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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiurim

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Vayechi 5774

1. A few comments on the Parsha beginning with a beautiful insight which I just heard from Rabbi Yisroel Belsky the other day. Everyone is Matmia on Yaakov Avinu. Here he is coming to give Berachos to his children and he gives Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi rather strong words of rebuke. This is at the same time that he was giving his other children words of blessing. It would seem to be inappropriate, certainly inappropriate for someone like Yaakov Avinu who is the one from whom we learn not to treat children differently. Certainly that needs an explanation.

Rav Belsky offered an explanation by way of the following Kasha. We find that Shimon and Levi are criticized in 49:7 (Arur Apam Ki Az) for being people who have a powerful anger. Shimon lived in different places of Eretz Yisrael because he was Milamed Tinokos, he was a Rebbe. Is that appropriate, that Shimon someone who has the Midda of (Arur Apam Ki Az) should be a Rebbe? The Shulchan Aruch says that Ain Hakapdan Melamed, that a Kapdan is not allowed to be a Rebbe.

Rav Belsky answered that Yaakov Avinu understood that the Shevatim were able to take his rebuke, they were able to take his Tochacha. As a matter of fact of all of the Shevatim the greatest Beracha went to Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi because they heard Yaakov Avinu's rebuke, they took it, and they repaired their misbehavior. So that Shimon who had this Midda of (Arur Apam Ki Az), the Midda of anger took Yaakov Avinu's rebuke of Yaakov to heart, worked on it and he became a Melamed Tinokos. He became among all the Shevatim the one who was most careful not to be a Kapdan. He was the one who had this nature, and worked on it and was able to change himself.

Regarding Reuvain we find in Shiras Devora, at the moment that Devora was complaining that Reuvain did not come and help to do battle, Reuvain uses the expression as it says in Shoftim 5:16 Gedolim Chikrei Leiv Lama Yashavta Bein Hamishposoyim. Why didn't you come to do battle Devora says, that Reuvain is (Gedolim Chikrei Lev). They are people who think well, they debate, and look at two sides of an issue before they do something.

This is the same Reuvain who Yaakov said in 49:4 (Pachaz Kamayim), you are quick to pass judgment and act. We find not too much later that the very same people are described as (Gedolim Chikrei Lev). Again the message is that Sheivet Reuvain took the Mussar to heart and Sheivet Reuvain on the contrary turned their behavior to be just the reverse.

The Gemara says in Eiruchin 16b (17 lines from the top) I wonder if in our generation there are really individuals who accept and take rebuke. We find it very hard to take rebuke. We react by defending our positions. That is human nature. The Shevatim were great. The Shevatim were on a different level. Yaakov Avinu knew that the best Beracha he could give Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi would be a Beracha of a harsh word, the Beracha of a rebuke at a moment like this where they would be able to change. And so this was at the end the greatest of all Berachos. A beautiful Vort and what a strong Mussar.

2. I would like to move on to one of the Berachos and to discuss with you 49:14 Yissachar Chamor Gorem, the Beracha of Yissachar who is a bony donkey as opposed to a fat heavy donkey who doesn't work. He is Chamor Gorem a donkey who is able to work. We find in the wonderful Posuk of Beracha something that appears to be a contradiction. (Vayar Menucha Ki Tov), Yissachar is called a Sheivet who understands the importance of rest. On the other hand it says further in the same Posuk (Vayet Shichmo Lisbol) that the Midda of Yissochor is that he bends his shoulder to carry a heavy weight like a Chamor. These are opposite ideas. One is the idea of Menucha needing its rest and the other is (Vayet Shichmo Lisbol) to be able to take on big challenges and heavy weights.

Rav Hutner in the Pachad Yitzchok on Shevuos has a beautiful explanation of this Beracha and it is not only an explanation of these words but the explanation of the key to being like Yissachar. Yissachar, the Sheivet that goes and spends its time with Ameilus B'torah, working on learning. Rav Hutner begins with the idea that the Torah is Nikneh with the key of Ho'amida B'veis Hashem Baleilos. Standing in Hashem's house at night, going out at night to the Bais Medrash and spending many hours in the Bais Hashem working on Torah. Of course Rav Hutner doesn't need to mention that Thursday night is Mishmar night which is a very opportune time to do such a thing. At any rate he explains the following. He says that there are people who are Amailim B'torah, they work, they don't have Menuchas Hanefesh, they work hard at their learning. That is a good Midda. There is a better Midda. The Midda of Yissachar. The Midda of a Sheivet that understands that if a person doesn't use his muscles then he becomes weak. If a person doesn't put himself to the task of learning Torah then learning Torah becomes foreign to him. Vayar Menucha Ki Tov Vayeit Shichmo Lisbol. The greatest Midda is a Midda of a Lomed Torah an Amal Batorah who puts his shoulder to the task, who works. (Vayar Menucha Ki Tov) he understands that being able to do it is his Menucha, is his rest, is his Menuchas Hanefesh, Shleimus. He feels Shalva when he learns for a long stretch in the Bais Medrash, of working on learning and understanding the Geshmak of the learning.

Rav Hutner compares it to the Midda of a man who has a wife who is an Eizer K'negdo, his helper and against him. Here again you can say that they are opposites. K'negdo she is against him. Eizer, she is his helper. Fortunate is the man who understands that when someone comes against him, when someone comes with good intentions to give him rebuke, to give him Mussar, Eizer that is his best help and then he does what he needs to do. He doesn't react violently to being rebuked by a wife. But rather Eizer, sees it as a help. The same thing here. A person who sees his learning, his Ameilus, as something hard it is a wonderful Midda and a person can do it anyway. However, there is a higher Darga, a higher Madreiga and that is (Vayar Menucha Ki Tov). Someone who can see the peace in it and he is really at peace when he works on his learning. Such a person goes out to learn at night as a routine. It is not a battle every time. It is his Menucha and at the same time that it is his (Vayet Shichmo Lisbol).

I remember seeing this idea regarding something else. We know that there are seven Middos, Chesed, Gevura, Tiferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchus made famous by the seven weeks of the Sefiras Haomer. These Middos are K'negged Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aaron, Yosef, and Dovid. Moshe's Midda is the Midda of the one who teaches Torah, is Netzach. What is Netzach? Netzach in Hebrew has two different meanings. Netzach means victory. Netzachon to be victorious, to win. The idea of Netzach is also used to mean eternity. Two seemingly different meanings. There are two types of victories. There is someone who wins a battle and gets up the next day to fight the battle again. He fights to wake up in the morning and then the next day he has to fight the battle all over again. He is a victorious warrior. There is a higher Madreiga of victory. Nitzachon, where a victory is eternal. Where someone battles and conquers and wins. There is no new battle the next day. There may be a new battle on a different front but in this war the war is over. Moshe Rabbeinu's Midda is the Midda of an Omeil Batorah, he fights to get to the Bais Medrash, it is a battle but he reaches a point of (Vayar Menucha Ki Tov) where it is a given, it is a Nitzachon, the battle is for eternity. It is won for eternity. Now a person should never feel sure, nevertheless that is the goal that it should be for eternity. It is a given that it comes Thursday night and he goes to the Bais Medrash for an extra Mishmar. It comes morning he heads out to Minyan. It is not a battle every day. This is the true Midda of Netzach.

