

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

### VAYECHI 5783

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#### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The traditional rabbinic approach as to why this portion of the Torah is titled “vayechi Yaakov” even though the subject matter of this Torah portion concerns itself with the death of Yaakov is that as long as his descendants – the Jewish people – are alive and functioning, then Yaakov is still considered to be alive.

The message here is one of immortality and continuity, family and generations. Like life itself and its counterpart, death, these words mentioned immediately above are difficult to define. Other nations and empires that are long ago extinct in terms of presence and participation in current world events, also have biological descendants alive and present in today's world population.

Nevertheless, we think of Rome and Babylon, Greece and Persia, the Holy Roman Empire and even the Soviet Union as being swept into the dustbin of history, never to rise to power again. So, the rabbis must be telling us a deeper message than mere biological and genetic survival from the past until today.

I have often thought that a great part of the secret of Jewish survival lies in the fact that different – completely different – generations are able to bond together, recognize each other and have the same common goals, values and lifestyle. My father was born before the Wright brothers flew an airplane and he lived to see human beings walk on the moon.

In spite of the difference in age, background and even language, he had close contact with and a great influence on his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They somehow recognized who he was in his essence and beliefs and easily responded to his presence and later treasured his memory. So, to a certain extent we may say that he lived on through his descendants.

Yaakov recognized the different personalities, qualities and talents of each of his children and grandchildren. His blessings to his children and grandchildren, as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, clearly indicate this fact. He had no one-size-fits-all blessing to bestow. And it is perhaps that fact that guarantees that as long as his descendants are alive, Yaakov also lives.

For every one of his descendants could say in response to the blessing that each one received – all of them different and personal – that their old father and grandfather understood them and recognize them for what they were. And because of that, they treasured his memory and championed his cause throughout the ages.

Relationships that bridge time and space, generations and world upheavals can only be forged upon the recognition and acceptance of the uniqueness of the parties involved. There is no blessing ultimately in national and personal life that is brought about by conformity. The pithy remark of the great Rebbe of Kotzk was: “If I am I and you are you, then I am I and you are you; but if I am you and you are me, then I am not I and you are not you.” The blessings of Yaakov to his future generations reflect the wisdom of this truism.

Shabbat Sharon

Rabbi Berel Wein

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#### COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ztl

On Not Predicting The Future

#### VAYECHI

Jacob was on his death-bed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died. But the text begins with a strange semi-repetition:

“Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.”

Gen. 49:1-2

This seems to be saying the same thing twice, with one difference. In the first sentence, there is a reference to “what will happen to you in the days to come” (literally, “at the end of days”). This is missing from the second sentence.

Rashi, following the Talmud,[1] says that “Jacob wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine Presence was removed from him.” He tried to foresee the future but found he could not.

This is no minor detail. It is a fundamental feature of Jewish spirituality. We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We make the future by our choices. The script has not yet been written. The future is radically open.

This was a major difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. The Greeks believed in fate, moira, even blind fate, ananke. When the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would have a son who would kill him, he took every precaution to make sure it did not happen. When the child was born, Laius nailed him by his feet to a rock and left him to die. A passing shepherd found and saved him, and he was eventually raised by the king and queen of Corinth. Because his feet were permanently misshapen, he came to be known as Oedipus (the “swollen-footed”).

The rest of the story is well known. Everything the oracle foresaw happened, and every act designed to avoid it actually helped bring it about. Once the oracle has been spoken and fate has been sealed, all attempts to avoid it are in vain. This cluster of ideas lies at the heart of one of the great Greek contributions to civilisation: tragedy.

Astonishingly, given the many centuries of Jewish suffering, biblical Hebrew has no word for tragedy. The word *ason* means “a mishap, a disaster, a calamity” but not tragedy in the classic sense. A tragedy is a drama with a sad outcome involving a hero destined to experience downfall or destruction through a character-flaw or a conflict with an overpowering force, such as fate. Judaism has no word for this, because we do not believe in fate as something blind, inevitable and inexorable. We are free. We can choose. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily said: “We must be free: we have no choice!”

Rarely is this more powerfully asserted than in the *Unetaneh tokef* prayer we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even after we have said that “On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed ... who will live and who will die”, we still go on to say, “But teshuvah, prayer, and charity avert the evil of the decree.” There is no sentence against which we cannot appeal, no verdict we cannot mitigate by showing that we have repented and changed.

There is a classic example of this in Tanach.

“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The Prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the

middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people: This is what the Lord, God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.’”

2 Kings 20:1-5; Isaiah 38:1-5

The Prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah he would not recover, but he did. He lived for another fifteen years. God heard his prayer and granted him stay of execution. From this the Talmud infers, “Even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, you should not desist from prayer.”[2] We pray for a good fate but we do not reconcile ourselves to fatalism.

Hence there is a fundamental difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. A prophet delivers not a prediction but a warning. He or she does not simply say, “This will happen”, but rather, “This will happen unless you change.” The prophet speaks to human freedom, not to the inevitability of fate.

I was once present at a gathering where Bernard Lewis, the great scholar of Islam, was asked to predict the outcome of a certain American foreign policy intervention. He gave a magnificent reply. “I am a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is passé.” This was a profoundly Jewish answer.

In the twenty-first century we know much at a macro- and micro-level. We look up and see a universe of a hundred billion galaxies each of a hundred billion stars. We look down and see a human body containing a hundred trillion cells, each with a double copy of the human genome, 3.1 billion letters long, enough if transcribed to fill a library of 5,000 books. But there remains one thing we do not know and will never know: What tomorrow will bring. The past, said L. P. Hartley, is a foreign country. But the future is an undiscovered one. That is why predictions so often fail.

That is the essential difference between nature and human nature. The ancient Mesopotamians could make accurate predictions about the movement of planets, yet even today, despite brain-scans and neuroscience, we are still not able to predict what people will do. Often, they take us by surprise.

The reason is that we are free. We choose, we make mistakes, we learn, we change, we grow. The failure at school becomes the winner of a Nobel Prize. The

leader who disappointed, suddenly shows courage and wisdom in a crisis. The driven businessman has an intimation of mortality and decides to devote the rest of his life to helping the poor. Some of the most successful people I ever met were written off by their teachers at school and told they would never amount to anything. We constantly defy predictions. This is something science has not yet explained and perhaps never will. Some believe freedom is an illusion. But it isn't. It's what makes us human.

We are free because we are not merely objects. We are subjects. We respond not just to physical events but to the way we perceive those events. We have minds, not just brains. We have thoughts, not just sensations. We react but we can also choose not to react. There is something about us that is irreducible to material, physical causes and effects.

The way our ancestors spoke about this remains true and profound. We are free because God is free and He made us in His image. That is what is meant by the three words God told Moses at the burning bush when he asked God for His name. God replied, Ehyeh asher Ehyeh. This is often translated as "I am what I am," but what it really means is, "I will be who and how I choose to be." I am the God of freedom. I cannot be predicted. Note that God says this at the start of Moses' mission to lead a people from slavery to freedom. He wanted the Israelites to become living testimony to the power of freedom.

Do not believe that the future is written. It isn't. There is no fate we cannot change, no prediction we cannot defy. We are not predestined to fail; neither are we pre-ordained to succeed. We do not predict the future, because we make the future: by our choices, our willpower, our persistence, and our determination to survive.

The proof is the Jewish people itself. The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is engraved on the Merneptah stele, inscribed around 1225 BCE by Pharaoh Merneptah IV, Ramses II's successor. It reads:

"Israel is laid waste, her seed is no more."

It was, in short, an obituary. The Jewish people have been written off many times by their enemies, but they remain, after almost four millennia, still young and strong.

That is why, when Jacob wanted to tell his children what would happen to them in the future, the Divine Spirit was taken away from him. Our children

continue to surprise us, as we continue to surprise others. Made in the image of God, we are free. Sustained by the blessings of God, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

[1] Rashi to Gen. 49:1; Pesachim 56a; Bereishit Rabbah 99:5.

[2] Brachot 10a.

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## **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

### **Parshas Vayechi**

#### **The Shechina Is Not Only Present at the Kosel**

Chazal say that the reason Yaakov Avinu bowed towards the head of the bed (Bereshis 47:31) is because the Shechina (Divine Presence) is present above the head of a sick person. For that reason, despite the fact that he was sick and weak, Yaakov Avinu turned around and bowed towards the head of his bed.

I saw an interesting observation in a sefer called Tiv haTorah: Why is it that the Shechinah is on the top of the bed of a sick person? The Tiv haTorah suggests that when a person is lying sick in bed, he may think that perhaps the Ribono shel Olam has abandoned him—that He is angry with him and punishing him. Chazal say that this is not the attitude a person should have. A person should have the attitude that despite my illness and despite my suffering, the Ribono shel Olam does not hate me. There must be some reason why the Ribono shel Olam wants me to experience this, either as a kaparah, or for whatever reason it may be, but this is for my own good. Therefore, Chazal say: You should know that here in this debilitating state, the Ribono shel Olam is with you! Don't give up hope, don't feel abandoned, and don't feel like an outcast. For this reason, the Shechina hovers over the head of the sick patient.

The Tiv haTorah cites a story of a Jew named Rav Tzvi Kowalsky. (I happen to have known him. He was a nephew of a certain long-time fund raiser for the Ner Israel Rabbinical College. Rav Tzvi used to come visit his uncle and I developed a connection with him.) He was a big Talmid Chochom. At one time, he learned b'chavrusa with the Chazon Ish. He was the Rosh Kolel of the Socatchover Kollel in Bnei Brak. He was literally a holy man. At the end of his life, he was quite sick and suffered a lot. When people would come in to him, they would give him "kvitlach" (small pieces of paper with short prayers and the person's

name), which he would take and put on the top of his bed.

