



# הַמִּזְרָחִי

# HAMIZRACHI

## PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT VAYECHI 5783 • 2023










**ISRAEL**  
**Parsha Picture**  
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קָבְרוּ אֶתִי אֶל אֲבֹתַי  
אֶל הַמַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר  
בְּשֵׂדָה עֶפְרוֹן הַחֲתִי  
בראשית מט:כט

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# 'Hear, Oh Israel'

## The Jewish Family Is One



**Rabbi Doron Perez**

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

After unthinkable suffering, and turmoil within Ya'akov's family, they somehow remain intact – as one family.

Despite the horrific sale of Yosef following the seemingly irreconcilable rift between the brothers, everyone manages to get past grievances and stand together on the deathbed of their father as one family with one heart.

Yosef is somehow able to forgive his brothers for their terrible act of selling him as a slave and practically leaving him for dead in Egypt, not to mention the ensuing years of pain, suffering and estrangement from his father and family. He remarkably rids himself of any hint of lingering grievance and any trace of resentment towards them. He is able to deeply introspect and see the part that he may have played in acting insensitively to all his elder siblings and angering them with his condescending and patronizing behavior - reporting them to their father and sharing with them repeated dreams of how they will all bow down to him. He was able to step out of his self-centered world and transition to a G-d-centered world where he is no longer the center but rather Hashem is. As such he sees the Hand of G-d in everything that happens to him, takes responsibility for the part he played and is able to be fully forgiving and wholehearted with all his brothers.

Yehuda, the leader of the brothers, and the one who initiated the sale of Yosef, himself

does a full cycle of *teshuvah* and proves that he would never again turn his back on his brother. It is he who takes personal and lifelong responsibility for Yosef's younger brother Binyamin's well-being and who convinces Ya'akov to send him down to Egypt. It is Yehuda who did the remarkable act of offering to spend the rest of his years rotting away in the dungeons of Egypt in place of his brother Binyamin – to both honor the commitment to his father and to never cause him additional pain for the loss of his other son from his beloved wife Rachel. Everyone has managed to introspect, repent, proactively take personal responsibility for their own actions, prioritize the needs of the other and the good of their brethren and keep the entire family together.

Our sages say that it was this very fear of the splitting of the family that concerned Ya'akov on his deathbed, before giving all his sons their blessings (Masechet Pesachim 56a). After all, as the *Midrash* points out there had been a history of family infighting and sons leaving the family fold – Yishmael and Eisav. Ya'akov feared that the pattern would continue. The sages beautifully describe how the brothers relayed their father's concerns and came together addressing their father by his name Yisrael, Israel, with iconic words of what became the '*Shema*': 'Hear, o' Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One.'

When they stood together as one united family, pledging allegiance to their father, his G-d, and his traditions, Ya'akov knew

that his family was intact. They would break the cycle of having deviant children, and irreconcilable family fighting and ultimately preserve the unity of the family, despite the iniquities and the wrongdoings that had been committed.

The very first family of Israel who would form the original nucleus of the Jewish people, literally *bnei Yisrael* – the children of Israel – as the sons of Ya'akov / Yisrael, laid the foundations for Jewish unity for generations to come. No matter what brothers have done, and no matter what arguments there may be, the extended Jewish family, the children of Israel must do everything to keep the family together as one Jewish people.

Incredibly, this is exactly how the Sefat Emet explains the meaning of this *Midrash* of the sages and what the deeper meaning of the famous line of the *Shema* is all about. It is a statement of children declaring to their father that they are a **collective commitment**, they declare to their father that they stand not as separate individuals, but together as one united family pledging absolute allegiance to their father, his family, His G-d and the G-d of his fathers and their family values. (Sefat Emet, Parashat Vayechi, 5665)

When Rav Kook, the founding chief rabbi of pre-state Israel was faced with the question of deep and seemingly irreconcilable differences of opinions amongst the different ideological factions within the pre-state *Yishuv*, he posed the question of whether indeed the time had come to slip off from other members of the Jewish people or alternatively to remain together. He unequivocally writes how a permanent split in the Jewish people would be akin to the cutting into pieces of the baby in the case of King Solomon and the disputed baby of the two mothers. (Orot HaTehiya 20). We dare not sever the Jewish people into pieces. He would often evoke the story of the brothers in general, and



**Our great challenge is to keep the integrity of our people together, understand the deep connection between our common fate and destiny, and find a way to work together.**

Yosef in particular as struggles within the family, which come to complement each other and ultimately keep the family together.

He writes as follows: “The requirement of *ahavat Yisrael* is not the same as the natural love that exists within all nations of the world. All nations are formed through natural means, whereas the formation of the Jewish people was built on deep mutual spiritual aspirations” (Orot Yisrael 4,8).

There is a deep spiritual value to the unity of the Jewish people. Our sages go as far as saying it was the unity of Israel which ensured success in the battle of one of the most wicked kings in Israel, King Ach'av and his wife Queen Izevel (Ahab and Jezebel). They committed acts of collective murder acts in slaughtering the prophets of Israel and created an idolatrous and immoral society totally at odds with the values of the Torah. Yet, surprisingly, they were successful in battle. The sages point out that the reason they were successful is that they did not speak *lashon harah* about each other. Since there was internal unity, judging others favorably, and working together, somehow created enough merit to succeed politically and militarily. Indeed the unity of the Jewish people is our secret weapon. We tend to be much better at coming together in times of trouble and external challenge, but not always in times of peace. Our great challenge is to

keep the integrity of our people together, understand the deep connection between our common fate and destiny, and find a way to work together.

I heard a beautiful story about a man who was stuck on a highway with a kippah on his head, waiting outside his car for someone to stop and help him. Another Jew stopped to help him, and during the conversation, the person who had stopped noticed that the person with the broken-down car was not Jewish. He asked him why he was wearing a kippah on his head. The owner of the car responded that his father had told him, “If you ever get stuck, you should just identify yourself as a Jew, because another Jew will definitely stop and help you.” There is a camaraderie among Jews that is unique and should be called upon, especially in this day and age.

The Rambam states that never in the history of the Jewish people had there ever been a Jewish community that didn't have a communal charity fund. (Rambam, Yad, Laws of Charity 9,3). A deep sense of camaraderie and mutual responsibility is at the core of Jewish life, and these bonds need to be called on, today more than ever. Just as the original Jewish family overcame all internal trials and tribulations, and was able to stand as one - to remain one unified family, so too, today, despite the deep arguments within the Jewish people and the State of Israel, it is critical to preserve the deeply religious value of the unity of Am Yisrael – the Jewish people. The collective fate and comradery amongst the Jewish people as they stood at Mount Sinai “like one person with one heart” is the prerequisite for the inculcation of Torah values – our collective destiny, which together ensure the success of the Jewish mission.



PIRKEI AVOT

# How To Be Free — Part I



**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi  
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אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי... והלכות מעשה אלקים הם והמכתב מכתב אלקים הוא חרות על הלכות, אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות, שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה.  
וכל מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה הרי זה מתעלה, שנאמר (במדבר כא) וממתנה נחליאל ומנחליאל במות: (אבות ו:ב)  
רבי נחוניא בן הקנה אומר, כל המקבל עליו על תורה, מעביריו ממנו על מלכות ועל דרך ארץ.  
וכל הפורק ממנו על תורה, נוטנין עליו על מלכות ועל דרך ארץ: (אבות ג:ה)

## The Link of Freedom to Torah

Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi taught: “Ein lecha ben chorin ela mi she’osek b’talmud Torah — Only those involved in Torah learning are (truly) free.” Rabbi Yehoshua derived this idea from the Torah’s description of the writing on the *luchot* as “*charut*,” a word spelled the same way as “*cheirut*, free.”<sup>1</sup> What did Rabbi Yehoshua mean by that? In what way are those not involved in Torah learning not free?

Many commentaries connect Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement to an earlier one of Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah: “The *ol* (yoke) of *malchut* and of *derech erez* are removed from anyone who accepts the yoke of Torah.”<sup>2</sup> Man is put in this world to work<sup>3</sup> and chooses what kind of work to focus his energies upon. He can opt for backbreaking work in the fields, or “work” with his mouth by learning Torah instead.<sup>4</sup> If he chooses the latter, he is “freed” from the former.<sup>5</sup>

How does that happen? How does a person who accepts the yoke of Torah have other responsibilities removed from him?

Rashi and the Rambam<sup>6</sup> explain that other people do his work for him. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai<sup>7</sup> famously applied this idea to the second *parsha* of *Kriyat Shema*. He explained that that *parsha*’s reference to our working in the field<sup>8</sup> must refer to a time when the Jewish People are not fully committed to Hashem’s will. At a time when we are, though, our work is done for us by others.

How does this happen? Who does the work for those learning Torah and why?

## A Divine Directive

Rabbenu Yonah explains that our *mishnah* mandates the exemption of those fully immersed in Torah learning (*torato umanuto*) from both contributing to community tax collection as well as the responsibility to join the rotation of government-required work.<sup>9</sup> Other people are required to cover the *talmid chacham*’s share.

Rabbi Yochanan<sup>10</sup> understood this principle in an even broader way. He taught that in addition to covering the *talmid chacham*’s share of communal responsibilities, people are also responsible to do the *talmid chacham*’s personal work for him. All of us should express our appreciation of the importance of Torah by working to facilitate the Torah learning of those who choose to devote themselves to it.

## A Divine Promise

The Rambam<sup>11</sup> himself explains the *mishnah* differently. Instead of a Divine directive, the Rambam understood the *mishnah* as a Divine promise. Rabbi Nechunya (and Rabbi Yehoshua by association) teaches us that Hashem spares those committed to Torah from the challenges and burdens most people endure. The person devoted to Torah learning is freed from the yokes of *malchut* and *derech erez* by Hashem, not other people.

The *midrash*<sup>12</sup> quotes this idea in Hashem’s name in reference to *ol malchut*. Moshe asked Hashem how He expected people suffering persecution in exile to devote time to Torah learning. Moshe wondered how people could commit themselves to the yoke of Torah learning while suffering under the yoke of *shibud galuyot*. Hashem

replied, “*Kol ha’osek baTorah, nitzol mi’shibud galuyot* — Hashem saves those involved in Torah from the yoke of exile.”

The Gemara<sup>13</sup> summarizes this idea beautifully by asserting that it was the oil that Chizkiyahu used to light up the *Batei Medrash* and *Batei Knesset* that merited the removal of the *ol* of Sancheirev from the Jewish People.

