

BS"D



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYECHI - 5764

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From: Rabbi Ben Kelsen, Esq. [benish@att.net]
Sent: January 08, 2004
To: parshas_hashavuah@yahoogroups.com
HaGaon Maran HaRosh HaYeshiva
HARAV CHAIM YAAKOV GOLDVICHT, zt"l
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Kerem B'Yavneh
Parshas Vayechi

Editor's Note: The following is adapted from the Rosh Yeshiva's Tisch of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 11 Teves 5751, December 28, 1990.

The Torah tells us in Sefer Bereishis (48:21-22) that Yaakov Avinu on his death bed told his son Yosef, "Behold I am dying. Hashem will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. I have given you one share more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Rashi, commenting on this passuk teaches that Yaakov Avinu was telling Yosef that because you, Yosef, will take the trouble to occupy yourself with my burial, I will also give you an inheritance in which you will be buried, Shechem. Rashi learns this from the passuk in Sefer Yehoshuah (24:32) where it is written "And the bones of Yosef which the Bnei Yisrael brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem." Chazal, however, in the Medresh Rabbah (Shemos Rabbah 33:8) have a different approach than that of Rashi. Chazal teach that "Hashem will be with you" is a reference to the Mishkan which Klal Yisroel build in the Midbar Sinai and eventually take to the city of Shiloh. Even more puzzling is another Medresh which states that the city of Shechem is given over to Yosef as part of the Bechorah. "'And Behold, I have given to you Shechem', this is the Bechorah, and 'the garments of Adam HaRishon that I took from the Amorite', this is Eisav...". Is there connection between these various teachings of Chazal? Is there a way to reconcile these seemingly disparate approaches? Is there a connection between the garments of Adam and the Mishkan?

Before being able to explore any possible connection between these ideas we must first understand the nature of the garments of Adam HaRishon. By eating from the fruit of the Eitz HaDa'as, Adam distanced himself from HKB"H. As this act was done by Adam voluntarily, HKB"H complied with Adam's will and "hid" Himself from Adam and Chava behind the veil of Nature. Therefore, as a result of the sin Adam created a veil which separates Man from the Ribbono Shel Olam, obscuring our ability to see Him clearly.

The epitome of this new perspective can be seen in Bereishis 3:8 where it is written that Adam and Chava hid themselves from HKB"H among the trees of the Garden. This raises the following question: How, exactly, does one hide from The Ribbono Shel Olam?! Essentially we are saying that following their sin Adam and Chava experienced a life in which HKB"H's presence is not readily apparent, a life in which a

person can be deluded into thinking that he can hide his actions from the Melech Malchei HaMelochim and in which he can hide the existence of HKB"H from himself. Thus we have the introduction of falsehood and deceit into the World.

As punishment for Adam and Chava's actions HKB"H made for them Ketones Or -- "coats of skin". Rashi explains that according to some, these coats were actually a layer of thick skin which covered their bodies. Physically, a skin is a separation between that which the skin envelopes and the outside world. The coats of skin are therefore symbolic of the separation that Adam created between Man and HKB"H. A second explanation offered by Rashi that Ketones Or means "a cloak of hiddenness". This translations is indicative of a second aspect of the partition which Adam created between Man and HKB"H.

Clothing is an external ornament, which hides within it Man's true image. So, too, though Man's eyes may perceive the world one way, the truth may be very different. Though his eyes see a world running according to the "Rules of Nature", by science, in reality we know the world to be guided by the hand of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Therefore one could say that HKB"H's influence and direction is hidden behind a disguising garment.

According to the Medrash in Bereishis Rabbah (63:13), Eisav obtained Adam's special garments from Nimrod. Symbolically, we mean to say that Eisav inherited the force which cloaks the presence of HKB"H from Man, reinforcing the partition which Adam created.

When Yaakov Avinu was forced to lie to his father Yitzchok's in order to claim the brochah of the Bechorah he could only do so after disguising himself in Eisav's special garments. According to Chazal these were the garments of Adam HaRishon which brought deception into the world.

Though the word "Or" (as in "Ketones Or") means "skin", the same letters--Ayin, Vav, and Reish, can be read as "Iveir," meaning "blind". Again we see the notion that skin represents the forces that blind a person. By raising himself to a spiritual level from which he has a clear perception of HKB"H a person can change that Or into a different "Or" - meaning "light" thus allowing the light of HKB"H's presence to penetrate the divide that normally blocks the ability to perceive the Shechina in this world. The Torah tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu descended Har Sinai his face radiated with light, the glory of the Shechina. One could say that the "Or", the skin of his face, had turned into "Or", light, through the removal of the partition which separates Man from HKB"H.

However, though Adam himself had now created a barrier between himself and HKB"H, he still had a much greater perception of HKB"H than anyone after him. In fact, the Gemara in Masseches Bava Basra (58a) tells us that when Rav Bana'ah entered the Ma'aras HaMachpeilah, in which Adam is buried, he found Adam's heels, most mundane part of the body, shining with a brightness greater than that of the sun.

The Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l, explained that these "garments of Adam HaRishon" were also the garments of Kohein Gadol. By using Adam's garments that came about because of the creation of a separation between Man and HKB"H for the Kohein Gadol we are attempting to repair the damage caused by Adam, to remove the partition. In essence we are taking the Gashmius, the physical, and using it as a tool to reach the greatest heights of Ruchnius, the spiritual.

This is the meaning of Yaakov Avinu's brochah to his son Yosef; "ben poras Yosef, ben poras alei ayin...", "A charming son is Yosef, a charming son to the eye..." Yosef was given the brochah of the Koach HaReiyoh, the Strength of Sight, the ability to see through the veil and perceive the Truth, that HKB"H is intricately involved in every aspect of the world. In this, he was truly the heir of Yaakov Avinu who embodied the concept of Emes, Truth. Yosef is able to see the Kedushah, the holiness, of HKB"H in everything.

It is for this reason, explained the Rosh Yeshiva, that we have a fascinating halachah. During the times of the Beis HaMikdosh, which sat on the borders of the land of Sheivet Yehudah and Sheivet Binyomin,

one could only eat Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini, two types of tithes, within the walls of Yerushalayim. However, when the Mishkan was the focus of Yehadus and was situated in Shiloh, one was permitted to eat Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini anywhere within sight of the City. This is because Yosef HaTzaddik, within whose son's borders the Mishkan stood, had no partition between himself and HKB"H. Therefore within the borders of Yosef's inheritance we do not need to be secluded behind the partition of great walls in order to remain on the level required to partake of Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini. The brochah of Yosef is the ability to remain on that level of perception of HKB"H no matter where we are physically, to perceive HKB"H's presence in this world. In other words, to no longer be hidden within cloaks of deception. May we all be able to attain such a level in the very near future and remain there forever.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/parshas_hashavuah/

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: January 08, 2004 "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYeCh

The Blessing of Exceeding Ones Potential

In this week's parsha our patriarch Yaakov blesses Yosef's children with the words "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menasheh'" [Bereshis 48:20]. This has become the blessing that fathers give to their children [for girls, using "... Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah"]. Jews of German descent -- and others as well -- bless their children with this blessing every Friday night. Even communities that do not have the custom of blessing children every Shabbos evening, use this formulation when blessing children on Erev Yom Kippur.