He said it was like putting “kvitlach” into the cracks between the stones of the Kosel haMaaravi. Just like Chazal say that the Shechina never departed from the Kosel Hamaaravi (Western Wall), so too the Shechina is present above the bed of a sick person. This is the Kosel, right here! The Shechina is here!

The point we are trying to convey is that a person, despite his illness, should never feel abandoned by Hashem. Why is Hashem doing this? We don't know the answer to that. But we can rest assured that it is not because He has abandoned us, and therefore the Shechina resides above the bed of a sick person.

Never Forgetting to be Appreciative

The pasuk says “The eyes of Israel were heavy because of age; he was not able to see and he brought them near to him and he kissed them and hugged them.” (Bereshis 48:10) Yosef came into his father with his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim. “Yaakov told Yosef, ‘I did not ever expect to see your face (again) and now Elokim has shown me also your children.’” (Bereshis 48:11)

However, it is striking to realize that this is occurring seventeen years after Yaakov Avinu was reunited with Yosef, upon his arrival in Mitzrayim! Yet seventeen years later, Yaakov Avinu is still commenting to Yosef that he never expected to see him. In Parshas VaYigash, Yaakov tells Pharaoh he is 130 years old (Bereshis 47:9). Yaakov is now 147. So why is Yaakov suddenly saying here “I did not even expect to see you, Hashem has been so good to me that He has shown me also your children”? That is old news! Why does he mention it now?

The answer is that for most people, something that happened seventeen years ago is old news. Despite how great an experience may have been, as time goes on, our nature is to forget favors. People forget how amazed and thrilled they were at the time when good things happened to them.

Do we remember our weddings and how grateful we were that we got married? Do we remember the birth of our first child? Do we remember how thrilled we were when we were zoche to march our children down to the chuppah? Yes, we remember, but it becomes old news. Perhaps these events come to mind on an anniversary, but the excitement of the moment certainly fades with time.

The pasuk is saying that for Yaakov Avinu, despite the fact that this happened seventeen years ago, he was in constant thanksgiving mode to the Ribono shel Olam every single day. He is still thanking Hashem for what happened when he first came to Egypt. It was constantly on his mind!

Understanding Yaakov's Bracha to Yosef

The following is an observation I heard in the name of Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, z"l, the Rosh Yeshiva in the Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY.

In Parshas Vayechi, when Yaakov is on his death bed, he calls in his sons and gives each of them brachos. Some of them do not exactly sound like blessings. However, they are all brachos. As we have said many times, the biggest bracha that someone can give to another person is to point out to him his strengths and weaknesses. The person should know what he should do with his life, what abilities he has and where he needs to improve himself. That, in effect, was what Yaakov was doing here.

Even to Reuvin, Shimon, and Levi, who had their foibles pointed out to them, that in itself is a bracha. He was telling them that they have these character traits, and this is something that they need to work on in the future. Chazal say that Shimon and Levi were zealots, and that Yaakov Avinu pointed it out to them. Levi, at least, was able to perfect his attribute of zealotry. That is why Levi, at the time of the aveira (Sin) of the Egel Hazhav (Golden Calf) stood up for that which was right. That is why Moshe Rabbeinu was able to praise Levi and say about that shevet (tribe) “Who said to his father and mother ‘I did not see him’ and his brother he did not recognize and his children he did not know for they observed Your Word and kept Your Covenant” (Devarim 33:9).

There is a common denominator to all of these brachos (even though some of them sound like brachos and some almost sound like klalos), which is pointing out the natural strengths and abilities of each individual shevet and suggesting what they should do with their lives. That is the biggest bracha that a person can give someone else.

In Yehudah, Yaakov sees Royalty (Malchus). In Yissachor, he sees Torah Study. In Dan, he sees the ability to judge. All this is well and good until we get to Shevet Yosef. By Shevet Yosef, it does not seem—at first blush—like Yaakov is mentioning any of Yosef's strengths. “Yosef is a charming child.... The daughters of Egypt used to climb up on the walls of

Egypt to gaze at his beauty (Rashi).” (Bereshis 49:22) It seems that Yaakov is saying, l’Havdil, that Yosef is gorgeous. He has the looks of a celebrity, and he was treated like a celebrity!

This is how we talk about a Jewish child? Have you ever heard someone praise a choson like that? One might say he is smart, he is personable, he is clever, but would we praise a choson by saying “He is drop-dead good-looking!”? Nobody talks like that. This is not Jewish speech. Where is the description of Yosef’s personality traits? Where are the qualities of his soul mentioned?

Yaakov’s ‘bracha’ to Yosef continues: “They embittered him and became antagonists; the masters of arrows hated him.” (Bereshis 49:23). Rashi explains: He was hated by his brothers who were sharp tongued like an arrow. Put it together: What is the praise of Yosef? He is gorgeous. He is handsome. All the girls swoon for him. And you know what? His brothers hated him.

Where are his strengths mentioned? Where do we see his techunos ha’nefesh (innermost qualities)?

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum said a very interesting thing, which is very relevant and very current. People gravitate to people who love them, admire them, and consider them important. People tend to part company from people who don’t treat them nicely, are not kind to them, and don’t appreciate them. In what context did Rav Shmuel Berenbaum say this? We are painfully aware of a plague that has affected our community in recent decades—the phenomenon of the drop-out youth, the ‘off-the-derech’ children, children who are raised in what seem to be wonderful homes, but for some reason, throw it all away. They leave a Torah lifestyle and hang out on the streets with the worst of people.

This is a very complex situation which can have numerous causes. But Rav Shmuel Berenbaum said that sometimes the reason for this situation is that—for some reason—the child does not feel loved by his family, by his own peers, and by frum society. On the other hand, he feels that the kids on the street love him. They treat him nicely. They treat him with respect. So where is he going to go? In my school, they sometimes treat me like dirt. My parents are always down my throat. Nobody loves me. ‘They’ (on the ‘street’) love me. SO where does he go? Human nature is for people to gravitate to and associate with

other people who they feel love them and appreciate them.

Now we understand the bracha of Yosef, and we understand his kochos (strengths): His brothers hated him. The brothers represented frum society. They slandered him. He came to Egyptian society and the girls are swooning over him. ‘Everybody loves me here.’ What might we expect of a lesser individual? “I am going to chuck this Yiddishkeit thing! Who needs it? My brothers treat me like mud, and these Egyptian girls can’t get enough of me.”

What did Yosef do? He remained a faithful Jew. He remained steadfast to his religion, in spite of the fact that the girls swooned and the brothers hated him. That is kochos ha’nefesh (strength of character) and commitment. This is the same strength of character that allowed him to withstand the temptations of the wife of Potiphar. That is what Yaakov Avinu was telling us in his bracha. He was describing the strength of his son Yosef. In spite of the fact that the girls climbed up on the wall to see him, in spite of the fact that he was loved by them, and in spite of the fact that he was hated by his brothers, nevertheless he remained an honest and faithful Jew.

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### **Parashat Vayechi** **by Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

#### **Recovery & Hope**

This is being written on the tenth of Tevet, the day dedicated to recalling the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Yerushalayim, eventually leading to the destruction of the first holy Temple.

In addition, the Chief Rabbinate of the Medina declared this day as “General Kaddish Day” for the descendants of the holocaust victims to recite Kaddish over those whose day of death is unknown.

Every passing day brings us closer to when the murderers and torturers, and their victims, will have passed on. It is incumbent upon us to remember and not forget all the details of the Shoah, because to remember Amalek is a Torah mitzva.

I have mixed emotions regarding visiting the extermination places in Poland and elsewhere. On the one-hand I don’t want to tread on this earthly presence of Gehennom. On the other hand, since I was brought up in an atmosphere of Torah, of love and compassion at home and at the yeshivot I attended, I have an under-developed sense of hatred.

King Shlomo states in Kohelet (3,8):

שְׁלוֹם וְעַת מִלְחָמָה עַת לְשׁוֹנָא וְעַת לְאַהֲבָה עַת

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

A visit to any of the places where an Aisavic descendant treads would contribute greatly to my tikun to hate. But I will probably forgo this “dubious” experience and spend the rest of my days concentrating on “Love thy brother as thy self,” and leave “a time for hate” to another “thoughtful Jew”.

The Tenth of Tevet

Back to the day of fasting commemorating the beginning of the siege of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, of the Holy City which ended with the destruction of the First Temple...

The people of Israel met and fought many enemies, all of them cruel, ruthless, and thirsty for Jewish blood. We emerged from the wars with ugly scars, but we remember Yehoshua bin Nun, King David, the period of the Judges, Passover, Purim, Hanukkah, Independence Day, Yom Kippur and more.

The Holocaust, who won? The people of Israel who managed to survive the German killing machine (even though today we number about thirteen million Jews in the world, millions less than our number of 18 million at the outbreak of the war), or were the Germans who killed six to seven million Jews victorious? Strange question, but definitely a legitimate one!

To arrive at an answer, it is necessary to determine what were the goals of the Germans – the descendants of Esau, the brother of Ya'akov?

There were two goals – one immediate and the other more distant. The immediate goal was the physical annihilation of European Jewry, followed by the extermination of all the Jews. With the larger goal in mind, of the extermination of Judaism! No longer a God who demands justice, kindness, and mercy. That “good” should overcome evil, the love of fellow man who was created in the image of God, that is to say the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, the seven Noachide mitzvot and the 613 mitzvot for the people of Israel.