The *Machzor Vitri* and *Bartenura* apply this idea to the yoke of *derech erez* as well. It is Hashem who ensures that those committed to Torah learning are unhindered by the need to (work too hard to) earn a living. The Gemara<sup>14</sup> quotes Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar who points out that Hashem takes care of animals without them having to work for a living. Hashem would take care of our needs as well (with minimum effort on our part) if we lived our lives correctly.

Before man ate from the *Eitz Hada’at*, he had what he needed without having to work “by the sweat of his brow.”<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Nechunya teach us that if we focus our lives on Torah learning, we are still (even after the original sin) able to tap into the prelapsarian ideal of survival without difficult work.

The *Chassidim Harishonim* were an excellent historical example of this principle. The *Chassidim Harishonim* spent nine hours a day davening. The Gemara wonders how their work got done and answers that Hashem ensured that their work was completed quickly and easily. How long our tasks take and how hard they are to complete hinges on whether we devote ourselves to something (else) that Hashem

Continued on page 13

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

# Two Wills: From Patriarchy to Monarchy



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

**T**his week's haftarah (Melachim I, 2:1-12) opens with the pasuk, "And David's days drew near to die..." echoing the second pasuk of the parsha: "And Yisrael's days drew near to die..." The navi of Sefer Melachim intentionally drew a parallel between David and Yaakov, two central characters, each one closing their respective eras: Yaakov ends the period of the forefathers, while David ends the period of the conquest and settlement of the land by their descendants. Each one heralds the beginning of a new era - Yaakov, one of oppression and building cities for Pharaoh, David - one of redemption and the building of the Beit HaMikdash for G-d.

Both the parsha and the haftarah contain the wills of the departing personalities, leaving directions for the next generation, a new era. Yaakov Avinu and David HaMelech, leaders of our nation, provide personal and national guidance relevant to future generations as well. Both direct their attentions to the son who will succeed them, imploring them to perform that which they themselves were unable to achieve. Yaakov makes his son Yosef swear to ensure Yaakov's burial in the family plot in Eretz Yisrael, while David has his son Shlomo swear that he will repay Yoav and Shim'i for their misdeeds towards him, and Barzilai for his goodness.

Yaakov and David also both recount episodes of their respective lives, including introspection: Yaakov tells Yosef, "And on my way from Padan Rachel died in the land of Canaan... and I buried her there on the way to Efrat..." (48:7). David recounts the deeds of Yo'av, Barzilai and Shim'i, all of whom he has not properly "repaid." Perhaps in both cases, the episodes recounted are not regrets, but reminders of life's seemingly inexplicable events.

Each of these two wills is also somewhat different from the other. Yaakov's last words to all his sons include his personal commandment to bury him in Mearat HaMachpela, and his specific directives to each one, based on their personalities, strengths and weaknesses. David's will contains specific directives only to Shlomo and in addition, an exhortation to keep Torah and mitzvot: "And you shall guard the Lord your G-d's charge, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies, as is written in the Torah of Moshe..." (2:3). David's will reminds us of the destiny and responsibility of Avraham Avinu, about whom Hashem said, "For I know him, that he will command his sons and his household after him and they shall keep the way of G-d, to perform righteousness and judgment" (Bereishit 18:19).

Yaakov and David address a broader audience, but they also intentionally appoint a suitable candidate as heir, who will provide stability and leadership for future generations. Though Yosef is the current political leader and economical provider in Mitzrayim, Yaakov appoints the fourth: "Yehuda, you will be praised by your brothers... your father's children will bow before you... The staff shall not depart from Yehuda, nor the scepter from between his feet" (49:8-10). In David's case the choice of heir is quite obvious, for in the previous chapter (which is read as the haftarah for Parashat Chayei-Sara) he stated to Natan and Batseva his wish to crown Shlomo over Israel and Yehuda during his own lifetime so that his Shlomo's position will be unquestionable. David's words thereby corroborate the prophetic blessing of Yaakov Avinu, securing and maintaining the rulership of the house of David so that "the staff shall not depart from Yehuda." David

explains to young Shlomo that he must continue to strengthen the kingship of Yehuda through proactive observance of mitzvot - "And you shall guard the charge of the Lord your G-d... in order that G-d will fulfill His word... 'If your children will guard their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul... there will not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.'" And he must be strict concerning parties (e.g. Yoav, Shim'i) who may present a threat to the throne, so that Yaakov's words "the staff shall not depart from Yehuda," would be fulfilled.

David's will is also the navi's "parshanut" on this week's parsha, underscoring the fulfillment of the prophetic messages of Yaakov Avinu. Although Yaakov bestowed kingship upon Yehuda, he blessed Yosef as the leader of his household, recognizing that Yosef had greater power at the time in Egypt. This, however, created disparity and intimidation amongst the brothers, especially after Yaakov's death. The haftarah, therefore, comes to clarify that it is David and his descendants who will be the leaders of Israel, as Yaakov had promised Yehuda. David and Shlomo will succeed in unifying and strengthening the nation of Israel.

Additionally, the haftarah continues and completes the journey of Yaakov Avinu: Parshat Vayechi tells us of Yaakov's final journey and burial in Chevron, and the haftarah reminds us that Chevron was David's first capital as king. David's journey continued from Chevron to his final resting place in Jerusalem: "And he was buried in the city of David." From the city of the forefathers to the city of David, the haftarah completes the "Toladot" of the Avot, with the final "Toladot" of *Melucha!*

# Halachic Q&A



## **Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council  
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

**Question: If a chatan is concerned that he will not be able to focus and have enough time to say viduy during mincha at the chatan's tisch, is it better for him to daven mincha alone or to say viduy at shacharit with a minyan?**

Answer: It is better for him to say it during shacharit with a minyan, because having kavanah is the more important factor.

**Question: Food was warmed up in a pot which we are not sure was toveled. Is the food kosher?**

Answer: Tosfot and the Rosh paskin based on the Yerushalmi (Avodah Zarah 15) that food that was placed or cooked in a vessel which was not toveled does not become prohibited. The Rema paskins this way lehalacha (OC 120:17). In this situation, the food should be transferred to a different vessel and eaten from that.

**Question: In what situations should we change the name of a sick individual?**

Answer: The Rema (YD 335) writes that there is a minhag to bless sick patients in the hospital with a new name, as changing a name can annul a decree against a person. The Gra connects this ruling to the Gemara in Rosh Hashana (16), which writes that changing names is one of four things that can annul a bad decree.

The poskim write that the name should not be changed completely, but rather, a name should be added to the choleh. This is based on the Arizal who writes that one

draws his livelihood through the letters of his name. Changing one's name completely can, chas v'shalom, disconnect him from this source. Therefore, one should only add. In the ceremony, generally the new name is said first, and then the entire name is said over again. The Chida adds that a woman should not change her name to Rachel, Batsheva, Leah, or Tamar, but rather should use Sarah, Chana, or Yocheved. For males, it is accepted to add Refael or Chaim.

This certainly should only be done under extreme circumstances and not for every sick individual. One should seek guidance before doing so.

**Question: Can a kohen go into Kever Rochel?**

Answer: There are two topics that need to be addressed:

1. Is a kohen allowed to become tamei (impure) for the sake of visiting kivrei tzadikim?
2. Does Kever Rochel impart tumah?

Midrash Mishlei, amongst other midrashim, indicate that kivrei tzadikim are unable to impart tumah. However, the Gemara in Bava Metziah 58 implies that kivrei tzadikim do impart tumah, as Rebbe built a structure for kohanim to insure they did not become tamei. Rabbeinu Chaim in Tosfot (Ketubot 103) understood that kohanim can become tamei for kivrei tzatzikim, and he himself did for Rabbeinu Tam. Similarly, the Ramban paskins that kivrei tzadikim do not impart tumah (Yevamot 61). Nevertheless, the

accepted psak is that kohanim cannot go to kivrei tzadikim. Rav Ovadya paskins this way in Shu"t Yechave Daat, and writes that this applies to Kever Rochel as well (based on Shu"t Zayit Ra'anah).

Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer writes that Rav Yitzchak Alfiya testified second hand that Kever Rochel was constructed in a way to not pose any issue for kohanim. The testimony includes that even the most righteous of kohanim used to enter without any concern. While the Tzitz Eliezer does not explicitly conclude whether we may rely on this, in a different teshuva he does imply that he allowed entry to kohanim based on this.

We should also consider another factor. The Ramban, along with many researchers, assume that Kever Rochel is actually not in Beit Lechem but rather somewhere in the Binyamin region.

However, even according to this opinion, there is utmost significance to prayers at Kever Rochel in Beit Lechem because myriads of Jews have davened there which gives the place a level of kedusha.

Between the Tzitz Eliezer and the safek of the location of Kever Rochel, it seems that kohanim who go into Kever Rochel have what to rely upon. Nevertheless, the more basic halachic ruling is that Kohanim should not enter.

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

# תקציר פרשת ויחי

הרבנית שרון רימון  
Tanach teacher and author



משנה למלך מצרים. היכולת להתמודד עם מצבים קשים ולהגיע דווקא מתוכם אל פסגות גבוהות יותר היא יכולת שחשובה מאד לעם ישראל כדי לשרוד בגלות, וכדי לצאת מן הגלות מחוזקים.

תכונה נוספת של יוסף, הבאה לידי ביטוי בהתמודדותו האישית עם הגלות הפרטית שלו במצרים, היא היכולת שלו להמשיך לשמור על זהותו. יוסף חי שנים רבות בין המצרים, אך לא איבד את זהותו. הוא לא הסתיר את מוצאו ולא התבייש בו, וכולם ידעו שהוא "עברי".

יוסף, אשר חווה מצבים קשים ויצא מהם, מכין את בני ישראל לקראת הגלות ומנבא להם שהם עתידים לצאת ממנה כשאלהים יפקוד אותם. יוסף, אשר ידע כל חייו להכיר בעזרת ה', הוא שמזכיר לבני ישראל שה' יגאל אותם ויושיעם מצרתם. יוסף, אשר ידע לשמור על זהותו העברית גם בהיותו בין המצרים, הוא הדמות העומדת לעיני בני ישראל בניסיונותיהם הקשים בגלות, כאשר הם שוקעים במ"ט שערי טומאה וכמעט נטמעים בין המצרים, אך בכל זאת ממשיכים לשמור על זהותם, ובזכות כך הם נגאלים.

הסיפור השני הוא סיפור קבורת יוסף. יוסף מבקש אמנם להקבר בארץ, אך הוא מבקש לא להקבר בה עכשיו, אלא עצמותיו נשארות עם ישראל במצרים, והצוואה לקבורת עצמותיו בארץ מהווה חלק מן התקווה לגאולה. כאשר בני ישראל ייגאלו, הם יקיימו את בקשתו של יוסף ויקחו את עצמותיו לקבורה בארץ.