There have been many attempts to explain why it is that of all the great personalities from the Torah and of all the illustrious personages of Jewish history, it is specifically Ephraim and Menasheh who were chosen to be the eternal role models for Jewish male children. Why not Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov? Why not Moshe and Aharon?

Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l (of blessed memory) once said that every parent hopes to see the blessing that their children reach their full potential in life. But Ephraim and Menasheh did something that was better than that. They exceeded their potential. They became more than that which their father could have reasonably expected from them. They achieved a status equal to that of the twelve children of Yaakov.

Part of Yaakov's blessing to these grandchildren was that the two of them would replace Yosef, and assume a status equal to that of Yaakov's other sons in the Tribal divisions of the Jewish people. This affected the encampments in the wilderness, their representation among the Spies sent to investigate the Land of Israel, their geographical allocation in the Land of Israel, and a variety of other issues. All these things happened because of this anomaly that Yaakov gave Ephraim and Menasheh the status of his own sons.

Rav Weinberg taught that the meaning of the blessing "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasheh" is "may you exceed your potential beyond anyone's wildest expectations."

Unfortunately, most of us live our lives not only without exceeding expectations, but without even meeting them. I recently saw a frightening thought from the Zohar. The Zohar teaches that immediately before a person's death, his soul gives a scream that can be 'heard' (spiritually) from one end of the world to the next. What is the soul screaming about? At that moment, G-d shows the soul an image of what it was supposed to become during its sojourn on earth. The soul is traumatized by the gap between what it was supposed to become and what actually became of it. The Soul lets out this shriek which is heard through the entire universe: "Woe is me. I did not even come close!"

Ephraim and Manasseh did not have to let out that scream when they left this world. Not only did they become that which they were supposed to

become, they even became members of the Tribes of G-d (Shivtei Kah). The biggest blessing a father can wish to his children is exceeding their full potential in life.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 399 - Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Voed. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 (410) 602-1350 Baltimore, MD 21208 FAX: (410) 510-1053

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM - Parshas Vayechi

And someone said to Yosef, "Behold! - Your father is ill." (48:1)

Visiting the sick is not easy. One must sensitize himself to the needs of the sick person and momentarily put himself in his shoes. The visitor must have in mind the varying degree of the person's illness and his own ability to confront the emotional and physical challenges that accompany it. The sick person is prone to moments of pain and depression. The one who visits him should address the issues that wreak havoc with his mind. Horav Solumon Mutzafi, zl, one of the great Sephardic rabbanim who lived in Yerushalayim prior to World War I, was known for his chesed in visiting the sick, as well as for his erudition in all areas of Torah jurisprudence.

It once happened that one of the gedolei ho'rabbonim, distinguished rabbinic leaders in Yerushalayim, became ill and was bedridden for an entire year. During that year, Rav Solumon would come over every Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov on his way home from shul to visit for about one hour. He would discuss Torah thoughts and halachic questions that had been posed to the Bais Din for arbitration. He would seek his advice on various issues. His family wondered why he would continue with his customary visit during the rainy season. Why did he not wait until Motzoei Shabbos? Furthermore, why did he subject his family to the trouble of waiting for him? It was not as if the mitzvah could not be performed the next day.

Rav Solumon explained, "When Shabbos night comes around, this great rav remembers how, when he was healthy and full of vigor, he would leave the shul in the accompaniment of a large crowd of students and admirers, each one vying for his attention. He would arrive at home filled with joy and enthusiasm. Now that he is incapacitated, he must feel unwanted, unworthy and depressed. Perhaps his Shabbos is ruined by feelings of discontent and sadness. Such a distinguished talmid chacham should not be sad - ever, but certainly not on Shabbos Kodesh. My family can wait a little, so that this rav will not be let down on Shabbos."

This is what visiting the sick is all about. We are to visit someone for one purpose: to make him feel good, not ourselves. Regrettably, all too often we perform acts of loving-kindness because we are on a guilt trip. Chesed is for others - not to quell our own self-condemnation. May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads... and may they proliferate like fish within the land. (48:16) The Midrash draws an analogy between a Jew's thirst for Torah and the unquenchable thirst a fish has for water. Fish grow and live in the water. Yet, as soon as a drop of new water is introduced into their environment, they seize it, as if they had never tasted water before. Likewise, a Jew grows and lives in the sea of Torah. Yet, when he hears a new Torah thought, he seizes upon it, as if he had never studied before. This was Yaakov Avinu's underlying idea when he blessed his descendants to proliferate as fish.

Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, derives a powerful lesson from here. We learn the overriding significance of each individual action that a person undertakes. Chazal say, "One who recites Krias Shma daily and misses one day, it is considered as if he never said Krias Shma." What is the meaning of this statement? Rav Aharon explains that just as every creation is composed of various components which can be viewed under the microscope, likewise, man is comprised of various elements. This applies not only to his essence, but also to his life and strength; everything is the sum total of various parts. Essentially, every minute, every second of his life is a separate, distinct unit. This unit exists forever and must be accounted for. Thus, if one did not recite Krias Shma, then that moment in time is left without kabbolas ol malchus Shomayim, a lapse in accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. There is a blemish forever, a lapse in his life, a moment that is without a kabbolah, a commitment. We are not to view this as one kabbolah among many thousands that do exist. No. For that moment, that individual component in time, this individual

had not committed himself. That moment is left for posterity - without commitment.

We derive from here the importance of making use of every moment allotted to us. The moment we waste is lost to us - forever. This is the meaning of the Midrash. Every dvar Torah, every moment that we can study Torah, is unique and distinct. It has nothing to do with the past or the future. It stands alone. We should thirst to seize it, or it is lost to us forever.

Accursed is their rage for it is intense... I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Yisrael. (49:7)

The key word regarding Shimon and Levi's character fault is not "anger," but rather, "intense." Ki az, "for it is intense," describes an anger that overwhelms a person, that owns his actions, that controls his thoughts and moments. It is not the anger; it is the intensity that must be cursed. Anger is not a good trait, by far. Chazal tell us that anger is like idol worship. It consumes a person, takes over his identity, and distances him from Hashem. Yet, Yaakov Avinu wanted the descendants of these two "angry" brothers spread out throughout Yisrael. They became the scribes and Torah teachers of our children. Does this make sense? Did Yaakov have in mind to send an angry man into a classroom to teach our children? Certainly not. There is another aspect to anger that is laudatory - stubbornness. When the anger is not az, "intense," when the individual is in control, then the stubbornness can give rise to a sense of mission, an ability to overcome overwhelming odds, to succeed where others would fail. Yes: Anger that gives way to akshanus, stubbornness, is commendable.