The measure of victory or defeat is the degree that Judaism exists in the world. Those who are angry at the Creator and abandon the observance of Shabbat, kashrut and all the other requirements that make up Judaism, because he cannot understand the holocaust, represent a degree of victory for the Nazis of all shades, as opposed to those who adhere to Judaism,

who raise the banner of historic sanctified Halachic Judaism.

The various anti-Semitic groups the world over are in essence present day Nazis and all are either financially supported by the Christians or encouraged by them. These haters of Jews and HaShem will not stop as long as there is one loyal, strong and dedicated Jew who continues to live under the holy umbrella every day here in the Holy Land.

National Recovery – The Future

Looking back, it is difficult to grasp what the situation was with our people at the end of World War II.

In 1939, the nation of Israel numbered about 17 million men, women, and children, and after 6 brutal years of war and murder, only 11 million Jews remained in the world.

The general feeling of our people was depression and defeat. We looked up at the sky with a heart-wrenching question, ‘Where was our father in heaven?’ and the answer we received was ‘Where were human beings?’

We found ourselves with six hundred thousand refugees in the largest cemetery in the world called ‘Europe’.

Thousands of Jews were murdered after the war when they returned to their former places of residence. The British locked the country’s gates to the refugees and the United States agreed to accept only a few.

The people of Israel were sick and devoid of all hope. The feeling was that our decline as a people was only a matter of time because who thought of getting married and having children?

In addition to our situation in Europe, hundreds of thousands of our brothers suffered difficult lives in Moslem countries.

We were on the brink of national insanity.

Then, three years after the war – the blink of an eye in historical terms – HaShem brought about the establishment of the State of Israel. The first law that was passed by the new State was the Law of Return whereby the State opened its doors to all Jews – to the sick and broken in body and spirit.

Over time, the refugees found a new life and a will to live.

People who lost their entire families and believed they would never be able to love again, started families and had children. The smiles that hadn’t been seen for years returned to faces that had seen the Angel of Death.

The State of Israel gave its citizens not only a sense of security but also the feeling that our God has the power to avenge a small part of the evil done to our people, such as the execution of the tyrant Eichmann who was tried before a court in Jerusalem and hanged by a Jew who that morning had worn tefillin.

These things were presented to the survivors by the Jewish state:

- 1- Recovery and hope.
- 2- Descendants and continuation.
- 3- Protection of the Jewish people, and punishment of our enemies.

In parashat Chayai Sarah, it is told how Abraham our father realized that his guests were not ordinary passersby who regularly visited his home, but angels of HaShem, each one sent to carry out a particular mission.

One was sent to heal Abraham and save Lot.

The second was sent to inform Abraham and Sarah about the future birth of Yitzchak.

And the third was to overturn the five evil cities in the Jordan Valley.

These three roles are the same as those that faced the State of Israel after the Holocaust.

Many of the survivors vowed that they would never put themselves in the fragile position of loving and losing. And the State united their broken hearts and restored to them the desire to live and to love themselves and others.

Like Abraham and Sarah, the remnant of the Holocaust was close to despair of establishing a continuation of the people of Israel, and the State provided them with the will and ability to continue their existence.

And as far as punishing the haters of Israel is concerned, we should ask our holy soldiers who sacrifice so much to defend the people of Israel after two thousand years of inability to defend ourselves.

My message to our brothers and sisters abroad, to the people of Torah there, to the yeshiva leaders and the rabbis of the communities, to the directors of Jewish schools and the heads of organizations: What would you give to be present at that time in Avraham's tent together with the ministering angels? To participate in the alleviation of the pain, to hear the promise of the continuation of the people of Israel, and to take revenge on the haters of our people?

After all, these things are present in our everyday lives in Medinat Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom  
Nachman Kahana

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### **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Avraham Chaim ben Simcha.

Prince Charming

A charming son is Yosef, a charming son to the eye [...] (49:22).

In this week's parsha, Yaakov Avinu gathers his sons for a final time in order to bless them before he dies. In actuality, Yaakov Avinu didn't merely bless his children, he actually defined who they were and articulated their strengths (and to some, their weaknesses as well) and the character traits that were to be passed down to their children.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that, among the blessings that Yaakov gave to Yosef, he mentioned that Yosef was impervious to ayin hora or "evil eye." This is based on the Gemara (Baba Basra 118b) that interprets the verse to mean that Yosef's charm was "above the eye" – i.e. beyond the reach of the evil eye. Rashi also mentions that part of the blessing to Yosef's sons (48:16) included that they would multiply like fish. The very same Gemara explains that because fish are covered with water no evil eye controls them.

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood concepts is that of ayin hora. How are we to understand the power of the evil eye and how does it really work? Is it just some mystical concept or does it have some practical understanding from which we can learn how to overcome it, or at least avoid the issue? Rav Moshe Feinstein z'tl paskened (Even Ha'ezzer 3:26), "We definitely need to be concerned with the ayin hora, but not overly particular. With these types of matters, the principle is – the one that is not bothered by it, it doesn't bother him." This is difficult to understand. Does ayin hora have real efficacy or is it merely imagined?

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 107b) states, "Rav explained the verse – 'Hashem will remove all illness from you' (Devarim 7:15) as a reference to the ayin hora – the source of most illness. In fact, he once went to a cemetery and discovered that 99 out of 100 had died from an ayin hora, while only one had died from other causes." Obviously, ayin hora is a powerful force, how are we to deal with it?

More to the point: If ayin hora has a real power to it, then how does a blessing to be impervious to the evil eye have any efficacy? For example, one cannot be “blessed” that a knife shouldn’t pierce their skin. So is the power of ayin hora real, and if so how does Yosef avoid the negative effects of it?

The Gemara (Yoma 35b) discusses how Hashem holds everyone accountable for his behavior during his lifetime: Hashem asks each soul why it didn’t spend more time studying Torah. If a person answers because he was too poor, Hashem asks, “Were you poorer than Hillel?” If he answers because he had uncontrollable desires to fulfill, Hashem asks, “Were your desires more than Yosef Hatzadik?”

What does this Gemara mean? How is one supposed to compare himself to those great men? How are they an achievable standard that one should apply in one’s own life? In fact, what made those great men so unique that they were able to overcome their own circumstances and successfully conquer their personal trials?

The answer to these questions is actually the key to understanding what ayin hora is, how we are affected by it, and most importantly, how to rise above it.

What made Hillel (and Yosef) so unique? In fact, we can even ask a deeper question: The Torah was given approximately 3,500 years ago, but Hillel lived only about 2,000 years ago. What was the standard for those 1,500 years? In other words, with what did Hashem challenge those who didn’t study Torah because they were too poor?

The answer is that they were off the hook. Because the standard of the times was that if a person was too poor then he was too overwhelmed and distracted with making a living. Meaning that almost everyone in the world (as the Gemara above says, 99 out of 100) looks around and sees what are the societal standards and then acts accordingly.

But Hillel changed all this. What made Hillel (and Yosef) so unique is that he didn’t look at what everyone else was doing, he looked within himself as to what his true capabilities were.

This is the key: most people choose to live a common life. What do others have? I want that. Before taking action or making a purchase, the thought is how will that make others look at me? This defines how they dress, what kind of car they drive, what kind of house they buy, and what kind of vacations they take. Most

people live a life reflective of other people’s perception of themselves.

This is very dangerous because gazing at something is a way of exerting control over it (this is also one of the reasons that it is prohibited to gaze at someone that one cannot be with). The Gemara (Baba Basra 2b) calls this Hezek Re’iyah – damage of gazing, and this has halachic ramifications when it comes to real estate because others are able to exert a real type of control.

This type of seeing is very powerful – consider the feeling a person has when he knows he’s being watched. This can have a deleterious effect because he knows he is being constantly scrutinized and perhaps even criticized. This scrutiny is the evil eye. By choosing to live the common life through the perception of others, we are allowing the evil eye to control us.

When a person is under siege (any kind – whether by lack of sleep or depression or under the constant scrutiny of others) his body acts in very strange ways. The body is severely weakened and more susceptible to illness, disease, and other maladies. Thus, ayin hora is a very real danger.

So, how are we to avoid it? By taking a cue from Hillel and Yosef – that is, not allowing others to have influence and control over our lives. We must make every effort to judge ourselves and act in accordance with our own potential and not by what our friends or others do. Likewise, we must do things for ourselves and not to impress others, make them think kindly of us, or worse, incite envy.

This is what the blessing to Yosef meant by “above the eye” – that he was not living in anyone else’s reality and did not care what their perception of him was. Instead, Yosef focused on doing things he himself was capable of achieving; no matter what others were doing. This is very hard to achieve, however, if one succeeds then he can avoid ayin hora because he is no longer operating in the realm of the ayin.

This is what Rav Moshe Feinstein meant when he said that if it doesn’t bother you then it won’t affect you. If one really doesn’t look at others and doesn’t subject his life to what others think of him then the ayin hora will not affect him. Unfortunately, most people have a difficult time achieving this. The majority of people care what Yeshivas (or colleges) their children go to and what others think of those schools. They want people to view them as being successful or well



dressed. These things are what drive ayin hora and must be avoided.

We should choose Yeshivas based on what is good for each individual child, not care what everyone else thinks is a Yeshiva pedigree. We should drive comfortable cars that we enjoy, not cars that primarily make a statement to our success. We should wear clothing that makes us feel happy, not just scramble to keep up with the fads.