יעקב, הנקבר בארץ ישראל, מהווה עוגן למשיכת עם ישראל חזרה אל ארץ אבותם. יוסף, שעצמותיו נשארות עם ישראל בגלות, מלווה את ישראל בהתמודדות עם הגלות.

שתי תכונות מרכזיות בדמותו של יוסף חשובות מאד לצורך ההתמודדות של עם ישראל עם הגלות, וכהכנת העם לקראת גאולה.

ראשית, ליוסף יש יכולת מיוחדת להתמודד עם מצבים קשים ולצאת מהם מחזק: הוא נמכר לעבד במצרים, ומיד מצליח לעלות לגדולה בבית פוטיפר; הוא מושלך לבית הסוהר, ומיד מצליח לתפוס שם מעמד חשוב; הוא יוצא מבית הסוהר והופך להיות

יומו של ספר בראשית הוא בירידה למצרים ובהשתקעות בה לקראת הגלות. יחד עם זאת, ספר בראשית מציג בסימומו את ההבטחה לגאולה, שמבשר יוסף לבני ישראל: "...וְאֵלֹהִים פָּקֵד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת..." (נכד). במהלך שנות הגלות, בשורת הגאולה של יוסף עברה מפה לאוזן, מאב לבן ונפחה תקווה בליבם של בני ישראל עד אשר בא משה והכריז באותה לשון: "ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם נִרְאָה אֵלַי... לֵאמֹר פָּקֵד פְּקֹדָתִי אֶתְכֶם..." (שמות ג, טז).

אם כן, ספר בראשית מסתיים עם התקווה לגאולה מן הגלות שעומדת להתחיל. התקווה לגאולה מתבטאת לא רק בהבטחתו של יוסף אלא גם בשני סיפורי הקבורה המופיעים בפרשת ויחי, כסיום לספר בראשית:

הסיפור הראשון הוא סיפור תהלוכת בני ישראל לארץ כנען, לקבורת יעקב אביהם. יעקב אמנם מת במצרים, אך הוא דואג לכך שבניו יקברו אותו בארץ, ובכך ירגישו את הקשר החזק שלהם אל הארץ, ארץ אבותם ומקום קבורת אבותם.



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# Why Can't We Know Everything In Advance?



**Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir**  
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

**D**r. Rakefet Ben-Yishai, a Bar Ilan University biologist, writes as follows:

“We are all familiar with difficult periods in life when we simply want to say: ‘I am going to sleep. Wake me up when it's all over.’ In times like these it would be so much easier to know that the end will be good, how everything will work itself out, and especially when...

The children of Israel are on the cusp of a long and difficult exile in Egypt. In this week's Torah portion, we read that Yaakov Avinu is ready to reveal to his sons before his death when the end of the exile will come, to explain when and how everything will end, but God prevents him from knowing. The question is why.

Long and difficult processes such as exile are meant to build ourselves up, to rise to new heights, for positive forces to grow within us and bring us to rectify something in ourselves and in the world. There is concern that if we know exactly when and how everything will end, we will live with passivity and complacency. We will simply feel that everything will somehow work itself out in the end, and will not do the practical and spiritual work which striving for redemption is all about.

People would want to know when they would marry, when they would merit to have children, or when their dreams would come true. Yaakov says to his sons that there will be an end, it will be good, but the details are hidden and obscure. There is no knowing when and how salvation will come, he tells his sons, so that the responsibility for bringing it rests on their shoulders. They are called upon to try harder, to clarify what they must

rectify, what they must prioritize and what kind of internal strengths they must develop, to understand how to act and what needs to be done in order to bring the redemption.

This is a heavy responsibility and often frustrating, but by shouldering it we change from passive people desperate for salvation to drop down on us from heaven to true partners in bringing good to ourselves and to the world. B'hatzlacha.”



Here's a thought from Rav Ariel Rackovsky, Rabbi of the Shaare Tefilla community in Dallas, Texas: “We talk a lot about elections these days, whether it's American or Israeli elections. It would seem that these events are more important and influential than anything else. Yet precisely at this moment, in synagogues throughout the world, we are reading the Torah portion of VaYechi, which concludes the book of Genesis, and we are beginning to read the book of Exodus which follows. These chapters describe the farewell of Yaakov Avinu from his sons and grandsons in great detail. This is followed by their continuing story – the story of a family of Jews in Egypt and their determination to preserve their identity by not changing their names, their language, or their habit of dress.

This little family – which grew into the nation of Israel – never commanded an imperial army, never ruled any country, and never even exerted control over any other group. Instead, our patriarchs and their kin suffered hunger and wandered throughout the ancient Middle East and yet, in the end, the example they set and the spiritual lives that they lived changed

the entire world. This is the message of the book of Genesis. It begins with the creation of the world, a story of universal impact, but develops, in the end, into a very personal family story - the farewell of Yaakov Avinu, on his death bed, from his sons. Each son receives an ethical message, highlighting character strengths and weaknesses. Our small acts have the power to change the world.”



וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר לְיוֹסֵף הִנֵּה אָבִיךָ  
חָלָה וַיְקַח אֶת שְׁנֵי בָנָיו עִמּוֹ אֶת מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת אֶפְרַיִם.

מה לומדים מהפסוק הזה? קודם כל, לא לפספס הזדמנויות. זה נשמע לכם פסוק טכני? אין דבר כזה פסוק טכני. מישוה בא ואומר ליוסף שאבא שלו חולה, והתורה מקדישה מקום וזמן כדי לספר שיוסף ממהר לקחת את שני בניו אליו כדי לשמוע את ברכתו. לכאורה זה פסוק פשוט, אבל בעצם הוא אומר לנו: צריך לשים לב ולהזדרז ו"לתפוס" רגעים כאלה. לא לפספס אותם בחיינו.

כאשר יוסף מגיע, כתוב שיעקב מתחזק ויושב על המיטה ונפרד מהם. יוסף הצליח. הוא לא הפסיד את ההזדמנות להיפרד, להתברך, לסגור מעגל, לחבר בין הדורות. כל אחד יכול לחשוב על רגע ההחמיץ או שלא החמיץ או שמהר כדאי לתפוס אותו כדי לא להחמיץ.

אז יוסף וילדיו מזדרזים, ומגיעים, ושומעים שני פסוקים מכוננים:

וַיְבָרְכֵם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, לְאָמֹר, בָּךְ יִבְרַךְ? שְׂרָאֵל לְאָמֹר,  
יִשְׁמַךְ אֱלֹקִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה.

רש"י: "הבא לברך את בניו יברכם בברכתם ויאמר איש לבנו: 'ישימך אלוקים כאפרים וכמנשה'."

הברכה היא – שיברכו אנשים להיות כמוהם. יש פרשנויות רבות מה זה "כאפרים וכמנשה". למה לא להגיד "כיוסף וכיהודה"? "כאשר וכזבולון"? למה לרדת אל דור הנכדים ולא לדבר על השבטים עצמם? פרשנים רבים כותבים שהשבטים גדלו בבית של יעקב אבינו, אבל רוב העם היהודי יגדלו

*Continued on next page*



# For the Shabbat Table



**Rabbi Danny Mirvis**  
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi  
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, and the days of Ya'akov, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty seven years” (Bereishit 47:28).

The opening verse of this week's Parsha introduces us to its main theme – the death of Ya'akov Avinu. Our commentators quote the Midrash which asks why Ya'akov only lived to the age of 147, as opposed to his father Yitzchak, who lived to the age of 180. The Midrash explains this 33 year difference in light of end of last week's Parsha, where Yoseph introduces Yitzchak to Pharaoh:

“And Pharaoh said to Ya'akov, ‘How many are the days of the years of your life?’ And Ya'akov said to Pharaoh, ‘The days of the years of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years, few and bad have been the days of the years of my life and they have not reached the days of the years of my fathers in the days of their sojourns’” (Bereishit 47:8-9).

“Why did Ya'akov live 33 years less than his father? The Holy One Blessed Be He

said to him, ‘I saved you from Lavan and from Esav and from Shechem, I returned Dina and Yoseph to you, and you said that your life has been short and bitter! By your life, I will take from them according to the number of words you said...’” (This quote does not appear in full in our editions of the Midrash, but can be found in manuscripts).

According to the Midrash, Ya'akov lived 33 years less than his father because of the 33 words of his bitter and ungrateful conversation with Pharaoh. However, there is a serious difficulty with this Midrash, for if we count in the verses, only 25 words relate to Ya'akov! The first eight words of the 33 are Pharaoh asking Ya'akov how old he is. Why are Pharaoh's words included in Ya'akov's punishment?

To answer this question, we need to understand why Pharaoh asked Ya'akov how old he is in the first place. Indeed, is it the normal way for world leaders to greet each other by asking how old they are? Ramban (Bereishit 47:9) explains that Pharaoh had never seen anybody in his whole kingdom looking as old as Ya'akov

did, prompting him to inquire about his age. Ya'akov therefore responded that his elderly appearance was a result of all his suffering.

Reb Chaim Shmeulevitz zt”l therefore explained that Ya'akov is blamed for Pharaoh's words for it was his broken and suffering appearance that prompted the question. Had he dealt with his suffering differently, he would not have aged so quickly.

In Hebrew, the word “Oneg” (pleasure) and the opposite word “Nega” (infliction) are comprised of the same three letters – “ayin”, “nun” and “gimmel”. The only difference between the words is where we place the letter “ayin”, also meaning “eye”. Often in life, the difference between pleasure and suffering is where we place the “ayin” – how we choose to look at things (Chiddushei HaRim).

Hashem provides us with the ingredients. How we choose to view them is up to us.

Shabbat Shalom!

*Continued from previous page*

אחד ואחת מאיתנו שנדגה לרוב בקרב הארץ, כלומר שיראו עלינו שאנחנו דג ביבשה, שאנחנו מחוברים למקור מים חיים.

אז יקב מברך את נכדיו. זה לא דבר טריוויאלי, לראות שלושה דורות רצופים, לראות קשר. חז”ל מלמדים אותנו כך, על קשר בין שלושה דורות סביב תורה:

כל המלמד את בן בנו תורה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיבלה מהר סיני.

כל השומע פרשה מבן בנו כאילו הוא שומעה מהר סיני. כלומר יש חשיבות ליכולת להטמיע מסר לאורך השרשרת המשפחתית. לכן חשובה הברכה לנכדים, הפרידה מהנכדים.

