 above concerning the double caves of Machpelah

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Parshat Vayechi

GATHER AND LISTEN, O SONS OF YAAKOV

Rosh Hayeshiva RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG, shlita

"Yosef harnessed his chariot, and went up to meet Yisrael, his father, to Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck excessively." (Bereishit 46:29) Yaakov, however, neither fell on Yosef's neck nor kissed him. Our Rabbis explain that [this was because] he was reciting K'riat Shema. (Rashi, ibid.).

The Ba'alei Mussar ask, what led Yaakov to recite K'riat Shema specifically at this emotional moment? They explain that he used this opportunity to collect the intense feelings of love that he felt toward Yosef at that moment, and to sanctify them towards the love of the Creator.

There is, however, an additional, deeper meaning. To Yaakov, Yosef's disappearance was more than the loss of a beloved son. To him, the fate of the entire family and nation was at stake. In each one of the Avot there existed a flaw, which found expression in one of his sons, resulting in the separation of that son from the sanctity of Israel, and his choice of a different path. Avraham produced Yishmael, and Yitzchak produced Esav. The question that tormented Yaakov was whether the struggle between Yosef and his brothers was a continuation of this pattern of struggle between brothers, which would result in division and rift? Or, was this struggle the expression of different positions and approaches within one nation, as a body comprised of many limbs, as Chazal state, "Yaakov bed was complete, with no flaw?"

A hint at Yaakov's fear is found in the Midrash pertaining to Yaakov's exile to Charan (Bereishit Rabbah 68:13):

"He took from the stones of the place." (Bereishit 28:11) Rabbi Yehuda says: Yaakov took twelve stones, saying, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu has decreed that He will establish twelve tribes. Avraham did not establish them. Yitzchak did not establish them. I, if these stones connect to each other, I know that I will establish them . . . The Rabbis say: . . . [Yaakov took two stones and said], "Avraham produced Yishma'el and all the sons of Ketura. Yitzchak produced Esav and all his chiefs. I, if these two stones unite, I know that no flaw will come from me."

For twenty-two years, Yaakov lived with the fear that perhaps he too was flawed, and would be subject to the same fate as his fathers. Now, however, with the reconciliation of his sons, it became clear that there would be no further rift within Am Yisrael. The twelve tribes are certainly separate limbs, but together comprise one whole body, and thus go to Egypt "beshiv'im nefesh" ["nefesh" is singular], as seventy people with one, united soul.

In the future, the prophet Yechezkel is commanded, "Take for yourself one piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yehuda'; . . . and take one piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yosef' . . . Then bring them close to yourself, one to the other, like one piece of wood, and they will become united in your hands." (Yechezkel 37:16-17) When Yaakov observes the reconciliation and unity of Yosef and his brothers, similar to the prophetic vision of the future, he expresses himself by reciting K'riat Shema, the declaration of the Unity of G-d.

This theme is repeated when Yaakov blesses his sons, as related in Pesachim (56a):

Yaakov desired to reveal the end of days to his sons, but the Divine Presence was removed from him. He said, "Perhaps there is some flaw in me, like Avraham, who produced Yishmael, or my father, Yitzchak, who produced Esav." His sons responded by declaring, "'Shema Yisrael' . . . Just as in your heart there is only One, so too in ours there is only One

("echad")."

The Maharal explains that the word "echad" hints at the variety and unity found simultaneously within the tribes. Alef [one] refers to Yaakov; Chet [eight] to the sons of the mothers, Rachel and Leah; and Dalet [four] to the sons of the maidservants, Bilha and Zilpa. Together they are "echad," one unit comprised of diverse forces and approaches.

It is impossible to expect redemption without unity. This was Yaakov's testament to his sons, "Hei'asfu - Assemble yourselves!" (49:1) Chazal interpret this in reference to internal conflict. Yaakov commanded his sons to be united, and thus prepared for the redemption. Alternatively, "hei'asfu" is a term for death. Yaakov told his sons that there must be no conflict, for that would lead to the spilling of blood, as Chazal have said "A synagogue or house in which there is conflict is destined to be destroyed."

"Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov." (49:2) Although I do not know when the ultimate day of judgment will be, I will tell you that when you assemble and gather together, you shall be redeemed. (Agadat Bereishit)

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MORDECHAI WILLIG - Priority and Innovation
http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2001/parsha/rwil_vayechi.html
RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG
PRIORITY AND INNOVATION

I "May Hashem make you like Efraim and Menashe," and he put Efraim before Menashe (48:20). This classical beracha emphasizes Yaakov Avinu's reversal of the chronological order of birth of his grandsons when he blessed them. What does this incident represent?

