

## **Weekly Parsha VAYIGASH 5782**

### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

As the story of Joseph and his brothers reaches its dramatic climax in this week's Torah reading, we are left with many unanswered questions regarding this unique narrative. One unanswered question is how much did our father Jacob really know about the events previously described in the Torah readings? There are various streams of thought regarding this matter. Rashi and the Midrash seem to believe that Jacob, by the end of his life, certainly was aware of the entire drama and of the participants in the story. He indirectly refers to it on his deathbed, especially regarding Shimon and Levi, for their aggressive behavior towards Joseph.

Jacob also seemingly complements Yehuda for his original moderation in dealing with Joseph, and for his later courage and heroism in defending Benjamin and confronting Joseph. It is, perhaps, safe to say that even if Jacob was unaware of all the details of the story, he knew the general facts of the narrative, and was able to piece it together for himself.

Jacob's reaction is seen in the blessings he gives to his children, his final words to all the participants in this drama. It is difficult to believe that Jacob would not have asked Joseph how he came to live in Egypt, and how he rose to such a prominent position of power and influence. One of the hallmarks of the relationship between Jacob and Joseph was the fact that, more so than the usual relationship between parent and child, they understood each other, and were sensitive to all the nuances of character that they possessed.

There are other sources and commentators that seem to feel that Jacob never really knew the entire story that led Joseph "to cover the eyes of Jacob with his hand" so that he would never know the rift in the family, and the consequences that eventually brought the children of Israel to the exile in Egypt.

All parents know that there are things about their children and their progeny that they do not wish to be informed about. Sometimes, in family matters, ignorance is truly bliss, and in his golden years, surrounded by family, Jacob felt comforted. There also is a natural tendency among children to attempt to hide unwelcome news, evil tidings, and unnecessary aggravation from their parents.

Now that the family has been reunited in Egypt and is living in the land of Goshen in comfort, if not even luxury, of what purpose would there be to retell the bitter story of family discord? The Torah seems to indicate that the last 17 years of Jacob's life were truly his golden years, surrounded by family, and respected and honored by the society in which he now found himself living. Why burden the old man with a story that would only reopen wounds and create unnecessary anxiety and even regret?

Jacob will go to his final resting place emotionally whole, reconciled even with his brother Eisav, and certainly at peace with his children and family. Whichever of the narratives we choose to follow, the Torah has told us all we need to know about Joseph and his brothers and the descent of the Jewish people into Egyptian society, and their eventual slavery and their redemption.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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### **The Birth of Forgiveness (Vayigash)**

#### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

There are moments that change the world: 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press (though the Chinese had developed it four centuries before); 1821 when Faraday invented the electric motor; or 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web. There is such a moment in this week's parsha, and in its way it may have been no less transformative than any of the above. It happened when Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers. While they were silent and in a state of shock, he went on to say these words:

"I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you... it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen. 45:4-8)

This is the first recorded moment in history in which one human being forgives another.

According to the Midrash, God had forgiven before this,[1] but not according to the plain sense of the text. Forgiveness is conspicuously lacking as an element in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom. When Abraham prayed his audacious prayer for the people of Sodom, he did not ask God to forgive them. His argument was about justice, not

forgiveness. Perhaps there were innocent people there, fifty or even ten. It would be unjust for them to die. Their merit should therefore save the others, says Abraham. That is quite different from asking God to forgive.

Joseph forgave. That was a first in history. Yet the Torah hints that the brothers did not fully appreciate the significance of his words. After all, he did not explicitly use the word 'forgive'. He told them not to be distressed. He said, "It was not you but God." He told them their act had resulted in a positive outcome. But all of this was theoretically compatible with holding them guilty and deserving of punishment. That is why the Torah recounts a second event, years later, after Jacob had died. The brothers sought a meeting with Joseph, fearing that he would now take revenge. They concocted a story:

They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers for 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. 50:16-18)

What they said was a white lie, but Joseph understood why they said it. The brothers used the word "forgive" – this is the first time it appears explicitly in the Torah – because they were still unsure about what Joseph meant. Does someone truly forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph wept that his brothers had not fully understood that he had forgiven them long before. He had no anger, no lingering resentment, no desire for revenge. He had conquered his emotions and reframed his understanding of events.

Forgiveness does not appear in every culture. It is not a human universal, nor is it a biological imperative. We know this from a fascinating study by American classicist David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (2010).[2] In it he argues that there was no concept of forgiveness in the literature of the ancient Greeks. There was something else, often mistaken for forgiveness: appeasement of anger.

When someone does harm to someone else, the victim is angry and seeks revenge. This is clearly dangerous for the perpetrator and they may try to get the victim to calm down and move on. They may make excuses: It wasn't me, it was someone else. Or, it was me but I couldn't help it. Or, it was me but it was a small wrong, and I have done you much good in the past, so on balance you should let it pass.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with these other strategies, the perpetrator may beg, plead, and perform some ritual of abasement or humiliation. This is a way of saying to the victim, "I am not really a threat." The Greek word *sugnome*, sometimes translated as forgiveness, really means, says Konstan, exculpation or absolution. It is not that I forgive you for what you did, but that I understand why you did it – you could not really help it, you were caught up in circumstances beyond your control – or, alternatively, I do not need to take revenge because you have now shown by your deference to me that you hold me in proper respect. My dignity has been restored.

There is a classic example of appeasement in the Torah: Jacob's behaviour toward Esau when they meet again after a long separation. Jacob had fled home after Rebecca overheard Esau resolving to kill him after Isaac's death (Gen. 27:41). Prior to the meeting Jacob sends him a huge gift of cattle, saying "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me" (Gen. 32:21). When the brothers meet, Jacob bows down to Esau seven times, a classic abasement ritual. The brothers meet, kiss, embrace and go their separate ways, not because Esau has forgiven Jacob but because either he has forgotten or he has been placated.

Appeasement as a form of conflict management exists even among non-humans. Frans de Waal, the primatologist, has described peace-making rituals among chimpanzees, bonobos and mountain gorillas.[3] There are contests for dominance among the social animals, but there must also be ways of restoring harmony to the group if it is to survive at all. So there are forms of appeasement and peace-making that are pre-moral and have existed since the birth of humanity.

Forgiveness has not. Konstan argues that its first appearance is in the Hebrew Bible and he cites the case of Joseph. What he does not make clear is why Joseph forgives, and why the idea and institution are born specifically within Judaism.

The answer is that within Judaism a new form of morality was born. Judaism is (primarily) an ethic of guilt, as opposed to most other systems, which are ethics of shame. One of the fundamental differences between them is that shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. In shame cultures when a person does wrong he or she is, as it were, stained, marked, defiled. In guilt cultures what is wrong is not

the doer but the deed, not the sinner but the sin. The person retains their fundamental worth (“the soul you gave me is pure,” as we say in our prayers). It is the act that has somehow to be put right. That is why in guilt cultures there are processes of repentance, atonement and forgiveness.

That is the explanation for Joseph’s behaviour from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the point where, in this week’s parsha, he announces his identity and forgives his brothers. It is a textbook case of putting the brothers through a course in atonement, the first in literature. Joseph is thus teaching them, and the Torah is teaching us, what it is to earn forgiveness.

Recall what happens. First he accuses the brothers of a crime they have not committed. He says they are spies. He has them imprisoned for three days. Then, holding Shimon as a hostage, he tells them that they must now go back home and bring back their youngest brother Benjamin. In other words, he is forcing them to re-enact that earlier occasion when they came back to their father with one of the brothers, Joseph, missing. Note what happens next:

They said to one another, “Surely we deserve to be punished [ashemim] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us” ... They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. (Gen. 42:21-23)

This is the first stage of repentance. They admit they have done wrong.

Next, after the second meeting, Joseph has his silver cup planted in Benjamin’s sack. This incriminating evidence is found and the brothers are brought back. They are told that Benjamin must stay as a slave.

“What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.” (Gen. 44:16)

This is the second stage of repentance. They confess. They do more; they admit collective responsibility. This is important. When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery it was Judah who proposed the crime (Gen. 37:26-27) but they were all (except Reuben) complicit in it.

Finally, at the climax of the story Judah himself says “So now let me remain as your slave in place of the lad. Let the lad go back with his brothers!” (Gen.

42:33) Judah, who sold Joseph as a slave, is now willing to become a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free. This is what the Sages and Maimonides define as complete repentance, namely when circumstances repeat themselves and you have an opportunity to commit the same crime again, but you refrain from doing so because you have changed.

Now Joseph can forgive, because his brothers, led by Judah, have gone through all three stages of repentance: [1] admission of guilt, [2] confession and [3] behavioural change.

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Repentance presupposes that we are free and morally responsible agents who are capable of change, specifically the change that comes about when we recognise that something we have done is wrong and we are responsible for it and we must never do it again. The possibility of that kind of moral transformation simply did not exist in ancient Greece or any other pagan culture. Greece was a shame-and-honour culture that turned on the twin concepts of character and fate.[4] Judaism was a repentance-and-forgiveness culture whose central concepts are will and choice. The idea of forgiveness was then adopted by Christianity, making the Judeo-Christian ethic the primary vehicle of forgiveness in history.

Repentance and forgiveness are not just two ideas among many. They transformed the human situation. For the first time, repentance established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent I show I can change. The future is not predestined. I can make it different from what it might have been. Forgiveness liberates us from the past. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of reaction and revenge. It is the undoing of what has been done.[5]

Humanity changed the day Joseph forgave his brothers. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are no longer prisoners of our past. The moral life is one that makes room for forgiveness.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)**

#### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel –“I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand” (Ezekiel 37:19)

Who is the most authentic claimant to leadership of the Jewish People: Judah or Joseph? The answer to this question has far-reaching implications for the future of the Jewish People, and I believe that we can find an answer in our Torah portion, Vayigash, where the palpable tension between Judah and Joseph flares up in ways that continue until today.