There is a third place I had once seen this Vort which is in the explanation of the Machzor. In the Machzor for the Yomim Noraim we say Vadai Shemo Kain Tehiloso, Hashem's name is Vadai and that is his praise. What is this name or Midda of Vadai and how are we supposed to emulate the Midda of Vadai? It is this which we are discussing today. Vehalachta Bid'rachav, there has to be an attempt to be a Vadai. We know with certainty that Hashem responds with kindness to everything that comes his way. The Middos of Hashem are Vadai, are certain. We have to emulate that. We have to try to conquer, to reach a Darga of Vadai, a Darga of (Vayar Menucha Ki Tov). Now of course it is true that a human being always has a Yaitzer Hora and when you win one war there is another war with the Yaitzer Hora coming over the horizon. Nevertheless, in each battle whatever we conquer that is us, that makes us, that is an emulation of Vadai Shemo.

3. My third Vort will be a short one but a sharp one. In Parshas Vayechi we find in Rashi in 47:29 the idea of Chesed and Emes. Chesed She'osim Im Hameisim Hu Chesed Shel Emes. When someone does Chesed with someone who has passed away that is true Chesed because he knows that he will never be able to be paid back. Why does Rashi say it here, the idea of Chesed and Emes is found earlier in the Torah in Parshas Chaya Sara where Eliezer says in 24:49 (ViAta Im Yeshchem Osim Chesed Viemes Es Adoni). When he asks that Rivka be given as a wife to Yitzchok he says that is (Chesed Viemes). Again, it seems to be a Chesed that is Emes. How does that fit with what Rashi says here? Rashi's words seem to only fit in the case of a Meis and not otherwise.

Ulai when it comes to making a Shidduch and it comes to choosing a Shidduch for your child there are many parents who are making a Shidduch for themselves, they are looking for honor, they are looking for money, they are looking for things to work out for them. Eliezer the perfect Shadchan said no, when you are choosing a Shidduch (Im Yeshchem Osim Chesed Viemes Es Adoni) look for the one that is the perfect one for your child, that fits your child, that suits your child. It is not a Shidduch for you it is a Shidduch for your children. This is a beautiful lesson in the (Chesed Viemes).

With that I want to wish everyone an absolutely wonderful Shabbos, Parshas Vayechi. Good Shabbos to all!

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Thu, Jan 1, 2015 at 1:05 PM subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayechi

Parshas Vayechi These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD#927 – Yissocher/Zevulun Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Yosef and Yaakov Agreed On the Purpose of the Blessings

Parshas Vayechi begins with the story of Yosef coming to Yaakov with his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim. "And Yosef saw that his father placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and it was evil in his eyes. And Yosef said, "This is not correct my father, for this one is the first born. Place your right hand on his head." [Bereshis 48:17] We are familiar with the sequence of events. Yosef purposely put Menashe close to Yaakov's right hand and Yaakov purposely crossed his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head. Yaakov refused to accept Yosef's "correction" and responded: "I know my son, I know. He (Menashe) too will become a nation and he too will be great; however his younger brother will be greater than him and his descendant's (fame) will fill the nations." [Bereshis 48:19]

Rav Yeruchum Levovitz provides an interesting insight into this 'dispute' between father and son. Later on in the parsha, the pasuk says: "All these are the tribes of Israel – twelve – and this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them; each according to his blessing he blessed them." [Bereshis 49:28] What does this last phrase – "each according to his blessing he blessed them" mean? Rashi interprets "the blessing that is destined to come upon each one."

Rav Yeruchum elaborates: People make a mistake when they go to a Tzaddik for a blessing. They think that this righteous person has a box full of blessings and they ask him to give him one of the blessings from his box. This is not how it works. A bracha can only accomplish what the person already has within his own potential. A bracha cannot create something that does not exist.

Let us give an analogy. There is plant food. There is a plant food that is custom made for roses. When a person applies these nutrients to a rose bush, one will be able to grow lush and beautiful roses. If a person uses the same plant food (designed for roses) on daffodils, it is not going to work because this food is only designed to bring out "rose potential", not "daffodil potential".

Likewise, explains Rav Yeruchem, a Tzaddik cannot bless a person with blessings that he does not already potentially have within him. The bracha will simply not work! If someone does not have a good voice and he goes to a Tzaddik and says, "I want to be a world class chazzan like Helfgot," he should not expect miracles. No Tzaddik can give a bracha to make a person who cannot carry a tune into a world-class chazzan. This is what it means when it says Yaakov blessed his sons "each according to his blessing he blessed them." He only expressed the blessings -- as Rashi remarks -- that each one was destined to already potentially have within themselves. It would not work to give Zevulun the bracha that he should become a Yissacher or vice versa.

The purpose of a bracha is that the recipient should become what he already potentially is destined to become, no more and no less.

Yosef looked at his two sons and protested, "Menashe is the first born. He should get the predominant blessing." Yaakov said, "I know my son, I know" -- meaning I know something by Divine Inspiration (Ruach haKodesh) that you do not know. I know that despite their birth order, the younger son will become the greater of the two. I know by Ruach haKodesh that Ephraim has the greater potential. Therefore, I need to bless them in this fashion. It will simply not work to try to give the predominant bracha to Menashe.

Yosef and Yakov both realized that a bracha works only to bring out the potential. Yosef naturally assumed that being the first-born, Menashe automatically had the greater potential and should receive the predominant

bracha. However, Yaakov realized prophetically that the greater potential resided with the younger brother, Ephraim.

"As This Day": A Beautiful Interpretation of an Ambiguous Expression

Following his father's death, when Yosef saw that his brothers were afraid that he would now take revenge upon them, he tried to reassure them: "Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good; in order to accomplish – as this day – that a vast people be kept alive." [Bereshis 50:19] In this speech to his brothers, what do the words "Kayom hazeh" [as this day] mean? It does not really seem to fit in smoothly! The commentary Be'er Moshe gives a fantastic interpretation.

We are now finishing the Book of Bereshis and as we have mentioned several times during these last twelve weeks, the predominant theme of Sefer Bereishis is: "Ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim" [the actions of the fathers foreshadow those of their children]. Whatever was accomplished by our forefathers allowed us to become the nation and people we are today.

Chazal say that during the entire time the Jewish people were in Egypt, not one woman was ever (knowingly) unfaithful to her husband. Considering the depravity and amoral nature of Egyptian society, this was truly an amazing feat.

How was such a feat accomplished? It came about through the power of "Ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim." When the Matriarch Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's palace and did not succumb to the sin of infidelity to her husband, it gave her descendants, generations later -- the entire time they were in Egypt -- the spiritual strength to avoid sins of infidelity.

Furthermore, in Parshas Vayeshev the pasuk says [Bereshis 39:10-11] "And it was when she (Potiphar's wife) spoke to Yosef day after day and he did not listen to her to lie with her, to be with her. And it was like this day (k'yom ha'zeh) that he entered the house to do his work and not one of the men of the household was in the house..." She literally tried to seduce Yosef on that day.

The Be'er Moshe links the expression "k'yom ha'zeh" in the story of Yosef and Potiphar's wife with the exact same expression found in Vayechi, when Yosef speaks to his brothers. The reason the men of Israel -- for hundreds of years -- were able to withstand sins of a sexual nature was because of Yosef's self-control on that "k'yom ha'zeh".