The Skverer Rebbe, zl, would relate that as a young boy he was known to have a stubborn streak. He once noticed a small object with which he immediately wanted to play. His grandfather took the object and placed it on the highest shelf of the bookcase, in order to keep it out of harm's way.

The little boy was not taking this lying down. He worked for an hour and devised a way to scale the bookcase and retrieve the object. When he finally succeeded, his grandfather patted him on the head, and said, 'Der yingel hot asach akshanus.' "This little lad has a lot of stubbornness."

His grandfather was right. It was this stubbornness that helped him survive the Nazis and rebuild his Kehillah, congregation. He overcame pain, deprivation and adversity to become a manhig, leader, that led and encouraged his flock. He was the prime architect of the idea of a chassidic community outside of New York. It was not easy, considering that many of the challenges that he had to overcome were not only from the secular community. Negativity among our own people has regrettably become natural, especially when someone else is doing what we just decided we would like to do. Despite the challenges and obstacles, he prevailed. It was then that he would relate his childhood prank and his grandfather's remark, saying, "I used up all that stubbornness to build this community."

Yosef went up to bury his father. (50:7)

Although all the brothers went to the funeral of Yaakov Avinu, Yosef is singled out because he took personal responsibility for his father's burial, despite his exalted position as the Egyptian viceroy. In reward for this, Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest Jewish leader, took personal responsibility for Yosef's remains when Klal Yisrael left Egypt. Being paid back middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, is the way Hashem metes out reward and punishment. When we perform a chesed for a person, we can be sure that it will be repaid in a like manner, at times many years later when we need it the most. I was especially moved by a selfless act of loving kindness performed by Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, for an elderly woman who had unknowingly helped him as a young boy. The venerable Rosh Hayeshivah's remembering for a lifetime that he had a debt of kindness to repay - and the manner in which he repaid it - demonstrates his incredible character.

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in his Reflections of the Maggid, relates the following story. It was a cold, dreary, stormy day when the aged Rosh Hayeshivah summoned his grandson to his house and said, "Please arrange a car for me. I have to travel to a town near Haifa to attend a funeral." Obviously, his grandson made every attempt to dissuade Rav Shach. His ill health and the inclement weather were both valid reasons for him to stay at home, but he knew that arguing with his grandfather would prove fruitless. In the car, during the two-hour trip, Rav Shach explained that he was attending the funeral of an elderly woman, who deserved great honor. While she might have deserved the great distinction, regrettably, there was barely a minyan, quorum, in attendance.

The funeral was short, sad and simple. After the funeral was over, Rav Shach still did not leave, but remained standing over the grave amidst the pelting cold rain. He stood there shivering, immersed in his thoughts for a short while, and then he was ready to go.

This scene was too much for his grandson. He needed an explanation, which Rav Shach promptly gave him. This is his story. When he was only twelve years old, it was announced that a yeshivah was forming for illuyim, brilliant students. The Rosh Hayeshivah was meticulous in selecting only those students who had great academic potential. Also, their diligence and dedication to Torah was to be exceptional, since material conditions were meager, at best. The older students were given a hard bench to sleep on, while the younger ones had the "luxury" of sleeping on the floor. Food was edible, although very sparse. Rav Shach was accepted in this yeshivah, despite his young age.

During the spring and summer, the young prodigy was able to tolerate the material conditions. Winter brought a new challenge, since there was no heat. The pangs of hunger, coupled with the bitter cold, took their toll on the young child. His commitment was challenged even more when he received a letter from his uncle, a successful blacksmith, asking him to "relocate" his vocation and join his burgeoning business. The letter arrived on Wednesday. By Friday, he was about to give up and join the "family" business. He decided that he would remain in the yeshivah for Shabbos and leave immediately thereafter.

Friday morning, a woman came to the yeshivah and shared her tale of sorrow with the Rosh Hayeshivah. Her husband had been a salesman who sold blankets. During his most recent trip, the horse and carriage that he was traveling in turned over, and he was killed. The woman had just gotten up from sitting shivah, and she wanted to donate the left-over blankets to the yeshivah. Rav Shach was one of the lucky students to be a beneficiary of her kindness. That blanket made the difference. He figured that he could survive the cold winter with the warm blanket. After that winter, the direction in which he would focus his life was clear.

Rav Shach continued, "That woman had a sad life. She never remarried. She later moved to Haifa and lived alone to a ripe old age. When I found out that she had passed away, I wanted to repay her kindness to me and attend her funeral. After the funeral, I waited around in the cold, rainy weather to remind myself how cold I was many years ago before this wonderful lady gave me the blanket. I wanted to have the proper hakoras hatov, gratitude, for all that she did for me." The two lessons that we derive from this narrative are apparent. No kindness goes unnoticed. Every kind act will be repaid. We also note the depth of hakoras hatov, appreciation, that Rav Shach had to this woman and how he viewed her simple act of generosity as the turning point of his life.

And they held a very great and imposing eulogy. (50:10)

Yaakov Avinu was accorded great honor as he was eulogized and lauded for his great virtue and accomplishment. Not everyone agrees with the concept of hesped, eulogy. In fact, many gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, have insisted that after their demise, they be buried without eulogy or fanfare. Horav Aryeh Levine, zl, the distinguished tzaddik of Yerushalayim, wrote the following in his tzavaah, will: "I request in every language of entreaty that I not be eulogized at all... Woe is to him about whom great praises are rendered - and they are not true. Especially, me, that I do not possess any Torah, that I am not proficient even in a perek of Mishnayos. I do not even know Chumash. To my great anguish, I never had the opportunity to study with a melamed, primary Torah teacher."

More than once, Rav Aryeh would comment that when they praise the deceased in this world with appellations that are not necessarily true, in Heaven it is demanded of him, "See, you could have been a baal madreigah, person of stature, listen to what they are saying about you!" When a person is lauded in this world, when his virtue and piety are being exalted, he had better be worthy of the distinction that is accorded to him, for in the World of Truth, the "other side of the story" is clear for all to see.