This is what the Gemara means that a technique for avoiding ayin hora is to take one's thumbs and place them in the opposite palms:

The Gemara Berachot (55b) states, "If a man entering a town is afraid of the evil eye, let him take the thumb of his right hand in his left hand and the thumb of his left hand in his right hand, and say: I [inserting his name], son of [his father's name], am of the seed of Yosef over whom the evil eye has no effect, as it is written, 'Ben porat Yosef, ben porat alei ayin.'"

Taken at face value it sounds like merely hocus pocus kabbalistic rituals. But with our understanding of ayin hora it becomes clear what a person is trying to convey with this act of taking thumbs into one's palms.

The fact that humans (and some primates) have opposable thumbs is very significant; it is what allows one to lock the hand and take things firmly in one's grasp. Having thumbs represents grasping and taking control of something. Thus, a person who wants to avoid ayin hora takes his thumbs into his palms to indicate that he is not in anyone's else's grasp (vis a vis ayin hora) rather he is from the spiritual children of Yosef and is totally within his own domain and impervious to ayin hora.

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## Parshat Vayechi

by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** -  
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### PARSHA 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 Sarah, 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

### PARSHA INSIGHTS

#### A Taste of Honey

"...and he will provide kingly delicacies" (49:20)

The world in which we live is a very round place.

A chicken's egg, the human eye, the spawn of tadpoles, an oyster, a grain of sand, the stem of a flower, the suction pad of a squid, the rings of a tree trunk, the moon and the sun. And, of course, the world itself.

There are few squares in creation. There's something called a cross sea: A cross sea (also referred to as a squared sea or square waves) is a sea state of wind-generated ocean waves that form nonparallel wave systems. Cross seas have a large amount of directional spreading. This may occur when water waves from one weather system continue despite a shift in wind. Waves generated by the new wind run at an angle to the old. Iron pyrite crystals come close to being perfectly cubic. But Most of the natural world is built on endless permutations of the circle.

Why? Why is the circle the ideal form of creation? When Hashem created the world, He brought into existence a single point, an infinitesimal dot, and from there He drew forth the entire Universe. ( Talmud Bavli, Yoma 54b)

If you take a dot and expand it equally in all directions, you get a circle. The circle is the ideal natural form because it expresses creation itself.

The square, on the other hand, the rectangle, and the other rectilinear shapes are the hallmarks of man.

The easiest way for man to build is with straight lines. Anything curved is more demanding technically, and more expensive.

Why is it more difficult for man to build a circular object than a square one? If the natural world is patterned on the circle, surely the circle should be the natural shape of man's works as well, and the circle should be his paradigm and not the square.

The Talmud ( Menachot 29b) tells us that Hashem created this world with the letter Heh:

If you look at the letter Heh, you will see that it is, in fact, a combination of two other letters, Dalet...and an inverted Yod.

The Dalet consists of two lines at right angles to each other, which point to the four cardinal directions of the compass:

The numerical value of Dalet is four. The lines of the Dalet represent expansion away from that primeval point of existence.

The Dalet is an archetypal rectilinear shape. Man's creations are based on the straight line because they flow from the Dalet that is their source.

However, this world was not created with the Dalet alone. It was created with the Yod as well, and the Yod had another role in creation. With the Yod, Hashem created the future world.

The Yod is really no more than the tiniest dot. The ideal dot has no direction and occupies no space. In order for us to write a Yod, we have to give it some dimension. Otherwise, it would be invisible. However, the ideal dot cannot be drawn in this world. A point that occupies no space is something that can only exist in a world that is above space — the future world. When this world focuses on the world beyond, it fulfils its purpose. When the Dalet focuses on the Yod — when rectilinear dimension focuses on a point that has no dimension — this world reaches its perfection.

When man sublimates his creations to that higher plane, when the dimensionality of the Dalet aspires to the transcendence of the Yod, earth touches heaven.

Then the letter Heh is complete.

Although the preeminent shape of nature is the circle, there exists a natural phenomenon that seems to defy this axiom.

Throughout recorded history, observers have marveled at the hexagonal pattern of the honeybee's elaborate storage system. More than 2,000 years ago, Greek scholars commented on how bees apparently possess “a certain geometrical forethought” in achieving just the right type of enclosure to hold honey efficiently. In the 19th century, Charles Darwin described the honeycomb as a masterpiece of engineering that is “absolutely perfect in economizing labor and wax.” The honeycomb is a hexagon, a six-sided circle, if you like. Why does the honeycomb seem to depart from the natural roundness of the creation and lean towards the linearity of man? Why is the honeycomb a synthesis of the circle and the square?

The answer is that the hexagon represents an ideal synthesis of form and function.

If the honeycomb were round there would be a lot of wasted space between the cells and the entire structure would be less strong.

Were the honeycomb octagonal, which would be even closer to the ideal circle, the modules would not interlock; there would still be some space in between each cell in the honeycomb.

Thus, the hexagon is the perfect blend of the circle and the square, the ideal synthesis of function and form, of this world and the world beyond this world.

Why was it, though, that Hashem chose the honeybee of all creatures to express this synthesis?

The bee is a unique creature. It itself is not a kosher creature, but its produce — honey — is. The honeybee represents the transformation of that which assur, prohibited, into that which is mutar, permitted. In fact, assur is better translated as “bound.” What makes something prohibited is our inability to reach the inner spark of holiness that gives it existence in this world. It is bound up, tied, and inaccessible. We cannot connect to it, and it connects only to itself. It is trapped, bound, assur.

Hashem has given the Jewish People the job of connecting this world to the one beyond it. Left to himself, man degenerates into an obsession with

physicality. He constructs monoliths to scrape the skies, vaunting geometry.

That which connects only to itself is inherently tameh, ritually impure.

Tumah results from the failed potential for connection: For example, Lashon Hara, speech that divides people, is inherently tameh, and in Biblical times caused visible lesions on the skin. The monthly cycle of the human reproductive capacity causes tumah when it does not lead to the beginning of new life. It expresses a failure to connect to what is beyond it. Therefore, with the breakdown of the lining of the womb, a woman must immerse in a mikveh. The word Mikveh is from the language of tikveh – hope – which is all about the future. The future world.

The honeybee symbolizes the elevation of the potential into the actual, the sublimation of tumah into taharah.

The honeybee takes the square and makes it into a six-sided circle.

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Psalm 84: Prepare Yourself for Prayer**

#### **The Dwellers of Your House**

This beautiful psalm expresses our yearnings to be close to God and His holy Temple: “My soul longs and pines for God’s courtyards!” (Ps. 84:3). Yet its most famous verse opens with the word Ashrei (fortunate):

“Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house. They will continue to praise You, selah.” (Ps. 84:5)

The Sages designated this verse to introduce Psalm 145 in the daily prayers. In fact, because of this opening verse, that chapter in the prayers is commonly referred to as Ashrei.

But who are these fortunate ‘dwellers’ in God’s house? And would it not be preferable to pray in His house, rather than just sit there?

#### **Preparations for Prayer**

The Sages recognized that heartfelt prayer requires some degree of mental preparation. They taught, “One should not rise to pray until first acquiring a reverent state of mind“ (Berachot 30b). We cannot make the sudden switch from our mundane activities to earnest prayer without a mental effort to clear our thoughts and focus our minds.

The Talmud describes two levels of mental preparation for prayer. The minimal level, which is expected of all people, is to acquire a general attitude

of solemnity and reverence. The Sages referred to this state of mind as koved-rosh, literally ‘heavy-headedness.’ We need to do away with any light-headedness and frivolity, and direct our thoughts toward higher values and eternal truths.

There is, however, a more intensive level of preparation for prayer. The chasidim rishonim, the saintly pious of ancient times, would meditate for a full hour before each prayer. They would not begin praying until they knew that “their hearts were fully directed toward their Father in heaven.”

Why did these pious individuals need so much time to prepare for prayer?

#### **Directing Both Mind and Heart**

The minimal level - focusing our thoughts on lofty matters - does not necessitate such a lengthy preparation. In a relatively short time, we can purify our thoughts by reflecting on positive and holy images.

But the chasidim rishonim also wanted to uplift their hearts - “until their hearts were fully directed.” Full control of our emotions and desires is a far more complicated matter. Personality traits, wants and desires are connected to our physical side. It takes time and effort to analyze our feelings and inclinations and guide them toward holy goals.

The pious of old based their lengthy preparations on the verse, “Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house.” The psalmist is not referring to a person who makes a brief visit to the house of God. This is not just a quick focusing of one’s thoughts on holy matters. Rather, the verse speaks of those who dwell in God’s house. These saintly individuals meditated at length, refining their desires and purifying their character traits to be in sync with their mind’s enlightenment. Such an intense preparatory effort requires a lengthy stay in the realm of the spiritual and the eternal.

#### **Spiritual Stability**

The verse concludes with the assurance that those who dwell in Your house “will continue to praise You, selah.”

The Sages taught in Eiruvim 54a that the word selah indicates something of a continuous and eternal nature. Those who dwell in God’s house, as they strive to elevate their hearts and emotions, attain a more stable level of holiness. They acquire a harmony in heart and soul that enables them to continually “praise You, selah.” In this way, they experience a consistent level of holiness and God-awareness.

Now it is clear why this verse was placed at the beginning of Ashrei, to be recited at the start of the prayer service. It reminds to prepare our state of mind before praying - and to take inspiration from those remarkable chasidim rishonim who would “dwell in God’s house” in deep meditation, focusing their minds and uplifting their hearts.