This insight puts the pasuk in Vayechi in an entirely different light: "Your intentions towards me were bad, but G-d had something else in mind. He did not only put me in Egypt to be able to sustain the world physically. He put me in Egypt so that I should be in a place of temptation with a married woman and be able to overcome that temptation in order to accomplish k'yom hazeh (like this day) l'ha'chayos am rav (that a vast people be kept alive)." L'ha'chayos am rav does not merely mean that the masses should have what to eat. It also means to sustain Klal Yisrael in Egypt that they should not stumble before the temptation to sin (sexually). This was part of G-d's "Grand Plan". Because of that which happened "on that day" (with Potiphar's wife), the Jewish people throughout their sojourn in Egypt had the spiritual strength to never falter in matters of sexual immorality.

This is yet another example of "Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim," which we have seen throughout Sefer Bereshis and which we conclude this week with the reading of Parshas Vayechi.

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Ma'aser Kesafim

Rabbi Michael Taubes

When Yaakov Avinu, while running away from his brother Eisav, awakens after dreaming about the Malachim ascending and descending the ladder, he davens to Hashem, and vows that if Hashem will provide for his needs and see that he will return safely to his father's home, he will give Hashem one tenth of whatever he has (Bereishit 28:20-22). The Da'as Zekeinim MiBa'alei HaTosafos (Posuk 20 s.v. im), a Midrash is cited which indicates that Yaakov at that time instituted that one should give away one tenth of one's money to Tzedakah. Although the Torah itself clearly presents elsewhere the Mitzvah to support the poor by giving Tzedakah (Vayikra 25:35, Devarim 15:7-8), no guidelines are given as to specifically how much money or what percentage of one's income must be given to Tzedakah in order to properly fulfill this Mitzvah. The idea giving one tenth of one's agricultural produce to the poor indeed documented in the Torah (Devarim 26:12); this is known as Ma'aser Ani, which was given in years three and six of seven year Shemitah cycle. No other mention, however, of a requirement to give specifically one tenth of anything to the poor is found in the Torah.

Based upon a Posuk in Mishlei (3:9), however, the Yerushalmi in Peiah (3b) implies that one is required to give Ma'aser Ani, a tithe of one tenth to the poor, from all of one's possessions, not just from agricultural produce. This view is cited by the Mordechai, in his commentary on the Gemara in Bava Kamma (Siman 192, 53b B'dapei Harif), where it is presented as a source for the Mitzvah to give Ma'aser Kesafim. Another source is found in the commentary of Tosafos on the Gemara in Ta'anis (9a) which expounds upon a Posuk later in the Torah (Devarim 14:22) that contains the seemingly extraneous double use of a word in relationship to tithes (Aser Ta'aser). Tosafos (s.v. aser) cites a statement in the Sifrei (which is not found in our current standard editions) that extrapolates from this entire expression that there are indeed two tithes which must actually be given. The first is the one tenth to be separated from one's agricultural produce, the second is the one tenth to be given to the poor from any other potential source of income, such as business or other capital gains that one may have. This too, then, is a source for the Mitzvah of Ma'aser Kesafim. It is worth noting that this same idea appears in the Yalkut Shimoni, in Parshas Re'eh Remez 893) and in the Midrash Tanchuma (os 18), where it is mentioned that this gift of one tenth of one's business income should be given specifically to those who are involved in Torah study.

The implication of the above sources is that the obligation to give Ma'aser Kesafim to the poor is rooted in the Torah, a view which seems to be accepted by the Shaloh (Shnei Luchos Habris, Maseches Megillah – Inyan Tzedakah Uma'aser, s.v. u'mikol makom), among others. Most other Poskim, however, do not consider this to be a Torah based obligation. The Maharil, for example (Shut Maharil, Siman 54, 56), writes clearly that the Mitzvah of Ma'aser Kesafim is MideRabbanan, and he consequently allows for certain leniencies in this obligation. The Chavos Yair too (Shut Chavos Yair Siman 224), in a lengthy Teshuvah where he discusses, among other things, what exactly is considered income and how to treat business expenses in this regard, likewise quotes an opinion that the obligation of Ma'aser Kesafim is MideRabbanan, and that the Pesukim mentioned above

are just a *remez*, a hint to the idea in the Torah. He notes there as well that the aforementioned Yalkut Shimoni writes specifically that the *Posuk* in the Torah is only a *remez*. The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah, 249:2) likewise writes that the requirement to give one tenth of one's money to the poor is only *MideRabbanan*, and it is merely hinted at by the *Posuk* in this Parsha referred to above; the *Ma'aser* actually required by the Torah relates only to one's agricultural products, and is given to the poor only once every three years.

Still other authorities rule that giving *Ma'aser Kesafim* to the poor is required neither by the Torah nor by the *Rabbanan*, but is rather a *Minhag*, a proper custom. This position is articulated by the Bach, in his commentary on the Tur (Yoreh Deah, Siman 331 s.v. *av*), when he discusses what type of *Tzedakah* may be given with *Ma'aser Kesafim* money, as opposed to *Ma'aser Ani* money, and is agreed to by Rav Yaakov Emden (Shut Sha'ailos Ya'avetz vol. 1 siman 6), who, quoting the above cited *Posuk* in this Parsha, writes that giving *Ma'aser* money to the poor is a *middas chasidus*, an act of piety learned from Yaakov Avinu; he then proves that there is no actual obligation, even on the level of a *Mitzvah MideRabbanan*. In an earlier Teshuvah (Siman 1), Rav Yaakov Emden quotes from his father the Chacham Tzvi that the Bach's position is correct, and he himself brings proofs to his father's view in a subsequent Teshuvah (Siman 3). The Chavos Yair, in the aforementioned Teshuvah, agrees to this position himself as well; this seems to be the majority view. The Pischei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah s.k. 12) notes that this position that giving *Ma'aser Kesafim* is only a *Minhag* was actually presented much earlier by the Maharam of Rothenberg. He then adds, however, that some hold that although it is only a *Minhag*, once one has observed the *Minhag*, he shouldn't stop doing so except in a situation of great need. Some of the above quoted *Poskim* discuss how many times one must observe this practice before it is considered that he has permanently adopted the *Minhag*.

One of the issues which depends upon whether giving *Ma'aser Kesafim* is an actual *Mitzvah* (from the Torah or from the *Rabbanan*) or whether it is simply a *Minhag* is the question of to whom one is required to give *Ma'aser Kesafim* money. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah siman 249 seif 1) writes that one must support the poor by giving them as much as they need, keeping in mind how much he can afford; giving one tenth is considered the average contribution, while one who wishes to be generous should give one fifth, as suggested by the Gemara in Kesubos (50a). The Ramo adds, though, that *Ma'aser Kesafim* money must be used specifically to be given to the poor, and not for any other *Mitzvah* or to assist any other worthwhile cause. The Shach quotes those who disagree and say that expenses for a *Mitzvah* which one otherwise would not have done may be paid for with one's *Ma'aser* money. The view of the Ramo is most likely based on there being a strong connection between *Ma'aser Kesafim* and *Ma'aser Ani*; the latter had to be given to poor people and not used even for *Mitzvos*. The view of the other *Poskim* probably is that since giving *Ma'aser Kesafim* is simply a *Minhag*, its rules do not necessarily parallel those of the *Mitzvah* to give *Ma'aser Ani*. The Chasam Sofer (Shut Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah siman 232) makes this very distinction; in his previous Teshuvah (Siman 231) he suggests that if when one first decides to undertake the practice of giving *Ma'aser Kesafim*, one has in mind specifically that he would like to use the money to pay for other *Mitzvos* or to support other charitable causes and not just give it to the poor, he may do so.