Rav Aryeh once explained why he was so insistent about not being eulogized. He related the following incident. It was during the great famine that enveloped Yerushalayim during World War I. People suffered terribly, as they fell like flies to the overwhelming hunger. There was a gabbai tzedakah, charity distributor, in Yerushalayim who was in charge of disbursing to the poor the money he had received from America and Europe. Unfortunately, power goes to people's heads, and this man took his position a bit too seriously. A close friend of Rav Aryeh's sent a sizeable amount of money designated specifically for Rav Aryeh's family. When the friend had not heard from Rav Aryeh, he wrote to him questioning if he had received the money. Rav Aryeh went to the gabbai and asked for his money. The gabbai responded, "I cannot give you the money until I ascertain that there is no other Aryeh Levine living in Yerushalayim." Rav Aryeh retorted, "I know everyone in Yerushalayim, and there is no one else by this name. Furthermore, the benefactor has written to me that he had sent me a check. I am in dire need of these funds, as I have a number of hungry children at home who are literally starving!" The man held his own and with great insolence said, "Nonetheless, before I give

away someone's money, I must be absolutely sure that it is going to the correct address."

A few days later, Rav Aryeh's son passed away, a victim of the vicious famine. Rav Aryeh continued, "I will never forget my child looking up at me, pleading, 'Tateh! Please give me a piece of bread.' I could not give him even a morsel, because I had nothing." During the shivah, seven-day mourning period, the gabbai appeared at my house with the money, saying, "I researched it, and I have confirmed that the money is rightfully yours."

Rav Aryeh looked up with tear-streaked eyes and said, "You may take the money and give it to someone else. I no longer need it." A number of days later, the gabbai passed away. The announcement went out all over Yerushalayim that the "distinguished" gabbai tzedakah had passed away and that everyone should attend his funeral. Rav Aryeh also attended the funeral and heard accolade after accolade about the man who had been so "meticulous" with his disbursement of allocated charities. Rav Aryeh knew first-hand how true this really was. His child was a sacrifice to the man's punctilious disbursement. "It was after that funeral that I decided unequivocally that I did not want to be eulogized. I knew what I really was. Why should I have to suffer the humiliation in Heaven?" These were the words of the Tzaddik of Yerushalayim. What should we say?

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From: RABBI JONATHAN SCHWARTZ
[jschwartz@ymail.yu.edu]

To: internetchaburah@yahoogroups.com

Subject: [internetchaburah] Internet Chaburah -- Parshat VaYeChi

Prologue: The close of the book of Berashit is one of the most dramatic endings in the Torah. Family patriarch Yaakov calls his 12 sons to his bedside and prepares to instruct them for the future. He then offers each one an individual Beracha.

Rashi cites the now-famous storyline of the

Talmud (Pesachim 56a) which tells an additional component. The Talmud relates that Yaakov wished to reveal the future to his children and the prophesy power was removed from him. Yaakov worried that perhaps there was something wrong with his children. He inquired into this fear. His children responded with the phrase Shema Yisroel-Hear us Yaakov, Hashem Elokeinu Hashem alone is our G-d and he is one. Yaakov responded with Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso. But how was his fear calmed? Where was the comfort?

The Maharam Shick offers an interesting perspective. He contends that this Midrash might be understood by another comment of the Talmud. The Talmud states (Berachot 13b) that one might think that he can read the Shema while walking, to this the Rabbis taught Ad Al Levaveicha should be recited while not moving (lit. standing).

The Maharam Shick notes that the concepts of moving and standing refer not to the physical but rather the contemplative. When one is steadfast, he is said to be unmoved. If he is doubtful of his position, he is said to be wavering. The other side notes that they can move him in his position and stance on issues. In regard to the recitation of Shema, we are told to declare the belief in G-d, not while moving and contemplating belief in him and his omnipotence. Rather, we must declare belief in Hashem while remaining firm standing strong in what we believe in. Yaakov feared that the children might be waffling in their belief. They reassured him. They stood strong and reaffirmed belief in Hashem in the same way that Yaakov had strong belief in his heart (and not the contemplative brain), they believed as well. Yaakov heard the strength, and was comforted by their unyielding commitment.

Today's society presents challenges to our abilities to make the same unmoving declaration while living in a world that is always on the move. This week's Chaburah examines one particular aspect of the problem. It is entitled:

Hikavtzu VShimu: Can you hear me now?

Without a doubt, one of the most powerful inventions of the last 20 years has been the advancement in telephone technology. Whereas in the past people had to wait to contact a friend or acquaintance until the other person was home, today people are in contact all the time. The results of the cell phone invasion allow people to be truly all connected whenever, wherever. However, the proliferation of telephones has not been without negative. Samaritans have set up rules for cell phone etiquette in order to prevent annoying phone calls in uncomfortable places. Universities have policies about cell phone usage in classes and libraries where the incessant ringing is seen as a nuisance. Recently, legislators in NY and elsewhere have gathered in order to enact laws concerning the noise pollution caused by the cell phone. What are the Halachic rules regarding cell phones? Can one bring a cell phone to Shul? Can he be asked (an expected) to turn it off upon entering a sanctuary?

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 151:1) notes that one is not supposed to use Shuls and Battei Midrash for frivolity. The Michaber notes that such frivolity includes Sichok (laughter perhaps a reason why Rabbis are generally not that funny) and unnecessary talking. He adds that we do not eat or drink in Shuls nor do we use them for short cuts or personal use. The Mishna Berurah (151:1:1) explains that the reason for this ruling is that shuls are to be Mikdeshei Miat (small Battei Mikdash) for which the prohibition of Umikdashee Tirau apply. The Smak adds that it is because of these respects due to a synagogue that synagogues become churches.

The Mishnah Berurah (151:1:2) adds that if one engages in important business conversation in Shul, he is still in violation (see also Pri Megadim here). Indeed, the Zohar (Parshat VaYakhel) stresses the severity of the sin of speaking idly in Shul, adding that the Shul should be a sanctuary for Torah and Tefillah. Indeed Rav Asi (Megillah 28b) notes that if a synagogue is used for conducting business, it will ultimately become used as a funeral home.

The source of the comparison of a Shul to the Beis HaMikdash in regard to the rules of Mora Mikdash appears in the Talmuds (Megilla 26a) sanctification of a town square with certain sanctity of the Mikdash because people Daven there during fast days. The Talmud (Megilla 29a) specifically adds that the comment of Yechezkel (11:16) VaEhee Lahem LMikdash Miat refers to the synagogues and Battei Midrash (See also Maharik, 161). As a result of this comparison, Shuls must be bigger than the other homes in the city (See Kad HaKemach, Beis Haknesses, Rambam <Hil. Tefilla 11:2>, Shulchan Aruch <O.C. 150:2>) and one may not remove a brick from a Shul in the same way that he cannot remove one from the Beis HaMikdash (Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvot 65).