Can this clash be resolved? Yes, but each of them will have to change in ways unique to their divergent life paths, with each discovering the rare trait of humility.

Joseph first appears as an arrogant youth, his dreams leading him to see himself as lord over his brothers, their sheaves of wheat bowing down to his; then the sun, the moon and the stars doing the same.

To his brothers, Joseph is an elitist loner. They are not ready to accept him for what he is: a man of many colors, of manifold visions with cosmopolitan and universal dreams. Joseph accepts his brothers' judgement. He is, in fact, different, a seeker after the novel and dynamic Egyptian occupation of agriculture; a citizen of the world more than a lover of Zion. When in Egypt, he easily accepts the Egyptian tongue, answering to an Egyptian name (Tzafanat-Pane'ah), and wears Egyptian garb. He has outgrown his parochial family: not only are they not interested in him, he is not interested in them!

In contrast, as Joseph rises to leadership in Egypt, Judah stumbles, and becomes humbled in the process. He suffers the tragic losses of two sons to early deaths, and estrangement from his brothers, who faulted his leadership after the incident of the sale of Joseph into slavery.

Upon hitting rock bottom, Judah experiences a remarkable turnaround. Both with regard to acknowledging the righteousness of his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38:26), and in his dramatic offer to Jacob to serve as a guarantor for Benjamin's safety (ibid., 43:8-9), Judah demonstrates authentic humility and repentance, which catapults him to becoming "first among equals" in the family. By taking responsibility for Benjamin, he does what he did not do on behalf of Joseph!

Moreover, he is now well-conditioned for familial leadership, which crescendos with his soliloquy at the beginning of Parshat Vayigash.

As a result of Judah's speech, even Joseph is forced to recognize Judah's superiority. It is Judah who has apparently recognized the true identity of the Grand Vizier. If Judah had not understood that he was standing and pleading before Joseph, he never would

have raised the tragic imagery of a disconsolate father bereft of his favorite son, the first child of his most beloved wife. The only one who would have been moved by such a plea would be Joseph himself!

And this moment of Joseph's understanding is also the moment of his repentance. He now sees the master plan, the hidden Divine Hand in all that has transpired. The brothers must come to Egypt not to serve him – Joseph – but rather to fulfill the vision of Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15): to bring blessings to all the families of the earth, to teach even Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, the true majesty of the King of Kings, the Master of the Universe.

Joseph is ready to subjugate his talents in the fields of technology, administration and politics to Judah's Torah and tradition. Joseph – now able to surrender his dream of lordship over the brothers – requests that his remains be eventually brought to Israel, recognizing that the destiny of the family is ultimately in our eternal familial and national homeland. Joseph is now ready to reunite the family under the majesty of Judah.

Generations later, Ezekiel, in a prophecy that appears in this portion's Haftarah, provides an ultimate rapprochement – nay, unity – between all of the tribes. "I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand" [37:19].

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel in the 20th Century, felt the footsteps of the Messiah and the nearness of redemption. He saw in Theodor Herzl, architect of the administrative and political characteristics of the Jewish State, the Messiah from the House of Joseph-Ephraim, the necessary forerunner to the ultimate redeemer. He eulogized Herzl as such upon his death, in his famous Encomium from Jerusalem.

Rabbi Kook anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah from the House of David-Judah, who would give spiritual meaning and universal redemptive significance to the "hands of Esau" that so successfully waged wars and forged an advanced nation-state phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Holocaust. May this vision become reality speedily and in our time!

Shabbat Shalom!

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**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

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### **The Key to a Good Life**

*Yaakov said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourn are one hundred thirty years; the days of the years of my life have been few and bad, and they have not reached the days of the years of my forefathers' lives in the days of their sojourns" (Bereishis 47:9).*

This is a perplexing statement for Yaakov to make. At the time of this exchange with Pharaoh, he was 130 years old and he lamented the fact that his life span had not reached those of his father and grandfather. But how could Yaakov have known that he would never reach their ages? It was certainly possible that he would go on to live for many years thereafter! Even Rashi's explanation – that Yaakov meant that his life hadn't been as good as his forefathers' lives – is difficult to understand. Wasn't it possible that Yaakov would not only live for many more years, but that he would ultimately have many more happy years?

In fact, it would seem that Yaakov should have every reason to have been more pleased with his life than Avraham and Yitzchak were with theirs, for a simple reason: Only Yaakov was blessed with children who were all righteous. Avraham was the father of Yishmael and the sons of Keturah, while Yitzchak had Eisav; only Yaakov had children who were all virtuous. Doesn't that contradict the sentiment he expresses in this possuk?

Clearly, none of these things are the basis for defining a person's life as "good." But what, then, is the definition of a "good" life?

The possuk in Mishlei states that "a person who has found a wife has found goodness," and the Gemara tells us that "one who is without a wife lives without goodness." The defining feature of a good life is a good marriage; without that, even having longevity and righteous children will not be enough to make one's life considered "good." In that respect, indeed, Yaakov's life did not reach the quality that Avraham and Yitzchak experienced.

We know that by the time Avraham Avinu was 52 years old, he and Sarah were working together on teaching the people of Charan to serve Hashem. Sarah was 10 years younger than Avraham and died at the age of 127; hence, we can ascertain that they were married for at least 85 years, and perhaps longer. Yitzchak's marriage to Rivka also lasted for many

years; they were married for 20 years before Yaakov and Eisav were born, and Rivka passed away when Yaakov was returning from Lavan's home at the age of 99 (as he arrived there at the age of 77 and stayed away from home for 22 years); thus, they were married for a full 119 years. Yaakov, though, was married to Rochel Imeinu for less than 15 years; they married only after he had worked for Lavan for seven years, and Rochel died on the road after leaving her father's house. Thus, according to this definition, the goodness of Yaakov's life indeed failed to compare to that experienced by his father and grandfather.

Raising children can be very difficult. Indeed, we often find that the children who turn out the best are those who were the most difficult for their parents to raise. Thus, even if a person's children grow up to be outstanding adults, this cannot be the way to measure a "good" life. Rather, the definition of a good life is one in which a man had a positive relationship with his wife.

### **No Man Left Behind**

*And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him... (45:27)*

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the wagons sent by Yosef hinted to the last Torah topic exchanged between father and son before Yosef departed – the mitzvah of Eglah Arufah. The Midrash (Beresishis Rabba 94:3, 95:3) notes the similarity of the words "Eglah," calf, and "Agalah," a wagon. In response to finding a corpse in the land of Israel, the elders of the closest town would decapitate a calf, an Eglah Arufah, as a communal atonement for the crime proclaiming that the townsfolk did not shed his blood (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

Perhaps while escorting his son on his journey, Yaakov taught Yosef the mitzvah of Eglah Arufah, the calf whose neck was axed by the elders of the nearest town upon the discovery of a murdered corpse. It was commonly understood that a person who was not properly escorted from a city would easily fall prey to thieves and murderers. But there is a fascinating element to this law. The Talmud (Horayos 6a) explains that this atonement is actually for the generation that left Egypt. In fact, we learn a very important halacha from here; that a nation is a corporate entity and that a corporate entity is eternal. Even though the actual generation that left Egypt was long gone, the national identity remains and therefore

an atonement can be brought even for those that left Egypt because the corporate entity remains.

Why would Yosef choose this mitzvah out of everything he studied with his father to send to Yaakov as a sign? In fact, as Rashi explains, it was something of a contrived message because Yosef didn't actually send the wagons, Pharaoh did! Yosef went out of his way to make sure that the brothers conveyed this lesson to his father. The question is why? What is so remarkable about this mitzvah that made it relevant to the current events that had transpired?

Clearly, Yosef (and pretty soon Yaakov as well) had come to the realization that this was the beginning of the fulfillment of Hashem's punishment to Avraham that his children would be in a foreign country for four generations. The only thing worse would be the possibility that they would never leave. However, in order to leave they first had to become a nation by overcoming the final barrier to achieving nationhood: appreciating the value of each and every member. That is why in the process of Eglah Arufah an atonement is brought "for those that left Egypt." Because it was on that condition that they left Egypt and became a nation.

Yosef, remarkably, had already addressed this issue with his brothers. Firstly, he wanted to see if they would abandon Shimon after he took him captive. When they returned with Binyomin he created the whole charade of accusing Binyomin of stealing his silver "magical" goblet to determine whether or not his brothers had finally internalized the lesson that they must be "one for all and all for one." The brothers passed this test with flying colors when they all equally agreed to serve as slaves in place of their brother Binyomin.

Yosef never really held them responsible for what they did to him on a personal level. His real issue with them was whether or not they had what it takes to become a nation. They finally proved that they did, and this was the message he sent back to Yaakov. We will survive this exile into a strange land.

#### **Did You Know...**

Yaakov had two main wives (Rochel and Leah) and two other wives (known as maidservants) who had a lesser status. The Torah sometimes refers to the latter wives as "pilegshim." A pilegshah, commonly translated as concubine, actually has halachic status of a wife, though with lesser rights (e.g. a pilegshah

doesn't have a kethubah, which is the security and financial protection that regular wives are provided).

It is very interesting that the word pilegshah is really a contraction of two words *plag* and *isha*. *Plag* means half and *isha* means woman. In other words, a pilegshah means half a woman. This explains a fascinating verse in the Torah. After Leah gave birth to her fourth child the Torah says, "She stopped giving birth" (29:35). What this means is that she was supposed to have four sons and her maidservant was supposed to have two and Rochel was supposed to have four and her maidservant was supposed to have two. Each "pilegshah" would have exactly half the amount of the main wives! Unfortunately, because Rochel "sold" Yaakov for the dudaim she lost two of the children that were supposed to be hers (Yissacher and Zevulun) and Leah ended up with six children. But in the end, of course, Hashem guides everything to the way that is supposed to emerge. In this week's parsha we actually see how it all work out – Leah has thirty two descendants and her maidservant has exactly sixteen and Rochel has fourteen descendants and her maidservant has exactly seven. Each pilegshah has exactly half the descendants of the main wife!