In terms of how to calculate one's income for the purpose of determining how much the one tenth is that he must give away, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shut Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah vol.1 siman 143) writes that money which is held back from one's paycheck for withholding taxes is considered as if it was never his, and thus is not viewed as part of his income; *Ma'aser Kesafim* need not be deducted from that portion of one's salary. This is unlike money which one actually has, but uses to pay for sales tax and the like, which is nevertheless considered part of one's income. He also discusses how to treat household expenses, such as funds needed for child

support, in terms of whether such money is subject to *Ma'aser Kesafim*. Rav Yosef Karo, in one of his Teshuvos (Shut Avkas Rachel siman 3), seems to rule that funds spent on all essential household needs are not subject to the requirement of *Ma'aser Kesafim*, but it is questionable as to whether or not this view is accepted; Rav Ovadyah Yosef (Shut Yichaveh Da'as vol. 3 siman 76 os 4) discusses this matter, quoting numerous opinions. It is worth noting that the Chafetz Chaim, in his treatise entitled *Ahavas Chesed* (Inyan *Ma'aser Kesafim*, Perek 18 os 2), offers specific guidelines as to how to properly observe the practice of giving *Ma'aser Kesafim*, including recommendations that one keep written records in a notebook about how much he gives to *Tzedakah*, as well as that one should take a reckoning of one's income and one's *Tzedakah* contributions once or twice a year. He adds later (20:6) that one who is careful about giving *Ma'aser Kesafim* is treated as though Hashem Himself were his partner in business.

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

An Evil Eye: Nothing for Yosef to Fear

Chazal observe that twice in Parshas Vayechi the Torah refers to Yosef and his sons, Ephraim and Menashe, as not being subject to the negative impact of an *ayin hara* - an "evil eye". Yaakov blesses Ephraim and Menashe that they should multiply like fish - just as fish are not seen as they swim underwater (either due to their depth or due to refraction), so too the descendants of Yosef are protected from those who may look at them with an *ayin hara*. Yosef receives his personal blessing from Yaakov and is described as one who is "*alei ayin* - above the eye". This blessing also acknowledges that Yosef is not influenced by the evil eyes that surround him. What is the significance of *ayin hara* and why are Yosef and his children immune from its negative influence?

Ayin hara can be understood to be synonymous with jealousy, which begins when one looks at what others have. A jealous person both wants the desired object for himself and does not want the other person to have it. As such, his looking at others with negativity is literally an *ayin hara*. Yosef, of all people, seems to be the most impacted by the *ayin hara* of jealousy. In Parshas Vayeishev we learn that "*vayir'u echav* - his brothers saw", i.e. they saw the favoritism symbolized by the *kesones passim*, and this led to their jealousy and the extreme *ayin hara* with which they viewed, and dealt with, Yosef. How does Yosef, the man whose brothers sold him into slavery due to their jealousy, eventually become the one who no longer has to ever worry about this powerful *ayin hara* of jealousy?

The trait of jealousy which manifests itself in our relationship to our fellow man emanates from a deficiency in our relationship with Hashem. "*Kol mah d'avid rachmana l'tav avid* - whatever Hashem does is for the good". A sincere belief in the ultimate goodness even of what appears evil enables a person to look at everyone and everything with an *ayin tov* - a good eye. One who fully internalizes this perspective and thus views everything in life positively will never be jealous of others because he never views himself as lacking anything.

Throughout his life, Yosef exhibited tremendous optimism. In every difficult situation he makes the best of his lot and succeeds to whatever degree he can notwithstanding the challenges that face him. What is the source of this powerful positive outlook that enables Yosef to survive his brothers selling him into slavery and later his imprisonment for false accusations? How does he cope with the pain of being forcibly separated from his father and the difficulties of surviving alone in a foreign land?

The Torah reveals this secret of Yosef in one of his last conversations with his brothers. They are frightened that upon the death of Yaakov, Yosef will

punish them for all that they had done to him. With tears in his eyes, he consoles them saying, "Elokim chashva letova - Hashem planned it for the good". These were the words that kept Yosef positive throughout all of his ordeals; he truly believed that at every moment of his life, Hashem was planning for the good. Yosef's genuine belief in "Kol mah d'avid rachmana l'tav avid" left no room for negativity in his heart. Watching others prosper didn't induce jealousy because Yosef truly believed he was receiving only the good of Hashem. "B'mida she'adam moded kach modidin lo - the way one acts to others is how Hashem responds to him". One who never exhibits an ayin hara to others because everything is for the good is not subject to the potential affects any ayin hara directed towards him.

Yosef, despite having initially suffering greatly jealousy-driven actions of others, emerges as one who is immune to the effects of the ayin hara of others due to his lifelong commitment to always seeing the good of Hashem in everything. This lifelong commitment and avodah transformed Yosef and his descendants into people who were "alei ayin" - above and immune to the jealous eyes of others.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Jan 1, 2015 at 4:21 PM

When is it Permitted to Tell a Lie?

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid. Years earlier, when he had revealed his true identity to them, he appeared to have forgiven them for selling him as a slave. That was the theme of last week's essay.

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

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

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

The sages derived a principle from this text. Mutar le-shanot mipnei hashalom: "It is permitted to tell an untruth (literally, "to change" the facts) for the sake of peace." [1] A white lie is permitted in Jewish law.

This is not the only place where the sages invoked this principle. They even attributed it to God himself. [2] When the angels came to visit Abraham to tell him and Sarah that they were about to have a child, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" God then asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18: 12-13).

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

It is clear that the sages needed both episodes to establish the principle. Had we only known about the Sarah case, we could not infer that it is permitted to tell a white lie. God did not tell a white lie about Sarah. He merely did not tell Abraham the whole truth.

Had we only known about the case of Joseph's brothers, we could not have inferred that what they did was permitted. Perhaps it was forbidden, and that is why Joseph wept. The fact that God himself had done something similar is what led the sages to say that the brothers were justified.

What is at stake here is an important feature of the moral life, despite the fact that we seem to be speaking of no more than social niceties: tact. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin pointed out that not all values coexist in a kind of platonic harmony. His favourite example was freedom and equality. You can have a free economy but the result will be inequality. You can have economic equality, communism, but the result will be a loss of freedom. In the world as currently configured, moral conflict is unavoidable. [3]

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

When David heard the news he was overcome with grief: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Samuel 18: 33). Joab is brutal in his words to the king: "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life ... You love those who hate you and hate those who love you ... Now go out and encourage your men" (2 Sam. 19: 6-8). David's grief at the loss of his son conflicts with his responsibilities as head of state and his loyalty to the troops who have saved his life. Which comes first: his duties as a father or as a king?

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

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

There is, for example, a famous argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what to say about the bride at a wedding. [4] The custom was to say that "The bride is beautiful and graceful." Members of the school of Shammai, however, were not prepared to say so if, in their eyes, the bride was not beautiful and graceful. For them the supreme value was the Torah's insistence on truth: "Keep far from falsehood" (Ex. 23: 7).

The school of Hillel did not accept this. Who was to judge whether the bride was beautiful and graceful? Surely the bridegroom himself. So to praise the bride was not making an objective statement that could be tested empirically. It was simply endorsing the bridegroom's choice. It was a way of celebrating the couple's happiness.