The Mordechai (Shabbos 225) notes that the sanctity of a Shul is actually compared to that of the Heichal. If this is the case, then even the airspace is sanctified, which would mean that today's women's balconies would be included in this area. Accordingly, it would seem that the sanctity of a synagogue is to be preserved as a biblical commandment. This is the understanding of the Yeraim (104 & 409). It is also the position of the Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvot Lo Taaseh 65) (See also Sdei Chemed Beis: 43).

Others disagree. They (Ran [Megillah Perek 3], Eshkol [Beis Haknesses], Pri Megadim [Mishbetzot Zahav 153:1], Eishel Avraham [152:6]) believe that the requirements of preserving synagogue sanctity are Rabbinic in origin. They argue that the whole of synagogue Kedusha began through the institution of the Rabbis. They certainly lack the power to create a Biblical commandment.

The Ramban (Megilla 25b), Rashba and Ritva offer a third possibility. They note that since the Shul is a Tashmish Mitzva (like a Sukkah or a Lulav) it has sanctity only as long as the people use it. However, when being used for prayer, the rules of sanctity apply. Accordingly, the

Ramban demands that meetings not take place in Shuls if they are not of a Holy nature. The Rambam (Hil. Tefilla 11:9) cautions against seeing a Shul as one's own home. He adds (Hil. Mezuzah 6:6) that for this reason Shuls do not need a Mezuzah. And Rashi (Megilla 25b) forbids one to even enter the synagogue if not for the purpose of a Mitzva.

Based upon the above, HoRav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner Shlita (MeeBeis Levi XII: 145) forbids one to use a cell phone in Shul. He argues that if one would get an audience with a Melech Hedyot (human king or any government official for that matter), he would turn off the phone. Therefore, as Kavod Shomayim, he must do so as well.

Rav Wosner adds that it is clear in Halacha that one is supposed to remove interruptive thoughts from his mind when he is preparing to Daven (See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 98:1). Moreover, he is not to hold anything in his hands during prayer not even a Sefer (O.C. 96:1) not even Pesukei Dizimra (Mishnah Berurah 96:1:1). The Mishna Berurah (96:1:4) explains that the reason for this is that his thoughts will turn to not dropping the item. Rav Wosner notes that if such stress is placed upon one's preparation for Kavanna, that Kavanna is certainly going to be lost if the individual will hear the bells and/or feel the vibration of a missed call or even a voicemail. This adds to his reasoning for demanding the shutting of the cellular phone (and beepers too) during Tefillah.

Moreover, cell phones interrupt others. Legislation has been enacted to deal with the noise pollution caused by cell phone use. This too, has ramifications in Halacha. According to Horav Eliyahu Shaulzinger (Kovetz Beis Yisroel, Tishrei 5764), if any idle conversation cannot be spoken in Shul, and that conversation is usually not of the interruptive type, then certainly cell phones, which by nature are interruptive, should not be used in Shul. Rav Yosef Leiberman (Mishnas Yosef, cited in MeeBeis Levi XII:147) adds that from the Biur Halacha(102:4) it is apparent that one must be concerned about interrupting the Kavanna of his fellow Mispallel. R. Leiberman contends that cell phone vibrations and rings are interruptive by nature and even if the fellow receiving the call can ignore it, others cannot.

Can one Daven in a Shul where others leave their cell phones on during Davening? The Shulchan Aruch (98:2) notes that one should not Daven in a place that will ruin his Kavanna. However, later he adds that since we are not experts on Kavanna today, one need not be strict on this issue. The Levush and Pri Megadim (cited in Mishna Berurah 98:2:7) caution that one must try to take as many precautions as he can. Thus, Rav Leiberman and Rav Wosner recommend that people turn off their phones during Davening, if not for themselves then out of respect for the place they are in or the people they are with. Rav Wosner goes one step further, imploring Shul administrations to be diligent and openly forbid active cell phones in Shul except for members of emergency services (like Hatzala or Doctors) who must keep them active as a result of Pikuach Nefesh.

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From: Midei [rachrysl@netvision.net.il] Sent: January 08, 2004
Subject: MIDEI SHABBOS
BY RABBI ELIEZER CHRYSLER
- Parshas Vayechi

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Parshas Vayechi

Three Good Reasons

The Pesukim leading up to Shevi'i tell the story of Yosef's brothers, who, following their father's death, feared that Yosef would avenge the wrong that they had done him. So they sent the sons of Bilhah, with whom he had been particularly close, to present him with a request in the name of their father, that he forgive them (even though their father, who did not suspect Yosef of doing that, had said no such thing before he died). Rashi explains that what prompted Yosef's brothers to suspect him of planning to harm them, was that during their father's lifetime, Yosef, out of respect for his father, had invited them all to eat at his table. But now that their father was no longer alive, Yosef had discontinued this practice. And they saw this as an indication that Yosef bore them a grudge. They were afraid that without their father to stop him, he would proceed to avenge the injustice that they perpetrated against him unhindered. What they did not know, was that his change of plan was motivated by his concern that, whereas until now he had sat at the head of the table at his father's bidding, he was afraid that he would be forced to continue doing so, against his will, since most of his brothers were older than him.

The Ba'al ha'Turim attributes their fear to an event that had occurred in Canaan, from where they had just returned to bury their father Ya'akov. They had seen Yosef stop by the pit into which they had thrown him, and look inside it, and they suspected him of fanning the flames of hatred and revenge. What they did not know was that he did this in order to recite the B'rachah of ha'Gomel, for the remarkable miracles that he had experienced.

Whatever the case, Yosef's reply was clear and unequivocal - "You have nothing to fear, because I am not G-d's policeman". 'Even assuming that I wanted to do you harm', Rashi explains, 'I would not succeed. After all, ten of you planned to harm me, yet G-d turned your plans into good. How can I, one person, expect my plans to harm you to materialize?' At first, this argument appears flawed. G-d had intervened on behalf of Yosef, whom he considered to be in the right, because his brothers had misjudged him. But seeing as the brothers had sinned against Yosef, why was it so obvious to Yosef that G-d would intervene on their behalf, should he set out to do them harm?

This question can be answered in three different ways. 1. It is fair to assume that Yosef ascribed G-d's intervention to the Pasuk in Koheles "G-d always takes the part of the one who is being victimized" (even, Chazal explain, if a Tzadik is chasing a Rasha). In that case, Yosef's argument was flawless. Having taken his part against a community of ten (despite the merits of a community), the communal merit would certainly ensure that G-d would defend that same community against the attack of an individual.

2. The brothers' actions in selling Yosef were not totally without justification. As Rashi explains, he seemed to look for opportunities to speak ill of them, and on the added basis of his dreams (which albeit, they misinterpreted), all the evidence pointed to the fact that he was attempting to eliminate them, or at least to wrest the leadership from Yehudah. As the commentaries explain, they sat in judgement before their decision to kill him (which they subsequently commuted, selling him into slavery), and found him guilty. Yet, in spite of that, G-d interfered with their plans and helped him to achieve what he did (see Seforno). Yosef on the other hand, could in no way justify planning to harm his brothers. True, they had attempted to cause him suffering, but that was a matter for G-d to judge, and not Yosef. Yosef's only reason for taking such action would be based on a desire to take revenge, which has certainly no justification. So if G-d took his part against his brothers, He would undoubtedly take the part of his brothers against him.