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For the week ending 11 December 2021 / 7 Kislev  
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***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -  
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#### ***Parshat Vayigash***

##### ***The Promise***

*"I am the G-d of your father...Have no fear of descending into Egypt...I shall descend with you to Egypt and I shall surely bring you up." (46:3-4)*

It was the first night of Chanukah. The single light of the menorah gleamed with a strange radiance. Its light came neither from wax nor oil. This was a very special menorah. It was made from an old wooden clog. And the oil was boot polish. This was Chanukah in Bergen Belsen.

The Bluzhever Rav chanted the first two blessings in the customary festive tune. He was about to make the third blessing but then he stopped. He paused for what seemed like a long time. He looked around the room at all the faces in front of him. And then, with a voice filled with strength, he said: "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, Who has kept us alive and preserved us and brought us to this

time.” “Amein” was the whispered reply from the huddled throng. Later, one of the men came over to the Bluzhever Rav and he said, “Can I ask the Rabbi a question?” “What is your question?” said the Rav. “How can you possibly make a blessing thanking G-d for bringing us to this time? Should we thank Him for bringing us to Bergen-Belsen? For bringing us to a time like this?”

“You know,” said the Bluzhever Rav, “I had exactly the same thought as you. That’s why I stopped in the middle. I was about to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and some of my other colleagues if I could really make that blessing, and then I caught sight of all the faces looking so intently at that wooden clog, filled with black camp shoe polish. I thought: Here we are in the depths, in the blackest darkness that could exist in this world. And here are some Jews lighting Chanukah candles. In spite of all the evil that those murderers are doing, we are lighting candles. And I thought to myself: Ribono shel ha’olam! Master of the world! Who is like your people Israel? Look how they stand with death staring them in the face and lovingly they hang onto every word — ‘Who did miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this time’ And I thought: If this is not the place to thank Hashem for bringing us to this time, then I don’t know when is! I have a sacred duty to say that blessing now.”

Chanukah is the only celebration in the Jewish calendar that spans two months. A month of light and a month of darkness. And despite the great light that was revealed on Chanukah, that light darkened in Tevet. On the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet we mourn three great tragedies: the translation of the Torah into Greek, the death of Ezra, which marked the end of prophecy, and, finally, the surrounding of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which led to the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. Tevet is a month of darkness.

The total number of candles that we light on Chanukah is 36 (excluding the shamesh). In the beginning of the Creation, a supernal light called the Ohr Haganuz shone. With it you could see from one end of the world to the other, meaning that you could see cause and effect. You could see why things happened. All was revealed. After 36 hours, Hashem hid it away so that it could not be used by those who are evil. That supernal light reappeared in the lamps of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash, and it can be found in the lights of our Chanukah menorahs to this very day. 36. If you count the number of days from the beginning of Chanukah until the end of Tevet, it

also comes to 36. The light spreads into the darkness even though you cannot see it.

I always thought that the end of Chanukah was a bit of an anti-climax. True, on the last night we light all the candles in a blaze of glory, but the following morning all that’s left to do is to clean up the mess from the olive oil. And apart from our mentioning al hanisim in our prayers, there’s nothing we actually do on the last day except to put the Chanukah menorah away. It seems strange that the last day of Chanukah is called “Zot Chanukah,” “This is Chanukah.” And yet this epitomizes the very essence and the message of Chanukah. Sometimes our lives are filled with darkness — the darkness of illness, the darkness of depression, of unhappiness. The lights seemed to have gone out in our lives, leaving us in a very dark world. Our comfort is to know that the lights have not gone out in our lives, but that they burn secretly, hidden from sight, and that very soon the whole world will be ablaze with a great light when Hashem’s promise to Yaakov Avinu will be fulfilled, and the entire world will recognize the G-d of Israel.

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***Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayigash  
Where Was the Rebuke in the Words "I Am Yosef"?***

Almost every darshan who writes a commentary on Chumash gives an interpretation to the following famous Medrash in this week’s parsha:

When Yosef said to his brothers “I am Yosef,” the pasuk says that the brothers could not respond to him because they were frightened of him (Bereshis 45:3). They were so stunned by this sudden revelation that they became tongue-tied.

The Medrash Rabbah here comments: “Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Tochacha (rebuke).” This is the way it is going to be in the future when a person leaves this world and stands in front of the Throne of Glory. We will have the same experience that the brothers of Yosef had that day in Mitzrayim. Yosef was the youngest of the brothers and yet his older siblings were unable to withstand his terse rebuke. How much more so will this be the case when the Holy One Blessed Be He comes and appropriately rebukes every individual for their misdeeds while on Earth! If the brothers had nothing to say when rebuked by their younger sibling, what will we say after 120 years when the Almighty

calls us on the carpet, so to speak? We certainly won't be able to open our mouths.

The question everyone asks is that the Medrash refers to Yosef's words to his brothers as a *tochacha*. Somehow in his brief statement, Yosef gave them *mussar*. It was a rebuke. But all he said were the words "I am Yosef". Where is the rebuke?

I myself have shared several answers to this question in previous years. This year, I found a new interpretation (which is based on a Ramban) in a sefer called *Nachal Eliyahu* from a contemporary author — Rabbi Eliyahu Diskin.

The Ramban in Parshas VaYeshev (Bereshis 37:15 D.H. VaYimtza'ay'hu) makes one comment which is really fundamental to the understanding of the entire story of Yosef and his brothers. The Ramban says the whole story really does not make any sense. Too many people made too many egregious errors here. Yaakov made an egregious error by favoring Yosef over the other brothers. Yosef made an error by suspecting that his brothers transgressed prohibitions such as *ever min ha'chai* and *gilui arayos*, etc. The brothers made a mistake by thinking that Yosef was out to kill them. Everyone was way off base despite the fact that we are talking about people here for whom the term "Gedolei Yisrael" is a major understatement, spiritually and intellectually. How did they all fall into this mess called "The Sale of Yosef" and all that transpired in its wake?

Says the Ramban, "*Ki HaGezeira Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker, v'Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum,*" which means, this is what G-d wanted to happen (*ha'Gezeira Emes*); and all the efforts that everyone made were not going to count for anything (*ha'Charitzus Sheker*); because the Ribono shel Olam wanted it to happen this way (*Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum*).

For example: Yaakov said to Yosef "Go find your brothers." How is Yosef supposed to find his brothers? They are out there somewhere in the desert tending to their sheep. Canaan is a vast land. There were no cell phones. There were not even phone booths! How is Yosef supposed to find his brothers?

Yosef goes off to look for his brothers. He can't find them. What should he have done? He should have turned around and gone home and said, "Daddy, I can't find them." End of story. Suddenly, he meets a person in the wilderness. Who is it? It is a *malach*! The *malach* takes him to his brothers. Why? It is because this is the way it had to happen. Klal Yisrael

had to go down to Mitzrayim. That is the way Hashem told Avraham that it would happen by the *Bris Bein HaBesarim*. This is the way Klal Yisrael will be formed—"in a land that is not theirs". (Bereshis 15:13)

*HaGezeirah Emes*. People try this and they try that. They make this effort and they make that effort. It is not going to work. *V'HaCharitzus Sheker*. All their efforts are going to fall by the wayside. They are for naught. At the end of the day *Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum*.

The reason why Yosef's saying the words "Ani Yosef" was a rebuke was because those two words sent the message, "You tried to sell me as a slave and now ANI YOSEF – I am the second most powerful man in the world. What happened to your plans? What happened to all your efforts to get rid of me? They were all for naught! Nothing came of them!" Why was that? Because the **DECREE WAS TRUE (*haGezeirah Emes*) and EFFORTS TO THWART IT WERE DOOMED (*v'ha'Charetzus Sheker*)**.

This is the type of rebuke we will get in the future world. We all pay lip service to the famous Gemara that a person's annual income is fixed at the beginning of the year (*Beitzah 16a*). We all believe—or at least we all say—that it was decreed in Heaven last Rosh HaShanah how much each of us will make throughout the year, to the penny. Now, if we are faced with a challenge or a *nisayon* in the middle of the year that we can make another ten or fifteen thousand dollars by doing something that is untoward or if not illegal, at least not on the up and up, we might think "Listen, this is a windfall here. I can make another ten or fifteen grand here! I am not going to let this opportunity slip by."

So, do we believe that our income is fixed or not? In the future world, the Ribono shel Olam is going to have a list of all those situations where He said "This is the way I decreed it was going to be. You tried to outsmart me and to cut corners to get more money than you deserved—or whatever it may be..." That is the rebuke we will face in the World to Come.

It is the exact same rebuke that Yosef gave to his brothers: You thought that you could do me in. It didn't happen. That is because the **DECREE WAS TRUE**. This is the way the Ribono shel Olam wanted it to happen, and so this is how it happened. And your **EFFORTS TO THWART IT WERE DOOMED!** That was how it was going to happen.



The Ribono shel Olam will have a whole lifetime of these type of things to present to us as rebuke. The immortal words “Ani Yosef” ring out for eternity with the message that the Almighty is going to make everything happen as He decrees. All human effort to circumvent those decrees will not make a hoot of difference.

***Yaakov’s Disbelief Gives Way to Rejuvenation—  
How and Why Did That Happen?***

My second observation comes from this same sefer, Nachal Eliyahu.

The brothers come back with good news and they tell Yaakov that Yosef is alive. The pasuk records: “Vayafeg leebo ki’ lo he’emean lahem.” (Bereshis 45:26). Simply put, Yaakov did not believe them. Is this not strange? Yaakov has been mourning for over twenty years for his lost son Yosef. He has been a depressed, broken, totally changed person. Finally, the brothers come in and tell him this wonderful news that Yosef is still alive. Why would he not believe them? This is the news he has been waiting to hear for twenty-plus years! Did he think they were trying to play a fast one on him – that five minutes later they would yell ‘April Fools!’? No son would do that to a grieving father. This is not a subject to joke about! What does “He did not believe them” indicate?