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

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

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

Mercy said, 'Let him be created, because he will do merciful deeds.'
Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood.'
Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will do righteous deeds.'
Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he will never cease quarrelling.'
What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Yevamot 65b. [2] Midrash Sechel Tov, Toledot, 27: 19. [3] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty,' in Isaiah Berlin, Henry Hardy and Ian Harris, Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. See also the important work by Stuart Hampshire, Morality and Conflict. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983. [4] Ketubot 16b. [5] Bereishit Rabbah 8: 5. [6] Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. The only person to have achieved a non-anthropocentric, God's-eye-view of creation, was Job in chs. 38-41 of the book that bears his name.

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org> to: Kol Torah <koltorah@koltorah.org> date: Thu, Jan 1, 2015 at 2:29 PM subject: Kol Torah Parashat VaYechi 2014

Who's in Charge?

by Rabbi Yaakov Blau

Many of the Birchot Ya'akov are rather obscure, and it is often hard to understand not only what events are being referred to, but also how to even translate the words. Yehudah's Berachah contains a section whose meaning is debated by the Rishonim. The Pasuk states, "Lo Yasur Shevet MiHudah UMechokeik MiBein Raglav Ad Ki Yavo Shiloh VeLo Yikhat Amim," "The staff shall not leave Yehudah, nor the scepter from between his legs, until

Shiloh comes and nations will gather to him" (BeReishit 49:10). Targum Onkelos understands that this Pasuk is teaching us that the Malchut, kingdom, will not depart from Yehudah until Moshiach comes. Rashi (ad loc. s.v. Ad Ki Yavo Shiloh) agrees with this reading and also quotes the Gemara (Sanhedrin 5a) which teaches us that this Pasuk refers to the Jewish leaders in Bavel who will be from Yehudah. The Ibn Ezra (ad loc. s.v. Lo Yasur Shevet MiHudah) interprets the Pasuk to teach that Shiloh refers to David HaMelech and is saying that David will bring Yehudah to full sovereignty, but with no mention of what will happen after that event.

The Ramban (ad loc. s.v. Lo Yasur Shevet MiHudah) famously understands the Pasuk to be a prohibition against anyone other than a member of Shevet Yehudah ever assuming a position of power. He explains that when Shaul, who was from Shevet Binyamin, was appointed as king, it was only a temporary measure from its inception. Since the request for a king was improper at the time, as evidenced by both Shmuel and Hashem's reaction to the request, the chosen king was never meant to be one whose family would be monarchs for an extended period. Along those lines, he feels that the Malchei Yisrael throughout Sefer Melachim were wrong to continue to usurp the kingship from David's family. Finally, he claims that the Chashmona'im sinned by becoming kings in the Chanukah period. The Ramban goes so far as to say that this transgression was the cause for the bad end of the Chashmona'im. The end was so extreme that the Gemara (Bava Batra 3b) recounts that anyone who claims to be from the Chashmona'im is in reality a slave, because a slave, Herod, assassinated the entire family line.

While this Ramban is often quoted, it is far from being universally accepted. The Ran (Derashot HaRan 7) responds to the Ramban that the Pasuk is not a command, as the Ramban understood it, but rather a prediction of what will happen. The prediction was fulfilled because it actually meant that sovereignty will never leave Yehudah altogether, not that no one else will ever assume a position of power. With this understanding, the Malchei Yisrael do not present a problem, as they never ruled alone; there was always a parallel Melech from Yehudah. He also is not bothered by the Chashmona'im becoming kings because he feels that they were merely emissaries of the Romans. The Abarbanel contests this last point, as he feels that the Chashmona'im had full sovereignty, which leads him to conclude that it is true that they made a pact with the Romans, but they were not subservient.

The final approach is that of the Abarbanel. He believes that the Pasuk means to say a descendent of Yehudah will always maintain a position of importance, but not necessarily be the main leader. The aforementioned Gemara in Sanhedrin also states that the second half of the Pasuk refers to the children of Hillel who taught Torah in public. The Abarbanel deals with the Chashmona'im period by assuming that the head of the Sanhedrin at the time was from Shevet Yehudah, and, as such, the Pasuk's prediction did indeed come true.

This final approach contains an important lesson for us. Too often leadership is seen in political terms, but the Abarbanel reminds us that Torah leadership is a critical aspect of leadership in our community as well.

Ma'aseh Avot Siman LeBanim

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Potpourri <parshapotpourri@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Jan 1, 2015 at 8:06 PM subject:

[Parshapotpourri] **Parsha Potpourri**

by **Oizer Alport**

Parshas Vayechi Vol. 10, Issue 12

Yissochar chamor garem roveitz bein hamishp'sayim (49:14) Parshas Vayechi contains the final blessings that Yaakov gave to each of his sons prior to his death. In his blessing to the tribe of Yissochar, whose descendants are known for their dedication to Torah study, Yaakov described him as a strong-boned donkey who rests between the boundaries.

Why did he specifically compare Yissochar to a donkey, as opposed to any other animal?

Rav Tzvi Markovitz explains that while Torah scholars also "carry a load" similar to a donkey, this parallel is insufficient, as there are other animals - such as horses - which are also capable of transporting heavy burdens. Rav Markovitz points out that although all animals carrying loads must inevitably stop to rest, there is a critical difference in how they do so. When horses stop for a break, their burden must be removed until they are ready to continue. Donkeys, on the other hand, are able to lie down and rest even while still carrying the weight on their backs.

There is a well-known, if perhaps apocryphal, story which is told about Aristotle. In between lessons, Aristotle's students once bumped into him "on the wrong side of town," in an area known for its immoral activities. Unable to reconcile his current behavior with the lofty philosophical teachings that he espoused during his lectures, his students asked for an explanation. Aristotle answered them, "When class is in session, I am the great Aristotle, and I share my pearls of wisdom with the world. At other times, I am not the Aristotle with whom you are familiar."

It is specifically to donkeys that the tribe of Yissochar is compared, as those who "carry the load of Torah" must also periodically stop to recharge. The distinguishing characteristic of true B'nei Torah is that in contrast to Aristotle, they conduct themselves even at these moments in accordance with their year-round behavior, never casting off their "burden" for even a moment.

V'hinei im'cha Shimi ben Geira ... v'hu kil'lani klala nimretzes ... va'eshba lo b'Hashem leimor im amis'cha becharev ... v'atah al t'nikeihu ki ish chacham atah v'yadata es asher ta'aseh lo v'horadta es seivaso b'dam she'ol (Melochim 1 2:8-9 - Haftorah) In the Haftorah for Parshas Vayechi, we read about the instructions that Dovid HaMelech gave at the end of his life to his son Shlomo, who would succeed him as king. He commanded Shlomo to remember the vicious curses which Shimi ben Geira had heaped upon him (Shmuel 2 16:7-8). However, because Dovid had sworn to Shimi that he wouldn't kill him for his actions, he advised Shlomo to use his wisdom to find a means to avenge his disgrace and execute Shimi.

Shlomo dutifully called Shimi and commanded him to build a house in Jerusalem, informing him that he must remain within the city limits, for on the day that he departs he will be killed (2:36-37). Shimi agreed to the terms, built a house in Jerusalem, and indeed refrained from exiting the city for three years. At that time, two of his slaves escaped, and he pursued them out of the city to bring them back. Upon hearing of this, Shlomo had Shimi summoned and decreed that because he had violated the conditions of their agreement, he was to be killed.

Although in hindsight this represented a brilliant method of reconciling Dovid's desire to have Shimi punished with his promise not to directly kill Shimi for his act of rebellion, how did Shlomo know that his plan would succeed, as we find that Shimi managed to abide by the condition for three years before an unexpected episode caused him to stumble? Why did Shimi, who was a wise man who understood the consequences of leaving Jerusalem and managed to refrain from doing so for three years, suddenly commit such a foolish mistake, one for which he paid dearly with his life?