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## **Drasha**

### **By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Vayechi

Stand and Deliver

This week the Book of Braishis ends. Yaakov (Jacob) summoned his son Yoseph (Joseph) and discussed final arrangements with him. He asked to be transported to Chevron and to be interred in the same cave as his father, mother, and grandparents. Yoseph returned home and an unprecedented event occurred. Yaakov took ill. He is the first human that the Torah records as getting sick. Yoseph was informed and quickly hurried to his father’s bedside. The Torah tells us that when Yoseph was announced, “Israel (Jacob) exerted himself and sat up on the bed” (Genesis 48:2). Yoseph enters the room and Yaakov proceeded to recount major events of his life to him. Yaakov talked about his divine revelations and the blessings that the Almighty bestowed upon him. He discussed the death of Rachel and explained why he buried her in Bethlehem and not Hebron. Then Yaakov proceeded to bless his beloved son Yoseph’s children in a unique manner. He designates Yoseph’s children as shevatim (tribes) with equal rights and inheritance as his other sons.

One portion of the episode needs clarification. The Torah is usually short on detail. Why then does the Torah tell us that when Yoseph walked in Yaakov exerted himself and sat up in bed? Why is that significant? Who cares if he sat up or lay down? If he was able to sit, why should he not? And if it was very difficult for him to sit up, why did he? And isn’t what Yaakov said more relevant than how he said it?

Rashi explains that the seemingly supplementary detail teaches us a lesson. A father whose son has risen to power must show respect. It may have been quite difficult for Yaakov to sit, however it was important. One must show respect for royalty, even if it is his own child who has risen to power. I’d like to analyze the incident from another angle.

American historian Paul F. Boller Jr. relates the following story: At noon on January 1st 1863, the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation was placed in front of Abraham Lincoln. He stared intensely at it as it lay before him on his desk. He picked up his pen to sign it, and was about to dip the quill into the ink when he hesitated and put his arm down. He paused, closed his eyes, and began the process again. Determinedly he picked up the quill, dipped it in the ink, and put it down. With a grim face he turned to Secretary of State William N. Seward and said, “My hands have been shaking since nine o’clock this morning. My right hand is almost paralyzed. If I am ever to go down into history, it will be for this act. My whole self is in it. However, if my hand trembles when I sign this proclamation, whoever examines it will say hereafter, ‘he hesitated’”.

With that, the President mustered his strength, dipped the quill into the ink, and slowly but resolutely signed in perfect form — Abraham Lincoln.

As he lay on his deathbed, Yaakov Avinu was about to perform an unprecedented act. He was about to bestow the title of shevatim, tribes, to his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe. This was an honor only relegated to his own children. Then he blessed them with words that were destined to become the hallmark of paternal blessings for generations to come. “By you shall (the children of) Israel bless their children – May G-d shall make you like Ephraim and Menashe. Thus shall be your children.”

Those were not blessings that could be endowed in a prone position. As weak as Yaakov was, he knew that the future of two young tribes lay in the strength of his blessing. He wouldn’t give it lying down. Yaakov Avinu knew that any sign of weakness that he would convey in transferring that most important message would be recognized for eternity. He mustered his strength and sat up to give that blessing that would wax eternal. Execution of great actions needs great strength and fortitude. Our forefather Yaakov knew that just as there are things you can’t take lying down, there are also many things, namely greatness and blessing, that you cannot give lying down.

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### **May you be like Ephraim and Menashe**

**Yaakov’s blessing to his grandsons Ephraim and Menashe and a lesson for our lives.**

**Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran**

“May you be like these two, like Ephraim and Menashe...”

As a quiet dusk settles on Friday evening, ushering in Shabbat, we bless our sons with the names of Yaakov’s grandsons. When we do, do we ever pause to wonder, what makes these two so singular among the generations of Israel that their names should be on our lips when blessing our own children? Why, of all the great and righteous men who stand out in the long millennia of Jewish history and experience, should these two names carry such power and grace?

For starters, these two, raised in Egypt and surrounded by the comforts and honor befitting their father’s position managed something too often elusive in the face of great wealth and power – they managed to remain good sons and devoted grandchildren. By doing so they ensured that there would be a next link in the great chain of Jewish tradition. In blessing them, Yaakov wanted for all future generations the indescribable gift that had been given to him, the knowledge that the next generation and the one after that would remain true to Jewish tradition. What loving zayde wouldn’t bless them!

We must remember that the Egyptian court and culture was not welcoming to Jewish tradition. Far from it. For these two, nothing “Jewish” came easy. In this, they were not like our own children for whom everything “Jewish” comes easily. Ephraim and Menashe weren’t raised in a neighborhood of other caring, devoted Jewish families; a neighborhood filled with fine yeshivot and thriving shuls. They didn’t grow up in a community with kosher markets on every other street corner. No, they were Jewish in spite of their surroundings; they were Jewish because they desired it in the marrow of their bones.

Yaakov understood that this quality, this determination to be Jewish, is what we want for our children and grandchildren; a level of devotion and commitment that comes from the kishkes, that comes from within.

Their love of Jewishness would have been reason enough for Yaakov to bless them, but they possessed another quality that differentiated them in the Torah narrative – there was no rivalry between them. Jealousy did not curse their relationship as it did Cain and Abel’s. They weren’t at odds like Yitzchak and Yishmael. They did not fight in their mother’s womb like Yaakov and Esav. They bore each other none of the animosity shown Yosef by his brothers.

Ephraim and Menashe represent a clear and necessary break from such cruel rivalry. They were and remained brothers in the truest sense. There was peace between them. They demonstrated that as sure as the love and respect between husband and wife ensure shalom bayit, peace among siblings makes for a life of joy and blessing.

The love and respect between Ephraim and Menashe was deeply held. To understand just how deeply, we need only pay close attention to the moment of Yaakov’s blessing, when he reversed hands and declared that the, “younger brother shall become greater than he, and his offspring will fill the nations.” Even at that moment, when the younger received a blessing before the elder, there was no discord! Certainly, everything we knew about Torah brothers to this point would have led us to expect strife to follow. And yet, there was no anger, no animosity, only peace.

Life is rarely fair, even to siblings. One has talents the other does not. One is taller. One has a stutter. One is successful. The other struggles. Despite such disparities, we pray for our children the gift of peace, that our children live peacefully together forever on, even after we parents, and grandparents have left this worldly stage.

Yosef brought his two sons Menashe (the elder) and Ephraim (the younger) to receive Yaakov’s blessings. “Joseph took the two of them - Ephraim with his right hand, to Yisrael’s left, and Menashe with his left, to Yisrael’s right – and he drew them close to him.” In the next posuk we learn however, that Yisrael did not take his cue from Yosef, but rather “extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head though he was younger and his left hand on Menashe’s head.”

Yosef protested but nothing Yosef said could convince his father that he had erred. Yaakov declares, “I know, my son, I know.”

I have often pondered this mysterious “choreography”, convinced that there had to have been a very deliberative reason for Yaakov’s blessing. I only began to understand when I came upon a compelling insight offered by my grandfather, HaGaon Rav Bezalel Zev Shafran ZT’L, and in doing so began to appreciate the source of the brothers’ goodwill.

My grandfather references the well-known posuk (in Devarim 17:11) where we are told to always and without exception follow the decisions of the beth din

(court), even if, “you are convinced that they are wrong”. Rashi tells us that even if the court seems to be saying that “right is left, and left is right”, still we must listen. The last word always belongs to the beth din.

Lo tasur min ha'davar asher yagidu lecha yamin u'small – You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.”

We are not to question the beth din but rather we are to say, “God who enjoined the Mitzvot, commanded that I perform all His commandments in accordance with all that they, who stand before Him, teach me to do...” In other words, the Beth Din HaGadol, are the emissaries of God Himself.

Their word is God's word.

My grandfather teaches (Yalkut HaChanochi 5) that the true meaning of the Sifri cited by Rashi is found in Midrash Tanchuma (Naso 29), “A person should not say, ‘I will not fulfill the commandments of the elders, since they are not from the Torah’”. That is, they should not say, “I will not follow the ruling of the Beth Din. As the Torah notes, ‘And you shall do according to...the law which they will instruct you.’” (Devarim 17:10-11) As God declares in Job (22:28) “You will decree, and it will be fulfilled for you.”

We follow the Beth Din because God agrees with the Beth Din.

My grandfather likens this to what is written about Yaakov at the time that he blessed Menashe and Ephraim. He made left right and right left. “And he placed Ephraim before Menashe. He made the younger go before the older; and HaShem fulfilled his decree.”

From this my grandfather divined the lesson that we are not to stray from what our elders – chachamim teach us. Yaakov switched right and left, something that, on its face, strikes us as wrong – after all, Menashe is the elder, should not he receive the blessing? But then we learn that God Himself affirms Yaakov's “decision” when Ephraim's tribe was the first to offer korbanot when the Sanctuary was dedicated.

When Yaakov declares, “I know, he (Menashe) too will become a people and he too will become great; yet his younger brother (Ephraim) shall become greater than he, and his offspring will fill the nations” it is not simply a prophecy, but rather a decree.

What lay at the heart of Ephraim and Menashe's embrace of Judaism? The very same thing that formed the foundation of the bond between them – a respect of the authority of tradition and God. This too is the reason we bless our children and grandchildren in their names, so that the generations that follow will understand the power of mesorah and tradition to keep the chain of Jewish life from breaking.

In due time the wisdom and truth of our obedience will become evident. This is the message Yaakov has left for us. Absolute faith in God and in His duly appointed chachomim – the Beth Din HaGadol sitting adjacent to the Beit HaMikdash – is the key to pure Jewish existence. God, His Torah and its legitimate interpreters, not straying an iota from authentic Torah.

