

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet VAYECHI 5770

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AROUND THE CORNER :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This Shabat we will complete the reading of the book of Bereshith. At the conclusion of this holy book it appears that the Jewish people are in a mini-paradise. Yaakov leaves the world surrounded by his now united family, his son Yosef is the viceroy of Egypt, his grandchildren have come to study the values and ways of God with him and the Lord has promised him that his descendants will leave Egypt and return to the Land of Israel.

The Jews live in the fertile land of Goshen and become numerous and successful. Yosef lives to see great-grandchildren at his knees and he assures his brothers and their descendants that they will leave Egypt and only asks them to swear that they will take his body with them and bury him in the Land of Israel. Nowhere in this biblical narrative is there any hint of the coming tragedy that will befall Yaakov's family and their descendants.

Slavery, hard labor, despair and seemingly endless servitude to Pharaohs "who knew not Yosef" are lurking just around the corner of this human story. Though Midrash attempts to place prophecy into the words and thoughts of both Yaakov and Yosef, the simple biblical text makes no reference to the impending downfall that is about to occur to the family of Yaakov. The Torah does not allow us to peek and see what is in store for the Jewish people. We will have to wait till next week's Torah reading to be apprised of the forthcoming dire situation.

This scenario has been repeated often in Jewish history. Did Spanish Jewry in its "Golden Age" ever imagine that 1492 and expulsion and forced apostasy was awaiting their descendants? Did Polish Jewry, invited into the country in the thirteenth century and given autonomy to practically rule over themselves by the Polish kings of the time ever imagine at the outset the murderous pogrom of 1648 or the anti-Semitism of that country in the years that led to the Second World War?

Did German Jewry, which saw itself as being the best Germans possible, think that a Hitler could arise and erase in one decade everything that they had thought they had accomplished over centuries? The answer to all of these questions is certainly "no!" No one could see what was awaiting them just around history's corner.

By 1938 with the issuance of the British White Paper regarding its mandate in then Palestine, who would have imagined that an independent Jewish state would arise and survive successfully barely a decade later? And what shall we say about the future of American Jewry, snug, smug and presently comfortable in the "Golden Country?"

I hazard no predictions. In fact, the unpredictability of human events should by now make us all cautious about proclaiming with certainty what the morrow will bring. We still have no magical periscope that will allow us to identify the coming events of our individual and national lives. The current economic downturn has made a mockery of the long term estate planning of many a so-called expert. Life always mocks our certainties and plans.

Judaism is a faith of optimism and hope. Eventually everything will yet come right though it does not give us the details as to how this will happen. We will leave Egypt, we will recover from Spanish expulsion, Poland and Germany on the surface are our allies, the Jewish state in the Land of Israel is alive and well, the Soviet monster has collapsed of its own weight and cruelty and millions of Soviet Jews are free to be Jews once again. No one foresaw all of these events clearly and in fact few dared to hope that they would ever become reality. But we never know what is waiting for us just around the corner of human events.

It may be good or even better than our fondest hopes and wishes. And there also is a chance for other less pleasant things to occur as well. Therefore our understanding of the matter is to deal with the present to the best of our wisdom and abilities. The future has not yet arrived and

therefore we should deal with what faces us now and, at the same time, continue to learn from what has happened in the past. Yaakov told his grandsons: "The Lord that has shepherded me from my earliest till now will certainly bless you and you shall be called by name and the name of my forefathers." That blessing remains valid for all of us today as well. Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYECHI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The end of the era of the Avot and the twelve brothers that created and formed the Jewish people takes place with this week's parsha. The family of seventy – the house of Yaakov – will grow and multiply and face centuries of pain and slavery in Egypt before being redeemed. None of this is yet apparent in this week's parsha.

The deathbed scene of Yaakov is one of the most poignant and inspirational in all of Torah. Yaakov wishes to tell his children and family what yet lies before them in Egypt and afterwards till the end of time. Heaven does not allow him to do so. As troubling as it is not to know the future it is perhaps even more troubling to know it. It is only the ignorance of the future that allows humans somehow to exploit the present and live a productive life.

Knowing the future makes of life an exercise of fated existence. It robs people of their God given choices in life and certainly stultifies any impulse towards creativity and discovery. Yaakov tells his children of an ultimate future – "until Shiloh arrives" – but the germane immediate future is hidden from him and his descendants.

There are many times in the Jewish story where the immediate future lurking just around the corner of time is hidden from an otherwise intelligent and seemingly practical generation. Heaven's motives in so dealing with us are unknown. But this fact of life – the future is always an unknown – governs our attitude and actions towards the present. We can only deal with the known that and not with an unknown future.

However the present can instruct us somewhat about the future. Yaakov blesses his children individually according to their present personal traits and accomplishments. Yet this assessment of them becomes the blueprint for their future as well. It is as though Yaakov analyzes the DNA of each of his sons and sees his genetic potential that will be realized in the future. Yehuda is already the king of his brothers and Yaakov is confident that this trait of leadership will continue throughout the generations of Israel.

Yissachar is now the student and the scholar and Zevulun is already the consummate commercial expert. Yaakov does not see the unknown future but he is a shrewd and perceptive judge of the present. Thus even the unknown future can be vaguely glimpsed simply by a realistic and wise understanding of the present. Heaven did not allow Yaakov to view the future through prophecy or other supernatural means.

But Heaven never interferes with the basic instinct, wisdom and analysis of the present by human beings. And this is what is clearly represented in the blessings of Yaakov to his sons. The Torah emphasizes this point when it will say to us at the conclusion of the book of Dvarim: "The hidden things belong to the Lord our God but the revealed things – the things that we ourselves can know through our own powers of wisdom and observation of the present – remain within our powers in order to fulfill all of the values and obligations of this Torah."

Shabat shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY :: Parshat Vayechi
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OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. Chazak!

INSIGHTS

Mirror, Mirror

Yosef took the two of them - Ephraim with his right hand, to Yisrael's left, and Menashe with his left hand, to Israel's right; but Yisrael extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger and his left hand on Menashe's head. He made his hands wise for Menashe as the first born (48:13-14)

Strange things happen to people when they look in a mirror. Their normal expression changes. An eyebrow is raised. Lips ever so slightly pursed. The head to the right and then to the left.

When we look in the mirror, we see ourselves not so much as we really are, but as we like to be. Head held a little higher, the posture more erect, holding in our breath so that clothes don't betray the evidence of two too many slices of chocolate cake.

When we look at other people, however, our perspective changes radically. Rather than emphasize the positive we tend to scrutinize others for their defects and lay the stress on what's wrong with them. What we see in ourselves as prudent, in others becomes stingy. Where we are vivacious, others are loud.

In this week's Torah portion, when Yaakov blesses Yosef's children Ephraim and Menashe, he crosses his hands and places his right hand, the stronger of the two, on the younger son Ephraim, and his weaker left hand on Menashe, the elder son. As Yaakov wanted to bless Ephraim with his right hand, wouldn't it have been easier for him to have told Ephraim to stand opposite his right hand and Menashe opposite his left, and that way there would have been no need for him to cross his hands?

The right side symbolizes two things: strength and importance. The left side also symbolizes two things: weakness and insignificance. When we look at ourselves in the mirror our right hand is reflected on the right side of the mirror. In other words, our strengths are reflected as being important. Our left hand - the hand that characterizes weakness corresponds to our left hand in the mirror. Meaning that we see our weaknesses as insignificant. However, when we stand opposite someone else, our right hand corresponds to their left hand, meaning we emphasize their shortcomings. Our left hand is opposite their right. We play down their strengths.

This is what Yaakov was teaching the two brothers Ephraim and Menashe. When you look at each other, use the same eyes that you would use for

yourself. See your brothers' weakness as secondary and his virtues as his essence.

For maybe the smaller brother will be greater than the elder.

Sources: Rabbi Chaim MiVerlodzi in Beit Yitzhak, Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Vayechi

G-d who shepherds me from my inception until this day... May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads. (48:15,16)

The Midrash makes an intriguing statement concerning the relationship between those two pesukim. Since geulah, redemption, is juxtaposed upon parnassah, livelihood, we understand that the two are analogous to one another. Just as geulah is a pele, wonder/supernatural act, so, too, is parnassah a pele. At a cursory glance, one would imagine that the act of redemption, liberating a nation from bondage, exile - or from whatever constraints in which the people find themselves - is an act of Heaven. It is not something to which we are accustomed on a regular basis. In the minds of most people, earning a living is totally natural. One labors, puts in time, exerts himself and is paid commensurately. It is that simple - or so we think. Chazal teach us otherwise. Contrary to popular opinion, the "curse" of B'zeias apecha tochal lechem, "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" (Bereishis 3:19), with which Hashem cursed man after he sinned, is not the "new" seed which sprouts the fruits of one's livelihood.