The pshat in this pasuk is revealed through a Medrash Tanchuma: A wicked person is considered dead during his lifetime because a rasha is dead emotionally and religiously if he does not recognize the Almighty and acknowledge all that He provides for this world. For all intents and purposes, he is in a “vegetative state” – totally oblivious spiritually to the world around him. He may have a pulse and a heartbeat, but if he can’t react spiritually to what the Holy One Blessed be He has provided for him, he is merely in a vegetative state. It is “life”, but it is not really “chaim”.

When the brothers came in and said to Yaakov, “Yosef is still alive” and Yaakov did not believe them, Yaakov did not think they were lying to him or playing a joke on him. Yaakov was concerned – what could be with a seventeen-year-old who was cut off from his family in his formative years and thrown into the fleshpots of Egypt? Yaakov reasoned – What kind of Jew could Yosef be at this point? Therefore, if he is alive but he doesn’t recognize a Ribono shel Olam in this world – he is not the Yosef that I once knew and then for all intents and purposes, he is not alive.

Yaakov heard “Od Yosef CHAI” but he thought to himself “that is not what I call LIFE.”

What happened? Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent...and the spirit of Yaakov their father rejuvenated (Bereshis 45:27). The famous Chazal says that Yosef was sending a signal to his father: The last thing that we learned before I was separated from you all those years ago was the parsha of eglah arufah. In other words, Yosef signaled that he still remembered the “sugyah that we were holding in.” Then, the spirit of Yaakov came back to life. “If Yosef remembers the Torah we learned together, then he really is alive.”

In 1940, Rav Elazar Shach (1899-2001) was in Vilna. Rav Shach was part of the Mir Yeshiva. The Mir Yeshiva went to Vilna at that time, as did most of the Eastern European yeshivos. Rav Shach met someone there, a Rav Kluf, and spoke to him in learning. They parted ways and did not see each other again until seven years later, after the war. They met again in Tel Aviv in 1947. When Rav Shach saw Rav Kluf for the first time after seven years of separation, the first thing he said to him was “I have an answer to that contradiction you raised in the Rambam.” After having gone through everything that occurred to him in those intervening years, still remembering “the kasheh that we left off with” and having “a teretz for that kasheh on the Rambam” exemplifies the meaning of preserving Chiyus (life) by a true Jew.

Medically speaking, a vegetative state is called life, but it is not much of a life in the eyes of people. In the eyes of upright Jews, life does not only mean eating, drinking and sleeping, but also recognizing that there is a Ribono shel Olam in the world.

That is what Yaakov did not believe at first, but when he saw the wagons – Ahh, Yosef is still thinking about learning; he is still thinking about that Sugya we studied together. If so, Yosef is in fact still alive and so, the spirit of Yaakov was then rejuvenated.

Finally, I have shared the following story in the past but it bears repeating.

A young fellow got married to a girl and then suddenly, in the middle of Sheva Brochos, he disappeared. He skipped town and abandoned his new wife, leaving her an agunah. Thirty years later a fellow walked into town and said “Honey, I’m home.” He claimed to be this woman’s long lost husband.

Twenty or thirty years later, we all look a lot different than we looked in our wedding pictures. Here comes this fellow and says “I am your husband.” How well did they even know each other? She did not know

whether or not to believe him. Was this really her husband or not?

The fellow was not a fool. He started telling her all kind of intimate things that, apparently, he could only ostensibly know if he was really her husband. He told her all sorts of details about the wedding. She assumed it must be him – because how else could he know this?

They asked the Vilna Gaon whether they could believe him to be her husband on the basis that he seemed to know these minutiae about her and the wedding and everything that only her husband could have known. The Gaon said to take the fellow to the shul that he davened in when he was a chosson. Ask him to point out where he sat. They brought the fellow into shul and they asked him, “Where did you sit when you were a chosson?” The guy froze. The Gaon said, “He is a liar!”

How did he know the other details? The answer is that at some point, he met up with the real chosson who was certainly a scoundrel and told him all the little details to make the fool-proof case that he was really that chosson. But he didn’t tell him where he sat in shul, because a scoundrel like that doesn’t remember or doesn’t care where he sat in shul.

That is the acid test. A true Yid remembers the spiritual things in life. A scoundrel doesn’t remember that kind of information. He remembers what color the flowers were at the wedding. Who cares about the flowers? Where you sit in shul – that is what counts.

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***Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz  
The Little Secret Behind Incitement  
Parashat Vayigash 5782***

Parashat Vayigash tells us about Jacob’s children who went down to Egypt to buy food due to the famine that affected their area. Judah and his brothers beg for favor from Egypt’s viceroy until he can no longer contain himself and he reveals his identity to them. “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt” (Genesis 45, 4). Joseph moves his father, brothers, and their families to a very fertile area in Egypt, called the Land of Goshen, and he sustains them and provides them with grain.

At the end of the parasha, the Torah details the depth of the crisis in Egypt as a result of the famine. Joseph, who had collected a great amount of grain during the years of plenty that preceded the famine, sold it to the residents of Egypt during the years of famine. The result was that the Egyptians bought the royal grain until they were impoverished and their assets were transferred to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, leaving them to turn to Joseph to beg for bread.

Out of despair, they offered to sell their fields to the King of Egypt and themselves as slaves in return for bread. Joseph accepted their offer and bought all their fields. From then on, the residents of Egypt moved into cities and worked their fields for Pharaoh who took ownership of the land.

The Torah describes the journey of our nation’s patriarchs and that of their sons who followed them. Even when it focuses on others who lived in the area where they were, it is only in the context of events linked to the patriarchs and their sons. Why, then, does the Torah give us such a detailed description of the socio-economic situation in Egypt that, seemingly, had no connection to the lives of the patriarchs and the tribes?

It seems that in order to answer this question, we must skip to the beginning of the book of Exodus, the second of the five books of the Torah. At the beginning of Exodus, we hear of a new Pharaoh ruling over Egypt who did not know Joseph. This Pharaoh incites his nation against the children of Israel who have since become a huge family. This incitement works and the Egyptians make the children of Israel their slaves, torturing them and killing their sons. Now we must look at this closely: What was the background of this incitement? Why did the King of Egypt incite his nation against the Jews and why was he so successful?

The answer to this is in the detailed description that concludes Parashat Vayigash. Divine will made it that the geopolitical situation that Joseph created in Egypt during the years of famine was the key to the incitement against his family years later. A situation was created in which most of the residents of Egypt lived in crowded cities, enslaved to the King of Egypt, forced to pay him a fifth of the yield they worked hard to grow. However, Pharaoh had tremendous wealth accumulated primarily during those seven years of famine when he sold grain to Egyptians in return for their assets.

Over time, this invariably led to great unrest and bitterness among the residents of Egypt. Pharaoh, afraid of being overthrown, found a simple solution: He incited the Egyptians against the children of Israel – the only ones who had fields and were not enslaved to him. Thus, Pharaoh hoped to kill two birds with one stone – to take the children of Israel’s wealth and to direct the Egyptians’ rage in the Jews’ direction. This phenomenon is not unique in the annals of history. Only eighty years ago, Adolf Hitler used the same exact method. Though the verses appearing in this week’s Torah portion give us the background to the incitement against the children of Israel, their enslavement and murder, we can learn lessons from this story for our times as well.

In these days of social networks, it is very easy to incite against individuals, sectors and political groups. This incitement frequently succeeds in making us turn our feelings of anger and frustration toward a particular person, sector, or movement. This is the easy way to escape daily challenges – to find a guilty party. When we read about the way the King of Egypt behaved, we learn to sharpen our senses and pay attention: What is the goal of the inciter? Is he trying to help us or is he playing with our feelings for his own benefit?

Instead of inciting, we must take responsibility. Instead of resentment, we must grow and create change.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

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### **Rav Kook Torah**

#### ***Vayigash: The First Exile***

#### ***Chanan Morrison***

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Hosea 528) makes a startling observation:

“Jacob should have gone down to Egypt in chains. Yet God said, ‘Jacob, My first-born, how could I banish him in disgrace? Rather, I will send his son to go down before him.’”

What did Jacob do to deserve being exiled in iron chains?

#### **Two Purposes to Exile**

We need to analyze the purpose of exile. The Jewish people have spent more years in exile than in their own land. Why was it necessary to undergo these difficult trials? Could they not be punished by other means?

In fact, the Midrash states that the Jewish people are particularly suited for exile. They are called “the daughter of exiles,” since the Avot (forefathers) were sojourners and refugees, subjected to the whims and jealousies of local tyrants (Midrash Eicha Petichta 1 on Isaiah 10:30).

Exile accomplishes two goals:

The people of Israel were created to serve God. The nation needs a pure love of God, undiluted by materialistic goals. Clearly, people are more prone to become absorbed in worldly matters when affluence and prosperity are readily attainable. In order that the Jewish people should realize their true spiritual potential, God made sure that the nation would lack material success for long periods of time.

Exile serves to spread the belief in one God throughout the world. As the Sages wrote in Pesachim 87b, “The Holy One exiled Israel so that converts will join them.” Similarly, we find that God explained the purpose of exile and redemption in Egypt, “so that Egypt will know that I am God” (Ex. 7:5).

The major difference between these two objectives lies in the conditions of the exile. If the purpose of exile is to avoid significant material success over a long period of time — to prepare the Jewish people for complete dedication to God and His Torah — then such an expulsion by definition must be devoid of prestige and prosperity.

If, on the other hand, the goal is to influence and uplift the nations of the world, then being honored and respected in their land of exile will not contradict the intended purpose. On the contrary, such a state of honor would promote this aim.

#### **Jacob’s Exile**

Jacob had spiritually perfected himself to the extent that nothing in this world could dampen his burning love for God. His dedication was so great that he could interrupt the emotional reunion with his beloved son Joseph, after an absence of 22 years, and proclaim God’s unity with the Shema prayer (Rashi on Gen. 46:29). Certainly, for Jacob himself, only the second goal of exile was applicable.