ראשון, מי בראש. הלוואי שנשמור על יחסים כאלה בין אחים.

הפסוק המכונן השני שנאמר כאן:

הַמְלֵאף הַגֹּאֵל אֶתִי מִכָּל רַע יִבְרַךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים וְיִקְרָא בָּהֶם שְׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי אֲבָרְהֶם וְיִצְחָק וְיִדְגוּ לְרֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ.

למה אנחנו אומרים את הפסוק הזה, ואומרים לילדים להגיד אותו? ראיתי בספר של הרב אביחי קצין רעיון נפלא שהוא מצטט מה”שפת אמת”: וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ – הרי דגים אין מקומם בארץ. דגים מקומם בים. למרות שהם בקרב הארץ – אף על פי כן מחוברים לים. האדם צריך להיות דג ביבשה עם חיות פנימית ורוחנית גם בגשמיות. ממש ברכה לכל

בגלות, במצרים, בתימן, ברוסיה, בסוריה – ולכן אפרים ומנשה צריכים להיות המודל. הם נשארים עם עצמאות רוחנית יהודית גם בתרבות זרה ומפתה, ולכן דור אחרי דור נברך את ילדינו שיצליחו כמוהם במאבק הזה.

אבל יש פה עוד כיוון – אנחנו מברכים את ילדינו שיהיו “כאפרים וכמנשה”, כלומר – שהם לא יריבו על הבכורה. הרי בכל המקרים הקודמים, החל מקין והבל, דרך יצחק וישמעאל, יעקב ועשו, יוסף ואחיו – היה קרב סביב הבכורה. גם כאן יעקב משכל את ידיו, ואומר שהבכורה אינה ביולוגית אלא רוחנית, כלומר לא הבכור מוכרז כבכור, ולמרות זאת – מנשה לא מערער את הברכה של אפרים. אין מריבה. זוהי הברכה לכולנו. לא לריב על כבוד, גאווה, אגו, מי

# To Wait Without Despair



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

**J**acob was on his deathbed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died. But the text begins with a strange semi-repetition:

Gather together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in the days to come.

Assemble and listen, Jacob’s sons. 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,<sup>1</sup> 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



**We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We *make* the future by our choices.**

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 *asson* 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!”<sup>2</sup>

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, “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, G-d of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.” (II Kings 20:1-5; Is. 38:1-5)

The prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah he would not recover, but he did. He lived for another fifteen years. G-d 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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 five thousand 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



**We do not predict the future,  
because we make the future –  
by our choices, our willpower,  
our persistence, and our  
determination to survive.**

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 G-d is free, and He made us in His image. That is what is meant by the three words G-d told Moses at the Burning Bush when he asked G-d for His name. G-d 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 G-d of freedom. I cannot be predicted. Note that G-d 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 G-d, we are free. Sustained by the blessings of G-d, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

**AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:**

- Would you like to know the future? Why?
- How does not knowing the future allow us to be free?
- What do you think your future will hold, and how can you try to make it happen?

1. Rashi to Gen. 49:1; Pesachim 56a; Bereishit Rabbah 99:5.
2. Quoted in slightly varying forms, as “We have to believe in free will. We've got no choice” attributed to L. Tiger, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979).
3. Brachot 10a.



# Individuality



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

**T**he פר העלם דבר של ציבור is a special korban brought on behalf of Klal Yisrael as a whole when the majority of the nation violate a serious law based on a mistaken ruling of the Beis Din HaGadol. The Mishnah in Horayos (1:5) records that each of the twelve shevatim had its own Sanhedrin, and there is a dispute among the Tana'im regarding whether the institution of the פר העלם דבר של ציבור applies to a mistaken ruling of a particular shevet's Sanhedrin or only to the Sanhedrin of all of Klal Yisrael that was seated in Yerushalayim. We see from here that there is a legally-binding concept of distinct shevatim, such that the members of each shevet are bound to follow the rulings of that particular shevet's Sanhedrin. This is why Ya'akov, before his death, blessed each shevet individually, "He blessed each according to his appropriate blessing" (Bereishis 49:28).

Every shevet represents a different approach to serving Hashem, and all the different approaches are acceptable. The Ba'al HaTanya expands on a comment of the Zohar on the passuk describing Yitzchak's request of Eisav prior to blessing him, "And make me delicacies such as I love" (Bereishis 27:4). Just as Yitzchak enjoyed a meal full of variety, so too does Hashem appreciate a variety in our service of Him.

Eretz Yisrael is endowed with its complete measure of kedushah only when "all its inhabitants are upon [the land]" (Arachin 32b). In order for the dinim of yovel, and presumably the dinim of shemittah, to apply, the majority of the world Jewish population must be living in Eretz Yisrael and there must be representatives of each of the shevatim living in their assigned territories.

The Ari z"l describes that in the days of Mashiach there will be twelve different

gates through which to enter Yerushalayim, there are similarly twelve gates of tefillah in shamayim. These correspond to twelve different nuschaos of tefillah, each of which is compatible with the neshamos of the people of each shevet. The Ari z"l continues that there will be a thirteenth gate of Yerushalayim, "Sha'ar HaKollel," for those who do not recognize their particular shevet, and that there is a corresponding thirteenth all-inclusive nusach (Nusach HaKollel), the Nusach Ari, which anyone may use. As entering Yerushalayim represents coming closer to Hashem, the different gates represent different paths of avodas Hashem, each one equally valid.

There are supposed to be different approaches to the service of Hashem, and Hashem appreciates this variety. We bring this imagery to life when we dance around the bimah each year during the hakafos on Simchas Torah. The Gemara in Berachos (58a) tells us that within any group of people, "their minds are not similar to each other just as their faces are not similar to each other." Each individual has a different way of thinking. Therefore, each person may perform the same mitzvah with a different twist and style. We are supposed to introduce personal intentions into each mitzvah. Indeed, the most lengthy passage in the Midrash Rabbah is found in Parshas Nasso, describing the different intentions of each Nasi, even though each one brought the identical set of korbanos for the inauguration of the Mishkan. While we are all obligated to perform the same mitzvos, Hashem wants each person to be unique when he fulfills those mitzvos.

The Gemara in Megillah (27b) tells us that the disciples inquired about the practices of different Tanna'im, asking, "On account of which [meritorious practice] have you attained longevity?" Each

of the chachamim responded by citing a variety of different righteous practices that he personally observed. A similar Gemara in Shabbos (118b) records a series of statements from various Amora'im who were exceedingly punctilious regarding a particular mitzvah or issur. Each sage exclaimed, "May a reward come to me because I observed such and such mitzvah properly." The Sefer Chareidim (perek 61) comments that this Gemara teaches us that aside from the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos that we each must perform to the extent that we are able, everyone should feel as if he has his own special mission in life. Every person should identify a particular mitzvah and try to observe it in a most complete manner, with absolute regularity, and with his full strength.

Rav Soloveitchik quoted the explanation of Rav Kook regarding the tefillah that we add toward the very end of the Shemoneh Esrei on Yom Kippur:

"My G-d, before I was formed I was unworthy, and now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed" (Berachos 17a). Rav Kook interpreted the tefillah as follows: "Before I was born, there was no reason at all for me to have been created," because there was nothing in the world that needed me. One's unique contribution is only relevant to the particular time and place into which he is born. "Now that I have been created," obviously, the time has come that I am needed in order to complete some aspect of the "wholeness of existence." In this particular set of circumstances, I should have been able to actualize my unique destiny. Yet, I bemoan the fact that I have fallen short of fulfilling my purpose of creation; "it is as if I had not been formed at all."

● *Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.*

# People Need People



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

**T**he end of this week's Parsha describes the death of Yosef. The Gemara in Sotah 13b asks why Yosef died before all of his brothers and answers מפני שהנהיג עצמו ברבנות – because he conducted himself with superiority. He acted like a king. Like the person in charge. But that begs a question. Yosef was the person in charge. There was only one man in the whole of Egypt who had more superiority than he did. What exactly did Yosef do wrong?

The Maharal in the Chiddushei Agaddot on Sotah says something incredible. He says that Yosef dying before his brothers was not because of a punishment. Yosef was supposed to live for 110 years. Rather, the world of עולם הזה is supposed to be one of human interaction. When human beings attach themselves to other human beings, they have a continuity and a lease of life. When a human being separates himself from others, he becomes a hermit. This in of itself is cause for a person to have a shorter life span, with the removal of this lease of life. The Maharal explained the reason for this in the introduction to

Continued from page 4

wants to help us find the time and head-space for.

## The Chicken and The Egg

People often feel like they do not have the time to commit to Torah learning because they are saddled with work and other burdens. The *mishnah* teaches us that, in truth, the linkage goes the other way. We are saddled with burdens because we do not commit ourselves to Torah learning.

May we devote ourselves properly to what matters most so we do not have to spend our time on what matters less.

We have seen how many associate the freedom mentioned by Rabbi Yehoshua

Netivot Olam. Hashem created the world for human beings to interact with other human beings. Every attribute of this world, every physical fact of this world, requires other people.

The Maharal gives an example. Nobody could provide everything they need solely on their own. You can't be the farmer who plants, the miller who mills, the baker who bakes, and at the same time raise the sheep, shear their wool, clean the wool, dye the wool, and make clothing. One person can't do everything. People need people. Olam Hazei was created for human beings to interact with each other.

The Maharal also compares it to a drop of water. If the water is in the river, then it is going to be powerful, it is going to be strong and it is going to endure forever. If a drop of water sits by itself on a table, it is going to evaporate and disappear forever. The same thing is true of a person. Human beings are created to interact in a positive way with other people. When a person has to act in a position of authority and superiority, he has no choice but to separate himself in many ways from other

people. By virtue of being a king, Yosef had to be aloof from the people around him which resulted in his human interaction suffering. Missing that lease of life that one gains from human interaction, Yosef passed away before his brothers.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia 105a says that the *mazal* of something owned by multiple people is better. If you are buying a lottery ticket, you might win if you have good *mazal*. Why would buying the ticket in partnership with someone else make your *mazal* better? Simply, when there are numerous people involved, the better it is. Human interaction makes a significant difference to our lives.

Interaction with other people is often seen as a burden. Getting involved in other people's needs is hard. Interacting with someone to show them you care is difficult. But human interaction is healthy and positive and we should endeavour to interact with those around us in a positive light wherever the opportunity presents itself.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

ben Levi in the sixth *perek* with the removal of the yokes mentioned in the third *perek*. Next week, we will see a second (more intrinsic) understanding of the freedom Rabbi Yehoshua describes.