3. Perhaps the most amazing thing about the story of Yosef is that initially it seems to be a question of who is right and who is wrong (as we just explained). And as the story develops, one might be excused for anticipating Yosef to turn out the winner and the brothers, the losers. Yet

ultimately, that is not what transpires. Yosef is the winner, yes. But the brothers win, too. In fact, Yosef's rise to power and position as viceroy of Egypt was for the benefit of the brothers, no less than for his own. That is why Yosef added the words 'in order to do today, to sustain many people'. And what's more, he utilized his position to improve their lot (as we explained in last week's main article). That being the case, Yosef's logic is indeed flawless. For if G-d saved him for the express purpose of sustaining his brothers, when the time would arrive, what sense would it make to allow him to destroy them, now that His plans had materialized?

Yosef concluded with the words "And now, don't be afraid, I will sustain you". Not only did he not intend to kill them, he was telling them, but he would not even punish them by withholding their sustenance.

Reb Yoshi Ber from Brisk, however, gives a different twist to the Pasuk. It was enough that they were being punished by the fact that they had to receive their sustenance from him (which Chazal consider a curse). They did not need to be afraid, he was telling them, that he would punish them further.

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From: RABBI RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM LIST
[parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il]
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayehi (Genesis 47:28-50:26) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - "And Jacob lived in the Land of Egypt seventeen years..." (Genesis 47:28)

This last of the Torah portions of the Book of Genesis begins as a "parsha stumma," as a "closed" portion, which means that there are no open spaces in the Torah Scroll parchment separating the last words of Vayigash (last week's portion) from the first words of Vayehi. Ezra the Scribe (circa 450 B.C.E) is considered to be the transmitter of the traditionally mandated separate Torah portions, as well as the masoretic rules governing the Torah script, such as the usual empty parchment space of nine letters between portions (Sifte Hakhmim, ad loc). Strangely enough, Vayehi opens a new Torah portion, but is nevertheless "closed" – there being no empty space whatsoever signaling its separate identity. Why not?

Rashi explains: "Why is this portion closed? It is because when Jacob our father died, the eyes and hearts of Israel were closed from the pain of subjugation which then began. Another interpretation is that (Jacob) wished to reveal (to his sons) the end – of – times redemption, but it was closed off from him." Both of these explanations seem problematic. Firstly, the Torah portion of Vayehi concludes on a crescendo of success, declaring that "Joseph dwelt (securely) in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived to see three generations come forth from his son Efraim" (Genesis 50:22,23). There is even a promise of a future return to the ancestral homeland (ibid., 24, 25). The subjugation in Egypt only begins in the Book of Exodus. So what makes Rashi suggest that the pain of subjugation initially emerges when Father Jacob died?

Secondly, why presume that the outline of the redemption was "closed off" from Jacob? The blessings do contain important glimpses of ultimate eschatological victory, such as: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the Book of Laws from between his feet until the peace (of the Messiah) shall come; unto him will be the ingathering of the nations" (Genesis 49:10). So why is Vayehi a "closed" portion?

I would argue that both of the reasons offered by Rashi must be seen as being interdependent and interrelated, in effect as one reason. Father Jacob did not merely wish to give his sons "far away" intimations of an ultimate redemption. He would have hoped to be able to announce the impending redemption right then and there, as the twelve tribes were standing around his death-bed.

And he had reason to believe that the necessary conditions for redemption had basically been met. After all, Jacob was nurtured on the story of the awesome and fearful vision of Abraham, the Covenant between the Pieces, wherein G-d tells Abraham, "You shall surely know that your seed will be a stranger (geirut) in a land which is not their own, and they shall serve (avdut) and be afflicted (inui) for four hundred years... the fourth generation will return here..." (Genesis 15:13,14,16). Now Jacob himself had gone into exile to his wily uncle Laban, with whom he was a ger, stranger (im Lavan garti – Genesis 32:5), by whom he had been enslaved (avdut) for twenty years (Genesis 31:41), and by whom he had been sorely afflicted (inui, ibid. 42). And these twelve sons – tribes were indeed the fourth generation, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. Jacob had anxiously anticipated that he could announce from his death – bed that his children could return to Israel and be redeemed!

Why was it impossible for Father Jacob to announce redemption? Why was the prophecy concerning an ultimate redemption in some undisclosed and far-off period to come, the best he could do? I believe it is because redemption depends upon majesty, pride, hadar. Father Jacob, who comes from Canaan – Israel, is the very personification of dignity, majestic reach. He demonstrates this when he meets Pharaoh for the one and only time. In complete contradiction to accepted protocol, it is the foreign Jacob who controls the conversation, opens and closes the interview, blessing Pharaoh both at the beginning and the end of their brief meeting. When we remember that Pharaoh defined himself as a god and he was the chief blessings dispenser in Egypt, Jacob's behavior was a breach of good manners at the very least. Apparently, however, the proud Jacob – heir to the distinguished heritage of Abraham and Isaac – cannot possibly imagine himself accepting a blessing from an Egyptian idolater. Hadar! (Genesis 46: 7-10)

Joseph, on the other hand, expresses a very different state – of – mind. When he realizes that he must fulfill his vow to his father and bury him in Hebron, Israel, he is forced to stoop to the level of an obsequious petitioner, begging the servants to explain to Pharaoh that his father adjured him to bury him in Israel. Joseph suddenly understands with painful clarity that he is, after all, only a foreigner in Egypt, subject to the charge of dual loyalty if he seems to express too strong of a Hebrew or Israeli identity (Genesis 50:4,5).

This is why I believe our Sages felt that with the death of Jacob came the beginning of the Israelite subjugation; it was at the point of the necessary request concerning Jacob's burial in Israel that Joseph understood that he had to be most circumspect in expressing his identity. Therefore he – and his entire household – was indeed subjugated!