Jacob’s descendants, however, would require the degrading aspects of exile in order to purify them and wean them from the negative influences of a materialistic lifestyle. As their father, it was fitting that Jacob be led to Egypt in iron chains. But since Jacob personally would not be adversely affected by worldly homage and wealth, he was permitted to be exiled in honor, led by his son, viceroy of Egypt.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 233-241)

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayigash**

**פרשת ויגש תשפ"ב**

**כי למחיה שלחני אלקים לפניכם**

**For it was to be a provider that Hashem sent me ahead of you. (45:5)**

The above *pasuk* should be every Jew's rallying cry upon confronting the various vicissitudes of life. Travail, challenge, obstacles, speed bumps – however one seeks to refer to them – they happen, but we must remember they happen for a reason which only Hashem knows. The mere fact that we accept that everything that takes place is Divinely dispatched and serves a Heavenly purpose, which is inherently good, should be sufficient balm for the pain and anxiety it leaves in its wake. We are, however, only human. As a result, while we are in the midst of the maelstrom of challenge, we often lose sight of its Heavenly Source. This is what Yosef intimated to his brothers: “It was Hashem – not you – Who sent me here. It was His purpose to have me here as a provider to facilitate your eventual arrival. It was destined to happen. We were going to come down to Egypt regardless. Hashem just made it easier for us.”

For twenty-two years Yaakov *Avinu* grieved for his precious Yosef. No one should experience the pain of mourning a child. It was all part of Hashem's plan. Yaakov's years mitigated the cumulative pain that his children would have endured had they been subjected to descend to Egypt in iron fetters as slaves. Instead, they went down as honored guests of the viceroy and Pharaoh of Egypt. We simply do not know Hashem's purpose, but the mere fact that we know that it comes from Hashem should in and of itself serve as an agent to ameliorate the pain. Everyone has a story of Divine Providence, in which what he thought was travail was actually the precursor to a happy, joyous ending. The following story reinforces this idea and will, thus, inspire those who think about its message to realize, *Ki l'michyah shlachani Hashem lifneichem*, “For it was to be a provider that Hashem sent me ahead of you.”

One evening, *Reb Shlomo Pinchas Schwimmer*, a resident of Monroe, N.Y., noticed a teenager wandering the streets. Clearly, the boy was lost and was finding it difficult to navigate the streets.

*Reb Shlomo Pinchas* pulled over and asked, “Can I help you get to your destination?” The boy replied, “I live in Monsey, where I attend *yeshivah*. During the summer, my *yeshivah* moves to a summer camp situated at 441 Sckunemunk Rd. I went to Monsey to see a doctor concerning the pain I have been experiencing in my arms. I took a taxi back to camp. However, the driver could not locate 441, so he dropped me off at the corner of Sckunemunk and Berditchev – assuming that it was a short walk to the camp. I have been walking around looking for 441 and have not been successful.”

*Reb Shlomo Pinchas* said, “I will be happy to drive you there.” The problem was that 441 did not appear on his GPS. After a few moments of searching, he came to the conclusion that Sckunemunk is a very long street, and 441 is situated in another village past the Monroe line. They began to drive, but, once again, they could not locate 441. Apparently, as is not uncommon in small, rural villages, the address might be there, but not always in plain sight.

The boy remembered a landmark, “Every morning, we use the *mikvah* on Koritz Street. If you can take me there, I know a shortcut to the camp. They drove to Koritz Street where the boy showed *Reb Shlomo Pinchas* how to get to the camp. This was an area to which he had never been. Indeed, he was impressed by the size of the camp's old, large building and the beautiful private lake in the background. He now knew how to get to 441 Sckunemunk. The two parted, with the boy thanking *Reb Shlomo Pinchas* for the time he spent accompanying him to his destination. It was the type of *chesed*, act of kindness, in its complete, unvarnished form. Accompanying someone who is lost is much more beneficial than giving him directions and expecting him to find his destination on his own.

The next day, the *yeshivah* boys went boating on the lake. One of the boats, carrying four students, turned over. Three students swam to shore. One boy was unable to make it to shore. *Hatzalah* of Monroe, which was closest to the area, received the call to come quickly to 441 Sckunemunk. The problem was that the *Hatzalah* volunteers could not locate 441. *Reb Shlomo Pinchas*, who is a member of *Hatzalah*, was fortunately able to direct the volunteers who arrived just in time to save the boy's life. The fact that the previous evening *Reb Shlomo Pinchas* had performed a *chesed* for a lost boy enabled him to help save a life the following day. Did I mention the identity of the

boy? He was the same boy whom *Reb Shlomo Pinchas* helped the night before. Since he still had pain in his arms, he was unable to swim ashore. A few minutes later, and *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, *Hatzalah* would have been too late.

We often think that something is bad; the cards are stacked against us. Hashem does only good. We are not able to see the large picture until we retrospect and look through the lens of hindsight. The combination of the taxi driver's mistake, dropping the boy off in the wrong place, and a *Yid's* incredible act of kindness proved to be quite beneficial for the boy. Hashem was setting the stage for the next day's salvation.

ויפל על צוארי בנימין אחיו ויבך ובנימין בכה על צואריו

**Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept. And Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)**

The *Midrash* comments that Yosef and Binyamin wept over the destruction of the Sanctuaries that would be built in their respective portions of the Land: the two *Batei Mikdash* that would be built in Binyamin's portion, and *Mishkan Shiloh* that stood in the portion of Yosef's son, Efraim. *Horav David Leibowitz, zl*, derives from here the overwhelming pain experienced by our forefathers concerning the *churban*, destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*. During the greatest moment of heightened joy, when all that should have occupied their minds was the homecoming/reinstatement of Yosef, their long-lost brother, their thoughts were elsewhere. Binyamin was finally able to embrace his brother, the only other child of Rachel *Imeinu*. He named his ten sons for Yosef, with each name serving as an allusion to the pain and suffering he had endured over the loss of Yosef. Yosef had been alone these past twenty-two years – away from his loving father and only maternal brother. Finally, during the moment of joy as these two brothers were reunited, they thought only about the destruction of the Sanctuaries.

Pain and grief overwhelmed the solace and joy that should have permeated this meeting. Why? Because the destruction of the Sanctuaries was a cataclysmic epic tragedy that completely erased their joy. It is not as if their *simchah*, joy, was marred. It was eradicated as if it had never existed. How can one feel joyous when the thought of the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash* looms so strongly in his mind?

*Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl*, quotes the *Navi* (*Melachim* II 20:22) following Yoshiahu *Hamelech* dispatching emissaries to Chuldah

*HaNeviah*, in which he petitioned her to pray that somehow the Heavenly decree against the *Bais HaMikdash* would be expunged. Chuldah responded that it was too little, too late; the actions of the people had catalyzed events that would bring about the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*. He, the king, who had walked righteously in the path of Hashem, however, *V'neesafu el kivrosecha b'shalom v'lo sirenah einecha b'chol haraah*, “You will be gathered to your grave in peace – and your eyes will not see all the evil that I am bringing upon this place.” The *Talmud* (*Moed Kattan* 28:2) wonders how it could be said that Yoshiahu would be gathered in peacefully (that he would die a peaceful death)? The *Navi* (*Divrei HaYamim* 2:35:23) states that the attacking army shot arrows at Yoshiahu. Three hundred arrows pierced his body, making it bleed like a sieve. Is this a peaceful way to leave this world? The pain that he must have endured is beyond imagination! Rabbi Yochanan responds: *She'lo charav Bais Hamikdash b'yamav*; “The *Bais HaMikdash* was not destroyed during his days.”

In other words: Despite being told that the *Bais HaMikdash* would ultimately be destroyed, despite suffering a terrible, painful death, nonetheless Yoshiahu died in peace. Why? He did not have to experience the devastation of the *churban Bais HaMikdash*. This gives us a window, an inkling, into the overwhelming pain that he would have suffered, had he witnessed the actual destruction. Only our *gedolei olam*, giants of Torah, forebears of our spiritual heritage, deeply perceived the spiritual perfection evinced by the *Bais HaMikdash*, enabling them to understand the utter devastation of its loss.

ויזבח זבחים לאלקי אביו יצחק

**And he slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Yitzchak. (46:1)**

Why Yitzchak and not Avraham? Surely, Yaakov *Avinu* remembered his *zayde*, grandfather, the Patriarch of the family. *Rashi* comments that Yaakov underscored the idea that a son owes more to his father than to his grandfather. The other commentators focus on the *middah*, attribute, of Yitzchak, which Yaakov felt would benefit his descendants most as they were about to commence the bitter Egyptian exile – which would lead to the next exiles, until the Final Redemption at the End of Days. *Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl*, explains Yaakov's actions as a lesson to his descendants about how to live a Torah life despite the vicissitudes of the bitter exile.

*Chazal* question Yaakov's actions. They, too, want to know why the focus was on Yitzchak, when, in fact, the father of our nation was Yaakov's grandfather. Among the explanations that the *Midrash* gives is the notion that: *Ro'im afro shel Yitzchak k'ilu tzavur al gabi ha'Mizbayach*, "We view the ashes of Yitzchak Avinu as if they are piled upon the *Mizbayach*, Altar." The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that when we look at the story of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, we do not view the incident through conventional three-dimensional perspective. This would present to us an image of Avraham replacing Yitzchak with the ram, and then slaughtering the ram instead of Yitzchak. *Chazal* teach that we should view this incident through the lens of *nitzchiyus*, eternity, during which Yitzchak was slaughtered, sacrificed, and now his ashes lay piled on the *Mizbayach* to serve as a *z'chus*, merit, for *Klal Yisrael*. While this is inspiring and uplifting, it does not explain the connection between *afro shel Yitzchak* and Yaakov's choice to offer his sacrifices solely to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak.