1. Rabbeinu Shem Tov explains that the inference is from the Torah's usage of this word instead of the more common "chakuk." See Yirmiyahu 27:20 and Kohelet 10:17 which use the root "ch-r-n" to refer to freedom.
2. Ruach Chaim Avot 6:2, Rambam Avot 3:5.
3. This is already evident from the beginning of the Torah, when rain did not fall until Adam was created because "Adam ayin laavod es ha'adamah."
4. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Sanhedrin 99b.

5. Bereishit Rabbah 13:7, Eliyahu Rabbah 13:7.
6. Rashi, Rambam to Avot 6:2.
7. Masechet Berachot 35b.
8. Sefer Devarim 11:14.
9. See Rabbeinu Yonah (Avot 6:2), who quotes Sefer Ezra (7:24) and Talmud Bavli, Masechet Bava Batra (8a) as additional sources for this idea. See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Berachot 35b and Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:10.
10. Masechet Shabbat 114a and Masechet Yoma 72b.
11. Rambam, Avot 6:2. See also Tiferet Yisrael.
12. Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat V'zot Habrachah 5.
13. Masechet Sanhedrin 94b, quoting Yeshayahu 10:27.
14. Masechet Kiddushin 82b.
15. Sefer Bereishit 3:19. See also Rashi there.

# The Biblical Precedent for Family Disagreements



**Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE**

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

Grandparents should keep sh'tum, they should not mix. But might there be a situation in which a rare exception to such conventional wisdom could be made? We find one in Parshat Vayechi.

Yaakov, who was blind at the time, was just about to die. Prior to his death, he summoned his two grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, in order to bless them – and through them, to bless all subsequent Jewish generations.

Yosef lined up the two boys in front of him. Menashe at Yaakov's right hand and Ephraim at his left.

But then Yaakov crossed his hands over and Yosef panicked. He shouted out, "Lo Chein Avi" – "Not so father!" Yosef dreaded a scenario in which the lessons of the previous generations would not be learned. He knew what had happened when Yaakov had bought the birthright from his twin

brother Eisav. He knew what had happened when he was favoured by Yaakov over his older brothers. And now Yaakov, the grandparent, was creating a situation in which, yet again, the younger child was going to be favoured over the older child.

Yet Yaakov would not listen to Yosef. He said to him, "Yadaati Vni Yadaati – My son I know exactly what I am doing." And he proceeded to bless the boys in that way. How could Yaakov have done this?

I believe Yaakov wanted us to recall for all time, the reaction of Menashe to his younger brother being favoured over him.

What did Menashe say? Absolutely nothing. He did not cry out. He did not complain and that's the whole point.

Yaakov predicted this because he had been studying with these children. He had seen them in their home in Egypt. He was impressed to see that in the home of Yosef

and Osnat, the position of the 'Bechorah' – the birthright was immaterial. The important thing was that everyone in the family should get on well together.

So Yaakov created this scenario to show that the boys would be blessed as the best of friends. And it was in this spirit that Yaakov continued, that for all subsequent generations, we should bless our children to be just like Ephraim and Menashe.

Within a healthy family environment, every child is unique and every child is special. And yes, of course, one might be born before another but every child should know that their parents love them as much as they love the other children.

In the spirit of this lesson imparted to us by Yaakov Avinu, may we all be blessed to have homes that are filled with peace and togetherness – homes in which our children are just like Ephraim and Menashe.



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# Bring It Home



**Rabbi Shalom Rosner**  
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

יששכר חמור גרם רבץ בין המשפטים (בראשית מט:יד)

Yissachar is a bony donkey, lying between the boundaries. (Bereshis 48:14).

**W**hat positive characteristic is the Torah emphasizing by referring to Yissachar as a donkey? The Gemara in Avoda Zara (5a) states that a man should approach Torah like an ox and a donkey. (*l'olam yasim adam atzmo al divre torah k'shor la'ol u'kchamor l'masa*). What is the difference between an ox and a donkey and why does the Gemara state that we need to act like both an ox and a donkey in the way we approach the study of Torah?

The Chafetz Chaim explains the nuance between an ox and a donkey with respect to Torah. An ox is a strong animal and is used to **prepare** the field for planting. The donkey is used to carry the produce from the field **after** it is ripe. With respect to work in a field, the ox is pre and the donkey is post. Similarly, with respect to Torah, we have to properly prepare, toil and work hard at mastering the material (like the ox). We have to buy *sefarim*, find a *chavruta* and set aside time to learn. But that is not enough. After we learn, we have to place what we learned in our heart and carry it with us (like a donkey) so we can continuously practice and implement what we learned. It is not enough for a person to go through *shas*, but the *shas* has to go through the person. The learning can't stay in the *sefer*. It has to be a *torat chaim*, where the Torah comes alive within me.



**After we learn or experience a spiritual high, we must internalize and carry that moment with us— otherwise we will not reap the fruits if our labor.**

On Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol immerses in a *mikva* five times and washes his hands and feet ten times. The last time he washes is after he places on his own clothes. Why does he have to wash his hands and feet again? He completed his *avoda* and is going home. Why is the Kohen Gadol undergoing an additional *tahara* process on his way out? Rav Schwab suggests that the message is clear. The Kohen Gadol just performed a holy ritual and is on a spiritual high. He cannot feel as if he is done and can get on with his life as he did yesterday. He can't leave it in the *Mikdash*. He has to purify himself on the way out so he can take it home with him! This is the *Chamor* (donkey) aspect with respect to internalizing a spiritual experience.

Similarly, when Yaakov awakes from his dream in Parshat Vayetzei, and recognizes his location he states: “*ein ze ki im*

*beit elokim, v'ze sha'ar ashamayim*”. Yaakov refers to the Makom HaMikdash as both a *bayit* (house) and a *sha'ar* (gate). How could one location be both a house and a gate? A *bayit* is an ultimate destination, an ends. We embark on a journey and we arrive at our destination – a house. A *sha'ar*, on the other hand, is not a place we go **to**, but something we go **through**. A gate is a means, not an ends.

The *Beit HaMikdash* was both, a House and a Gate. It was a *bayit* in that it was a place we went to in order to worship Hashem. But it was also a gate — we took the inspiration we experienced in the Mikdash back home with us.

As an ox prepares a field, we need to prepare ourselves for the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot. As a donkey, after we learn or experience a spiritual high, we must internalize and carry that moment with us – otherwise we will not reap the fruits if our labor. Yissachar is depicted not only as a talmid chacham, who was engaged in learning, but one who *brought it home* and implemented what he learned.

# Parshas Vayechi: When the End Will Come



**Michal Horowitz**  
Judaic Studies Teacher

**W**ith this week's parsha, Parshas Vayechi, the curtain once again closes on the Book of Bereishis. As many times as we have journeyed and learned through the Book of Bereishis, it is always most impactful, enriching, and rewarding to do so once again. And every year, as we close the book, there is a sense of longing as we leave our Avos, Imahos and their families once again.

With so many lessons learned as we have gone through Bereishis together, Parshas Vayechi affords us one more opportunity to do so now.

At the age of one hundred and forty-seven, Yaakov Avinu is facing the end of his life. Before he departs from this world, he blesses each of his sons, the shevatim (the twelve tribes), individually (Bereishis 49). "Gather around, and listen, the sons of Yaakov, and listen to Yisrael your father" (49:2).

R' Yitzchok Zilberstein writes, "Yaakov Avinu had a special message for each one of his sons. Nevertheless, he made a point of gathering them all together and giving each his blessing in the presence of the other brothers - to teach that, although every Jew has his own mission in life designed just for him, he must never blind himself to the fact that he is part of a whole.

"Royalty was granted to Yehuda, kehuna to Levi, Torah to Yissachar, and so on. Every individual has his personal mission to carry out in his lifetime. But the individual must always remember the part he plays in partnership with the whole. This principle can be learned also from the way the Israelites' flags were arranged

in the desert: Each tribe had its own flag, but they were all united in their camps surrounding the Mishkan.

"R' Mordechai Shulman, Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka, learned this principle from our Avos.

"Before Avraham discovered the Creator, his growth came through his own efforts; afterward, he received a gift of even greater growth from on High. Yitzchak received his father's inheritance, but it is clear that he did not receive his (primary middah of) 'pachad Yitzchak' from the chessed of Avraham. He grew and flourished as a result of his own independent efforts. Although he was Avraham's disciple, Yitzchak constructed his own path in serving Hashem. Everything that he received from his father was reworked with his own tools, so to speak, until he achieved results that were personal, original and unique.

"Yaakov Avinu, disciple of Avraham and Yitzchak, likewise did not merit (his primary middah of) 'emes l'Yaakov' until after many years of toil, learning in Shem's yeshiva, to reach his own zenith using his own tools and in his own way.

"This is the meaning (of what we say daily in the Shmoneh Esrei, when we bless Hashem Who is The) 'Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v'Elokei Yaakov - G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak and G-d of Yaakov.' The Rashba explains that each of our forefathers attained his level by taking an individually carved path toward Hashem.

"As the pasuk says: "He counts the number of stars; to all of them He assigns a name" (Tehillim 147:4). Each star has its own mission. On the other hand, the world

needs them all. Not a single star may be dispensed with. Because the Children of Israel are compared to the stars (Bereishis 15:5), we have here an excellent paradigm for our own work in Hashem's world.

"One may add that this also exemplifies the harmony at work in the Jewish home, in which each member has his or her own unique role to play. While each has a specific, individual job to do within the family, husband and wife (and children!) must nevertheless work together in their joint service of Hashem, thereby creating peace in the home" (Aleinu L'Shabei'ach, Bereishis, p.584-585).

This was the final lesson of Yaakov Avinu, as he blessed each of his sons in front of the others. Every person must know that he is absolutely unique, and has a tafkid that only he can fulfill. And simultaneously, he must know he is part of a the greater whole, the klal, and his individual tafkid can only be fulfilled in the context of the klal.

When Yaakov gathered his children around his deathbed in order to bless them, he initially had a different, primary motive. The pasuk (49:1) says, "Gather around and I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of days." Rashi (ibid) comments: "He wanted to reveal the end (when Moshiach would come), but the Shechina departed from him and he began to say other things."

Perhaps in the Birkas Yaakov, our forefather Yaakov IS teaching us the secret to the ׀, the end of our exile, which cannot come soon enough... When we each embrace our unique roles, characteristics, strengths and abilities, while we fuse together with each and every other

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# Beracha, Bechira, or Bechora?



**Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

“**W**hen I was returning from Padan, Rachel died suddenly during that journey, while we were still some distance from Efrata [and thus even farther away from Chevron!], and therefore I buried her on the road...”

Yaakov explains to Yosef that Rachel's burial on the roadside (rather than in “Ma'arat Ha'Machpela”) was due to unforeseen circumstances, and thus should not be interpreted as an indication of a lower status. On the contrary, despite Rachel's somewhat disrespectful burial, Yaakov still considers her as having been his ‘primary’ wife.

Therefore, even though Reuven is the first-born of Leah, Yosef is awarded the **family** “bechora,” since he is the firstborn to Yaakov's primary wife, the “ishah” whom he had originally intended to marry.

After awarding Yosef with the “bechora,” Yaakov continues with a special blessing to Efraim and Menashe. Considering their new status as bona fide “shvatim,” and recognizing the fact that they had grown up with no contact with their uncles and cousins, Yaakov adds a special blessing to help facilitate their incorporation into the ‘chosen family’: “Ha'malach ha'goel oti [who saved Yaakov] mikol ra [from all evil], y'varech et ha'n'arim [He should bless these children to help them ‘blend in’ with the chosen family, in order that:] v'yi'karey va'hem shmi v'shem avotai Avraham v'Yitzchak...”

In other words, in order that Yosef's two sons will be identified with Yaakov's family name – i.e. the name of the forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak – Yaakov blesses them with special Divine providence, the same providence that helped Yaakov survive his confrontation with Esav and Lavan.

Yaakov concludes his blessing to Yosef by reminding him that a time will come when the ‘chosen family’ will return home: “And Yisrael said to Yosef: I am about to die, but God will be with you and return you to the land of your fathers...”

In light of Yosef's appointment as family “bechor,” he must assume the responsibility to inform the future generations of this Divine promise. Yaakov is not sure how long it will be until God will lead them back to Eretz Canaan. Nevertheless, his children must transmit this tradition to **their** children, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared to meet their destiny.

It is precisely this message that Yosef repeats to his brothers and family on his deathbed, at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit: “And Yosef told his brothers, behold I am about to die, v'Elokim pakod yifkod etchem [God will surely remember you] and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised by oath to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.”

Now that the family “bechora” has been awarded to Yosef, Yaakov summons all his sons together in order to give each his personal blessing. Although each son receives what the Torah describes as a “bracha”, not all these “brachot” appear to be what one would call a ‘blessing.’

Reuven is told: “You are unstable as water, you shall no longer excel...”

Shimon and Levi are rebuked: “Let not my person be included in their council ... For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen. Cursed be their anger...”

On the other hand, Yehuda and Yosef are emphatically blessed with both prosperity and leadership. Other brothers also receive blessings, albeit less promising

than those of Yosef and Yehuda, but blessings nonetheless, as opposed to the sharp criticism hurled upon Shimon and Levi.

What is the meaning of these “brachot?” Do the individual traits of the brothers predetermine the fate of their offspring? Do Yaakov's blessings reflect the principle of determinism and negate the concept of “bechira chofshit” (free will)?

When Yaakov blesses his children, he assumes more the role of father rather than prophet. As a parent and the last forefather of God's special Nation, he must blend the goals of his family destiny with the realities of his life experience. His blessings, therefore, reflect the potential he sees within each of his children.

In order to fulfill a goal, a person must recognize his potential, both his good qualities and shortcomings. Recognizing his children's varying strengths and weaknesses, Yaakov blesses them according to their individual capabilities and talents. Although this blessing does not necessarily guarantee the final outcome, it guides and directs each son in the proper direction.

Yaakov does not intend his harsh castigation of Reuven, Shimon and Levi to result in ultimate condemnation. Rather, he hopes that they will recognize their weakness of character and work towards its improvement. As clearly demonstrated in Levi's case, this sharp rebuke can later turn into blessing, should that shevet return to the proper path.

Similarly, Yehuda and Yosef possess a potential for leadership that should be recognized by their offspring and properly developed and implemented. However, even the kings of the House of David must be constantly conscious of their conduct,

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# Precision



**Rabbi Eli Mansour**

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In Parashat Vayehi, we read about the passing of Yaakov Abinu and the large funeral that was held for him in Eretz Yisrael. A very large group of Egyptian officials joined Yaakov's sons in bringing his remains to the Machpela Cave for burial. Before the burial, the procession stopped in a place called Goren Ha'atad, where a seven-day mourning period was held (50:10). The Torah then tells us that the Canaanites in the area saw the large gathering, and inquired about what was happening (50:11).

The Midrash adds that when the Canaanites heard that the large group was mourning the death of Yaakov, a righteous man, they paid their respects. According to one view, they undid the buckles on their belts around their robes. Another view says that they opened their buttons. A third view claims that they did nothing more than just point at the coffin and observe that this was Yaakov. The Midrash, remarkably, teaches that these Canaanites were very sinful and worthy of being annihilated, but they were spared because of the respect they showed to Yaakov. Although they simply made a very slight gesture, this slight gesture was deemed so significant that it provided merit through which they were spared destruction.

The Midrash's comments bring to mind the famous story about the wife of the Vilna Gaon, who had a friend with whom

she would collect money for the poor. These two righteous women agreed that whichever one of them died first would come to the other in a dream to tell her what the next world is like. The Vilna Gaon's wife passed away first, and she indeed appeared to her friend in a dream, as she had promised.

"I cannot tell you what the next world is like," she said, "but there is one thing I can tell you. You might remember one bitterly cold night when we were going around collecting charity, and we were looking for a certain house. When you saw the house, you pointed to it to show it to me. You cannot begin to imagine what an effect that pointing had in the heavens, and how much you are going to be rewarded just for pointing!"

Even the slightest Misva act is immensely valuable. Even something as simple as pointing with one's finger, if done for a Misva, yields unimaginable rewards.

This is why we must be so careful and precise with our Misva performance. Since each minuscule Misva act is precious, it must be done properly, with care and precision.

This concept is elaborated upon in the first chapter of Mesilat Yesharim, which explains that the more precious something is, the more precision it demands. When vegetables are weighed in a grocery

store, the measurement does not have to be precise to the tiniest fraction. But when a goldsmith is weighing gold for a piece of jewelry, the amount has to be precise. When two friends agree to meet for lunch at 1 pm, neither of them would be terribly upset if the other arrives at 1:05. But in an Olympic race, a fraction of a millisecond can make the difference between lifelong glory and heart-wrenching disappointment. If a person's desk is a couple of inches larger or smaller than what he wanted, he could probably manage. But in brain surgery, a fraction of an inch is the difference, literally, between life and death.

I occasionally hear people who ask why Halacha is so exact, why it is that Halachic observance demands close, careful attention to the minuscule details. Nobody asks why umpires in a baseball game insist that the runner who beats the throw by a fraction of a second is safe. Nobody asks their accountant why he is so precise in calculating their tax refund. But people ask this question about Misvot – because they do not properly appreciate the inestimable value of Misvot. The Mesilat Yesharim teaches us that the world to come is infinitely more precious than anything in this world – and so naturally, the Misvot must be performed with delicate precision, and with attention to the finest details. This is what we need to do in order to earn the great rewards that await us.

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Jew to form the great Klal of Yisrael – perhaps THEN we will merit that the end will come.

Let us all strive to internalize and embrace our individual mission, while working for the betterment of our people as a whole.

For only with these combined strengths – yachid and klal – will we survive galus until the  $\text{יָרֵד}$  finally does arrive. As Yosef, on his own deathbed, assured his brothers, and their children after them:

"And Yosef said to his brothers, I am going to die, and G-d will surely remember you, and take you up from this land, to the land that He swore to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov" (50:24). May we merit the  $\text{יָרֵד}$ , the final end to our exile, immediately and in our days.

# My Heart is in the East



**Rabbi Moshe Weinberger**

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**T**he parsha begins (Bereishis 47:28), “And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years and the days of Yaakov, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years.” Unlike every other parsha where there is a space in the Torah before the beginning of the parsha, parshas Vayechi is “closed.” In other words, the last word of the previous parsha and the first word of parshas Vayechi are adjacent to one another without any space between them. Rashi says, “Why is this parsha closed? Because when Yaakov Avinu died, the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people were closed because of the pain of the enslavement which they began to impose upon them.”

Many commentaries ask the following question about Rashi’s explanation: We know that the enslavement of the Jewish people did not begin until some time after Yaakov’s death. According to Rashi’s explanation, parshas Shmos should have been the closed parsha because the enslavement of the Jewish people did not begin until the beginning of parshas Shmos!

We have an additional question as well. Just before Yaakov’s death, he asked Yosef (ibid. at 29) to swear to him, “Do not bury me in Egypt.” When Yosef agreed, the pasuk said (ibid. at 31), “And Yisroel prostrated himself at the head of the bed.” Once he was assured that he would be buried in Eretz Yisroel, he bowed down. He was then ready to die. We see that Yaakov valued burial in Eretz Yisroel so much that he was not ready to die until he knew that he would be buried there. With this in mind, let us study a somewhat perplexing Midrash (Bereishis Raba 47:5):

It once happened that Rebbi [Yehuda Hanasi] and Rabbi Eliezer were walking by the gates outside Tiveria. They saw the coffin of a deceased person who was coming from outside Eretz Yisroel

to be buried in Eretz Yisroel. Rebbi said to Rabbi Eliezer, “What does this accomplish? Since his soul departed outside of Eretz Yisroel and is coming to be buried in Eretz Yisroel, I say about him (Yirmiya 2:7), ‘you have made my heritage an abomination’ in your lifetimes, ‘and you came and contaminated My land’ in your death.” He [Rabbi Eliezer] said to him [Rebbi], “Because he is buried in Eretz Yisroel, Hashem atones for him, as it is written (Devarim 32:43), ‘And his land atones for him.’”

This Midrash is difficult to understand. Why does Rabbi Eliezer prove from an oblique pasuk in Devarim that it is worthwhile to be buried in Eretz Yisroel even when one’s neshoma passed into the next world outside of Eretz Yisroel? Why doesn’t he prove it from the fact that Yaakov wanted to be buried in Eretz Yisroel although he was about to die in Egypt?

In order to make sense of the foregoing questions, we must first study a famous teaching of the Baal Shem Tov. The sefer Tzava’as Harivash (Hanhagos Yesharos 69) quotes a brief but powerful teaching that, “A person is where his thoughts are.” His grandson Reb Moshe Chaim Efrayim of Sudilkov expanded on this concept when he wrote (Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Parshas Bereishis), “It is known that wherever a person thoughts are, he is entirely there.” The Baal Shem Tov’s primary student, the Magid of Mezritch is also quoted (Hanhagos Tzadikim 27) as saying, “Whatever place a person is thinking about, he is attached to that place.” This is one of the fundamental teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.