In the final analysis, Jacob is the proud Jew from Israel, while Joseph is the galut Jew who, despite his high office, remains the suspected outsider. From Egypt the best we can hope for is survival; only from Israel can emerge the necessary hadar which leads to redemption. Hence at the conclusion of the Book of Genesis, with the Israelites still in Egypt, the time is not yet ripe for redemption because the subjugation has begun. "May the Merciful one lead us standing upright – proud and majestic – in our Land"

Shabbat Shalom.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at: <http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>
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From: RabbiWein@jewishdestiny.com
RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY COLUMNS
Parsha Archive January 09, 2004
VAYECHI

The last seventeen years of the life of our father, Yakov, are years of contentment and serenity. His family has been reunited, albeit in the foreign land of

Egypt, and the rift between Yosef and his brothers has somehow been repaired. Yakov studies Torah with his grandsons, even those who were born in Egyptian exile, far from the holy home of Yakov in the Land of Israel. He basks in the glory of the achievements of his beloved son Yosef and in the accomplishments and students of the school of Torah established by Yehuda in the land of Goshen. He is finally at peace after his long and difficult life of struggle, enemies and heartbreak. As the Lord had promised Yakov, "Yosef will place his hands over your eyes." The triumph and success of Yosef soothes Yakov's later years.

But Yakov is aware that the success and prosperity of his family is illusory and temporary. He sees in his prophetic vision the exile of Egypt unfolding and how it will become progressively bitterer. The baleful scene that his grandfather Avraham witnessed in the dream of his "descendants being strangers in a land that is not theirs, and that they will be enslaved and tortured there" until G-d redeems them, is a living reminder to Yakov of what the future of Egypt will hold for his descendants. Yakov knows that difficult times are coming and that his dream of the creation of the people of Israel will be contested by the very Egyptian nation that has proved so kind and hospitable to him and his family in his lifetime. Yakov's concern therefore is how he can help prepare his descendants for the ordeal that awaits them. What are the weapons of inner strength that he can bequeath to them that will enable them to withstand the centuries of physical and psychological degradation that face them? The nature of a father and/or grandfather is to protect and support his progeny. Yakov is therefore undoubtedly determined to help his children. But how?

I think that the answer lies in the final blessings that Yakov grants to his children before his death. Yakov addresses each one of his children individually. And though each one of his sons has merits and talents, Yakov is not reticent to point out their shortcomings of personality as well. But it is apparent that Yakov's intention is that each one of the sons develops, in fact, concentrates, on their inner strengths and particular individuality. It is as if the salvation of Israel lies in its diversity, its individual independence and human differences, rather than in a sense of conformity and unnatural sameness. Yehuda is the lion, Zevulun the sailor, Yisachar the great-boned donkey who bears the burden of Torah scholarship, Naftali is the swift gazelle and Binyamin is the prowling wolf. Our teacher, Moshe, in his final blessing to the nation of Israel, also follows the pattern of Yakov. He does not bless the people as a whole, nor does he blur the differences of outlook, professions, and personalities within the nation. Rather he blesses and strengthens the particular talents and ways of each of the individual tribes, thereby guaranteeing a healthy, balanced and strong Jewish people.

Yakov knows that without the individual strengths of each of his sons separately being reinforced and put to constant use, the Egyptian exile could very well overwhelm the Jews. Therefore the Psalmist phrases the redemption of Israel from Egyptian slavery as being the moment "When Israel left Egypt, the House of Jacob [departed] from an alien society." Israel, as a united nation and people left Egypt. But it was only able to do so because it remained "the House of Jacob," individual personalities and distinct individuals. This insight into the blessings of Jacob remains valid today. It was the great Rebbe of Kotzk who said it perhaps best: "If I am I because I am you, and you are you because you are me, then I am not I and you are not you. But if I am I because I am I and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you!"

Shabat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein info@jewishdestiny.com subscribe online at www.RabbiWein.com.

From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: January 07, 2004 To: weekly@ohr.edu
Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Vayechi
TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 10 January 2004 / 16 Tevet 5764 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1405>

A Bill For The Pyramids "Only the land of the priests he did not buy..." (47:22)
A few months ago the newspapers carried a news report of an Egyptian legal move to sue the Jewish people for the silver and gold that we asked from the Egyptians on our departure from that land some three thousand years ago.
Those Egyptian lawyers obviously had failed basic Egyptian History 101, because the Egyptians tried the exact same thing some two thousand years ago in the court of Alexander of Macedonia. Alexander summoned a representative of the Jews. The task fell to Geviha ben Pesia who argued as follows: "Our ancestors were 600,000 able-bodied men who worked for a full 210 years. Let's calculate a laborer's wages for a year and multiply that by 600,000 and then multiply it again by 210, and we'll see how much you owe us for our work. Whatever excess there is we'll return to you."

When the Egyptians started to calculate they very soon reached astronomical numbers and fled without even attempting to defend themselves.

Why did the Egyptians accept Geviha ben Pesia's claim in the first place? It was Pharaoh, not the Egyptian people, who had enslaved the Jews. It was Pharaoh who owed them their wages, not the Egyptians. Why, then, were the Jewish People allowed to take the gold and silver of the Egyptians? Ostensibly, the Egyptians owed them nothing.

During the years of famine, it was not only foreign nations that had to buy grain from Yosef but the Egyptians themselves. Eventually, they exhausted their money and they sold Yosef their horses, sheep, and donkeys. In the second year of the famine they came to Yosef and said "The only thing we still own are our bodies and our land. Give us grain and we will be your slaves. We will give you our land as well so that we and our children do not die from hunger. Yosef acquired both the people and their lands for Pharaoh. From then on, the Egyptians became tenants on their former lands and had to give Pharaoh a fifth of all their crops.

Thus in reality, Pharaoh owned the entire land of Egypt and all its inhabitants. When the Jews took the treasures of Egypt with them - they were really taking Pharaoh's gold and silver.

"Only the land of the priests he did not buy..."

One section of Egyptian society was exempt from paying for grain - the priests. Why does the Torah bother telling us of the priests' unique status? Nothing that the Torah records is incidental. It must be, therefore, that we are supposed to learn something from their inclusion.

If Pharaoh granted special status to his priests who were mere idolaters, surely we should be prepared to support in every way we can the talmidei chachamim (Torah scholars) of our generation, on whose shoulders the world stands.

Sources:

- Talmud Sanhedrin 91; Meshech Chochma; Bereishet 47:22; Sefer Chassidim
Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
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From: RAV KOOK List [RavKookList@hotmail.com] Sent: January 06, 2004

Rav Kook Dvar Torah List - VaYechi: Revealing the End of Days

VaYechi: Revealing the End of Days

"Jacob called for his sons. He said, 'Come together, and I will tell you what will happen in the end of days.'" [Genesis 41:1]

In fact, Jacob never did reveal to his sons when the final exile would end. According to the Midrash, this esoteric knowledge was hidden from Jacob.

"It is like the devoted servant whom the king trusted with all that he possessed. When the servant realized he would soon die, he assembled his sons in order to set them free and inform them where their will and deed were located. The king, however, found out and stood over him. When he saw the king, the servant backtracked from what he had planned to tell his sons. The servant began to entreat his sons, 'Please, remain servants of the king! Honor him just as I have honored him all my days.'"