The Alshich HaKadosh explains that Shlomo, in his great wisdom, understood human nature profoundly. A person's natural inclination is to crave freedom and to resist any restraint placed upon it. Although Shimi's "jail" didn't resemble the typical cell, in that he was free to enjoy everything offered by the greatest city on earth, he was nevertheless artificially confined. Shlomo recognized that sooner or later, Shimi's need to feel free and unrestrained would win out and he would violate the terms of their arrangement. When this eventually occurred, Shlomo was ready and waiting to execute Shimi in a dignified manner, just as his father had requested.

Answers to the weekly Points to Ponder are now available! To receive the full version with answers email the author at oalport@optonline.net. Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):

1) The Parshas Derochim writes that Rochel died just as Yaakov prepared to enter the land of Israel (48:7) because he was only permitted to be married to two sisters outside of the land of Israel. Tosefos writes (Yeamos 20b) that a regular Kohen who marries a widow and is then anointed as the Kohen Gadol (who is forbidden to marry a widow) is allowed to remain married to her since she was permissible to him at the time of their marriage. Why wasn't Yaakov similarly allowed to remain married to Rochel and Leah even in the land of Israel since they were both permitted to him at the time he married them outside of the land of Israel? (Matamei Yaakov, M'rafsin Igri)

2) What is the significance of the fact that Yaakov drew his feet onto the bed prior to dying (49:33), and why does the Torah record this information? (Taz Yoreh Deah 339:4)

3) Although Yosef attempted to calm and reassure his brothers (50:19-21), Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that he never explicitly forgave them for their actions. As a result, they died still responsible for the sin of selling him into slavery. Their atonement was only completed when their descendants were punished as the Asarah Harugei Malchus - ten great Rabbis who were brutally murdered by the Romans. If Yosef forgave them, why did he refuse to say so, and if he didn't forgive them, why was he unwilling to do so after so much time had passed? (Shiras Dovid here and Esther 3:15) Parshapotpourri mailing list Parshapotpourri@shemayisrael.com http://mail.shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/parshapotpourri_shemayisrael.com

Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Wed, Dec 31, 2014 at 3:33 PM subject: Parshat Vayechi 5775 - Rabbi Berel Wein

Home In My Opinion UPS AND DOWNS Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Though every election in Israel is full of surprises, because we are a restless and constantly dissatisfied people there is a pattern that has emerged from all of the previous nineteen elections that have bedeviled us over the past sixty-six years. The pattern includes constant fragmentation of existing parties as personal ambition and rigid ideology overtake practical and achievable goals. Another facet that is apparently constant in all Israeli elections is the emergence of new parties with grandiose promises and attractive personalities. They all seem to paint a rosy future of peace and prosperity, social equality and stern justice and an absence of corruption and venality. These new parties always seem to do quite well in the election process. The history of the state of Israel is loaded with the debris of such parties which rose, obtain substantial mandates to the Knesset and yet somehow disappeared or were terribly diminished by the next round of elections. There has been an unbroken pattern of this over the past many decades and it seems that it is about to occur in this coming election as well.

There are a number of new parties and personalities, or better put, recycled personalities that seem to be riding the crest of the wave of current popularity. Upon closer examination it is hard to see how any of their proclaimed programs and policies can actually be realized, given the nature of the Middle East, the Palestinians, the Israeli way of doing business and the heritage of the socialist infrastructure on which the state was founded. But I am confident that these new parties will somehow do well in the coming election and I am also confident that they will also end up, as almost all new parties that arose in Israel over the past years, in the dustbin of history. Israel is always searching for a savior, a messianic figure that can and will solve all of our problems and make us beloved amongst the nations of the world, united at home and at peace with ourselves and our neighbors. So, anyone or any party that advertises itself as being that savior will naturally attract votes and support from a populace that is trained to ignore the realities of Jewish life and of the historical attitude of the world towards us. So, I am also convinced, that since the inception of the state of Israel the guiding hand of Heaven thwarts our follies and somehow does not allow the repetition of catastrophic mistakes made by us in the past. The Bible

records for us a verse that states: "He Who dwells in heaven laughs at us; God mocks us." I do not pretend to know the opinion of Heaven as to our forthcoming election. In fact I think that invoking God's name in this purely secular exercise is itself wrong if not even blasphemous. But I do have the feeling that Heaven is at least chuckling over the election campaign currently being waged by our erstwhile saviors, both new and old. I have often recounted the anecdote attributed to Abraham Lincoln about the horse thief who was apprehended in his act of burglary. He was subjected to instant frontier justice and was tied to a rail, dipped in tar, covered with feathers and was being carried out to be deposited in a nearby swamp. Lincoln said that the man was heard to mutter that if were not for the honor he would forgo the pleasure. I think that that is a good description of what we are experiencing in the current election campaign. It is the honor that allows wise and good people to be subjected to the indignities that this type of election campaign produces. Some parties will increase their representation in the Knesset, some parties that were previously powerful and influential will wane and almost disappear. There will be many ups and downs as there always are in elections. Nevertheless probably very little will change in our daily personal lives and perhaps even in the overall national life of our wonderful little country. The savior will not yet have arrived and our problems are not likely to disappear in the immediate future no matter what the results of the election may be. This does not mean that we should despair of positive change or of good leadership. But it does mean that we should be realistic, rational and we should try to retain our emotional equilibrium and good sense in judging the parties and personalities involved. I make no recommendations or predictions regarding the election. I only think that it will always follow the pattern of previous elections and that the ups and downs of Israeli political life will continue in the future as well. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha VAYECHI Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The last seventeen years of the lifetime of our father Yaakov are, so to speak, the best years of his long and eventful life. When appearing before the Pharaoh of Egypt, Yaakov freely admits that the first one hundred thirty years of his life were sparse and difficult. He experienced a lifetime of troubles and travails from the moment he was born holding on to the heel of his brother Eisav. He and Eisav will contend for the blessings of their father and for the immortality of founding an eternal people that will live throughout history against all odds. Yaakov will struggle to save his family and possessions from the wiles of Lavan and his sons. Yaakov will wrestle with an angel, be sorely tested and wounded, and yet prevail. Eventually he will receive the blessings of that angel which are encapsulated in the name of Yisrael. Yaakov will suffer the indignity and trauma of his daughter being raped by Shechem and yet he will disapprove of the bloody revenge that his sons visited upon the community that spawned the perpetrators of that outrage. His beloved wife Rachel dies in childbirth and Yaakov is hard-pressed to recover from that blow. Yaakov seeks a modicum of peace of mind and body when the greatest tragedy of his life – the story of Yosef and his brothers – rests upon him. In despair, he is convinced that he will go to his grave mourning for his beloved lost son. All in all, Yaakov's description of his life and its events when standing before the Pharaoh is unfortunately very accurate, if not even understated. So it comes as no wonder that the final years of his life are called the years that he actually "lived." He is reunited with his beloved son Yosef, the family is bound together, at peace with one another and is protected, secure and prosperous in their new home in the land of Goshen. Yet Yaakov is aware that this rosy picture of Jewish life in Egypt is a temporary mirage, an illusion that will soon fade and that the years of hardship and bondage are already on the horizon. The Lord had revealed that future to Yaakov's grandfather Avraham generations earlier and that bill was now coming due. God has promised Yaakov that these future troubles will not be seen by him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Yaakov is troubled by the darkened future of his