Total commitment and unquestioned faith is the unique characteristic of Ephraim and Menashe. Their faith led them to overcome all the distractions and challenges of their time and culture so that they could be fully Jewish; it allowed them to live in peace and harmony, without discord and rivalry.

So, like Yaakov, we pray and bless our children, praying that they will not just be “like” these brothers but will be in fact Ephraims and Menashes; that they will embrace being Jewish in their hearts and souls and that they will pursue and enjoy peace with each other.

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## **Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)**

### **By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “And Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his [Joseph's] neck” (Genesis 45:14).

The final verse of the last portion of Vayigash summarizes the astonishing achievement of the Israelites in Egypt: ‘And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the country of Goshen and they took possession of it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly’ (Genesis 47:27). Could anything be a clearer testament to the resilience of Jacob's descendants who, in a relatively short period of time, managed to grow rich in real estate, to be fruitful and to multiply?

Yet according to Rashi, this very next verse, the opening of Vayechi, sends us in the exact opposite direction, a 180-degree turn for the worse, informing us that the Egyptian bondage was then beginning! Interestingly, Rashi's interpretation is not based on the

words of the verse itself (Genesis 47:28), but rather on the almost hidden or interior meaning of the Torah embedded in the white space – or lack of white space – between the final verse of Vayigash and the opening verse of Vayechi. The portion of Vayechi opens without a parchment hint that a new chapter is beginning, or that a new story is being told.

There are no paragraphs or indications of chapters in the text of the Torah scrolls. Rather, a white space – anywhere from a minimum of nine letters wide to the end of the entire line – is the Torah's way of indicating that a pause or separation of some kind exists between the previous verse and the following section.

What is unique about Vayechi is that it is the only portion in the Torah with no white space preceding it, as the last verse in Vayigash flows right into the opening verse of Vayechi. This lack of a division leads Rashi to comment that the reason why our portion is setumah (closed) is because "...with the death of Jacob, the hearts and eyes of Israel become closed because of the misery of the bondage with which they [the Egyptians] had begun to enslave them" [Rashi ad loc.].

For Rashi, the achievement of Vayigash lasts no longer than the blink of an eye, or the amount of time it takes to finish one verse and begin another. In one verse the Israelites may be on top of the world, but Rashi wants us to understand that the message of the lack of white space is that we are now witnessing the beginning of the end.

But the truth is that the slavery does not come until a generation – and an entire biblical book – later, when we are told of the emergence of a new king over Egypt, 'who did not know Joseph' (Exodus 1:8). In the meantime, we are still in the book of Genesis; Joseph, with the keys to the treasury in his pocket, is the Grand Vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and his kinsmen are doing astonishingly well on the Egyptian Stock Exchange. So why does Rashi's commentary appear to be 'jumping the gun'?

Rabbi David Pardo explains in his commentary Maskil l'David that the first intimations of Jewish slavery are indeed to be found in the portion of Vayechi, but in a later verse describing an apparently uncomfortable situation in the wake of Jacob's demise:

"And when the days of mourning for Jacob were over, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh saying, 'If now I

have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, my father made me swear, and he declared: I am dying. In my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me..."(Gen. 50:4-5).

Does this request sound like words spoken by the Grand Vizier of Egypt? Does the number two figure at a Fortune 500 company, who undoubtedly confers with the president on a daily basis, need an appointment to see him, forced to go through the usual hierarchy of administrative personnel that junior staff have to go through? Why not a simple knock on the door on the part of Joseph?

Why does the Torah even go to the trouble of reporting the process by which Joseph presents a petition – through intermediaries – to have his father buried? And Joseph doesn't even go through a secretary; he begs ('if I have found favor in your eyes') the 'house of Pharaoh', which generally refers to the household staff, the servants of Pharaoh. The Grand Vizier asks a maid or butler to whisper his need to bury his father in Pharaoh's ear. Is this the level to which a second-in-command must stoop in order to get time off for a parent's funeral?

I would suggest that perhaps the almost obsequious manner in which Joseph must arrange to have his request brought before Pharaoh indicates not so much a general change in Joseph's political position, as the delicacy of this particular petition. Therefore, it serves as a moment of truth for Joseph as well as for the readers of his story.

Joseph may have reached the top of the social ladder in Egypt. He speaks Egyptian, dresses as an Egyptian, has become renamed Egyptian (Tzafenat-Pane'ah), and is married to a native Egyptian (perhaps even to his previous master's daughter). From slave to Prime Minister, Joseph has certainly lived out the great Egyptian dream. Now, however, he is forced to face the precariousness and vulnerability of his position.

Ordinarily a person wants to be buried in his own homeland where his body will become part of the earth to which he feels most deeply connected. Indeed, in the ancient world the most critical right of citizenship was the right of burial. The wise Jacob understands that Pharaoh expected Joseph to completely identify with Egypt, to bring up generations of faithful and committed Egyptians after all that his adopted country has given to him. But this was impossible for Jacob – and the patriarch hoped

that it would also be impossible for his children and grandchildren as well. They were in Egypt, but not of Egypt. They might contribute to Egyptian society and economy, but they could never become Egyptians. Jacob understood that his burial in Canaan would be the greatest test of Joseph's career, and would define the character of his descendants forever. Hence, he makes his beloved son solemnly swear not to bury him in Egypt. Hence, our Midrash understands that Hebrew servitude in Egypt begins at this very juncture, when Joseph understands that the Hebrews would always be stranger-slaves in Egypt. Indeed, Egypt is a story of every Jewish Diaspora in history. Shabbat Shalom!

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Yaakov Avinu blessed his sons with brachos appropriate to their future callings in life. They and their children after them for generations engaged in many different professions, some of them even becoming dentists...

### **May a Cohen Go to the Dentist?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Yankel Katz (\*Names are fictitious) called me recently with a very surprising shaylah:

"I am scheduled to have a dental implant placed in my mouth. My dentist told me that the procedure may require the insertion of cadaver bone around the implant. Since I am a cohen, I immediately realized that I may have a serious halacha problem on my hands, or more accurately, in his hands and my mouth. May I have these products inserted? May I even go into the dentist's office knowing he has these remains (parts of a corpse) on hand? Maybe I cannot even enter the building?"

I admit that I was more than a bit incredulous that human remains are commonly used today in basic dentistry and medicine. I did some research and discovered that indeed, Yankel's information is accurate. Many forms of dental, oral, podiatric and other kinds of surgery utilize cadaver-derived products. Surgeons and dentists use these human products (typically bone, skin, and heart muscle) in various grafting procedures. Similarly, many podiatrists use human remains in the construction of foot implants. Because of this, most periodontists (gum specialists) and dentists specializing in implants store human muscle and bone in their offices. Thus, Yankel's shaylah is realistic: May a cohen enter an office building knowing that there is probably a dental

or foot clinic somewhere in the building that contains human remains? Does this prohibit a cohen from freely entering large office buildings?

Furthermore, a non-cohen who causes a cohen to become tamei will also be violating the Torah. Obviously, the ramifications of these shaylos are ominous, and the potential repercussions could be catastrophic for people employed in most cities. Because of these considerations, I researched this shaylah with utmost seriousness.

There are three potential halachic issues involved in this shaylah:

I. Benefiting From Human Remains (Issur Hana'ah)

II. The Mitzvah of Burial

III. Tumah.

To address these questions, we first need to gather some factual information. I began by asking Yankel's dentist the following questions:

1) How extensively are cadaver bones and muscle used?

2) How much material does a dentist keep in his office?

I received the following answers:

1) Every periodontist and oral surgeon has this material in his office. In addition, many general dentists have it too if they perform gum surgery or implant surgery.

2) There is no practical way to answer this question accurately. Specialists such as oral surgeons probably have a lot. I keep between 2-10cc. They are usually stored in 0.5, 1, and 2cc bottles.

And now some background to the halachic shaylos involved:

#### **I. BENEFITING FROM A CORPSE**

May one benefit from a corpse or from human remains?

The Gemara rules that one may not benefit from a corpse (Avodah Zarah 29b). However, the Gemara does not discuss whether this prohibition applies only to the remains of a Jew or also to those of a non-Jew.

Why should it make a difference?

The Torah pasuk teaching that one may not benefit from a corpse refers to a Jew. Thus, many poskim conclude that the prohibition is restricted to the remains of a Jew (Tosafos and Rashba, Bava Kamma 10a; Nekudos HaKesef and Gra, Yoreh Deah 349; Shu't Radbaz #741; Mishneh LaMelech, Hilchos Aveil 14:21). Others rule that remains of either Jews or non-Jews are equally forbidden (Shu't Rashba 365;



Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 349:1). Still others compromise between these two positions, contending that the prohibition to use a gentile cadaver is Rabbinic, whereas not using a Jewish corpse is prohibited min haTorah (Pischei Teshuvah ad loc.).

In a circumstance of pikuach nefesh one may of course benefit, as is true with virtually all mitzvos of the Torah. Although tooth replacement is not a life threatening urgency, it is important to use the best quality dental implant.

To quote Yankel's dentist, himself an observant Jew:

"In my opinion, the severity of this halachic issue should hinge on the detriment caused by tooth loss. Clearly losing one tooth or even all the teeth will not result in death. However, tooth loss often results in dietary/nutritional issues. People who have a difficult time chewing will not have a proper diet. Although people who lose their teeth can still eat, they tend to eat soft foods, which are usually high in carbohydrates and low in protein, vitamins, and minerals. Foods that are high in protein, vitamins, and minerals, such as meat, poultry, grains, and fresh fruits and vegetables, tend to be harder to chew. Consequently, people who eat mainly soft foods may become undernourished. I have seen many cases where people receiving their first set of dentures lose a lot of weight due to the difficulty involved in learning how to use them. Some people adapt and those who do not often seek implants if they can afford it. The only thing preventing most people from having implants is the exorbitant cost, since insurance does not usually pay for them at this time."