We see the same idea based on a pasuk in Tehillim (87:5) which says, “And regarding Zion [Yerushalayim], it will be said, every man is born in her.” What does this mean? Is every Jew who will ever live born in Yerushalayim? The Gemara (Kesubos

75a) explains the pasuk as follows: “one that is born there and one that longs to see it.” According to the Gemara, one who longs to see Yerushalayim is considered as if he was born there!

We are accustomed to Rashi’s explanation that parshas Vayechi is a “closed” parsha indicates that there was some deficiency in the Jewish people because of Yaakov Avinu’s death. But perhaps we can explain, based on the above, that there is no separation between parshas Vayechi and the prior parsha for a different reason. Because Yaakov’s thoughts were just as focused on Eretz Yisroel after he came to Egypt as they were when he lived in Eretz Yisroel, there was no separation between the Yaakov Avinu who physically lived in Egypt and the Yaakov Avinu who lived in Eretz Yisroel. That is why there is no separation between parshas Vayechi and the previous parsha, Vayigash.

That is also why Rabbi Eliezer was unable to prove from Yaakov Avinu that even one who dies outside of Eretz Yisroel benefits from being buried in Eretz Yisroel. Because Yaakov’s thoughts were fixed on Eretz Yisroel, he never truly left. He could therefore not be used as an example of one who is buried in Eretz Yisroel after living in exile. Yaakov never really lived in Egypt!

Rav Kook taught the most beautiful thing along these lines (Oros, Eretz Yisroel): “The true encouragement and Jewish ideal in exile only comes from the depth of the desire for Eretz Yisroel... Longing for salvation is the preservation of Judaism in exile... And in the Judaism of Eretz Yisroel, [longing for Eretz Yisroel] is the salvation itself.”

May even those of us who do not merit to live in Eretz Yisroel merit to desire and long for Hashem’s salvation and Eretz Yisroel so that it will be our true place now, and with the coming of Moshiach and the complete redemption, may it be soon in our days.

# Are You a Hypocrite?



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**T**he Talmud relates the following episode:

When our father Jacob was on his deathbed, surrounded by all of his children, he suddenly felt that the Divine presence, the Shechinah, departed from him. He was overtaken by dread and fear that one of his children present in the room was living an immoral life, and that is why the Shechinah has left him. The old father confronted his children asking if perhaps one of them has corrupted his ways, betraying the values he, Jacob, had attempted to inculcate within them.

His sons responded with the most famous Jewish declaration: “Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokenu Hashem Echad.” Listen Israel – Jacob’s name was Israel – the Lord is Our G-d, the Lord is One. Kishem Sh’ein B’libcha Ela Echad, Kach Ein B’libeinu Ela Echad. Just as in YOUR heart there is only One, so too, in OUR heart there is only One.”

At that moment Jacob responded and said, “Boruch Shem Kevod Malchuto Le’olam Va’ed. Blessed be the honorable name of His kingdom forever and ever.” (Talmud Pesachim 56a).

Their response raises a question. The first half of their statement seems superfluous. We know that in Jacob’s heart there was only One G-d. That was not up for discussion; no one was suspecting Jacob’s heart. The question was what was going on in THEIR heart. All they needed to say was, “Listen father, in OUR heart there is only One!”?

The answer is that in this very expression they have encapsulated one of the great themes of education. The first half of their sentence was not superfluous. Jacob’s children were explaining why their father need not fear about his children’s moral destiny. “Jacob our father, if there is One in your heart,” the children told their father, “you can be assured that in our hearts, too, there is only One.” Children are the mirror of their parents’ hearts, not of their

words. Since in your heart there was one, our heart too is saturated with the one living G-d.

All too often, parents think that they can impart values to their children without internalizing these values in their own daily lives. They teach their children about integrity, faith, love, and discipline, but they do not necessarily embody these principles themselves. They preach of one G-d, but that G-d does not challenge them in their personal lives. They will speak up against anger, animosity, envy, and selfishness, but they themselves fall prey to these traits.

This usually does not do the trick. Children do not respond to what their parents say as much as to who they are. Values are like colds: they are caught, not taught. If in your heart there is One – in his heart, there will also be One. When your child experiences consciously and subconsciously your purity and integrity, it is likely that the values that shaped the parents will continue in the lives of their children. It may take some years or sometimes decades, but the seeds planted by your heart in the heart of your children will produce the results.

When asked about the greatest challenge he faces today, the principal of one of the largest Jewish high schools in the United States related this thought: Parents spend thousands of dollars a year in tuition to send their children to our school where, along with calculus and chemistry, we are expected to teach some basic ethics. Then, on Sunday, the parents take their child to an amusement park and lie about his age in order to save five dollars on the admission fee. To save five bucks they destroy a \$25,000 education.

Most parents and teachers realize that values and perspectives must be planted by personal example. However, in practice, we sometimes try to build into our children’s and students’ behavioral routines that we

personally have not yet mastered. We insist that our children eat properly, even though we survive on coffee and donuts. We insist that they don’t sit by the TV for hours, while we fall short of these expectations.

This hypocrisy has disastrous results: Too many children legitimately view their parents and teachers as insincere. Disrespect burgeons slowly until, around ages 12-15, it shreds the parent-child or teacher-student trust and relationship. Then children reject the moral authority of the adults in their lives. They isolate themselves emotionally from parents and teachers and begin making their own (often self-destructive) decisions.

In a famous study regarding the transmission of values from parents to children, the following question was asked of many children: What do your parents want you to be when you grow up—rich, smart, famous or good? Most of the children – from a variety of demographic and cultural sectors – ranked rich, smart, or famous as most important. And the characteristic that ranked lowest was being ‘good.’ Ironically, parents across the same sectors responded that they favored ‘good’ as the preferred characteristic for their child.

Why was there this disconnect between the desire of the parents and the perception of their children?

The answer may be that preaching to children demands parallel practice by parents. True goodness is not taught in books, it is transmitted by living example. Parents may tell their children that they want them to be good people above all, but what are the children *experiencing* from their parents? Are they—the parents—placing goodness above all other comforts?

This was the message of Jacob’s children to their father: The reason there is in our heart only One, is because our hearts reflect and mirror YOUR heart, and in your heart, there is only One. This is true concerning every parent and teacher.



# Vayechi: Alive



**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

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**R**av Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zy'a, Rosh Yeshiva of Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan and Av Beis Din of Boston, was one of the leading scholars, talmudists, Jewish philosophers and thought-leaders of the generation. Rav Soloveitchik was a teacher par excellence and impacted the lives of thousands of talmidim and *musmachim* through his shiurim and writings. A scion of the rabbinic dynasty of the Beis haLevi and Reb Chaim of Brisk, "the Rav" was a torchbearer of the Brisker approach to Torah and greatness in Torah.

At a *pidyon ha-ben* celebration in 1974, when Rav Soloveitchik was in his seventies, he reflected on the awesome role and responsibility of transmitting our *mesorah* to the next generation.

To me it's an experience of combining, uniting, merging many generations into one community, where discrepancy of age disappears, where years play no role, and centuries have no significance. Where generations can, so to speak, communicate and commune with each other...

Whenever I start the shiur, the door opens, another old man walks in and sits down. He is older than I am. All the *talmidim* call me 'the Rav'... but he is the great one, the grandfather of 'the Rav'; his name is Reb Chaim Brisker, without whom no *shiur* can be delivered nowadays. Then, the door opens quietly again and another old man comes in, he is older than Reb Chaim, he lived in the 17th Century. What's his name? Shabsai Kohen, the famous "Shach", who must be present whenever *dinei mamonos* are being discussed and we study Bava Metziah or Bava Kamah. And then, more visitors show up. Some

of the visitors lived in the 11th Century, some in the 12th Century, some in the 13th Century, some lived in antiquity, such as Rebbe Akiva, Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam, the Ra'avad, the Rashba, more and more come in, come in, come in. Of course, what do I do? I introduce them to my pupils, and the conversation commences.

This unity of generations, this march of centuries, this conversation of generations, this dialogue between antiquity and present will finally bring the redemption of the Jew. These great scholars, the living Torah scrolls, the *chachmei ha-mesorah*, stand for more than their own physical existence. They are links in the chain of Torah, participants in the ongoing dialogue that began at Sinai.



Our *sedra* records the final moments of Yaakov Avinu's physical life as he shares parting messages and blessings with his children, charging their missions for the future.

Despite Yaakov having been eulogized, embalmed, and buried, Gemara states (*Taanis* 5b) that יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לֹא מָת, "Our father Yaakov did not die." The sages explain: מָה זָרְעוֹ בְּחַיִּים — אֲף הוּא בְּחַיִּים, "Insofar as his descendants are alive, he himself is alive." Yaakov lives on through us, his children, and through his *mesorah* and his righteousness, which were transmitted throughout the generations to those who would carry his influence forward. Indeed, the impact of this ongoing transmission is very much "alive" and present in the world.

On the subject of "Our father Yaakov did not die," the Lubavitcher Rebbe says that

the term 'afterlife' is anyway inaccurate, for the experience of the soul after leaving this worldly existence is actually just a continuation of life in another form. The difference is, in *olam ha-zeh*, this world, life is experienced in one dimension. After 120 years (the human lifespan mentioned in the Torah), the soul moves to exist in its next iteration, yet it also remains as a presence in this world, especially through the continuing impact of its actions and accomplishments in this world, including its descendants. Our sages expressed this fact in their well-known sayings:

"The righteous are exalted in death even more than in life" (*Chullin*, 7b).

"Tzadikim are called alive even in their death" (*Berachos*, 18a).

In Rav Soloveitchik's celebrated essay, "Sacred and Profane", he reflects on the *yahrtzeit* of his father, Rav Moshe, zt'l:

"It seems to me as if my father were yet alive, although four years have come and gone since his death. It is in a qualitative sense that I experienced his nearness and spirit tonight. I cannot explain the דמות דיוקנו של אביו (*Sotah*, 36b), "the spiritual picture of father" that hovers near me tonight as in a yesteryear of physical existence.

...The Jew of the *mesorah* has a different conception of time. Revelation and tradition erase the bounds of time. Distance in time is non-existent for him. Thousands of years may have elapsed but he walks back and forth from antiquity to modern times...