people, a future that he is completely aware of. Yet, we hear no note of pessimism in his final words to the Jewish people. Rather, both he and Yosef reassure the generations to come that the Lord is somehow with them, and that he will redeem them from all of their troubles and fashion them into the most eternal and influential people on the face of the globe. It is this faith in the future, the belief that good will somehow prevail that is the most important legacy that our father Yaakov has left to us. It is this belief and attitude that is the unique hallmark of the people of Israel and guarantees to us our continuity and ultimate triumph and success. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

from: [Rabbi Dr. David Fox] PROFFOX@aol.com date: Thu, Jan 1, 2015 at 9:37 PM

subject: A Second Thought On Parshas VaYechi

"...lu yistamenu Yosef..." "...maybe Yosef has been harboring his hatred for us..." (50:15) As our parsha ends and as Sefer Bereishis draws to a close, the Torah relates how Yosef and his brothers traveled back to Israel in order to bury Yaakov their father. Upon their return, however, the brothers reverted to their fear that despite all covenants and promises, Yosef now would vent his vengeful anger for the treachery they had shown years before upon selling him into slavery. They apologized and pleaded for forgiveness. Yosef's reaction was to cry, assuring them that he maintained a spiritual perspective, not a grudge. What might be a deeper meaning in this passage?

The Gan* introduces a midrash. As the brothers retraced their path on the return trip to Egypt, they passed the spot where earlier on, the selling of Yosef had taken place. When Yosef saw the pit where he had been held in captivity, he turned aside and peered into the pit. He then recited the blessing "Blessed is HaShem Who made miracles for me in this place." (Many of us have never had the need to recite this prayer. It is found in the Talmud and codified by the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch. One says it upon visiting a place where he or she has been saved from danger or disaster. The midrash records that Yosef said that bracha at the bor.) When the brothers saw Yosef turning off the road and transfixed at the pit, uttering his thanks to HaShem for his miraculous rescue from danger, they reached a conclusion. They assumed that with that reminiscence, their brother would recall all of the ill will and enmity which they had shown him. They were certain that he still harbored hatred for them and would now avenge himself on them. Yosef, in turn, had been having a spiritual encounter. This was between him and HaShem. He was utilizing that site for a moment of prayerful communion, acknowledging with thanks that a miracle had indeed taken place with his rescue from the pit. That rescue was the catalyst for all of the events which led to his ascendance in Egypt and his eventual role in being able to sustain his father and reunite the family. From the brothers' perspective, that encounter at the pit appeared to bode negative tidings for them. From Yosef's perspective, nothing was further from the truth. He was at peace with his brothers because he was attuned to his and their role in enacting the Divine Will. He had attained the madreigos of acceptance and granting forgiveness. That is the meaning of our passage, according to the Gan. So often, we perceive and interpret ambiguous events according to our own agenda, our own projection, our own subjective assumptions. It is so important to consider that reality is not always consistent with the ideas which churn in our minds. Just because you believe something does not make it true! Good Shabbos again.

[*The Gan was written by Rabbeinu Aharon ben Yosi haKohen. He is cited by the Panae'ach Raza over one hundred times. Based on analysis of his writing style and his focus, it is apparent that he lived in Northern France in the early 1200s. He was a student of three disciples of Rabbeinu Yitzchok the Elder, who was a great-grandson of Rashi and founder of the Tosafists school of Talmudic commentators. He appears to have been a great sage in that he cites the Talmud, the Midrash and rabbinic authorities who preceded

him. His father Rabbeinu Yosi haKohen was also a Torah scholar, in that he is also cited within the Sefer.]

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PARSHAS VAYECHI

...And now, your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine. (48:5)

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, derives from this pasuk that the symbol of the pertinacity of a Torah education; its staying power, and ability to overcome challenge, is whether it is still perceived in later generations. An education that endures generations is a good education. This idea is gleaned from Yaakov Avinu's statement concerning Yosef's children who were born prior to the arrival of the Patriarch in Egypt. Li heim, "They are mine!" has meaning only if they had been born and raised in the moral filth of Egyptian society without Yaakov Avinu to serve as a positive influence, as the barometer of the family's moral compass. When Yaakov remarks, Li heim, "They are mine!", we see the overarching significance of the chinuch, education, that he gave Yosef. It had endured, and now he sees it reflected in his grandsons.

In Footsteps of the Maggid, Rabbi Paysach Krohn quotes a story that he heard from the Mashgiach of Beth Shraga, Horav Mordechai Schwab, zl, which demonstrates the long range impact of a pure education on children. The parents, as we will see, obviously were not concerned with the amount of time, effort, or money that had to be expended in order for their children to have a good Torah education. In the following story, we witness the sacrifice on the part of parents and the way that it paid off throughout the years.

Reb Zevulun was a German National who had emigrated to Lucerne, Switzerland. Rav Schwab knew him well. Reb Zevulun was in the tailoring business. His son, Daniel, was an intelligent young man who was very mature for his age and possessed the type of charisma that seemed to succeed in the business world. Therefore, at the young age of seventeen, Daniel entered his father's business. Before long, Daniel was taking business trips for his father. These trips were day trips, in which he left in the morning and returned that evening. Since he was progressing so well, his father felt comfortable to send him to Locarno, Switzerland, located near the Italian border, which was a five-hour rail trip. The plan was for Daniel to spend a week in Locarno, since it was an important deal that could not be rushed. The morning after Daniel left, Reb Zevulun had occasion to be in Daniel's bedroom, where, to his chagrin, he noticed that his son had left his Tallis at home. The custom of much of German Jewry is for young men, even prior to getting married, to wear a Tallis gadol during Shacharis, their morning prayers. Noticeably, the Tefillin were gone, because his son would never forget his Tefillin. The question that gnawed at the father was: Did his son carelessly forget his Tallis, or did he leave it on purpose? He was traveling to a new town where, quite possibly, the custom for a young man to wear a Tallis was not popular, so that his son would feel self-conscious. He could also have been so preoccupied with preparations for the journey that taking the Tallis had just slipped his mind. In any event, Reb Zevulun was not about to allow this to go by unnoticed.

Reb Zevulun immediately looked for someone to tend to his business, while he proceeded to the train station to purchase a round-trip ticket to Locarno. He wasted no time. Immediately upon arriving in Locarno, he took a taxi over to the hotel where son had reservations and went to his room. Shock and fear coursed through Daniel, when, answering the knock at his door, he

opened it to meet his father. "Father, is everything all right?" was the immediate question on the young man's lips. "Everything is fine. Do not worry." Reb Zevulun replied. "I came because I think that you must have forgotten something at home. Do you remember what you forgot to pack with your essentials?" his father asked.

"No, I think I took everything with me. I cannot think of what I could have neglected to bring along." He really could not think what he might have overlooked to bring along with him.

Finally, Reb Zevulun could no longer contain himself: "Do you think that, among the different items in your suitcase, you could locate your Tallis?" Daniel was incredulous. He had not forgotten to take his Tallis; he had not taken it on purpose! He could not believe that wearing a Tallis was so important to his father that he would take a ten-hour train trip just to bring him the Tallis, which he really did not want to wear.

Reb Zevulun said no more. He removed the Tallis from his briefcase, gave it to his son and bid him goodbye.