"So too, Jacob called his sons to reveal to them the end of days. Then the Holy One revealed Himself to Jacob. 'You summoned your sons, but not Me?' ... When Jacob saw G-d, he began entreating his sons, 'Please, honor the Holy One just as my fathers and I have honored Him.' ...

"The sons responded, 'We know what is in your heart', and they all proclaimed, 'Listen, Israel!' ('Shema Yisrael!') ... Jacob quietly responded, 'Blessed be the name of the honor of His kingship forever'. The Holy One then said (to Jacob), 'It honors G-d to conceal the matter. [Proverbs 25:2] This attribute does not belong to you.'" [Midrash Tanhuma VaYechi 8]

This Midrash raises many questions. Why did Jacob want to reveal to his sons when the final exile would end? Why was he prevented from doing so? Also, parts of the parable do not fit. It should have the king hiding the deed from the servant, just as G-d hid the end of days from Jacob. And the servant wanted his sons to be free - how could Jacob have wanted his sons to abandon the yoke of Heaven? Why did G-d reprimand Jacob for not calling Him? And finally, what does "Shema Yisrael" have to do with Jacob's intention to reveal the end of days?

We first need to examine why the exile has lasted so long. It is written that the people of Israel "were punished twice for all their sins". [Isaiah 40:2] How could G-d, the compassionate Father, punish the Jewish people more severely than what they deserve?

The key to understanding this matter is the following verse:

"I have only known you from all of the families of the earth; therefore I visit upon you all of your iniquities." [Amos 3:2]

If the Jewish people were like all other peoples, then the destruction of the Temple would have sufficed to atone for their sins. However, the goal of Israel is to

acquire true "ahavat Hashem", a love of G-d that is permanently fixed in their hearts. In order to achieve this level of unfailing, constant love, they need to undergo great purification to remove all hidden blemishes; otherwise, these faults could reawaken and induce moral relapses in a future generation. This is the meaning of the verse: "I have only known you" - to attain this special level of love - "from all the families of the earth". And since your goal is to achieve this constant love of G-d, "therefore I visit upon you all of your sins", even greater than the severity of the offense itself. All this is in order to purify the heart from the corruptive influence of sin, and enable you to attain the holiness of sincere love of G-d.

Thus, the Sages wrote that Israel sinned doubly, were punished doubly, and will be consoled doubly. [Pesikta deRav Kehana, Nachamu] The sin was double: besides the gravity of the sin itself, it led to their estrangement from loving G-d. They were punished doubly, in order to both cleanse the sin and to purify the heart to love G-d. And they are consoled doubly: not only are their transgressions forgiven, but they will also merit G-d's holiness and Divine presence.

The second issue that must be clarified is: can one know when the end of days will come? The Sages interpreted the verse, "A day of retribution is in My heart" [Isaiah 63:4] - "to My heart I have revealed it, but not to My limbs". [Sanhedrin 97a] How could Jacob know that which even the angels were not informed?

Theoretically, if we knew the spiritual level that Israel needs to attain, and the errors that future generations will commit (and the time needed to rectify those errors), then we should be able to calculate when the end of days will occur. However, even this calculation is not so straightforward. Perhaps G-d will not wait until Israel, in their own merits together with the expiating quality of exile, attain their final goal? Perhaps G-d will hasten the end, elevating Israel even before they have properly prepared themselves for it?

In fact, this is precisely how Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream, a dream foretelling "what shall be in the end of days". In the dream, "a stone, broken off without hands, smote the image". [Daniel 2:34] This image symbolized the four great empires and the corresponding exiles of Israel. The stone, the Divine tool for destroying the image and ending the exile, was "broken off without hands". The final redemption will not be achieved solely through the efforts of the Jewish people to elevate themselves. G-d desires that Israel will partially correct themselves; but their eternal spiritual level will not be through their own hands, but by G-d Himself. [See Zohar Pekudei 240]

The righteous who walk before G-d always try to attain spiritual perfection on their own accord, without 'burdening' Heaven. Jacob wanted his family to acquire their final objective of eternal love of G-d through their own merits. He wanted to reveal to them the end, to inform them the goal that they must strive to attain, so that they could achieve this level through their own actions.

G-d, however, had different plans. The world was created with free will, in order that there should not be the "bread of embarrassment". Yet, we somewhat lose out when we attain perfection through our own efforts. Our goal is to attain love of G-d, but also to express our awe and submission before G-d. In truth, for all of man's remarkable potential, we do not deserve to be called 'G-d's servants'. G-d willed that Israel recognize their subservience before Him out of awe for His greatness, in addition to the relationship of a son who loves his father.

Therefore, the Midrash tells us, G-d held Mount Sinai over Israel like a bucket, forcing them to accept the Torah. [Shabbat 88a] This act demonstrated that we acknowledged our subservience to G-d. Similarly, in the future end of days, G-d will not wait until the people of Israel have perfected themselves. For then they would only have the quality of loving G-d, and would be missing the sense of awe and servitude to Him. G-d will redeem Israel before they are ready. The redemption will arrive like "a stone that is not by hand". Thus it is impossible to know the hour of the end of days; this date is only "revealed to My heart".

Now we can properly understand the parable. The king's servant wanted to free his sons, so that they could serve the king purely out of love. When the king stood above him, however, the servant recognized the majesty of the king was so great that the highest goal is in fact to be the king's servant. That is why G-d rebuked Jacob when he only summoned his sons: did you want the final redemption to be achieved only through your efforts?

Human perfection is attained on two levels: correct beliefs in knowing G-d's infinite perfection; and secondly, when our actions are in harmony with G-d's Will. When Jacob's sons heard their father begin to reveal the end of days but then stop, they said, "We know what is in your heart". Perhaps you think we do not deserve this goal of eternal love of G-d, due to lack of faith. Therefore they proclaimed to their father, "Listen Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One". Jacob responded that it is not faith but deeds that need to be corrected. "Blessed be the name of the honor of His kingship forever". Kingship ("malchut") implies observance of the king's laws.

Complete adherence to G-d's will, however, could only come after the Torah was given at Sinai. Thus the Midrash concludes with G-d's rejoinder to Jacob, "This matter is not for you". True subservience to G-d will only be possible after the revelation of the Torah.

When the faithful servant saw the king in all his majesty standing above him, he backtracked from his original plan of freeing his sons. Similarly, after G-d revealed Himself, Jacob recognized G-d's infinitely exalted nature. He realized that, even in the end of days, the true goal is to combine love with submission and awe. Therefore Jacob abandoned his plan to reveal the spiritual level of true "Ahavat Hashem" that the Jewish people need to attain in the end of days. Instead, he admonished his sons to honor and fear G-d, just as he and his fathers had.

[Midbar Shur pp. 273-280]

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