For Jewish boys and girls, Avraham is not a mythical figure but an ever-present inspiration. They live through his tribulations and wanderings. They

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# Remembering Rachel Imeinu

## Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

**A**lone, Rachel Imeinu is buried in a far off location as Yaakov Avinu and his family traveled back to his father's home. On his deathbed, Yaakov explains to her son Yosef that he did so based on a Divine directive. When the Jew would be exiled by Nevuzaradan, they would pass her burial place so she could daven and beseech Hashem to have mercy on their behalf. Why was Rachel Imeinu chosen for this task? Leah Imeinu was the mother of the majority of tribes, more of her own children were affected. Would she not have been a more fitting petitioner?

Rav Tzadok Hacohen teaches that the first place we meet a person or a word in the Torah, expresses its true essence and primary force. We first find Rachel Imeinu as a shepherdess tending her flock. Upon seeing her, Yaakov Avinu lifts his voice and weeps since he foresaw that he would not be buried with her. However, Vayavinu Bamikra explains that Yaakov perceived Rachel as the Ultimate Shepherdess of her flock, the Jewish people. He understood

her position on the road, appealing for her children was her preeminent charge.

Rav Moshe Shapira explains that Rachel Imeinu was weeping for a very different reason. When the Jews were independent in Eretz Yisrael they followed the ways of the Torah and were referred to at that time as the children of Yosef or Efrayim. Once they were exiled, Rachel Imeinu realized “ki enenu”, her children were no longer on this level, they had lost the qualities that Yosef Hatzadik imparted for posterity. Indeed, Tanach only refers to the Jews as Yehudim in later texts such as Megilat Esther and Zecharyah when the Jews were in the process of exile. For this reason, Rachel Imeinu is on the road, davening for her children to return to the land and their previous level of tzadikim – “veshavu banim legevulam”.

Although Leah Imeinu biologically had more children, the Maharal maintains that it is Rachel Imeinu who is the spiritual mother of all Am Yisrael. Rachel was known as the ‘akeret habayit’, the mainstay of Yaakov’s home. Hence, her

burial plot is like a magnetic force at the crossroads to bring her children back home. Each family that makes Aliyah is spiritually drawn to our land and it is as if one can hear an echo from above as each person arrives, “vshavu banim legevulam”.

The mystical sefarim explain that since Leah Imeinu spent so much time at the crossroads crying so that she would not have to marry the wicked Eisav, she merited not to be buried at the crossroads. Since Rachel Imeinu did not go to the crossroads to inquire about Yaakov Avinu and daven, she is buried at the crossroads crying and davening for all eternity. Rav Kamil asks, why is Rachel Imeinu guilty for not davening at the crossroads for her mate? After all, she knew she was going to marry Yaakov Avinu! We learn a powerful lesson, Rav Kamil notes. One can never take anything for granted! Even those things that we assume we will get or that already belong to us need our continuous tefillot. Kever Rachel becomes a symbol of one’s constant reliance on Hashem and not taking anything for granted in life.

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travel with him from Syria to Eretz Yisrael. They feel the fear and trembling of Yitzchak at the Akeidah. They escape with Yaakov to Charan. They are imprisoned with Yosef in the pit. They rejoice in his ascendancy to high office and fame. They lead the Jews with Moshe in the Desert of Sinai. They sing with King David. They are exalted with the prophets. They laugh with Rabbi Akiva. They meditate with the

Rambam. These figures are not dead or historical ‘have-beens’ for the children of the *cheder* or the adults of the *halacha*, but dynamic, living heroes who visit the Jew from time to time, bring him comfort, inspiration, and hope.”

May our completion of Sefer Bereishis, punctuated by the passing of Yaakov Avinu, enliven us with a sense of responsibility and pride. As we cry out “*Chazak chazak v'nischazeik*,” may we be truly

strengthened, and celebrate the privilege of being a link in the unending chain of Torah. May we pass our precious *mesorah* along to our loved ones and to the next generations — with the loving care and aliveness of all the true *tzadikim*.

# What Will They Say About Us???



**Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi**  
Popular Torah teacher and author

The emoji that stood out the most in the messages sent to me over the past two weeks was the emoji with the hand touching the face, an emoji that means, “What a shame...” The emoji, of course, was linked to an embarrassing quote from someone “from us”: a religious Knesset member, a rabbi, a politician.

Then the media began to shame their representatives as well, with headlines like, “Watch out! We are no longer an opposition!”, “Remember to be statesmanlike!” And to top them all off, “Do not hate religion more than the people.”

Would I spare myself and the public some of these embarrassing statements? Absolutely. It's important to pay attention to what people think of us.

When Yosef's brothers came to him full of fear and said to him, “Our father commanded before he died that you not take revenge on us for selling you,” he replied

to them, “How should I take revenge on you? What will the Egyptians say about us? People who slander each other and take revenge on their family members will certainly do the same to strangers! You can't trust them!” (Midrash Rabbah). In other words, Yosef said: “What will the gentiles say about us if we behave in this way?”

But Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said, “Religious Jews must be careful with their excuses.” The statements with which we constantly defend ourselves are no less dangerous to our image. In his words, he is referring to people who hope to reduce the dimensions of anti-Semitism when they try to “behave better” so that they will be loved more... Jews can not cure anti-Semitism, only anti-Semites can cure themselves, along with the society they belong to. This is because Jews are not the cause of anti-Semitism, but its object. An object of hatred and a cause of hatred are two different things! Assimilation and trying

to find faults in our behavior as a reason for hating us is not a cure for hating us. If people do not love you for what you are, they will not love you anymore if you pretend to be something you are not.

Wow.

Rabbi Sacks and, this week, Rabbi Mirvis were knighted by the King of England. The royal family also values the rabbinic establishment because it is careful in its statements and does not get carried away, but most of all because the rabbinic and religious establishment there values itself and its values so much.

Fix what is wrong in our society, but stop being ashamed of who and what we represent. They will not love us that way anymore.

Remove the hand that slaps the face in the emoji and just extend it towards Shalom with royal chivalry.

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in order that they be worthy of exercising their leadership.

Undoubtedly, the “brachot” of Yaakov contain additional prophetic and metaphysical significance as well. Yet, they do not negate the basic principle of “bechira chofshit” [freedom of choice].

Why must Am Yisrael consist of twelve distinct “shvatim?” Would it not have been better to form one homogenous society? Would this not be a more appropriate framework through which the **one** G-d is represented? Why must the friction between Yosef and Yehuda continue throughout the entire Tanach?

Recall our explanation of G-d's purpose in choosing a special nation in wake of

the events at Migdal Bavel. It was G-d's hope that this special Nation would lead all Seventy Nations towards a theocentric existence. For this purpose Avraham Avinu was chosen, and for this purpose the existence of “shvatim” becomes indispensable. Let's explain:

People, by their very nature, tend to group into distinct societies, each with its own ‘flag’ – its own defining character, personality, goals and aspirations. These societies eventually develop into nations who may occasionally fight over opposing goals, or cooperate in working towards the realization of common goals.

Through His agent, Am Yisrael, G-d hopes that all nations, while remaining distinct, will recognize the common purpose for

the creation of man and cooperate for the achievement of that goal.

As we see in Yaakov's “brachot” to his sons, each “shevet” possesses its own unique character and singularity. The composite of all these qualities can be harnessed towards a common good. As G-d's model Nation, the cooperation between the ‘Twelve Tribes of Israel’ in the fulfillment of their Divine and national goals can serve as an archetype for the Seventy Nations to emulate. Through harmonious cooperation and the unifying force of a common goal, the Nation of Avraham becomes a ‘blessing’ to all nations. Mankind thus realizes its potential, and Am Yisrael fulfills its Divine destiny.



# Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin  
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In Parashat Vayechi, Yaakov blesses his sons, using very poetic language. As such, at times it can be difficult to interpret and translate. For example, here's one verse from his blessing to Yosef (Bereshit 49:26) –

בְּרַכַת אָבִיךָ גְּבֻרֵי עַל-בְּרַכַת הוֹרֵי עַד-תְּאֻזֹת גְּבֻעַת  
עוֹלָם תִּהְיֶינָ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף וְלִקְדֻקְדָּה נְזִיר אֶחָיו:

One translation renders it as:

“The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors, to the utmost bounds of the eternal hills. May they rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the elect of his brothers.”

Let's focus on the first phrase. Other translations suggest:

“May the blessings of your father transcend the blessings of mountains eternal”

“May your father's blessing add to the blessing of my parents”

“Your father's blessing surpassed the blessings of timeless heights”

The reason for these various translations centers around how to understand the word הוֹרֵי. Those translations which had it as “mountains” or “heights,” follow the opinion of Rashbam and Shadal, who assume it derives from the word הַר – “mountain.” This view is also supported by the hills mentioned later in the verse, as well as a comparison to the similar blessing the tribe of Yosef receives from Moshe:

וּמְרֹאשׁ הַרְרֵי-קִדְמוֹת וּמִמְקוֹד גְּבֻעוֹת עוֹלָם:

“With the best from the ancient mountains, and the bounty of hills immemorial.” (Devarim 33:15).

The other translations (ancestors, parents), like Rashi and Ibn Ezra, derive the word from the root הרה – “to conceive, become pregnant.” In modern Hebrew,

this gives us the word הוֹרֶה – “parent” (which is not related, as many mistakenly assume, to מוֹרֶה – teacher. That word comes from the root ירה.)

However, in Biblical Hebrew, we only have the word in the feminine form: הוֹרָה. It appears twice (Shir HaShirim 3:4 and Hoshea 2:7). In both cases, it is usually translated as “the one who conceived.” As such, it refers to the mother, not the more generic “parent.”

If Yaakov's blessing meant “mountains,” then only in later Hebrew did the form הוֹרָה come into being. We first find the singular form in midrashic literature, where it meant “father”, and only in later Hebrew could it refer to both parents in the plural, or either father or mother in the singular.

## Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh  
Mizrachi Melbourne

What am I? I appear **five** times in the Parsha.

Three times in connection with Yaakov himself.

Twice in the blessings of Yaakov.

### Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Yaakov's bed appears 5 times.  
3 times described as תַּמְתָּ (47:31; 48:2; 49:33)  
1 time as תַּמְתָּ (49:4)  
1 time as יָצַרְתִּי (49:4)



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PARSHA WEEKLY

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Kehilath Jershurun  
Kingsway Jewish Center  
Lincoln Square Synagogue  
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park

North Shore Hebrew Academy  
Young Israel of Merrick  
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Young Israel of New Rochelle  
Young Israel of North Woodmere  
Young Israel of Oceanside  
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