Years passed, and Rav Schwab had occasion to speak with the Mashgiach of Yeshivas Kaminitz, and he related this story. When he concluded the story Rav Schwab said, "I am sure such a thing never happened again. What we do not realize is that Reb Zevulun was not going out of his Sunday afternoon comfort zone simply for one Tallis. No! He was going out for the future generations. From this day on, not one of his descendants would ever forget a Tallis. Their father taught not just his son, but he taught all future generations the importance of not forgoing wearing the Tallis.

I dared not accept the thought that I would see your face, and here G-d has shown me even your offspring. (48:11)

Yaakov Avinu is overjoyed as he shares his innermost feelings with his long lost son, Yosef. For twenty-two years he had mourned a son who supposedly had been mauled to death by a wild animal. Little did he dream of ever seeing Yosef again. Now, not only does Yosef stand before him, but even Yosef's children are there waiting for his blessing. Lo pilalti - "I dared not accept/I dared not dream"; after all, it was impossible. Yosef was dead! What is there to dream about? In this vein, pilalti means resignation, a lack of acceptance, an unwillingness to hope, to dream. The Patriarch was resigned to a life without Yosef - and surely without his children. Now, he expresses his gratitude to Hashem.

Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, suggests that pilalti maintains its relationship with the word tefillah, prayer. Yaakov is expressing his incredulity over seeing not only Yosef, but his children as well. This occurred despite lo pilalti; "I did not pray." He was so consumed with grief, so enveloped with mourning, that he never thought about praying. Why? Yosef was dead! For what could he have prayed? Nonetheless, Hashem was so good to him. Despite his lo pilalti, lack of prayer, Hashem "listened" and sent a dual salvation - Yosef and his children!

The world was established on the principle that prayer is effective. Not only is it effective, but, without it, one simply will not see his requests answered. Heavenly bounty does not simply appear from nowhere without a formal request on the part of man. Hashem wants to hear from us. The vehicle for achieving this relationship, our medium of conversation with Hashem, is prayer. This idea is underscored by Rashi in his commentary to Bereishis 2:5.

Rashi teaches that plant life had already been created, but it was waiting beneath the surface for the creation of Adam, who would recognize the utility of rain and its critical importance for crop production. As long as man was not present to work the soil, acknowledge and appreciate the gift of rain, the crops remained beneath the surface in their potential for growth. When Adam was created, he prayed and was answered. Hashem provides for the needs of man, but man must request them by using the vehicle of prayer as his means of communication. Prayer is our conversation with G-d. We pray; Hashem responds. We are unaware of the magnitude of the wealth of

spiritual and material bounty that is reserved for us, and, if we do not pray, we may never know what we are neglecting
Yaakov Avinu realized the tremendous chesed that Hashem performed for him. He did not pray because he did not know for what to pray. Hashem knew this, and granted him the wonderful gift of a long-lost son and grandsons. At the bar-mitzvah of his grandson, Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, expressed a similar feeling of gratitude. He began by remembering the almost idyllic life he had experienced as a yeshiva student in the Novaradoker Yeshiva in Biyalastok, Poland. "We were sitting and learning - not bothering a soul. We kept to ourselves. Our only life, our only care, was Torah study. The Communists thought otherwise. They decided that we were a dangerous threat to the world. Without warning, and without due process, we were herded into a train bound for Siberia. After days of travel under the most inhumane conditions, with no concern for our physical needs, we arrived in Siberia. The cold was bitter, and what little clothing we had was hardly sufficient to keep us warm. Added to this was the news that we had been given a twenty-five year sentence at hard labor. This punishment was meted out to enemies of the state.

"Hard labor in Russian parlance meant working at back-breaking labor from early in the morning until late at night, outside in the bitter cold, under the watchful eyes of sadistic guards who looked for every opportunity to "punish" offenders who were slacking off on their job. There was no hope of escape. In his "welcoming address," the labor camp's supervisor shared with us that no one had ever escaped from Siberia. Indeed, where would he go in the frozen tundra?

"Confronting such miserable conditions, the only prayer that coursed through my mind was to ask Hashem for a piece of bread, or at least the privilege of burial in a Jewish cemetery. I was beyond hope. There was nothing else for which to pray. Anything else was absolutely unrealistic. We were all going to die here.

"If someone would have informed me that, sixty-five years later, I would be standing proudly and speaking at my grandson's Bar-mitzvah, I would have looked at him as if he had lost his mind. Indeed, I have been blessed with a large family, with simchos, joyous occasions, on a regular basis. I never dreamed that such experiences would be a part of my life.

"I now understand David Hamelech's prayer in Sefer Tehillim 22:2, *Rachok m'yeshuasi divrei shaagasi*, which is usually translated as, "Why so far from saving me; from the words of my roar?"

"Simply, this means that a person requests twenty thousand dollars and, in the end, receives only one dollar. Now, I think the pshat, interpretation, of the pasuk should be just the opposite. I asked Hashem that He at least provide me with a Jewish burial. In the end, He gave me so much more than I had asked for. My salvation far exceeded my request!"

He saw that serenity is good... He bowed his shoulder to bear. (49:15)
When one peruses the brachah, blessing, given to Yissachar, it appears as a lesson in contradiction. Yissachar symbolizes the ben Torah who devotes himself to Torah study under all circumstances. One would think that, if he is confronted with peace and serenity, it would be an opportunity for relaxation and rejuvenation; rather, the Torah tells us that the peaceful repose is not Yissachar's reaction to serenity. Instead of rest, Yissachar girds himself for hard work. Is this not counterproductive?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, explains that, if one wants to raise a healthy, content and happy child, showering him with material bounty and giving in to his every whim and fancy are ineffective; these approaches will succeed in actually hindering the desired goal which he seeks to achieve. Catering to a child's desires creates a dangerous dependence, because the child becomes accustomed to getting what he wants - or he will not produce. The moment that he is not satisfied, that he feels lacking, he experiences pain and turmoil, and he becomes disjointed.

The road to contentment is achieved by becoming accustomed to not getting what one wants, to not having much of anything. The less one needs to

survive, the easier it is for him to endure. This lack of neediness makes life peaceful. This is how soldiers are trained to survive under adverse conditions, under the most difficult circumstances. War is not fun. A soldier must focus on the battle, ignoring everything else.

The ben Torah must learn Torah without distractions. Yissachar observed that serenity allows one to study Torah unimpeded, giving him the opportunity to grow and thrive in Torah. In order to realize this, he must bend his shoulder and tolerate any annoyance. Additionally, he must avoid material pleasure and be oblivious to pain and discomfort. Once such self-control is achieved, he is able to sit and learn, in serenity and happiness, for nothing fazes him. He has transcended the hindrances to his success. In his hesped, eulogy, for Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, said, "I have never met an oved Hashem, one who served Hashem (with such extreme devotion) as Rav Chatzkel, the Mashgiach (Mir, Ponevez)." Afterwards, his students asked him, "Did the Rosh Yeshiva not meet the Chafetz Chaim, zl, and Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl?" (Certainly, their service of Hashem was without peer).

Rav Shach replied, "Every tzaddik, righteous person, has his individual unique approach to serving Hashem. The Mashgiach had an approach that was unlike any other I had ever seen. His avodah was such that, when he wanted something, he did not do it; when he did not want something, he did it." In other words, Rav Chatzkel went against his own will. Those endeavors which went against his grain, which he did not enjoy doing - those he did. Conversely, those endeavors which he did enjoy doing - those he did not do. He refused in any way to defer to his desires.

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