*Rav Freifeld* explains this after first distinguishing between the manner in which the nations/peoples of the world react to being exiled and the manner in which *Klal Yisrael* responds to its pressures and challenges – both physical and spiritual. Probably without exception, every nation which has been forced into exile has ceased to exist, as a result of it becoming swallowed up by the surrounding culture. The host nation has absorbed its language, customs and traditions. After a century (more or less), the original nation is no longer extant, almost as if it had never existed. The one exception to this phenomena is *Klal Yisrael*, who has experienced *galus*, exile after exile, and has managed to retain its identity.

Yaakov Avinu was acutely aware that he was descending into the bitter Egyptian *galus* – the forerunner of other exiles to follow during our tumultuous history. *Titein emes l'Yaakov*; "Give truth to Yaakov": Our Patriarch's attribute of absolute truth was in danger. How would it survive *galus*? It was in response to this question that Yaakov focused on *afro shel Yitzchak*. He was, by his actions, imparting a powerful lesson to his descendants: *Galus* cannot be confronted by means of a three dimensional perspective on reality. Survival in *galus* is possible only when we look through *nitzchiyus* vision – a vision that penetrates past the three-dimensional world with its ambiguities and illusions. Yaakov knew that

only by strengthening his relationship with *emes*, absolute truth, which is *nitzchiyus*, would he survive *galus*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that Torah in America was established by those who adhered to *emes*. They ignored the conditions, they did not listen to the naysayers; they did not worry about their own co-religionists' fear of shaking up the status-quo. They looked with *emes* when everyone else looked through the conventional, three-dimensional prism. People made jest of *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, and his plan to establish a *kollel*, learning center for married men. They were wrong, because *Rav Aharon* focused on *emes*, and a world without Torah is *sheker*, false. When one works with *emes*, he has no deterrents, no conditions, and no compromises. It is either absolute truth or it is totally false.

**ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף להורות לפניו גשנה**

**He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen. (46:28)**

Yaakov Avinu sent Yehudah, the leader of the brothers, to make the necessary arrangements for their imminent arrival in Egypt. Yehudah's mission (according to *Rashi*, who cites the *Midrash*) was to establish a *makom Torah*, a *yeshivah* from which Torah and its teachings would emanate and radiate to the family. Traditionally, the *makom Torah* has always been the priority in settling a community. Without Torah as its centerpiece, the community as a spiritually-committed community would be hard-pressed to survive. Upon perusing the *pasuk*, two questions stand out. First, why Yehudah over Yosef? Yosef *HaTzaddik*, despite being the Egyptian viceroy, was a *tzaddik*, righteous man, who was deeply committed to Hashem. He was already in Egypt and had established connections. Why not allow Yosef to build the *yeshivah*? Yehudah might have been the Torah giant, but Yosef certainly was no one to ignore. Second, the Torah uses the word *lefanav*, ahead of him, twice, when, in fact, neither was necessary.

In response to the first question, I think we can say that Yaakov felt that by having Yosef serve as the *Rosh Yeshivah*, he was sending a pejorative message to future Torah establishments. Only someone like Yosef, who maintained a position of secular leadership, who was welcome in halls of power, who enjoyed the acclaim of the wider community for his adroit skills, should be the *Rosh Yeshivah*. While this might apply to Yosef the *tzaddik*, to incorporate his other talents and secular position in his curriculum

vitae would mean undermining every *Rosh Yeshivah* and *gadol* whose lack of secular embellishment would not find favor in the minds of those Jews whose priorities are not properly aligned with Torah values. In order to circumvent the wrong impression, Yaakov sent Yehudah, the *melech*, king of the brothers. His monarchy was based solely on character and Torah refinement – not on secular accoutrements. This does not, however, explain why the word *lefanav* is used twice.

*Horav Moshe Bick, zl*, offers an insightful explanation as to why Yehudah – not Yosef – was chosen to be the *Rosh Yeshivah* and why *lefanav* is mentioned twice for what appears to be no textual reason. *Chazal (Pirkei Avos 3:17)* state: “If there is no wisdom (Torah), there can be no fear (of Heaven); if there is no fear (of Heaven), there can be no (Torah) wisdom.” Torah and *yiraas Shomayim* go hand-in-hand with each one incomplete without the other. David *Hamelech* says (*Sefer Tehillim* (111:10): *Reishis chochmah yiraas Hashem*, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d.” *Rav Bick* explains that this does not mean sequentially – with fear preceding wisdom; rather, we are being told that the fear of Hashem that one receives as a result of his wisdom/Torah learning is the most prized and chosen of *yiraas Shomayim*. Fear without Torah is definitely significant, but lacking. Torah that engenders fear of Hashem is the apex of Torah study.

To create a successful Torah institution, it is critical that both qualities – Torah and *yiraah* – work in tandem. While both Yehudah and Yosef possessed exemplary fear of Hashem and were erudite in Torah, it was Yehudah who was the greater *gaon*, Torah giant, while Yosef excelled in *yiraas Shomayim*. With his choice of prioritizing Yehudah over Yosef (as *Rosh Yeshivah*), Yaakov sought to impart a vital lesson: Torah is a priority over *yiraas Shomayim*, because fear of Hashem in a person who is lacking in Torah (or not willing to receive guidance and direction from someone who is erudite) is flawed. This is why the Torah underscores the word *lefanav*, ahead of him; Yehudah, who is the symbol of Torah, was ahead, dominated. The word *lefanav* is mentioned twice to teach that when one studies Torah (Yehudah), he must stay focused on it being the precursor to greater *yiraah* (Yosef). When the question arises concerning which one is to be prioritized, the Torah (Yehudah) is *lefanav*, ahead of *yiraah* (Yosef). I must add that the success of that first *yeshivah* in Goshen

was due to the fact that Yehudah and Yosef worked together, with each one acknowledging the other’s strength.

### *Va’ani Tefillah*

פתח לבי בתורתך ובמצותיך תרדוף נפשי – *P’sach leebec b’Sorasecha u’b’Mitzvosecha tirdof nafshi*

**May my heart be wide open to Your Torah; may my soul pursue Your mitzvos.**

We ask Hashem to open our hearts in His Torah. Simply, this follows our earlier requests that Hashem guard our mouth and distance us from acting deceitfully, because, when one possesses a flawed character, his learning is not learning. It is similar to running sewage through a clean vessel. Sewage is sewage; the vessel does not purify it. On the contrary, it will tarnish the vessel. Furthermore, as the *Sefer Chareidim* observes, the sin of *bitul* Torah, nullifying/wasting time from Torah study, is *k’neged kulam*, overrides all other *aveiros*, sins. Without Torah, nothing is the same. Every positive activity – *mitzvah*, act of lovingkindness – derives its integrity from the Torah. When one performs a *mitzvah*, he requires the Torah’s guidance concerning how, when and to whom he should perform the *mitzvah*. Otherwise, he might actually be acting inappropriately. We, therefore, ask Hashem for His guidance and support in performing His *mitzvos*. We do this after our request for an open heart to study Torah, because, without Torah, there is no *mitzvah*. To perform *mitzvos* on an optimum level, one must be proficient in – or, at least, attempt to study – Torah, if he wants to succeed in properly carrying out Hashem’s will.

The *Sefer Chareidim* concludes that just as one prays for himself, likewise, he should pray that his progeny all be *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing Jews. This coincides with the *Midrash* which relates that *Eliyahu HaNavi* foresaw concerning a certain *Kohen*, who prayed, prostrated himself and wept profusely to Hashem, that his children be righteous and G-d-fearing Jews. Hashem blessed him that every one of his sons became a *Kohen Gadol* and not one preceded him in death.

*Sponsored in memory of our dear father and grandfather*

*Harry Weiss* צבי בן יואל ז"ל

*By: Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss and Grandchildren, Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss, Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, &*

*Brian "Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"*

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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***Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Vayigash  
Listening To Kerias Ha-Torah Part 1  
Rabbi Doniel Neustadt***

There are two basic opinions among the early poskim concerning the nature of the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah on Shabbos morning. One opinion[1] holds that every adult male is obligated to listen to the weekly portion read every Shabbos morning from a kosher Sefer Torah. He must pay attention to every word being read, or he will not fulfill his obligation. The second opinion[2] maintains that the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah devolves upon the congregation as a whole. In other words, if ten or more men are together on Shabbos morning, they must read from the weekly portion. While each member of the congregation is included in this congregational obligation, it is not a specific obligation upon each individual, provided that there are ten men who are paying attention.

There are some basic questions concerning Kerias ha-Torah whose answers will differ depending on which of these two opinions one follows:

Is one actually required to follow each word recited by the Reader, the koreh, without missing even one letter [and, according to some opinions, even read along with him to make sure nothing is missed[3] ], or is one permitted – even l’chatchilah – to be lax about this requirement?

Is it permitted to learn or to recite Shnayim mikra v’echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah?

If an individual missed a word or two of the Torah reading, must he hear the Torah reading again?

If ten or more men missed one word or more from the reading, should they take out the Sefer Torah after davening and read the portion they missed?

If one came late to shul but arrived in time for Kerias ha-Torah, should he listen to the Torah reading first and then daven?

If a situation arises where tefillah b’tzibur and Kerias ha-Torah conflict, which takes precedence?

If a situation arises where, by listening to Kerias ha-Torah, one would not be able to daven altogether, which takes precedence?

Should one interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah?

The answer to these and other such questions depends, for the most part, on which of the two views one is following. Clearly, according to the first opinion, one must give undivided attention to each and every word being read. Davening, learning or reciting Shnayim mikra v’echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah would be prohibited, and even b’diavad one would have to make up any missed words. But according to the second opinion, the answers to all these questions would be more lenient, for as long as the congregation fulfilled its obligation to read the Torah correctly, and as long as ten men paid attention to the reading, the individual’s obligation is no longer a matter of concern.