At this point, I think it is important to explain the difference between dentures and implants.

#### DENTURES VERSUS IMPLANTS

Dentures are removable appliances that replace some or all of the teeth. They are usually not firm enough to allow a proper bite and chew, and thus a patient using dentures usually regains only a very partial ability to chew. In addition, they are often uncomfortable.

To install dental implants, the dentist utilizes a surgical screw to which he cements crowns or bridges. Alternatively, he uses the implants as anchors to hold complete dentures in place. In either instance, the resultant bite is much stronger than dentures and allows the patient an almost total ability to chew a regular diet.

Dental researchers introduced implants in the '60's, and they became mainstream practice in the '90's.

They are now usually considered the "standard of care" for tooth replacement.

Therefore, one can understand the practical importance of using high-quality implants, assuming, of course, that no compromise of halacha results for either the patient, the dentist, or cohanim in the vicinity.

#### USE OF HUMAN TISSUE

Rav Moshe Feinstein wrote a teshuvah concerning transplanting human remains in non-life-threatening situations (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:229, 230). Clearly, one may transplant such organs as kidneys, livers, and heart because of pikuach nefashos (life-threatening emergency). However, transplanting items such as bone, cornea, muscle, and ligament are not usually for life-threatening situations. As explained above, dental implants relieve a non-life-threatening emergency, although one could argue that these situations are considered choleh kol gufo, where halachic rules are somewhat relaxed. Nevertheless, treating a choleh kol gufo does not permit violating a Torah prohibition.

We noted above that there is a dispute whether one may use remains of a non-Jew; Rav Moshe concludes that, under extenuating circumstances, one may rely on the lenient opinions. A second question now presents itself, which is whether one may assume that the remains used are those of a non-Jew, since using remains of a Jew is certainly prohibited min haTorah. Again, here also Rav Moshe ruled leniently that one may assume that the remains are of non-Jewish source, since most people are not Jewish (Mishneh LaMelech, Hil. Aveil 3:1).

#### NOT THE NORMAL USE

Some poskim permit the use of human remains for non-life-threatening emergencies because of a different line of reasoning. The Gemara (Pesachim 25b) rules that someone who is ill, but does not have a life threatening condition, may apply a balm made from orlah fruit (that grew in the first three years of a tree's growth), notwithstanding that the Torah prohibits benefiting from such fruit.

Why is this permitted where the situation is not life threatening?

This is because many prohibitions that are asur b'hana'ah (forbidden to benefit from), are prohibited min haTorah only when the prohibited item is used in its normal way. Smearing fruit on one's skin is not a typical, normal use. Since orlah is prohibited min

haTorah b'hana'ah only when used in its normal way, smearing orlah fruit as a balm involves only a rabbinic prohibition, which is relaxed for an ill person.

However, this leniency does not apply to all prohibitions. For example, the Torah prohibits using kilayim (forbidden fruit of a grapevine) even in an atypical way. For this reason, an ill person may not smear kilayim as a balm, even though he may smear orlah balm.

Where does the prohibition to use human remains fall? Is it like orlah, and is permitted for an ill person to use in an atypical manner, or like kilayim and prohibited.

The poskim dispute whether the prohibition not to use human remains applies to using them in an atypical way, Shu't Radbaz #979 and Mishneh L'Melech, Hilchos Aveil 14:21 are lenient, whereas Rabbi Akiva Eiger (notes to Yoreh Deah 349) prohibits. If it is permitted, there is a basis to permit the use of human remains from a Jew for someone who is ill when the situation is not life-threatening.

Rav Moshe rules that min hatorah one may not use human remains in an atypical way, although other poskim are lenient (Shu't Har Tzvi, Yoreh Deah #277). The latter approach might allow using muscle and bone for implants even from a Jewish cadaver.

However, since there are alternative sources for implants, such as bovine tissue, it is halachically unclear whether this justifies use of human implants. Although some dentists feel that the cadaver-based material is superior, others do not agree. Therefore, someone who is considering cadaver implants should ask a shaylah from his or her Rav, whether or not one is a cohen. In addition, although the dentist may have asked a shaylah and been told that he or she may use human implants, the patient's Rav may feel otherwise. Thus I believe that a frum dentist who received a psak that he may use human tissue should advise his frum patients to ask their own shaylah.

## II. THE REQUIREMENT TO BURY THE DEAD

Is one required to bury a small amount of human remains?

The poskim dispute how small an amount of Jewish remains requires the mitzvah of burying. Some contend that one must bury even an amount as small as a k'zayis (Tosafos Yom Tov to Shabbos 10:5). Others contend that one is required to bury only that which could represent an entire body (Mishneh LaMelech, Hilchos Aveil 14:21). However, it seems

that all agree that there is no Torah mitzvah to bury the remains of a gentile, except due to tumah concerns. Thus, this question would not affect our shaylah once we assume that the remains involved are of a non-Jew.

## III. TUMAH AND A COHEN

A human cadaver (meis) of either Jew or gentile conveys tumah when a person touches remains or carries them. Although these halachos do not affect most Jews nowadays, a cohen is still forbidden to come in contact with human remains in a way that he will become tamei.

Jewish remains convey tumah through ohel, which means that a cohen may not be under the same roof or in the same room as the remains. However, if all the doors and windows in the room holding the remains are closed, the tumas ohel is probably contained within that room (see Nekudos HaKesef on Taz, Yoreh Deah 371:3; see also Shu't Noda BiYehudah, Yoreh Deah #94). However, there is a lesser form of tumah, called sof tumah latzeis (lit., the tumah will eventually leave), that extends beyond the closed doors or windows, though only in the direction that one will eventually remove the tumah.

## OHEL AND A NON-JEW

The poskim dispute whether non-Jewish remains convey tumah through ohel; i.e., does someone in the same room as non-Jewish remains become tamei? According to those who contend that non-Jewish remains convey tumas ohel, a cohen may not enter a room containing a gentile corpse or part of a corpse. Thus, a cohen should be careful not to enter any hospital except for a life-threatening emergency, since there is likely to be human remains somewhere in the hospital. Similarly, a cohen may not enter a museum without carefully verifying that it does not contain any human remains -- an unusual circumstance. According to those who contend that non-Jewish remains do not convey tumas ohel, a cohen may enter a hospital when one may assume that it contains no Jewish remains.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that non-Jewish remains do not convey tumas ohel, yet a cohen should still be machmir not to be in the same ohel as gentile remains. Thus, a cohen should not visit someone in the hospital unless there is an extenuating reason, i.e., there is something important that only he may accomplish. Similarly, a cohen should not enter a museum without verifying that it does not contain human remains. [This discussion is limited to a case where the remains

in the hospital are of a non-Jew. In a situation where there are likely to be Jewish remains in the hospital, a cohen would be allowed to enter the hospital only for a life-threatening emergency (pikuach nefashos).]

Thus, if we assume that the remains contained in the dental office are a non-Jew's, then a cohen entering the office would not entail a halachic violation, but would be something that should be avoided (according to the above ruling of the Shulchan Aruch). However because of other halachic factors (too complicated to explain in this article), there is a basis to be lenient and allow a cohen to enter the dentist's office and certainly the building. Personally, I would encourage the dentist to store the remains in a way that guarantees that there is no tumas ohel, a procedure that I will gladly explain to any dentist on an individual basis, but that is too complicated to elucidate in this article.

#### WHAT ABOUT YANKEL KATZ'S IMPLANT?

So far we have discussed whether one may use human remains as an implant and whether a cohen may enter the office. Assuming that Yankel's Rav rules that he may rely on the remains being of a non-Jew and that one may use gentile remains, the shaylah is still not completely resolved. Because Yankel has the bone graft installed in his mouth, he will now be touching and carrying the remains, and a cohen may not touch or carry non-Jewish remains. Is there any possible solution to this issue, or must Yankel opt for a non-human product? The answer to this question lies in a different direction.

#### IS THERE A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF REMAINS THAT CONVEYS TUMAH?

Here the issue is, how small an amount still conveys tumah? Although the amount of flesh that conveys tumah is one k'zayis, the amount of human bone that conveys tumah in this situation may be as small as a k'se'orah, the size of a barleycorn, which is tiny (Ohalos 2:7; Rambam, Tumas Meis 4:4).

How big is a k'zayis? The estimates of the poskim range from as little as 3 cc. to as much as 25 cc. A dentist typically uses less than this amount in a patient, although sometimes he might use a larger amount. Thus, one should verify this information in order to ask a shaylah. However the amount of bone used is certainly greater than the size of a barleycorn, thus precluding a cohen from receiving a dental implant of human origin.

There is one other aspect about dental offices that one should know: Some dentists keep a human skull on hand for explanation and education. A cohen should clarify in advance before visiting a dentist whether he is a skull-bearer, and should make similar research before scheduling an appointment at the podiatrist and other physicians, who often also use human remains in their surgeries or have cadaver models on hand for visual explanations. A concerned practitioner will procure plastic replicas rather than genuine human parts to minimize difficult situations for a cohen.

A cohen has the privilege of blessing the people, in addition to serving in the Beis HaMikdash, may it be built speedily in our day. Concurrent with these privileges come many responsibilities, including the requirement of avoiding tumah. This necessitates an awareness of possible tumah situations and being aware of new developments in our constantly changing society.