Earlier (ibid, 14), Yaakov placed his right hand on Efraim's head, and his left hand on Menashe's. Yet Menashe remained on Yaakov's right knee, necessitating the crossing of Yaakov's hands. Why didn't Yaakov simply place Efraim on his right knee?

The Netziv (14) explains that Efraim preceded Menashe only in spiritual matters, symbolized by Yaakov's placing his right hand on Efraim's head. However, in worldly matters Menashe was superior, and was therefore blessed on Yaakov's right knee.

Indeed, the little we know about the lives of Efraim and Menashe supports the description of their respective strengths. Efraim was often in Yaakov's presence learning Torah (Rashi, 1), whereas Menashe served as the official interpreter in Yosef's palace (Rashi 42:43).

When Yaakov defended his actions, he told Yosef (48:19), "I know that the elder will be great, but the younger will be even greater". Rashi explains that this referred to the respective descendants of Menashe and Efraim, namely Gidon and Yehoshua. The Netziv added that Gidon was a warrior, succeeding in worldly pursuits, whereas Yehoshua was primarily a Torah scholar and teacher, excelling in spiritual matters.

II A fundamental difference between the worldly and spiritual realms is reflected in these biblical personalities. To succeed in worldly affairs ϕ diplomatic, military, technological, and financial ϕ one must always respond to changing realities. Innovation is a prerequisite for overcoming new challenges in physical matters. New strategies, weapons, technologies, and careers are appropriate, and necessary, in order to succeed.

By contrast, spiritual accomplishment demands fealty to ancient tradition. Both in study and practice, the Torah Jew is guided by the law given by Hashem at Sinai thousands of years ago. Even novel interpretations are attempts to understand that revelation, and were initially given at Sinai.

Gidon overcame a more powerful army by devising a new strategy.

In making a great noise by sounding shofars and breaking jugs, his small force fooled the enemy into flight and they were defeated (Shoftim 7:19-22). Wars must be fought with new weapons and strategies to confound the foe. This individual innovation was referred to as "this strength of yours" which Hashem gave Gidon to save Am Yisroel(6:14).

Yehoshua was the loyal disciple of Moshe, the one to whom Moshe transmitted the Torah he had received at Sinai. Moshe's face was like the sun, and Yehoshua's like the moon (Baba Basra, 75a). Yehoshua's goal was to reflect the radiance of his master Moshe, as the moon reflects the light of the sun. He was chosen for spiritual leadership because of his dedication to his rebbe and tradition, and his aversion to innovation in the study and practice of Torah.

These ideas resonate not only in the personalities of the great descendants of these shvatim, but in the very name of their forebears as well. The name Menashe is based on "nashani" (41:51), the root of which means to forget (Rashi 32:33), or to move away. In the worldly area in which Menashe excelled, one must forget old ideas and move to deal with new realities.

The name Efraim comes from "hifrani" (41:52), which means He has made me fruitful. Just as a fruit is a replica of the previous ones grown on that tree, so does spiritual greatness and leadership require preserving the immortal tradition of previous generations.

III The Medrash Tanchuma (Naso 29) states: A person should not say, "I will not fulfill rabbinic commandments, such as Ner Chanukah, since they are not in the Torah itself." In fact, Hashem agrees with these enactments. The proof is that Yaakov placed Efraim before Menashe, and Hashem confirmed this order by the fact that Efraim's offering preceded Menashe's.

The enigmatic connection between rabbinic mitzvos and the precedence of Efraim can be explained based on the above. Klal Yisroel's healthy aversion to new mitzvos might lead to the rejection of Ner Chanukah. Only if Hashem approves will the new commandment be followed.

Yaakov's reversal of the order was a bold and questionable spiritual decision, and yet Hashem confirmed it. Change for its own sake is objectionable, but when instituted by great leaders who normally abhor innovation, it must be embraced by Am Yisroel, just as it is endorsed by Hashem.

Unusual circumstances led Yaakov to bless Efraim first, and led Chazal to institute Ner Chanukah. But the connection is deeper. The very name Efraim requires loyalty to old tradition and resistance to spiritual change. Only one whose conservative bias to preserve ancient laws and customs is fully developed can be trusted to make the occasional change warranted by a new situation.

By placing Efraim first, Yaakov demonstrated not only the priority of spirituality, but also the need to adhere to the traditional Torah way, changing only when necessary. When Hashem confirmed the reordering, He provided guidelines for Halachic leadership and innovation for all generations, and the basis for the acceptance of Ner Chanukah. Hopefully, those loyal to Torah will find and follow rabbinic leaders who will strike the proper balance between tradition and innovation.

[From last year]

http://www.torahweb.org/torah/1999/parsha/rsch_vayech.html

RAV HERSCHEL SCHACHTER
MESORAH AND CHANGE

The medrash points out that the bracha which Avraham granted his son Yitzchak revolved around the verb, "natan" ("Vayiten Avraham et kol asher lo leYitzchak"). Therefore, years later when Yitzchak formulated his bracha for his son Yaakov, he opened with the words, "Vayiten lecha Elokim." And because Yitzchak's bracha ended with the

use of the verb "karah" ("Vayikra Yitzchak el Yaakov"), years later, when Yaakov was formulating his bracha for his children, he started with the same expression,

"Vayikra Yaakov el banav." Yaakov concluded his brachot with the expression "vezot asher diber lahem avihem." Therefore, many years later when Moshe Rabbeinu formulated his brachot to Klal Yisroel he too used the same expression, and started with the phrase, "Vezot habracha." And again, because Moshe concluded his brachot with the expression, "ashrecha yisroel," years later, when King David composed the Sefer Tehillim, he began with the same expression, "Ashrei haish."

The medrash learns from the pasuk, "mezekeinim etbonan" (Tehillim 119), that each generation learns from and emulates the practices of the earlier generation. The rabbis of the medrash understood quite well that it would be unreasonable to expect all the generations to always use the exact same expressions. Times change, attitudes change, and expressions of speech change. The rabbis just felt that the practices of each generation should be connected with those of the earlier generations.

If the Rabbis felt this way with respect to formulating brachot certainly they would feel more so with respect to halachot of how to keep the mitzvos. True, the Torah scholars of each generation if they are qualified- may express an opposing view to those of earlier generations. We see many times in the Mishnayot that a later Beit Din overturned the psak of an earlier Beit Din. But there still must be a "hemshech" and a connection to the Torah views of the earlier generations. To use the terminology of the Rav, "chiddush" (new insight) is acceptable, but "shinui" (change) is not; and one must have a very strong mesorah to know how to distinguish between the two. Mattan Torah did not occur yesterday. Our Torah of today is only valid to the extent that it has been transmitted accurately, by the masorah, from earlier generations. That masorah is one consisting of a way of thinking halachically, as well as attitudes, perspectives, and style, vis- -vis the wording of brachot.

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CANDLE, DAWN AND CROSSROAD "For the mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light." (Mishlei 6:23) This is comparable, says the gemara, to the situation of a man walking along a lonely road in total darkness. He is afraid of the thorns which may cut him, the sword-like growths which may stab him and the pits into which he is likely to fall. In addition he is in fear of the wild beasts and bandits which lurk in the darkness and he is not certain that he is walking in the right direction.

He comes upon a torch to light his way and is now able to avoid thorns, sword-like growths and pits. But he is still in fear of beasts and bandits and uncertain of his direction. When the light of dawn appears he is safe from the beasts and bandits who slink back to their lairs but he is still uncertain of where he is heading. Only when he reaches a familiar crossroads is he finally free from all the dangers which have threatened him.

Maharsha explains this parable in the following fashion:

Life in this world is compared to a journey through darkness. Man is composed of body and soul. The body performs the mitzvot, while the soul, which encompasses man's intelligence, is occupied with the intellectual activity of Torah study. In man's physical existence there are three major obstacles to security and perfection. Thorns symbolize man's struggle against hunger as we find in the penalty of human labor meted out to Adam. "Thorn and thistle will it [the earth] sprout for you" (Bereishet 3:18). The sword-like growth represents the sword of the enemy and the pits symbolize the sudden death of sickness and accident. Performing mitzvot with our physical powers is similar to the torch and the merit of these physical actions achieves for us physical security.

But man is also threatened in regard to his spiritual security. The evil inclination in man is like the beast within while the evil influence of bad company is like the bandit outside. These spiritual dangers can only be countered by the spiritual-intellectual force of Torah study which is like the light of day.

What do the crossroads, which bring final security, represent? A number of definitions are offered by the Sages. Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak states that this means a Torah scholar with fear of sin. Rashi explains that if one has achieved the self-discipline of fearing sin after achieving Torah knowledge, he is safe from all dangers, for Torah educates him in regard to his responsibilities and what is right and wrong while self-discipline restrains him from following his passions. This is called finally knowing that one is heading in the right direction. *

Sotah 21a

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