Shulchan Aruch does not give a clear, definitive ruling concerning this dispute. Indeed, while discussing the laws regarding the permissibility of learning during Kerias ha-Torah, he quotes both opinions without rendering a decision. Instead, he concludes that “it is proper for a meticulous person to focus on and pay attention to the words of the reader.” This indicates that Shulchan Aruch and many other prominent poskim[4] hold that while it is commendable to be stringent, it is not absolutely essential. Mishnah Berurah[5], though, quotes several poskim who maintain that the halachah requires that each individual listen to every word of Kerias ha-Torah[6]. Rav M. Feinstein rules that even b’diavad one does not fulfill his obligation if he misses a word, and he must find a way to make up what he missed[7]. There are, however, a host of poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational and not an individual obligation[8].

Several contemporary poskim suggest what appears to be a compromise. Clearly, l’chatchilah we follow the view of the poskim that each individual is obligated to listen to Kerias ha-Torah, and it is standard practice for each individual to pay undivided attention to each word that is recited. Indeed, in the situation described above where Kerias ha-Torah conflicts with tefillah b’tzibur, some poskim rule that the obligation to hear Kerias ha-Torah takes precedence, in deference to the authorities who consider it an individual obligation[9]. But, b’diavad, if it were to happen that a word or two was missed, one is not obligated to go to another shul to listen to the part of the reading that was missed. Rather, we rely on the second opinion which maintains that so long as the congregation has fulfilled its obligation, the individual is covered[10]. Accordingly, if listening to Kerias ha-Torah will result



in missing davening altogether, davening takes priority, since we rely on the poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational obligation[11]. Similarly, one should not interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah[12].

But regardless of the above dispute and compromise, the poskim are in agreement about the following rules: There must be at least ten men listening to the entire Kerias ha-Torah. If there are fewer than ten, then the entire congregation has not fulfilled its obligation according to all views[13].

Conversing during Kerias ha-Torah is strictly prohibited even when there are ten men paying attention. According to most poskim, it is prohibited to converse even between aliyos (bein gavra l'gavra[14]). One who converses during Kerias ha-Torah is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven[15]."

Even those who permit learning during Kerias ha-Torah stipulate that it may only be done quietly, so that it does not interfere with the Torah reading[16].

"Talking in learning" bein gavra l'gavra is permitted by some poskim and prohibited by others. An individual, however, may learn by himself or answer a halachic question bein gavra l'gavra[17].

1. *Shibbolei ha-Leket* 39, quoted in *Beis Yosef, O.C. 146*. This also seems to be the view of the *Magen Avraham 146:5*, quoting *Shelah and Mateh Moshe*. See also *Ma'asei Rav 131*. See, however, *Peulas Sachir on Ma'asei Rav 175*.

2. Among the *Rishonim* see *Ramban and Ran, Megillah 5a*. Among the *poskim* see *Ginas Veradim 2:21; Imrei Yosher 2:171; Binyan Shlomo 35; Levushei Mordechai 2:99 and others*. See also *Yabia Omer 4:31-3 and 7:9*.

3. *Mishnah Berurah 146:15*.

4. *Sha'arei Efrayim 4:12 and Siddur Derech ha-Chayim (4-5)* clearly rule in accordance with this view. This may also be the ruling of *Chayei Adam 31:2 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8*.

5. *146:15. Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:6 and Kaf ha-Chayim 146:10,14 concur with this view*.

6. There are conflicting indications as to what, exactly, is the view of the *Mishnah Berurah* on this issue; see *Beur Halachah 135:14, s.v. ein, and 146:2, s.v. v'yeish*.

7. *Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:23; 4:40-4-5*. If ten or more men missed a section of the Torah reading, then they

should take out the sefer after davening and read that section over; *ibid*.

8. See also *Eimek Berachah (Kerias ha-Torah 3)*.

9. *Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140)*. See dissenting opinion in *Minchas Yitzchak 7:6*.

10. *Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Siach Halachah 6:8 and Halichos Shlomo 1:12-1; see also Minchas Shlomo 2:4-15); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140)*.

11. *Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140)*.

12. *Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 1:12-4)*. [A Diaspora Jew who may have missed an entire parashah when traveling to Eretz Yisrael after a Yom Tov, does not need to make up what he missed (*ibid. 6*). See *Ishei Yisrael 38:29* for a dissenting opinion.

13. *Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:5*.

14. *Bach, as understood by Mishnah Berurah 146:6 and many poskim*. There are poskim, however, who maintain that the *Bach* permits even idle talk bein gavra l'gavra; see *Machatzis ha-Shekel, Aruch ha-Shulchan, and Shulchan ha-Tahor*. See also *Peri Chadash, who allows conversing bein gavra l'gavra*. Obviously, they refer to the type of talk which is permitted in shul and/or on Shabbos.

15. *Beur Halachah 146:2, s.v. v'hanachon, who uses strong language in condemning these people*.

16. *Mishnah Berurah 146:11*.

17. *Mishnah Berurah 146:6*.

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## A Haftarah from Yechezkel

### Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

We will soon see why I chose this topic for this week's article.

Question #1: Which Haftarah?

Who chose which haftaros we read?

Question #2: Why is Yechezkel different?

In what ways is the book of Yechezkel unusual?

Question #3: Rarely Yechezkel?

Why is the haftarah on Shabbos seldom from Yechezkel?

Introduction

On certain Shabbosos and most Yomim Tovim, Chazal established specific haftaros to be read (Megillah 29b-31b). On other Shabbosos, no specific haftarah was instituted, but an appropriate section of the prophets is read. When no specific section of Navi was indicated by Chazal, each community would choose a selection of Navi suggestive of the parsha. Indeed, if one looks at old Chumashim, books of community minhagim and seforim that discuss these topics, one finds many variant practices.

Today, which haftaros are read on specific Shabbosos has become standardized, and our Chumashim mention only the selections that are commonly used. There are still many weeks when Sephardic and Ashkenazic practices differ, especially regarding minor variances, such as exactly where to begin or end the haftarah, whether to skip certain verses, and whether and where to skip to a more pleasant ending.

Almost unique Vayigash

Parshas Vayigash is almost unique, in that it is one of only two regular Shabbosos during the entire year in which the haftarah is always from the prophet Yechezkel. In Ashkenazic practice, we have relatively few haftaros on regular Shabbosos that are from Yechezkel. In addition to parshas Vayigash, the customary haftaros of Ashkenazim for Va'eira (28:55), Tetzaveh (43:27), Kedoshim (22:1) and Emor (44:15) are also from Yechezkel, but, of these, only on Emor do we always read from Yechezkel. Shabbos Va'eira occasionally falls on Rosh Chodesh, in which case we read a special haftarah, Hashamayim Kis'i from the book of Yeshayahu; Tetzaveh sometimes falls on Shabbos Shekalim, in which case the haftarah is from the book of Melachim (Megillah 29b; 30a). And, in practice, Ashkenazim rarely read the haftarah printed in the chumashim for Kedoshim. When Acharei and Kedoshim are combined, as they are in all common years, the haftarah is from Amos, which is printed in the chumashim as the haftarah for Acharei. (We should note that the Levush, Orach Chayim 493:4, disagrees with this practice. However, the other authorities, both before him and after, accept that we read on that Shabbos from Amos.)

Even in leap years, when the parshi'os of Acharei and Kedoshim are read on separate weeks, if Shabbos

Acharei falls on erev Rosh Chodesh, most Ashkenazim read Mochor Chodesh on parshas Acharei and the haftarah from Amos on Kedoshim. And, even when Acharei and Kedoshim are read on separate weeks and Acharei is not erev Rosh Chodesh, there are years in which Kedoshim falls on Rosh Chodesh, and we read Hashamayim Kis'i.

Thus, the only time we read a haftarah for Kedoshim from Yechezkel is in a leap year in which neither parshas Acharei nor parshas Kedoshim falls on either erev Rosh Chodesh or on Rosh Chodesh. The next time this will happen under our current calendar is in 5784, although we hope that Moshiach will come soon and that our calendar will once again be established by the Sanhedrin, in which case the pattern may be different.

Special haftaros

Although Yechezkel is the source for the haftarah on relatively few regular Shabbosos, there are five special haftaros during the year from the book of Yechezkel. The haftaros for parshas Parah (36:16) and parshas Hachodesh (48:18) are both from Yechezkel, as are the haftaros for Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach (37:1), for Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos (38:18) and for Shavuos (1:1).

Reading these haftaros on these special Shabbosos is already recorded by the Gemara (Megillah 30a; 31a). The haftarah read on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach, referred to as the haftarah of the atzamos hayeveishos (literally, the dry bones), is about the bones of the Bnei Efrayim, who were annihilated when they attempted to escape from Egypt, many years before the time of yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

The haftarah read on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos discusses the wars of Gog and Magog. According to Rashi (Megillah 31a), this haftarah is read then because it continues the theme of the haftarah of the first day of Sukkos, which is the passage discussing the wars of Gog and Magog in the book of Zecharyah. The Tur (Orach Chayim 490), quoting Rav Hai Gaon, cites the following reason for reciting these two special haftaros on Chol Hamoed: "I heard from wise men that techiyas hameisim will occur in Nissan and the victory of Gog and Magog will transpire in Tishrei, and, for this reason, we recite the haftarah of the dry bones (that, in the haftarah, come back to life) in Nissan and the haftarah beginning with the words Beyom ba Gog in Tishrei."

So, indeed, we do read haftaros from Yechezkel about eight times a year, but relatively rarely on a “regular” Shabbos.

#### Background

Before addressing the rest of our opening questions, let us spend some time appreciating the book of Yechezkel and its author. Of the three major prophets of Nevi'im Acharonim, Yechezkel is the latest, although his lifetime and era of prophecy overlap that of Yirmiyahu. Yechezkel began prophesying shortly before the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash. Yeshayahu had been assassinated a century before; the elderly Yirmiyahu was in Eretz Yisroel, admonishing the people; and the much younger Yechezkel had been exiled to Bavel as a member of the young leadership of the Jewish people, including such great future leaders as Mordechai, Ezra and Daniel, during the expulsion of King Yehoyachin (Yechonyah).