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#### Basic Law of Torah Study And Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l

##### Revivim

Nine years ago, the idea of enacting a "Basic Law: Torah Study" was mentioned here for the first time, and thank God, the coalition now intends to enact such a law \* There are three goals for the law: a declarative determination that the Torah is a supreme value; greater funding over other studies; and postponing the recruitment of Torah learners \* Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l fulfilled in his life the commandment "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" both in the simple sense, and as interpreted by our Sages "That you shall make the name of Heaven beloved"

Recently, I was happy to hear that the coalition intends to establish in a Basic Law the value of Torah study, an idea I raised about nine years ago as part of this column. The title of the article in 'Revivim' of October 24, 2013, Issue 565 was: "Basic Law: Torah Study". Friends who searched the Internet claim that this was the first time this idea was brought up in a printed article. It seems that this is an opportunity to repeat the basics I wrote in that article, with a few additions for accuracy and clarification.

##### The Value of Torah study

First I wrote: " When attempting to present a vision for the State of Israel, it is imperative to first address the mitzvah of Talmud Torah (Torah study), because

the unique vision of the Jewish people is revealed in the Torah; the further we expand and deepen our study of it, the more we will understand our special role as a nation, as individuals, and as family and community members.

This mitzvah is so great that our Sages said it is equivalent to all the commandments.

“Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper storey of Nithza’s house, in Lydda, when this question was raised before them: Is study greater, or practice? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying: Practice is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered, saying: Study is greater, for it leads to practice. Then they all answered and said: Study is greater, for it leads to action” (Talmud Kiddushin 40b). There are two meanings to the conclusion of our Sages: First, that Talmud Torah is great. Second, that it leads to action. It follows that if Talmud Torah does not lead to action, it is not great. From this we also learn the importance of action which stems from the Torah.

#### The Three Levels

The Jewish nation’s study of Torah must take place on three levels:

- 1) Study aimed at promoting great Torah scholars who will elucidate issues for the benefit of the Clal (general populace), including morei hora’ah (law deciders), community rabbis, dayanim (judges), (rabbis) for advanced yeshiva studies.
- 2) Study aimed at training rabbis working in the fields of education and counseling: teachers, instructors, counselors, psychologists, and social workers.
- 3) Torah study for all Jews, in order to know the basics of Torah – its general rules and details – so one can manage his life according to its path. To achieve this, a lot of study time must be dedicated in the formative years of one’s life, and later on throughout the years, to set times for Torah study.

At the end of the article I wrote: “In order to secure this utmost national value in our public life, a “Basic Law of Torah Study” should be enacted, affirming that “The State of Israel is committed to encourage and fund the study of Torah in Israel,” while detailing the three levels of study mentioned above.

#### The Purpose of the Law

There are three main objectives for the law: the first, in principle, to establish in a Basic Law the supreme status of the value of Torah study, and the vision that Torah study will add light and blessing, faith and morality to all areas of life, to Israel, and to the

nations of the world. As the prophet said: “In the days to come, The Mount of the LORD’s House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills; and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. And the many peoples shall go and say: “Come, let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction (Torah) shall come forth from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Thus He will judge among the nations and arbitrate for the many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war” (Isaiah 2: 2-5).

The second objective is to enshrine in the Basic Law the greater funding for Torah study relative to all other important studies. And also in relation to members of different religions, who will not be able to claim that the governmental funding for Torah study comes from a budget intended for all religions, but rather, as the vision of the Jewish state, the value of Torah study has been enshrined on its banner, in order to spread faith and morality in Israel, and to all the families of the world.

The third objective is enshrining in the Basic Law the postponement of the recruitment of Yeshiva students whose Torah study is for the sake Judaism’s existence, and the fulfillment of the vision of the People of Israel.

#### Torah Study for the Growth of Talmidei Chachamim

As mentioned, Torah study should take place on three levels. One, the study of Talmidei Chachamim (Torah scholars) who delve deeper into the Torah in order to understand its foundations and reasons, and reveal its light to the Clal, to the family, and to the individual. To clarify its halachot (laws) and guidance; what is mutar (permitted) and what is assur (forbidden); what mitzvah is obligatory, and what is reshut (optional); Sabbaths and holidays; legal procedures; resolving personal and public conflicts; establishing decent work procedures; long-term planning for a healthy, spiritual life for society, and the economy. These Torah scholars will also lead the communities, teach in yeshivas, and serve as judges in the Jewish Law courts.

From this, it will be possible to have a good and blessed influence on the entire world. For thanks to the developing science and the enormous power given

today in the hands of humans, we desperately need moral guidance. There are nations who live in unprecedented abundance, but their lives are liable to lose their deep spiritual meaning, and thus become dreary and futile. Beside them live nations, many of whom are poor, destitute and suffer from hunger and disease, and their terrible frustrations are liable to erupt and endanger the world.

It is the role of the People of Israel to spread the light of faith, Torah and morality to the world, and thus, extend blessing and vitality to all peoples. To this end, we need to develop Talmidei Chachamim who will devote themselves to their studies while at the same time, have knowledge of the culture and its values, so that they can illuminate and guide the actual lives of the individual, and society.

#### Torah Study for the Training of Educators and Counselors

The second level relates to the training of Talmidei Chachamim who will engage in education, teaching, counseling, and therapy. There is no need to expand on the field of education and its importance, but it is clear that in order for teachers to be able to fulfill their mission, they must know a great deal of Torah – in breadth, and depth. For psychologists and social workers as well, it is appropriate that in addition to all the wisdom and professional knowledge accumulated over the generations, they should delve deeper into the areas of the Torah that pertain to their vocation, so they can continue the light and blessing of the Torah into their professional lives.

#### Torah Study for All

The third level relates to the mitzvot of Torah learning imposed on every Jew, who should attempt to encompass all the foundations of the Torah, in Halacha, Mussar (ethics), and Machshava (thought). This is because studying the Torah with Derech Eretz, honesty, and an ayin tovah (positive outlook) strengthens the national and personal identity of every Jew, and reveals the light of his soul. Out of this, one's character traits are perfected, and brings him to perform good deeds. That is why every Jew is obligated in the mitzvah of Torah study (Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:8).

Moreover, each person's individual study contributes to the entire Clal. First, because it is impossible to create a good society without all its members being full partners in its vision. Second, since there is no person who is similar to his fellow man, consequently,

every Jew who studies Torah reveals in it, his own special spark. And since part of the study is done in a group, thus his insights arise as questions or answers and are included in the general study, deepen the understanding, and take part in the complete revelation of the Torah.

Unfortunately, within the framework of institutionalized education, students are unable to learn everything that is needed to guide life from a Torah point of view. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on perfecting the study program, and developing frameworks for setting times for Torah study for adults.

#### Torah Scholars and the Soldiers

Since one of the objectives of the law is to regulate the postponement of the service of yeshiva students, it is necessary to mention the general purpose of public Torah study. The Torah designated the Kohanim (priests) and the Levites to be Torah learners and teachers for the Jewish people, but in no way is this a separation from Clal Yisrael. On the contrary, in Israel's camp in the desert, the Kohanim and Levites resided in the center of the camp. And in the Land of Israel, in addition to the Temple being in the center, the Levites and the Kohanim were scattered throughout the tribes of Israel, so that they would be connected to all of Israel wherever they were, and could teach them Torah. The terumot and ma'asrot (tithes) that the Israelites gave to the Kohanim and Levites, was also intended to strengthen the connection of the Torah scholars to the working people, with whom they rejoiced in good days of abundance, and grieved with in times of sorrow and hardship.

Furthermore, one of the main roles of the Kohanim and the Levites was to encourage military service, since in addition to the Kohen Ha-Gadol (high priest) who was responsible for the work of the Temple, another Kohen was appointed whose role was to encourage the warriors of Israel, and he was called the "Kohen Mashuach Milchama" (a Kohen who is anointed for purposes of war) (Deuteronomy 20:2-4). With him were other Kohanim and Levites who accompanied all the soldiers in Israel to their camps, and their job was to encourage the soldiers by blowing trumpets and saying words of encouragement, as a rabbinical and educational corps. They also served as military police, since it was the Levites who served as policemen, who dismissed from the camp those

entitled, and punished those who evaded the campaign (Mishnah Sotah 8:6).

Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l

This week we attended the funeral of Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l, who in his life fulfilled the mitzvah "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart", both in the simple sense, and also in the sense of what our Sages said: "That you shall make the name of Heaven beloved, in that he should read Torah, and learn Mishna, and serve Torah scholars, and he should be pleasant with people in his business transactions. What do people say about such a person? Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah, fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah, woe to the people who have not studied Torah. So-and-so, who taught him Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how proper are his deeds. The verse states about him and others like him: "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Yoma 86a).

In addition to his special leadership and outstanding devotion, Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l was the beloved and faithful student of our teacher and mentor Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda. Like him, he explained and repeated to his students, the necessity of studying Torah in the name of all of Israel, and for the sake of

all of Israel. And that the Second Temple was destroyed because the Torah scholars did not recite the initial blessing over the Torah, in other words, they did not learn out of faith in God "Who chose us from all the nations" and from that "gave us His Torah". As a continuation of this, he taught that true Talmidei Chachamim should be the first to understand the magnitude of the mitzvah in military service, and the magnitude of the mitzvah to settle the Land of Israel and engage in its development from a scientific, social, and economic point of view. Talmidei Chachamim should increase shalom (peace) in the world, because shalom expresses the divine idea that unites all parts of Am Yisrael, and the goodness and truth in all views.

The "Basic Law of Torah Study" is intended to raise Talmidei Chachamim like the example of Rabbi Haim Druckman ztz"l.

This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated from Hebrew.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

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לע"נ

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