Horav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, zl, explains that nothing changed concerning man's livelihood from before the sin to afterwards. Man is sustained directly from Hashem's open hand. The difference between before the sin and afterwards is that, prior to the sin, man was worthy of receiving his due directly from Hashem - without the embellishment of nature: No intermediary; no cover-ups; full disclosure; directly from Hashem, the Source of sustenance. Once Man sinned, he was no longer worthy of such revealed, miraculous intervention. His livelihood would now be concealed within a veil of natural occurrence called b'zeias apecha. He would have to put forth effort, toil and sweat, in order to receive his sustenance. It comes from the same source, but its appearance changed. This is the challenge over which man must triumph: to see through the cloud of ambiguity and discern the hand of Hashem Who is sustaining him from his own sweat and toil. His inability to see, unless he really looks with great clarity of vision, is part of the curse.

This is what Chazal mean when they compare redemption to earning a livelihood. They are both derived from the same source. When man opens his eyes and looks, he will notice that Hashem guides his livelihood. We find it difficult to acknowledge, because we think the "sweat of our brow" catalyzes our success. This is the curse of b'zeias apecha tochal lechem.

Rav Goldvicht writes that he learned this lesson as a young boy, from an elderly Yerushalmi storekeeper. The elderly man eked out his paltry livelihood from the meager earnings he garnered from his little stationery store. This was in the "old days" before the time of the mega department store. Every block was filled with small "mama and papa" stores selling their wares. The little stationery store sold pencils, pens, erasers, paper, notebooks, etc. Understandably, its primary market was the schoolchildren who needed supplies. The norm was that one student did not enter alone on a shopping spree. They always brought their friends. Therefore, on any given day, a young boy or girl seeking a simple pen or an eraser would come in accompanied by his or her twenty closest friends, each one working off his daily sugar intake. Clearly, this was not the easiest, most relaxing way to earn a living, especially for a gentleman who was aging.

Rav Goldvicht relates that he came in one day and saw the storekeeper, Reb Shlomo, in action. It was lunchtime at the local cheder, and a young boy needed a blue eraser. Since this was an especially difficult decision to make alone, he brought along his fifteen closest friends. Reb Shlomo climbed up a ladder and rummaged through a number of boxes, finally locating a blue eraser. He climbed down and showed it to the boy, who asked, "Do you have something nicer than this?" Reb Shlomo said nothing,

but climbed back up the ladder and searched for something more "acceptable" to the needs of the young connoisseur. He brought down another eraser, which pleased the young man. Haggling over the price followed. An elderly Jew, and a young boy accompanied by fifteen friends, were all in profound dialogue concerning the value of this blue eraser. They finally agreed on a price; the children left, and Reb Shlomo looked at the young Rav Goldvicht and said, "This goes on every day."

Reb Shlomo continued, "Hashem cursed man, saying B'zeias apecha tochal lechem. I can live with that. Entailed in this curse, however, is the notion that one will earn a living. It will be difficult, but he will earn. Sadly, I have the curse but no earnings to show for it."

This occurred at the beginning of the week. On Thursday, the situation had not yet changed. He still did not have sufficient money to cover his expenses for Shabbos. Thursday afternoon, as his depression was getting to him, an American tourist entered the store looking for a Parker pen. A Parker pen was not the pen of choice for the average Israeli. It was very expensive. Apparently, this American was accustomed to the finer things in life, and the price did not seem to concern him. In addition, a Parker pen sold at a premium, so the mark-up was substantial. The buyer was so impressed with the quality, that he asked for two pens. His elementary school daughter could use another pen. The sale was made, and Reb Shlomo now had more than enough funds for Shabbos.

Reb Shlomo was still not satisfied. He had another question to ask of the Almighty: "B'zeias apecha is a curse. I just earned a handsome profit without expending any effort. Where is the curse?" He reflected for a moment and realized, "One question answers the other. We think that the sweat of our brow catalyzes our earnings. This is untrue! Labor, toil, and sweat - these are the 'tax' Hashem places upon us as payment for the sin of Adam HaRishon. Parnassah, livelihood, is from Heaven. Hashem supports us - not the sweat and toil. We must pay our tax, and, when we have paid sufficiently toward our individual quota of the curse, we receive our due from Hashem. I paid my toll at the beginning of the week through serving the youngsters. Now, I receive my earning without any added effort. I expended enough for the entire week."

Reb Shlomo was a simple man who had a profound understanding of how parnassah works. We should all merit such perception.

Yehudah - you, your brothers shall acknowledge; your hand will be at your enemies' nape; your father's sons shall prostrate themselves to you. A lion cub is Yehudah; from the prey, my son, you elevate yourself. (49:8,9)

Yehudah received an impressive blessing from his father, particularly in one area: complicity in the suspected responsibility for the murder of Yosef. The phrase, miteref beni alissa, "from the prey, my son, you elevate yourself," is interpreted by Rashi as relating to the "tearing apart" (teref is defined as prey, but literally means tearing apart) of Yosef, a reference to the perceived murder of Yaakov Avinu's son, Yosef. Yehudah had risen above suspicion. Originally, Yaakov had suspected that Yehudah, the son destined for monarchy, was the mastermind behind Yosef's disappearance. After all, Yosef had been a threat to the throne.

Yaakov now declared that, on the contrary, Yehudah was instrumental in saving Yosef. It was Yehudah who issued the challenge to his brothers, Mah betza ki naharog achinu, v'kisinu es damo, "What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" (Bereishis 37:26) On the other hand, Yehudah was punished for beginning a mitzvah, attempting to save Yosef, and not following through. Reuven, however, did not receive such royal treatment from his father. He was blessed, but not to the extent that Yehudah was. Why? Reuven also attempted to save Yosef, something which the Torah explicitly states. Ironically, it was not even his fault that he did not succeed. By the time he returned, Yosef had already vanished. It seems incongruous that Yehudah, who had been part of the original plan to kill Yosef but later changed his mind, received a greater blessing than Reuven, who was from the very beginning opposed to any harm coming to Yosef, but had simply returned too late to save him.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, asserts that their original intentions played the critical role in their individual rewards. From the very outset, Reuven

did not countenance eliminating Yosef. He argued against bodily harm. Thus, he did not have to deal with second thoughts; he neither had to alter his position; nor did he have to contend with rationalizations to justify changing his mind, as was the case with Yehudah. Unquestionably, Reuven deserved reward for his good intentions, but he was basically acting in accordance with his sensibilities. Yehudah, however, had to live with the demons that appear when one has the courage to change his position, when he realizes that he has erred. Yehudah realized that they had been wrong concerning Yosef, and he was man enough to concede his error.

It is most difficult to acknowledge that one might have been wrong or that someone else's view makes more sense. We seek every avenue to validate our opinions, to justify our actions, to rationalize our attitude. It is the intrepid spirit who possesses strong character, who can admit to a mistake in judgment and be flexible enough to alter his course of action. This characterized Yehudah, and explains why he received such a momentous reward.

Rav Sholom substantiates this idea citing the choice of words of Yaakov Avinu, miteref beni alissa, "from the prey, my son, you elevate yourself." Yehudah actually elevated himself above his brothers. After he had agreed to be a part of their plan to eliminate Yosef, he changed his mind and elevated himself by challenging their decision. He had no qualms about acknowledging that he had erred, because his life was governed by emes, truth. When he realized that what his brothers were doing was not emes, he immediately attempted to convince them to recant their decision. This same fidelity to the truth prompted Yehudah to confess that he was the one who had been with Tamar. He was the father of her unborn children. One cannot hide from the truth. This unique quality was the reason that Hashem selected Yehudah for monarchy. A leader must not only adhere to the truth, he must also live by it, regardless of the consequences.

Yehudah could have easily justified not coming forth and saving Tamar at the expense of his reputation. It was a chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name, that such a distinguished leader had a tryst with a woman of ill repute. Who could confirm that Tamar was right? Maybe he was not the father. He knew the truth, however, and a monarch does what is right, or else he should not be a monarch. The Torah world does not live by the same standard as contemporary society, which is marked by crooked politicians and self-serving leaders. If a Jewish leader cannot declare, Tzadkah mimeni, "She is more righteous than I!" he should not lead. He is missing the most important attribute necessary for true leadership: integrity.

In Tehillim 85:12, David Hamelech says, Emes meieretz titzmach, "Truth will sprout from the earth." The Baal Shem Tov, zl, wonders why truth is available at such a premium. If it is sprouting from the ground, it should be readily accessible to all. Why would it be any different than the herbage that grows in abundance? He explains that it is, indeed, there for anyone to "pick." It is growing in the ground, but, after all is said and done, it is on the ground. One must bend down to pick it up, and bending down can, at times, involve some embarrassment. Not everyone is willing to sacrifice so much. Lowering oneself, or putting oneself at the mercy of the scorn of others, is too high a price for some to pay to acquire the quality of truth. For some of us, "bending down" requires too great an effort. That, regrettably, is the sad commentary on society. Truth is just not worth it. I have an ego to feed, a reputation to nurture and uphold. Obviously, such people have a bigger problem than they are able to admit.

We do not understand the extent that one must go to speak the truth - to live a life of integrity. Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of Mir and Ponevez, was an extraordinary person in many ways. His adherence to the truth was legendary. One vignette, which was seen in these pages awhile back, is one that I feel is worth repeating. It defines his character. In fact, I feel it represents the "gold standard" of the middah, attribute, of emes.

Rav Chatzkel's (as he was endearingly called) son-in-law passed away at a very young age. The Mashgiach was bereft. His pain was overwhelming over the loss of someone so special, so close, so dear to him. Immediately

thereafter, Horav Yitzchak Aizik Scher, zl, also passed away. One of the premier Torah leaders of the generation, his loss was felt throughout the Torah world. Rav Chatzkel was asked to eulogize him. He was a contemporary and a close friend. It was, therefore, surprising when, initially, Rav Chatzkel refused to speak. He explained that since his son-in-law had died recently, he was distraught over his loss. He feared that when he spoke about Rav Aizik Scher, it would invoke his grief for his son-in-law. Thus, when he would cry, the listeners would think he was crying only about Rav Aizik, he would be portraying an untruthful image, since part of that emotion would have been invoked by the loss of his son-in-law. Rav Chatzkel said, "I do not want to be a shakran, liar!" Perhaps we should ask ourselves how distant we are from such an appreciation of emes.

So they instructed that Yosef be told, "Your father gave orders before his death...Thus shall you say to Yosef: O, please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers and the sin for which they have done you evil." (50:16,17)

The brothers dispatched the sons of Bilhah, with whom Yosef had been very friendly, with the message to Yosef that, prior to his death, their father had asked Yosef to forgive his brothers for selling him as a slave. Veritably, this was not true. Yaakov Avinu knew that Yosef was a righteous person who would never seek vengeance. Chazal derive from here that, in order to promote peace and harmony, one may even alter the truth. This is a powerful statement, considering the Torah's admonition in Shemos 23:7, Midvar sheker tirschak, "Distance yourself from a false word." Indeed, regarding no other prohibition does the Torah emphasize that one should distance himself from it. If so, why does peace take precedence over the truth?

Furthermore, we find another circumstance in which Hashem Himself omitted something in order to maintain harmony in the home. When the three angels told Avraham Avinu that Sarah Imeinu would bear a child, the Matriarch laughed, saying to herself, "After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!" (Bereishis 18:12) Hashem told Avraham that Sarah had difficulty believing she would have a child, but He left out the part about her husband being old. In one case, the brothers were bending the truth, and, in the second instance, Hashem omitted part of a statement. "Truth be told," however, both of these cases are about "subduing" the truth for the sake of peace.

Is peace truly greater than truth? At the beginning of Sefer Bereishis, the Midrash addresses the creation of humankind and seems to imply the converse. When Hashem was about to create Adam HaRishon, He "conferred" with the ministering angels. The Midrash relates that the angels were divided in their opinion concerning his creation. Basing itself on the pasuk in Tehillim 85:11, "Kindness and Truth encountered each other; Righteousness /Benevolence and Peace collide." The Midrash offers a fascinating account of the debate which ensued in Heaven.

Kindness said that man should be created, since man would bestow kindness on others. Truth, however, contended that man should not be created, since he would be filled with falsehood. Benevolence countered that he should be created, since by nature, man would be benevolent. Peace was opposed to the creation of man, claiming that man would be contentious. They "voted" two against two. A tiebreaker was needed. Hashem took Truth and flung it down to earth. This act forced a majority in favor of creating man. Seeing this, the angels exclaimed, "Hashem, why do You despise Your seal?" Chosamo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu emes, "The seal of the Almighty is Truth." Hashem responded, Emes mei'eret tismach, "Let truth spring up from the earth." (Tehillim 85:12)

This fascinating Midrash has provided commentators with a wealth of material upon which to expound. We wonder why Hashem used Truth as the tiebreaker. Why did He not cast Peace down to the earth and keep Truth up in Heaven? Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, explained that, by casting Truth down to earth, Hashem was in effect eliminating its reason for opposing the creation of man. Truth was now on earth. Man would no longer be dishonest. Regrettably, his other failing - his contentious nature, his gravitational pull to conflict - remained. On the

other hand, had Hashem sent Peace down to earth, man's problem of strife would have been ameliorated, but his issues concerning integrity would continue. Hashem made a choice and sent Truth down, because it is preferable to have a battle waged in an honest quest for truth than to have peace established upon a foundation of falsehood!

While this resolves the issue of why Truth was cast down to earth, it does not explain why Truth may be subdued in order to promote peace. On the contrary, Peace born of "subdued truth" is problematic. How can such peace be validated, even if it is to promote harmony between husband and wife and to encourage filial relationships between friends and family?

We suggest that the difference is between "living a lie" and "bending the truth." Once Truth was sent down to earth, it became part of human nature. Man is, by nature, honest. Integrity is a part of his natural essence. Since Peace remained in Heaven, man does not possess a natural proclivity towards it. In other words, Peace does not come naturally to man. Chazal are teaching us that we may "bend the truth" - or go against man's natural tendency - in order to promote peace. Otherwise, his natural instinct towards conflict will prevail, and he will bury the truth. Therefore, we go against his nature to prevent him from falling into his natural tendency. All this is done to preserve peace and harmony, which are so hard to attain and so easy to lose.

But Yosef said to them, "Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good. (50:19,20)

After Yaakov Avinu had died, the brothers were disconcerted lest Yosef now take revenge against them. They sent him a message relating that, prior to his passing, their father, Yaakov Avinu, had asked that Yosef forgive his brothers for their actions against him. Yosef allayed their fears, asking, "Am I instead of G-d?" which Rashi interprets as a rhetorical question: "Could I alone cause harm to all of you?" He then adds that this entire fiasco was part of a Divine Plan to bring him and his family down to Egypt. Targum Onkelos, however, does not view "ha'tachas Elokim anochi" as a declarative statement. Rather, he suggests that Yosef is intimating, "I am under G-d." I fear Him and am subservient to Him. My yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, does not allow me to take any action against you. Thus, the word tachas is similar to teichas, as in al tira v'al teichas, "Do not fear and do not lose resolve." (Devarim 1:21) We wonder why Yosef deemed it necessary to preface his words with an emphasis on his yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, and then add that it was all part of Hashem's Divine Plan. He could have just said that Hashem wanted this to occur, so why was he to contradict the Divine Plan? How does yiraas Shomayim play a role?

Horav Chaim Kamil, zl, explains that only after one has established a foundation of yiraas Shomayim as the beacon which guides his life, can he develop coherent, logical and sound reasoning. Without fear of Heaven there is no logic; nothing makes sense, every rationale can be disputed or denied. Yiraas Shomayim gives the individual the ability to think cogently without being swayed by his emotions. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence can see this phenomenon played out on a regular basis. One whose lodestar for life is yiraas Shomayim will invariably act sagaciously and with prudence - not with partiality and partisanship. He will neither act injudiciously, nor will he countenance inappropriate behavior. Yosef emphasized his fear of Heaven because he knew that, without it, he would be no different than anyone else, and the most logical reasoning would have limited, or no, effect. He saw Hashem's Divine hand guiding all of the occurrences in his life, because Hashem's Presence never left his mind.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, once met the Gerrer Rebbe, zl, the Imrei Emes, and asked him to define yiraas Shomayim. The Imrei Emes, a man of few words, responded with the pasuk in Shemos 9:20, concerning those Egyptians who, upon hearing of the impending plague of barad, hail, immediately took their animals into their barns for protection, "Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses." He added that a lack of yiraas Shomayim was manifested by "and whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart." The yarei Shomayim never loses sight of the Presence of the Almighty.

As is explained by the Zer Zahav, the Egyptian who feared Hashem did not wait for the hail to descend before he brought his animals in. The moment that Moshe Rabbeinu warned Pharaoh, these Egyptians knew it was a signal to protect themselves immediately. Hashem had "proven" time and again that His power was consummate. This teaches us, infers Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, that the yarei Shomayim is the one who takes great pains to see to it that he is not in a situation which might lead to sin. Someone who really cares about something: makes every effort to be on time; does not rush out when it is over; sees to it that he is on his best behavior; and makes sure that he is properly attired. He fears making a mistake, because acting appropriately means so much to him. This is the feeling which permeates the life of the yarei Shomayim.

Va'ani Tefillah

Hallelu shmei ha'shomayim...Yehallelu Shem Hashem

כי Hu tzivah v'nivrau. Va'yaamideim lo'ad l'olam

Praise Him the most exalted of the heavens...Let them praise the Name of Hashem, for He commanded and they were created. And He established them forever and ever.

This psalm is divided in half: the beginning notes the praise rendered by the Heavenly hosts and creations; and the second half cites the praise given by the earthly creations. Interestingly, concerning the Heavenly creations, the Torah states that the reason for their praise is, "He commanded and they were created," while, concerning the earthly creations, the Torah says, ki nisgav Hashem l'vado, "For His Name alone is exalted."

Teruas Melech explains that the Heavenly creations have no bechirah, freedom of choice. They are given a mission to which they adhere, because they have no other choice. They are created to perform a function. The earthly creations have both good and evil within themselves, as well as the ability to choose between the two. Thus, if they overcome their inclination to act negatively, they are praiseworthy. It is a major achievement for them. Therefore, concerning their Heavenly creations, it is stated, "He commanded and they were created." They remain the same, as unchanging as when they were created. Hashem "established them forever and ever" that they continue in the manner in which they were created, without alteration or embellishment. The earthly creations, however, are worthy of praise because "His Name alone is exalted." Since they sense the greatness of Hashem Above them, they are infused with the fortitude to overcome their evil inclination. Hashem's Name is exalted, because the earthly creations look up to Him for strength and guidance.

Sponsored in memory of Dovid ben Yaakov niftar 22 Teves 5762 by the Schulhof and Winter Families

Parshas Vayechi: Squeeze Play

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Matzav.com)

Yaakov had passed from this world. His twelve sons were left alone in a foreign world, and it was time for reconciliation. The brothers were afraid that with Yaakov's passing Yoseph would avenge them for selling him to Egypt. So they sent the sons of Yaakov's concubine Bilhah, with a message. "Your father commanded before his death saying, 'Thus shall you tell Yoseph, please, kindly forgive your brothers terrible deed and their sin for they have done you evil.'" Yoseph assures them that he has no intent for retribution. In fact, he promises to sustain the brothers and their families.

The Talmud in Yevamos tells us that Yaakov would not have suspected Yoseph to be vengeful and he never issued the stated command. The Talmud extrapolates from this incident that one may twist the truth for the sake of peace and harmony. Yet it seems that there was a bit more than twisting truth. It seems that there was an overt lie. And why would they use Yaakov's name in this untruth? If he did not suspect Yoseph as Rashi explains, then weren't they insulting him by saying, "your father commanded"? The 1929 Boston Braves were owned by Judge Emil E. Fuchs. Judge Fuchs cared basically for the financial management and legal affairs of the team, but the depressed economy and his unwillingness to put

up with the difficult and expensive Roger Hornsby, left the team without a manager.

Judge Fuchs, an experienced adjudicator, read the rulebook and surrounded himself with a few cronies who would help him guide the team. Then he literally brought his swivel chair into the dugout and began to manage the team.

It was late in the summer of that dismal season, and the team had just been on a losing streak. Miraculously, however, it seemed that the down streak was about to end. The game was tied in the bottom of the ninth and the bases were loaded. The Braves were batting and Judge Fuchs gave the orders to swing away.

After one strike, the batter, Joe Dugan, called time and approached his well-respected manager. "Judge," the player suggested, "the rookie at third base is playing well behind the bag. If I drop a bunt, we'll squeeze in the winning run!"

The judge looked sternly at the ball player. He was stunned at the mere suggestion. "Mr. Dugan," he exclaimed, "You will do no such thing. Either we will score our runs honorably or not at all!"

The Sha'ar Bas Rabim explains that though Yaakov never explicitly gave the command to lie, he did issue a game plan for the future. Before he blessed the brothers, he gathered them together with the words, "gather yourselves together," (Genesis 49:1-2). The charge for the future was unity, and whatever it took to achieve unity amongst the brothers was the core of Yaakov's wishes. The brothers understood how to play the game of life and how their father Yaakov would have wanted it. Peace and harmony were the only ultimate goal. That is what all parents want for their children and that is what the objective of the twelve brothers was. It took a squeeze play, but harmony was achieved. Had Yaakov been alive to manage the situation he may have also chosen the exact game plan. Yaakov, with the guidance of his mother and a skillful deception, had his father give him the blessings that were intended for Esav.

My grandfather, Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, once told me that attaining the highest level of any attribute require knows when to violate it! And to that end, Avraham the stalwart of kindness and compassion, was ready to sacrifice his own son at God's command, surely an act of seeming brutality. Yaakov, whose virtue is truth, knew when it was proper to mislead. And Yaakov's sons who understood the virtue of Yaakov's truth, also understood his quest for peace. They learned, very well, that though sometimes it is time to swing away, this was the time to drop a gentle bunt.

"Do Not Sin Against The Child": Divorce Involving Children Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski (TorahWeb.org)

On Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur we read about the execution of the ten greatest Talmudic sages by the Romans. This was to atone for the sin of the tribes who sold Joseph into slavery. The Talmud says that the heavenly angels protested the injustice of this, but G-d said, "Keep silent! This is My decree!"

The outstanding condemnation of this heinous sin was by Reuven, who said, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not sin against the boy?'"(Genesis 42:22). These words of Torah continue to reverberate: "Do not sin against the child."

Children did not ask to be brought into this stressful world, one in which they must endure many hardships. Indeed, the Talmud says that it would have been better had man not been created (Eruvin 13b). The distresses that most people experience in their lives far exceeds their pleasures.

But for whatever reasons, we do bring children into this world, and we must be aware of the awesome responsibility this entails. Every bit of our conscience dictates that once we bring a child into the world, we have an obligation to provide the child with the means to achieve happiness. We cannot give our children happiness. All we can do is to give them an environment which will be conducive to their attaining happiness.

The greatest need children have is security, and this is provided when the home is truly peaceful and harmonious, and the children feel that the parents' care and love for them is primary in their lives, not second to anything, not even to their own wants. As I have said elsewhere, once you bring a child into the world, you have forfeited the right to insist on your own wants. Consideration of what is best for the child comes first. Bickering among the parents undermines the child's security and is a sin against the child. "Do not sin against the child."

Unfortunately, some marriages do not work out. If a couple separates, foremost in their thoughts must be, "What can we do to minimize the impact on the child of the dissolution of the marriage?" All other considerations, such as financial arrangements and custody must be set aside, and everything must be tailored to lessen the trauma on the child. Selfish demands that fail to take into consideration the effect on the child are a sin of the greatest magnitude.

It is unthinkable, yet it does happen, that in the bitterness of a divorce, the parents may use the children as weapons. Using children as human shields in war is a violation of international law, and using children as weapons in a divorce battle is a heinous crime. We react with horror when we hear that some animals kill and eat their young. Using a child as a weapon to further one's interests is no less an abomination! This puts a person into a status even lower than that of animals, who operate by instinct and do not have a conscience.

Yonah's and Esti's marriage got off to a rough start. From the very beginning, Yonah was a "control freak." He objected to Esti's desire to visit her mother, and was even critical of her phone conversations. Under the guise of financial responsibility, Yonah had total control of the family finances. Esti could not sign checks and did not have a credit card. She worked as a teacher, and surrendered her check to him. He made insulting comments about her family. When Esti complained about him to her parents, they told her to try and "be nicer" to him, but Esti's efforts made no change in Yonah, whose control escalated.

They had a boy, and Yonah built a strong relationship with the child. The child began going to yeshiva at age six. When the child was eight, Yonah began to be lax in his Yiddishkeit. One time the child told Esti that his father had taken him to a restaurant of "all goyim." Esti was horrified, and told Yonah she wanted a divorce. In the negotiations, Yonah wanted the child every other weekend. Esti was reluctant, because Yonah no longer observed Shabbos, but Yonah said he had as much right to raise the child as she did. He said that unless she agreed to his having the child on alternate weekends, he would not give her a gett. In order to get the gett, Esti agreed to the weekends.

The child was going to yeshiva, where he learned that violation of Shabbos was wrong. The child would tell Esti about what he and his father did on Shabbos, and Esti would tell him that "we don't think that is right." The child reported that his father said that "mother's ways are old-fashioned and these laws are no longer necessary."

This is a fresh case. The child is not doing well in yeshiva and is chutzpadig to Esti. There is no prediction how this child is going to turn out, but being confused at age eight about what is right and wrong and being torn between two parents does not augur well for the child's future. Esti got her gett, but to do so she effectively sacrificed her son's spiritual future.

Children can suffer an entire lifetime because parents put their own needs before those of their children. Can there be a sin greater than ruining a child's future?

If a marriage terminates, mediation is far more desirable than litigation. In an adverse confrontation, neither lawyer gives due consideration to the children. A mediator can suggest ways to protect the children's interests and can help the parents focus on the children's welfare. Hopefully, both parents can be helped to maintain a positive relationship with the children in spite of their separation.

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Haaretz.com

Portion of the Week / A mystifying request

By Benjamin Lau

In this week's Torah reading, the last one from the book of Genesis, Jacob and Joseph - the two chief protagonists of the book's second half - die, and in accordance with Egyptian tradition, their bodies are embalmed.

Rabbi Meir Leibush ("the Malbim," 1809-1879) cannot comprehend Joseph's request that his father's body be embalmed, and declares that, "the purpose of the burial ceremony is to enable the dead person's body to turn to dust."

Jewish burial rites reflect the immense difference between the body and the soul. Ecclesiastes (12:7) describes our release from the body's chains when we pass away: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." And mortality is first mentioned in God's words to Adam: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19).

Medieval exegetists thought "dust" was suitable for describing the nature of the human body, which consists of dry bones and flesh. As Rabbi David Kimchi ("the Radak," 1160-1235), writes in his commentary on Genesis: "Most of the human body's components and our bones, which keep the body upright, are cold, dry materials, like dust."

Whereas burial releases the spirit from the body, allowing it to ascend and take its place in heaven, embalming perpetuates the body's physicality. Regarding the embalming of Jacob, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), a contemporary of the Malbim, observes, "Here we see an interesting contrast between the Egyptian view, which expresses itself in the embalming of the dead, and the Jewish view. The Egyptians embalmed the dead so that the body would retain its uniqueness; however, they did not consider the soul unique, because they believed that it traveled from one body to another, sometimes even entering an animal's body. However, according to Judaism's view, the soul is eternal and the body has no permanent place. Our mortal body turns to dust and experiences many material incarnations."

It should be pointed out that the word hanita (embalming) is also used in connection with agriculture: hanitat ilanot or hanitat perot, to mean the ripening of the fruit on the tree. Whereas, according to the first usage, an illusion exists because embalming aims to preserve dead people as if they were alive, the use of the word to mean ripening of fruit refers to a process that is very real - to a life force that awakens in the tree after it has emerged from hibernation.

While we can understand why Joseph, a viceroy, asks that his own body be embalmed, we are mystified by his request that this be done to his father's body; after all, before he died, Jacob instructed Joseph to bury him in the tomb of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Hebron. However, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar ("the Ohr Hachaim," 1696-1743) states that, "Joseph shows great respect for his father because the embalming procedure is reserved for honorable citizens and for pharaohs. Or perhaps Joseph fears the Egyptians might misunderstand a refusal to embalm Jacob's body - that they might think he is not dead or that his corpse does not need embalming because it emits no odor? In any case, there is the distinct danger that the Egyptians might decide to worship Jacob as a god."

In the view of Rabbi Judah Hanasi (135-219 C.E.), editor of the Mishnah, however, Joseph sins when he instructs the Egyptians to embalm his father's body: "Why does Joseph die before his brothers? Because he has embalmed his father, God tells him: Did you not think I was capable of preserving your father, this righteous person who has served me so well? After all, I said to him, 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob' [Isaiah 41:14], which should be read, 'Fear not the worm, O Jacob.'"

According to Rabbi Judah, Joseph tries to fight the normal biological process we undergo of returning to dust as our bodies decompose. Unable to part from his father, Joseph thus adopts the Egyptian custom of embalming the dead, although he does not place his father's mummified body in a sarcophagus.

When people whom we hold dear are dying, we too try to thwart the Angel of Death's plans. Indeed, a very moving story appears in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Ketubot) concerning Rabbi Judah's last moments on earth. Seeing their master dying, his disciples declare a public fast day. They pray for God's compassion and proclaim, "Anyone who says that Rabbi Judah is dying will be pierced with a sword."

The rabbi's maidservant climbs to the roof of his home and prays, "Heaven wants Rabbi Judah and so does earth. May it be your will, O God, that heaven will succumb to the earth's will." When she observes how Rabbi Judah is suffering, she prays, "May it be your will, O God, that the earth will succumb to heaven's will." Seeing that the disciples are continuing to pray for the rabbi's recovery, she takes a clay pitcher and hurls it to the ground below. The sound of the crash causes the scholars to stop praying - and just then, Rabbi Judah finally departs from this world. The men ask Bar Kappara to see whether their master has, in fact, died. When Bar Kappara discovers that Rabbi Judah is gone, he declares: "Angels and humans struggled over the Holy Ark. The angels overcame the humans, and the Holy Ark has been captured!" In Bar Kappara's eyes, therefore, Rabbi Judah is like the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed: Everyone wanted to hold on to him.

Death closes the chapter of life, and the living must carry on despite their grief. When Jacob dies, the responsibility for safeguarding God's blessing to the patriarchs is placed in the hands of his descendants, who bid farewell to his body but preserve his spirit.

Tomorrow we reach the end of Genesis and, with this article, I have reached the end of my three-year stint of writing this column. I wish to thank all my readers for their many letters and responses, and to wish every success to the person who will take over from me.

[Rav Kook List]

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayechi: When Great Souls Err

Shortly before his death, Jacob blessed his sons. But some of these blessings were more like reproaches:

"Reuben, you are my firstborn... first in rank and first in power. [But since you were] unstable as water, you will no longer be first, for you moved your father's beds." [Gen. 49:3-4]

According to some opinions, Reuben did not actually interfere with his father's sleeping arrangements. He intended to do so, indignant at what he saw as a slight to his mother's honor and her place in the household. But at the last minute, Reuben restrained himself.

How did Reuben succeed in overcoming his overwhelming feelings of injustice and dishonor?

Reuben's Fear of Punishment

One rabbi inferred the method Reuben used to master his anger from the letters of the word PaChaZ ('unstable'): 'You reminded yourself (Zacharta) of the punishment for this act; you made yourself intensely ill over it (Chalita); and you avoided sin (Peirashta)' [Shabbat 55].

This explanation is surprising. Was Reuben motivated by the lowest form of yirat shamayim - the fear of punishment (yirat cheit)? Was this the only way the tzaddik could prevent himself from wrongdoing? Could not such a great individual take advantage of more lofty incentives, utilizing his soul's natural love and awe of God?

The Achilles' Heel of Great Souls

Some people are blessed with such pure and noble souls that their characteristics are naturally based on the qualities of virtue and goodness. But even these tzaddikim need to recognize their limitations as fallible human beings. They too can be misguided by delusions. Precisely because they rely so heavily on their innate integrity, they may more easily fall in the trap of making terrible mistakes, inflicting much harm to themselves and the world around them.

Truly great souls will avoid this mistake. They will carefully examine the source of their outrage. Further examination may indeed reveal that their zealous response comes from a real case of injustice. But if there are any doubts about the source for their powerful emotions, they can change their usual approach. Instead of examining the matter in terms of overall ideals and lofty future visions, they can take into account more commonplace moral considerations. Such unpretentious calculations are sometimes more effective than nobler considerations.

Reuben reminded himself of the penalty for disrupting the delicate balance in the family and usurping his father's position. The simple reminder of the personal price to be paid helped Reuben clear his mind and thoughts. He was then able to analyze more accurately his true motivations and arrive at the correct ethical decision.

The resulting inner turmoil was tremendous. Reuben was accustomed to following the dictates of his innate integrity. The conflict between his sense of injustice and his realization as to the correct response was so great that he felt ill - emotionally and physically. "You made yourself intensely ill over it."

This too is spiritual greatness: to be able to acquiesce before ethical imperatives. Truly great individuals are able, like Reuben, to rein in all of the soul's powers when necessary. They recognize the absolute justice of the Eternal Judge, before Whom there are no excuses and no exceptions. Even if entire world - your entire inner world - tells you that you are righteous, still consider yourself guilty [See Nidah 30b].

Great good can come from recalling the punishment for sin, even if this motivation may appear petty and beneath one's spiritual stature. This simple reminder can go beyond all the sophisticated calculations - calculations which can mislead even great souls. In this fashion, Reuben succeeded in avoiding sin, and retained his purity and spiritual powers.

[Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 48-49]

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: <mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com>



Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

The Curse of Boredom

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Man is bored. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on his entertainment and amusement. He pays enormous sums to anyone who can elicit a smile from him and make him forget his daily worries. What are these worries? Poverty, sickness, persecution, physical pain? None of these. His main worry is existence itself. He is dissatisfied with what he is doing, with his job, trade or profession. He hates the routine of getting up at 7, catching the 7:45 train, and arriving at the office, where one meets the same people and discusses the same affairs. He finds no joy in what he is doing; he wants to free himself from his daily obligations and activities. He resents the repetition, which is basically a natural phenomenon. He is the most miserable of creatures because he is confined to a cyclic existence which keeps on retracing its steps afresh; for he knows what he is going to do next and what is expected of him. He travels to far-off places, because he is tired of his hometown, with its familiar surroundings, and he engages in an incessant quest for new experiences and stimuli. Of course, all his attempts to break up the monotony and introduce change into repetitious existence are futile. For there is nothing in creation that can offer man something new, exciting and fascinating. He soon realizes that whatever he was looking for does not exist and he comes home, back to his old surroundings and duties. He chases a mirage that recedes endlessly upon his approach.

Basically, this boredom is the consequence of the primal curse with which paradisiacal man was burdened when he rebelled against his Master: "In the sweat of your brow you will eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). These words

convey the idea of a life that is not only hated but joyless, the idea of work from which there is no escape, the curse of uniformity and boredom. Man is engaged in a steady rebellion against monotony and strives for change and renewal.

This curse of disapproval affecting man's mode of existence manifests itself in a twofold way. Man hates the work in which he is engaged and seeks to free himself from the so-called bondage: one looks for an escape-route which would somehow bring him to the haven of an unfettered existence. This is exactly the illusion that entertainment tries to create for man, at least for a few short moments. Alternatively, man commits himself unconditionally to work in the hope that more accomplishments, greater successes, more fantastic conquests will fill one's being with joy and contentment. One says to himself: I hate my work now, because the attainments are meager and I have not realized my life's ambition, which is indefinable. However, when I shall succeed in fulfilling my destiny, I shall find happiness.

Man, because of a desire for freedom, becomes more and more enslaved. He would like to liberate himself from all the restrictions of a Parmenidean existence. He desires a limitless multitude of experiences and is indiscriminate about how he attains them. He seeks changes of circumstance, panorama, friends, and objects of enjoyment. What delighted him the day before is obsolete today, and what he indulges in now will lose its attraction with the rise of the morning star. New wishes, strange horizons, unique experiences, unknown ends, lure him from the security and warmth of his homestead. He becomes drunk with the endless opportunities which imagination paints before his mind's eye and he does not want to survey the landscape twice from the same spot. What he wants is a different sunrise every morning.

Boredom is the wages of sin, of an existence overcome by aesthetic enthusiasm or trance. The heroic-adventurous attempt to adore existence as something delightful and great, and to surrender completely to beauty, is followed by the hollow feeling of bankruptcy and discouragement, a feeling that borders on morbidity. This state of affairs was brilliantly dramatized in Koheleth: "All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Boredom does not characterize the ethical experience but the aesthetic. This is what Adam and Eve found out after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge: "they opened their eyes and knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7), that their nude and senseless lives were full of absurdity and worthless.

Boredom is the admission of the meaninglessness of the aesthetic existence. Why? Simply because the aesthetic gesture is non-teleological. No vision awaiting realization addresses itself to Adam, no distance to be covered beckons to him. No promised land draws him on, impelling him to journey through desert sands and hot dunes. For Adam the morrow will not differ from the today, which, in turn, did not attain anything that had not been there yesterday. He does not travel from one position to another, heading toward a great destination, for he has none. The aesthetic experience is not a purposeful one; it is not eager to realize something; hence all the adventures and heroic poses come to naught. The aesthete looks back upon a past rich in experience but devoid of accomplishments, full of excitement but empty of meaning. Experience, however flamboyant and captivating, does not promote the idea of self-discovery, self-realization and self-redemption; experience thus withers like the flowers in the field. The excitement, though thrilling and rapturous, does not explain the rationale and goal of his existence, and it leaves him despondent and sad the morning after. Boredom is a feeling of disillusionment and teleological void.

Excerpted from *Worship of the Heart* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
More information on the book can be found here: <http://www.ou.org/books>

Edutainment Weekly (torah.org)

**A Blessing on your Head, Mazel Tov Mazel Tov
"Edutainment Weekly" from Jon & The Chevra:
(Insights from this week's Portion: Vayechi)**

This Week's RRR (Relevant Religious Reference): "May G-d Make you like Ephraim & Menashe" – from the "Blessing of Children" at the Shabbos Table

This Week's SSC (Suitable Secular Citation): "May the Lord protect and defend you..." – Goldie & Tevya, blessing their Daughters in "Fiddler on the Roof"

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

It was the ultimate Jewish experience (or at least so I thought at the time): overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem with the sounds of Tevya being pumped into my ears through my Walkman headphones! Yes, I am a long-time fan of "Fiddler", as my Walkman-era reference reveals. And while there are certain messages in the clever show that I am not 100% on board with, I feel that they are overshadowed by the soul-stirring songs that carry a unique knack for tugging at our Jewish kishkas. When Zero Mostel (as Tevya) belts out his riveting rendition of "Sabbath Prayer", for example, the sounds seem to have a direct hotline to my heart and an express short-cut to my Soul.

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that one of the most awe-inspiring memories in my early adult exploration of Judaism was the first time I witnessed children being blessed at a Shabbos table. As I watched this transcendent interaction, I was powerfully stirred by its poignant beauty: in effect, the Parents of these young girls were reaching to the heavens on behalf of the people they loved most, bringing down Divine compassion to ensure their children's future would be imbued with success, goodness, and meaning. Now, Thank G-d, the beautiful custom is one that I benefit from weekly. Either my Parents bless me on Shabbos while placing their hands on my head, or they do so ahead of time by the other means available to "reach out and touch someone", made possible by the phone company.

BLESSINGS FOR THE BOYS

While Goldie & Tevya blessed their "five daughters" in "Fidler", in our Home, there are blessed boys for us to bless. Each week we ask that G-d make them like our Forefather Joseph's Sons, Ephraim and Menashe. The custom of invoking these two great ancestors of our People actually comes from this week's Portion. Jacob, on his deathbed, summons his Children to give them a final blessing. But first, Jacob requests the presence of two of his Grandchildren – Joseph's sons Ephraim and Menashe – to receive blessings. Why would Jacob prioritize his Grandchildren over his Children? And in our times, why wouldn't we ask that our Sons be like the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (which would parallel the blessing on behalf of Jewish daughters: that they should be like the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah)? Why Joseph's Sons Ephraim and Menashe instead?

ENDURING THE EXILE

Ephraim and Menashe had nearly every temptation imaginable to contend with. They grew up in the morally depraved society of ancient Egypt; their Father Joseph was Egypt's Viceroy, making them part of the Royal Family in a decadent culture (having to deal with fame, wealth, etc.); they themselves became involved in Egypt's government affairs, assisting their Father in his leadership roles; etc. And yet, in the face of the ultimate challenges to assimilate and forfeit their integrity, Ephraim and Menashe were steadfast in their consistent loyalty to the G-d of Israel. So too, in all of our Exiles throughout history – even in countries that are not quite as spiritually toxic as ancient Egypt – we pray that our children will emulate Ephraim and Menashe, and will not be lured away from their People by the seductive appeal of "High Society" assimilation.

BUBBIES, ZAYDIES & GRANDCHILDREN

So why did Jacob prioritize his Grandchildren over his Children in offering his final blessings? [The following answers are direct quotes from Rabbi Shraga Simmons of Aish.com, but the bolding is mine]: "The

commentators explain (and every grandparent knows) that even more than the joy of having children is the joy of having grandchildren. Why is this so? Most creatures in the world have parent-child relationships – whether it is a mother lion protecting her cubs or a mother bird feeding her young. But only the human being has a concept of grandchildren, of perpetuation beyond a single generation. This is an effect of our spiritual soul which is rooted in infinity. Being a grandparent therefore connects us deeply to our uniqueness as human beings.” ... “Far more than children, it is grandchildren who reveal the foundation and future direction of a family line. Hence the popular saying: ‘The issue is not whether you have Jewish children, it’s whether you have Jewish grandchildren.’” May we all be blessed to have Jewish grandchildren who will truly be like Ephraim and Menashe!

* Some of this week’s insights were inspired by and adapted from an article by Rabbi Shraga Simmons (of Aish.com), entitled “Blessings of Ephraim and Menashe”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra
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Weekly Halachah - Parshat Vayechi 5750
Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)
Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit
Burial in Eretz Yisrael

Question: Is it a mitzvah to be buried in Eretz Yisrael? How much effort and money is it proper to expend in order to be buried in Eretz Yisrael?

Discussion: It is commonly accepted that being buried in Eretz Yisrael is a noble aspiration. Both Yaakov Avinu and Yosef ha-Tzaddik, who died outside of Eretz Yisrael, had this concern uppermost in their minds before their deaths.¹ Consequently, many people, following in the footsteps of our forefathers, spend vast sums of money and spare no effort in order to be buried in Eretz Yisrael.²

Rav Y.E. Henkin, however, rules differently. The following is a loose translation of his responsum:³

Concerning sending the aron (of a the deceased) to Eretz Yisrael, actually it is totally not to my liking, and regarding this the Chovos ha-Levavos says that “a bonus is not given unless the debt is paid.” For great talmidei chachamim who are world renowned for their meticulous observance of mitzvos, both the “easy” ones and the “harder” ones, it is fitting and proper to bring them to burial in Eretz Yisrael, as were Yaakov and Yosef... but in this case, I tend to think that it is arrogance (yuhara). In addition, it wastes the money of middle-income widows and orphans, since it entails a tremendous expense, and the widow and orphans are (sometimes) embarrassed to object... I think that (this could be considered) stealing from the widow and the orphans. This (responsum) is for someone who asks advice on this matter. However, if one wants to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, we cannot stop him, because the poskim seem to allow reinterment to Eretz Yisrael...

Rav Henkin does not disclose the halachic reasons behind his ruling. But a careful analysis of the sources reveals that our Sages were not unanimous in their endorsement of transporting bodies to Eretz Yisrael for interment. The Talmud⁴ quotes Rav Anan as saying that whoever is buried in Eretz Yisrael is considered as if he is buried under the altar. But the Talmud also quotes the critical view of Rav Elazar, who declares that entering Eretz Yisrael only after death (in order to be buried there) is not comparable to living and dying there.

Indeed, the Rambam⁵ includes both of these views in his ruling. He says:

The Sages have taught that whoever resides in Eretz Yisrael, his sins will be forgiven... whoever is buried in Eretz Yisrael would be forgiven and it is as if his burial plot is an altar... But entering Eretz Yisrael after death is not comparable to entering Eretz Yisrael during one's lifetime. Nevertheless, the greatest rabbis had their dead buried there; go and learn from Yaakov Avinu and Yosef ha-Tzadik.

The Rambam, albeit hesitantly, seems to endorse the practice.⁶

The Zohar,⁷ however, says that those who live outside of Eretz Yisrael, yet have their bodies brought to Eretz Yisrael for burial, are considered to be contaminating Eretz Yisrael. According to the Zohar, then, it would be undesirable to bring a corpse into Eretz Yisrael. Seemingly, there are various, somewhat conflicting views among our Sages on this subject.⁸

According to Rav Henkin’s ruling,⁹ however, the divergent views can be resolved. A person of great stature, one who is recognized for his fear of G-d and for his meticulous observance of the mitzvos, is indeed welcome in Eretz Yisrael even after death. Should he still require a small measure of atonement,¹⁰ it will be effected through his burial in the Holy Land. A man of lesser stature, however, who did not spend a lifetime totally immersed in the study of Torah and avodas Hashem (the category which includes most people), may not be welcome in Eretz Yisrael after his death. It may be “arrogant” for him to think that he is worthy of such an honor. Those people should rather move to Eretz Yisrael while they are still alive, since one cannot compare the merit of living in Eretz Yisrael to merely being buried there, as the Rambam rules.

Thus, it is presumptuous for the average person to compare himself to Yaakov and Yosef. They, indeed, were unique and unparalleled in their piety and fear of G-d, and clearly deserved to be buried in Eretz Yisrael.¹¹

It should be made clear, however, that by no means is this the view of all the poskim.¹² One should consult his own rav, who is familiar with his personal situation, before making an important decision such as this.

1 Bereishis 47:29; 50:25.

2 See Ramban (Toras ha-Adam, Kevurah) who implies that there is an additional advantage in being buried in Yerushalayim.

3 Written responsum published in Am ha-Torah, vol. 1, no. 15 and in Kisvei Rav Henkin 2:91.

4 Kesubos 111a.

5 Hilchos Melachim 5:11.

6 The Rambam also discusses this issue in a written responsum; ?see Teshuvos Rambam (Freiman) 372.

7 Acharei Mos 72:2. This is also the opinion of Rebi Bar Kiria quoted in the Yerushalmi, Kilayim 9:3.

8 See Responsa Mahri Bei Rav 38, Responsa Ralbach 63 who understood there to be conflicting opinions within Chazal on this subject.

9 As was reported to me, Rav M. Feinstein also counseled that the average person should not be buried in Eretz Yisrael.

10 Since, after all, “There is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins” (Koheles 7:20).

11 Indeed, the Rambam explicitly says that only the “greatest rabbis” were buried in Eretz Yisrael, which seems to exclude all others. See also Responsa Radvaz 2206.

12 See Tzitz Eliezer 11:75 who strongly endorses the concept of burial in Eretz Yisrael. See also Har Tzvi, Y.D. 274 and Chelkas Yaakov 3:142.

Taking Care of the Ill -- The Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff (yvmkaganoff@013.net)

In honor of this week’s parsha, wherein Yosef discovers that his father has taken ill, I bring you my article on:

Question #1: “Rabbi,” asked Mr. Greenberg, “My neighbor, Mrs. Friedman is having an operation. Is it appropriate for me to visit her?”

Question #2: Does Dr. Strauss fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* when he makes his hospital rounds?

Question #3: “My sister-in-law is hospitalized for a few days for a minor procedure. I should really visit her, but I just can’t find the time. Is it halachically sufficient for me to call her?”

Parshas VaYeira opens with *Hashem* visiting Avraham Avinu three days after his Bris Milah. Rashi points out that *Hashem* was performing *bikur*

cholim, visiting and providing care for the ill. In the same way, by taking care of the ill, we fulfill the mitzvah of emulating *Hashem's* ways, in addition to the special mitzvah of *bikur cholim* (Gemara *Sotah* 14a). Thus physicians, nurses, or other medical professionals should have in mind before every visit or appointment, that they are performing two mitzvos, one of emulating *Hashem*, and the other of *bikur cholim*. Since we rule that *mitzvos tzrichos kavvanah*, to fulfill a mitzvah requires being cognizant of that fact, any medical professional gains much merit by realizing this every day.

Every community should have an organization devoted to the needs of the sick, and it is a tremendous merit to be involved in organizing and participating in such a wonderful *chesed* project (*Ahavas Chesed* 3:3).

The *Kli Yakar* (*Bamidbar* 16:29) offers an additional reason for fulfilling *bikur cholim* - to benefit the visitor -- because he thereby appreciates the importance of doing *teshuvah*. And this provides extra merit for the sick person since he caused someone else to do *teshuvah*, even if it was unintentional.

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 40a) reports that when one of Rabbi Akiva's disciples was ill, no one came to check his welfare. Then Rabbi Akiva entered his dwelling, cleaned it and sprinkled water on the floor (to prevent dust from rising), and the student exclaimed, "Rabbi Akiva, you have brought me back to life!" After this experience, Rabbi Akiva taught that someone who visits the ill is considered as if he saved someone's life!

WHY "BIKUR" CHOLIM?

What does the "Bikur cholim" mean?

It is worth noting that although "*bikur*" means "visit" in modern Hebrew, the original meaning of "*bikur*" is not "visit" but "checking." In other words, the actual mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is to check which of the sick person's needs have not been attended to (*Toras HaAdam*).

There are two main aspects of this mitzvah:

- I. Taking care of the physical and emotional needs of ill people.
- II. Praying for their recovery (*Toras HaAdam*, based on Gemara *Nedarim* 40a).

I. TAKING CARE OF PHYSICAL NEEDS

In addition to raising the sick person's spirits by showing one's concern for him or her, the visitor should also ensure that his/her physical, financial, and medical needs are properly cared for, as well as other logistical concerns that may be troubling him/her. Often, well meaning people make the effort to visit the sick, but fail to fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* properly because they fail to take care of the *choleh's* needs (*Gesher HaChayim*).

Always cheer up the *choleh* (*Gesher HaChayim*). If you know that you cannot cheer him up, you should not visit him.

Your visit must benefit the *choleh*. In most circumstances, a visit should be short and not tire out or be uncomfortable for the ill person. Sometimes the sick person wants to rest, but feels obligated to converse with a visitor (*Aruch HaShulchan* 335:4). Unfortunately, in such cases, visitors think they are performing a mitzvah, while they are actually doing the opposite. It is important to remember that the entire focus of *bikur cholim* is on the sick person's needs and not on the visitor's desire to feel noble or important. I remember my mother a"h having such guests during one of her hospital stays; although she kept hinting that she wanted to rest, they didn't catch on and stayed put. They thought they were performing a kind deed, while in reality they were harming a sick person who desperately needed to rest.

OVERNIGHT CARE

One of the greatest acts of *chesed* is to stay overnight with a *choleh* (*Aruch HaShulchan* 335:3; *Shu't Tzitz Eliezer, Volume 5, Ramat Rachel*, #4). A similar act of *bikur cholim* and true *chesed* is to stay overnight with a hospitalized child to enable parents to get some proper sleep and keep their family's life in order.

A person can fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* even a hundred times a day (*Nedarim* 39b). If one frequently pops one's head into one's sick child's bedroom to see how the child is doing, or periodically drops in to visit a shut-in, one fulfills a separate mitzvah each time so long as it does not become burdensome to the *choleh*. Similarly, a nurse fulfills the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* each time she checks on a patient, and -- therefore she should have intent to do this for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah. (This applies even if she is paid, because the proscription against being paid to do a mitzvah applies only to the mitzvah's minimum requirement. Once one does more than this minimum, one can be paid for the extra time one spends. The same certainly applies to someone paid to stay overnight with a sick patient.)

IS THERE AN OPTIMUM TIME OF DAY TO VISIT?

The Gemara states that one should **not** visit a sick person during the first quarter of the day, since one usually looks healthier in the morning and the visitor may not be motivated to pray on his behalf. One should also not visit a sick person at the end of the day when he looks much sicker and one might give up hope. Therefore, one should visit an ill person during the middle part of the day (see Gemara *Nedarim* 40a, and *Ahavas Chesed* 3:3). Rambam offers a different reason for this halacha, explaining that at other times of the day, visitors might interfere with the attendants and medical personnel who are taking care of the *choleh* (*Hilchos Aveil* 14:5).

(Why does the Rambam give a different reason than the Gemara? The *Kesef Mishneh* suggests that the Rambam had a different text of this Gemara.) Thus, the ideal time for visiting an ill person is in the middle of the day, unless he is receiving medical treatment at that time.

Despite the above, the custom is to visit the ill person regardless of the time of the day. Why is this so? The *Aruch HaShulchan* (*Yoreh Deah* 335:8) explains that the Gemara's visiting times are advisory rather than obligatory. The Gemara is saying that one should visit the ill person at the time most beneficial for his/her care, which is usually the afternoon, either because this does not interfere with medical care or because it is the best time to detect the patient's medical status. However, this is only advice and can be tempered by other practical concerns.

WHAT IF THE ILL PERSON IS RECEIVING SUBSTANDARD CARE?

In this instance, one should try to upgrade the *choleh's* care without agitating him in the process (*Gesher HaChayim*).

WHOM TO VISIT FIRST

Usually, it is a greater mitzvah to visit a poor *choleh* than a wealthy one. This is because there is often no one else to care for the poor person's needs (*Sefer Chassidim* #361). Additionally, he may need more help because of his lack of finances, and he is more likely to be in financial distress because of his inability to work (*Ahavas Chesed* 3:3).

If two people need the same amount of care and one of them is a *talmid chacham*, the *talmid chacham* should be attended to first (*Sefer Chassidim* #361). If the *talmid chacham* is being attended to adequately and the other person is not, one should first take care of the other person (*Sefer Chassidim* #361).

CROSS-GENDER VISITING

Should a man pay a hospital visit to a female non-relative, or vice versa?

The halacha states that a man may attend to another man who is suffering from intestinal disorder, but not to a woman suffering from such a problem, whereas a woman may attend to either a man or a woman suffering from intestinal disorder (*Mesechta Sofrim* Chapter 12). This implies that one may attend to the needs of the opposite gender in all other medical situations (*Shach, Yoreh Deah* 335:9; *Birkei Yosef* 335:4; *Aruch HaShulchan* 335:11 and *Shu't Zakan Aharon* 2:76).

However, some halachic authorities distinguish between attending to a sick person's needs and visiting, contending that although a woman may usually provide a man's nursing needs and vice versa, there is no requirement for a woman to visit an ill man (*Shu't Tzitz Eliezer, Volume 5,*

Ramat Rachel, and Zichron Meir pg. 71 ftn 24 quoting *Shu't Vayaan Avrohom, Yoreh Deah #25* and others). Other authorities contend that when one can assume that the woman's medical needs are provided, a man should not visit her because of *tzniyus* concerns (*Shu't Chelkas Yaakov* 3:38:3; *Shu't Tziitz Eliezer, Volume 5, Ramat Rachel, #16*). Instead, he should inquire about her welfare and pray for her. I suggest asking your Rav for direction in these situations.

According to a famous story of Rav Aryeh Levin, when he was once concerned that a certain widow who had been told not to fast on Yom Kippur would disobey orders, he personally visited her on Yom Kippur and boiled her water for a cup of tea to ensure that she drank. In this way, he fulfilled the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* on Yom Kippur in a unique way (A *Tzadik in Our Time*).

II. PRAYING FOR THE ILL

The *Beis Yosef (Yoreh Deah 335)* writes, "It is a great mitzvah to visit the ill since this causes the visitor to pray on the sick person's behalf which revitalizes him. Furthermore, since the visitor sees the ill person, the visitor checks to see what the ill person needs." We see that Beis Yosef considers praying for the ill an even greater part of the mitzvah than attending to his needs, since he first mentions praying and then refers to attending to the other needs as "furthermore."

Someone who visits a sick person without praying for his recovery fails to fulfill all the requirements of the mitzvah (*Toras HaAdam; Rama* 335:4). Therefore, physicians, nurses, and aides who perform *bikur cholim* daily should accustom themselves to pray for their sick patients in order to fulfill the complete mitzvah of *bikur cholim*. A simple method of accomplishing this is to discreetly recite a quick prayer (such as "*Hashem, please heal this person among the other ill Jewish people [b'soch she'ar cholei yisrael]*") as one leaves the person's room. (A doctor in his office can recite the same quick prayer.)

MUST ONE PRAY FOR A SICK PERSON BY NAME?

When praying in a sick person's presence, one need not mention his name and one may recite the prayer in any language. The Gemara explains that this is because the *Shechinah*, the Divine presence, rests above the *choleh's* head (Gemara *Shabbos* 12b). However, when the ill person is not present, one should pray specifically in Hebrew and should mention the person's name (*Toras HaAdam; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 335:5). If one cannot pray in Hebrew, one may do so in English or any other language except Aramaic (see *Taz* 335:4).

[Incidentally, since the *Shechinah* is in the *choleh's* presence, visitors should act in a dignified manner (Gemara *Shabbos* 12b; *Shl"ta*). This includes both their behavior and their mode of dress.]

Why must one pray in Hebrew when the ill person is not present? Rashi explains that in such a case, when one prays for an individual, angels have to transport the prayer to the Divine presence (the *Shechinah*) – these angels transport only prayers recited in Hebrew and not those recited in Aramaic (Rashi to *Shabbos* 12b s.v. d'shechinah). However, when praying in the presence of the sick person one may pray in any language since the *Shechinah* is nearby and the prayer does not require the angels to transport it on high (Gemara *Shabbos* 12b).

MAY ONE PRAY IN ENGLISH FOR THE ILL?

This explains the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic. What about other languages? Do the angels "transport" prayer recited in a different language?

To answer this question, we must first explore a different issue: Why do angels not transport Aramaic prayers?

The halachic authorities dispute why the angels do not convey prayers recited in Aramaic. Some contend that angels communicate only in Hebrew and, furthermore, only convey a prayer that they understand (*Tosafos, Shabbos* 12b s.v. *She'ayn*). According to this approach, the angels convey only Hebrew prayers. However, other authorities contend that the angels do not convey Aramaic prayers because they view it as

corrupted Hebrew and not as a real language (*Rosh, Berachos* 2:2). Similarly, the angels will not convey a prayer recited in slang or in a different undignified way. According to the latter opinion, the angels will convey a prayer recited in any proper language and one may pray in English for an ill person even if he is not present.

The *Shulchan Aruch* quotes both opinions, but considers the first opinion as the primary approach (*Orach Chayim* 101:4). However, in *Yoreh Deah* 335:5, the *Shulchan Aruch* omits the second opinion completely. The commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* raise this point, and conclude that the *Shulchan Aruch* felt that praying for an ill person is such a serious matter that one should certainly follow the more stringent approach and pray only in Hebrew when the *choleh* is not present (*Taz, Yoreh Deah* 335:4). Therefore, one should not pray for an individual sick person's needs in any language other than Hebrew. If one is unable to pray in Hebrew however, one may rely on the second opinion and pray in any language other than Aramaic.

DOES ONE FULFILL BIKUR CHOLIM OVER THE TELEPHONE?

To answer this question, let us review the reasons for this mitzvah and see if a telephone call fulfills them. One reason one visits the ill is to see if they have any unfulfilled needs. Although one might discover this over the phone, one cannot ascertain everything without seeing them. The second reason one visits the ill is to motivate the visitor to pray on their behalf. Again, although one may be motivated by a phone call, it is rarely as effective as a visit. Furthermore, although a phone call can cheer up the *choleh* and make him feel important, a personal visit accomplishes this far more effectively. Therefore, most aspects of this mitzvah require a personal visit. However, in cases where one cannot actually visit the *choleh*, for example, when a visit is uncomfortable for the patient, or unwanted, one should call (*Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 1:223; *Shu't Chelkas Yaakov* 2:128). Some authorities contend that it is better for a man to call a hospitalized or bed-ridden woman who is not a relative since it is difficult for an ill person to maintain the appropriate level of *tzniyus* (*Chelkas Yaakov* 3:38:3).

ALWAYS PRAY FOR GOOD HEALTH

A healthy person should daven for continuing good health, because it is far easier to pray that one remain healthy than to pray for a cure after one is already ill. This is because a healthy person remains well so long as no bad judgment is brought against him in the heavenly tribunal, whereas an ill person needs *zechuyos* to recover. This latter instance is not good for two reasons -- first, the *choleh* may not have sufficient *zechuyos*, and second, even if he does, he will lose some of his *zechuyos* in order to get well. Before taking medicine or undergoing other medical treatment one should recite a short prayer: "May it be Your will, *Hashem* my G-d, that this treatment will heal, for You are a true Healer" (*Magen Avraham* 230:6; *Mishnah Berurah* 230:6, based on Gemara *Berachos* 60a).

People who fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* are promised tremendous reward in *Olam Haba*, in addition to many rewards in this world (Gemara *Shabbos* 127a). Someone who fulfills the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* properly is considered as if he saved people's lives and is rewarded by being spared any severe punishment (Gemara *Nedarim* 40a).

May *Hashem* send *refuah shleimah* to all the *cholim* of *Klal Yisrael!*

TALMUDIGEST :: Bava Batra 135 - 141
For the week ending 2 January 2010 / 15 Tevet 5770
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

THE MYSTERIOUS DAUGHTER - Bava Batra 141a

What hidden message lies in the words of the Torah (Bereishet 24.1) that "G-d blessed Avraham bakol" (with everything)?

Rabbi Meir's view is that the blessing was that he did not have a daughter.

In contrast Rabbi Yehuda states that he had a daughter and her name was bakol.

In his commentary on Chumash, Ramban explains Rabbi Meir's position as based on the impossibility Avraham would have faced in finding a suitable husband for a daughter. None of his Canaanite neighbors could be considered, and if he had to send her abroad to his family she would be negatively influenced in that pagan environment.

One solution to this dilemma might have been to marry her off to his son Yitzchak, which would have been permitted according to the opinion

(Mesechta Sanhedrin 58b) that Noachide law then in effect for our ancestors permits marrying a sister.

This is rejected, however, on the basis of a question raised by Tosefot as to why, according to Rabbi Yehuda, did Avraham have to send his servant abroad to find a wife for Yitzchak when he could have matched him with his sister. One of the answers given by Tosefot is that the daughter was not the child of Sarah but rather of her handmaiden Hagar, thus making her unfit as a wife for Yitzchak.

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