#### Yechezkel, the Torah scholar

We are aware that, among the many attributes necessary for someone to attain prophecy, Torah scholarship and meticulousness in halacha are included (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:1). And yet, even among this very elite group of halachically-concerned individuals, the Gemara demonstrates that Yechezkel stood out as one who was exceptionally careful, particularly in areas of kashrus and tzeniyus (Chullin 44b). He did not eat any food on which a shaylah had been raised, even when a posek subsequently ruled it to be kosher, a meticulousness that the Gemara views as worthy of emulation.

Yechezkel was a qualified member of the Sanhedrin and perhaps its head. The Gemara mentions that, not only was he authorized to create a leap year, a power reserved for the special beis din appointed by the nasi of the Sanhedrin, but he once did so, when he was in chutz la'aretz (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 1:2). This is unusual, since ruling and declaring the new month must be performed in Eretz Yisroel, and can only be performed in chutz la'aretz when there is no equal in stature in Eretz Yisroel to those leaders in chutz la'aretz (Brachos 63a). This implies that Yechezkel was, at least at this point in his life, the greatest Torah scholar among the Jewish people.

We also know that Yechezkel had received from his teachers the ongoing tradition of specific halachos that had been related to Moshe at Har Sinai as a mesorah, called halacha leMoshe miSinai. Yechezkel took care

to record these rulings, so that they would not be lost to the Jewish people (Taanis 17b).

#### Yechezkel, the man

“Rava said: ‘Whatever Yechezkel saw, Yeshayahu had seen. To whom can Yechezkel be compared? To a villager who saw the king. And to whom can Yeshayahu be compared? To a city dweller who saw the king’” (Chagigah 13b).

The question the Gemara is bothered by is that both Yeshayahu and Yechezkel describe their visions of the Heavenly array of angels, yet Yechezkel's descriptions are much more vivid and detailed than those of Yeshayahu.

Rashi explains that Yechezkel shares with us all the details he saw in the angels, because he was unfamiliar with seeing “royalty.” Yeshayahu, on the other hand, was of the royal family and was not as astounded by what he saw. For this reason, he did not record as much specific detail when he saw Hashem's royal retinue.

#### Yechezkel, the persecuted

Being a prophet was often not a pleasant occupation, perhaps as bad as being a congregational rabbi. Yechezkel underwent intense suffering as part of his role. In addition, the midrash reports that people said very nasty and untrue things about his yichus (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 771).

#### Yechezkel, the book

Who wrote the Book of Yechezkel? The Gemara (Bava Basra 15a) reports that it was written by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, who also wrote Trei Asar, Daniel and Esther. Why did Yechezkel, himself, not write it? Rashi explains that since he was in chutz la'aretz, he was not permitted to write down the prophecies. Therefore, writing it down required awaiting the return of the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah to Eretz Yisroel. Rashi notes that this also explains why Daniel and Esther, both of whom lived in chutz la'aretz, did not write their own books.

#### Nevi'im Acharonim

Although we are all familiar with the division of the works of the nevi'im into Nevi'im Rishonim (Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shmuel, Melachim) and Nevi'im Acharonim (Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, Trei Asar), this distinction does not show up anywhere in the Gemara or in the early commentaries. The earliest source that I know who mentions this distinction is the Abarbanel, but all he writes is that Nevi'im Rishonim are predominantly historical in style, whereas Nevi'im Acharonim are closer to what we usually think of

when we talk about prophecy. This does not tell us anything about why these two terms, *Nevi'im Rishonim* and *Nevi'im Acharonim*, are used to describe the two subdivisions, since many of the events of the *Nevi'im Acharonim* predate those of the *Nevi'im Rishonim*.

Rav Tzadok Hakohein points out that the *Nevi'im Rishonim* are written in third person, similar to the way the Torah is written, whereas *Nevi'im Acharonim* are written in first person. For example, the opening words of Yechezkel read: And it was in the thirtieth year in the fourth (month) on the fifth of the month, and I was in the midst of the exile on the River Kefar. As Rashi notes, this is an interesting literary device whereby the prophet does not identify who is speaking, and requires that his words be interrupted two *pesukim* later to tell us who this prophet is. Presumably, the interceding *pasuk* that identifies Yechezkel was supplied by the *Anshei Keneses Hagedolah*, when they edited his prophecies into a written work, as the Gemara explains (Bava Basra 15a).

Again, this approach of Rav Tzadok Hakohein does not teach us why the terms *Nevi'im Rishonim* and *Nevi'im Acharonim* are used to describe them.

I found an answer to this question in a relatively recent work, *Ohel Rivkah* by Rabbi Isaac Sender (page 140), who quotes a novel insight from *Nevi'ei Emes* by Rabbi Avraham Wolf (page 173), a work with which I am unfamiliar. The earlier prophets, such as Eliyahu, warn of difficulties that will befall the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael, but never warn them that their misdeeds may lead to their being exiled. The first prophet to do this is Hoshea, who, according to the Gemara (Bava Basra 14b), was an older contemporary of Yeshayahu. Thus, Hoshea, who is the first of the twelve prophets of *Trei Asar*, was chronologically the earliest of the prophets to admonish the Jewish people that their misdeeds may lead to their being exiled from the Holy Land, and is the earliest prophet whose works are included in *Nevi'im Acharonim*. This may provide an explanation as to why the works dating before Hoshea are called *Nevi'im Rishonim*, and he begins an era called *Nevi'im Acharonim*.

Yechezkel in chutz la'aretz

At this point, we can address one of our opening questions:

In what ways is the book of Yechezkel unusual?

Well, for one important aspect, the entire book transpired in chutz la'aretz. Although this is true, also, of the books of Esther and Daniel, and possibly Iyov, they are in *Kesuvim*, rather than being books of prophecy. To quote the midrash (*Yalkut Shemoni* 336:1), "Until Eretz Yisroel was chosen, all lands were appropriate for prophecy. Once Eretz Yisroel was chosen, the other lands were excluded."

So, how can the book of Yechezkel open with a statement that he received prophecy while in chutz la'aretz? The answer is that, prior to being exiled to Bavel, Yechezkel had received a prophecy in Eretz Yisroel (*Moed Katan* 25a, according to the second approach cited by Rashi). This enabled Yechezkel to become a prophet and continue prophesying after he was exiled.

An interesting aspect about Yechezkel is that it is the only book of the prophets of which we are told not to read parts of it as *haftarah*. This requires clarification.

The Mishnah (*Megillah* 25a) states: "We do not read, as *haftarah*, from the passage of Yechezkel called the *merkavah*, in which he describes the appearance of the Heavenly 'Chariots' (Yechezkel 1). However, Rabbi Yehudah permits doing so. Rabbi Eliezer rules that we do not read as *haftarah* the passage of Yechezkel that begins with the words, *Hoda es Yerushalayim*" (*Yechezkel* 16:1).

Let us explain these two disputes among the *tanna'im*. First the Mishnah records a dispute between the *tanna kamma* and Rabbi Yehudah. The Rambam explains that the *tanna kamma* objects to reading the *merkavah* as a *haftarah* because people will attempt to understand it in depth, and its subject matter is beyond the ken of mortal man. Rabbi Yehudah is not concerned about this.

How do we rule?

The *rishonim* note that the Gemara rules that this *haftarah* should be read on *Shavuot*. Obviously, the Gemara accepted Rabbi Yehudah's approach, although we usually follow the *tanna kamma* (*Tosafos*; Rambam), and this is the accepted *halacha*.

*Hoda es Yerushalayim*

The Mishnah also cited a dispute in which the *tanna*, Rabbi Eliezer, ruled that the passage in Yechezkel 16 should not be read as a *haftarah*. Rabbi Eliezer's reason is either because the passage speaks extremely negatively about the populace of Yerushalayim (Rashi) or because, in the course of its rebuke of Klal Yisroel, it also makes pejorative comments about our forebears (*Levush*, *Orach Chayim* 493:4). The

halachic authorities all conclude that we rule according to the tanna kamma against Rabbi Eliezer, and that one may recite the haftarah of Hoda es Yerushalayim.

In practice, however, Ashkenazim do not read this haftarah, and the Levush (note to Orach Chayim 493:4) contends that this decision is deliberate. However, there are edot hamizrah communities that do read this passage as the haftarah for Shemos, a practice mentioned by both the Rambam and the Avudraham. Reading these words of Yechezkel, one can readily see why this was chosen for that week's haftarah, since it describes the bleak origins of the Jewish people. Some of its verses have found their way into the Hagadah that we recite at the Seder on Pesach night, for the same reason.

In conclusion:

Two passages of the Book of Yechezkel are “controversial;” in both of those instances we rule that one may use them for the haftarah.

Although Yechezkel is not a frequent choice for haftarahs on regular Shabbosos, there are several

readings from it that we use during the year, each one with a powerful message.

Parchas Vayigash haftarah

This week's haftarah begins exactly where the haftarah of chol hamoed Pesach ends, and discusses how Yechezkel sees two pieces of wood, one marked “for Judah and his associates,” and the other marked “for Yosef, the tree of Efrayim, and his associates.” Yechezkel describes how Hashem told him to bring the two sticks together and that they would become one in his hands. As Dr. Mendel Hirsch notes, when Yechezkel had this prophecy, the ten tribes, symbolized by Yosef and Efrayim, had long been exiled, and the southern kingdom of Judea was about to fall. Yet, the disunion among the descendents of Yaakov had continued long after the dissolution of their two competing monarchies and long after their feud should have ended. Judea and Efrayim continue their separate ways into the exile, and require the involvement of Yechezkel to bring them together again. Yechezkel is called upon to rebuke the Jewish people for this misbehavior – there is no place for internal divisions within Hashem's people!

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל