

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayechi

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

COMBATING DARKNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

Notwithstanding Yaakov's joy in seeing his family reunited and faithful to their traditions, it is still hard to imagine how the years he spent in the idolatrous environment of Egypt could be the best of his life.

The answer to this puzzle is that, as mentioned previously, Yaakov had sent Yehudah to set up an academy for the study of the Torah in Egypt. Yaakov thereby ensured that he and his descendants would remain immune to the negative influences of Egypt's corrupt society.

Furthermore, by resisting the enticements of Egypt, Yaakov's children grew in a way that is only possible when we are faced with challenges.

This is why Yaakov's best years were those that he spent in Egypt, for it was only there that he could see that his children had fully absorbed his moral instruction and guidance. He now knew that the Divine mission begun by his grandfather, Avraham, would continue.

Similarly, we often find ourselves in “Egypt,” in places of spiritual darkness. Like Yaakov and his family, through studying the Torah we remain safe from the darkness of “Egypt” and reveal G-dliness even there. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 10, pp. 160-166) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

INEXTINGUISHABLE FLAME

Reb Yisrael Modzitzer

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years.” (47:28)

The statement “The House of Yaakov is afire” means that in every Jewish heart there is a spark of the Divine.

Of this spark, our Sages declared, “Yaakov, our father, did not die.” This flame would never be extinguished.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Reb Noson of Breslov

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

The main life that Yaakov experienced was in Egypt, where he lived with joy and peace (see Zohar I, 111b). How is it that in the Holy Land, Yaakov did not attain peace, but in Egypt, an impure land where his descendants would eventually suffer in bondage, he did attain peace?

The greatest levels of joy come about when one takes hold of his sadness and depression and transforms them into happiness. Exile corresponds to sadness and depression; Yaakov's response shows us how to turn around its effects. Yaakov “lived in the land of Egypt” - he knew that the exile would continue until all the sparks of holiness would be gathered up. But he was able to find peace and even attain great happiness in Egypt, for he strengthened himself and his descendants with the joyful promise of the Future Redemption.

KEEPING IT UNKNOWN

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

Why is this portion closed (i.e., the text of the Torah is divided into paragraph-like passages, which are separated from each other by several blank spaces, yet in this case, there is space of only a single letter separating the word “Vayechi” from the word that precedes it)? Because Yaakov wanted to reveal to his sons the date of the end of days, but his vision was closed from him. (Rashi)

Why would Yaakov have wanted to reveal the date of the end of days to his sons? Because exile is easier to endure if one knows in advance when it will end. But G-d desired the Jews' exile to be difficult (thereby enabling true free will, as well as increased reward), and therefore He closed Yaakov's vision from him.

ETERNAL LIFE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

Although the Sidra begins with “Vayechi” (And he lived), it really speaks of the death of Yaakov.

As the reading shows, Yaakov's life was one of connection to G-d that transcended the material world. Since he shared this quality with his descendants, it was perpetuated beyond his mortal lifetime. As our sages say, “Yaakov, our ancestor, did not die. As his descendants are alive, he is alive.” The vitality we experience in our Divine service today is made possible by the life of Yaakov.

EXPERIENCE BREEDS SENSITIVITY

Baal Shem Tov

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

The mystical meaning of this verse is similar to that of, “In my distress You have relieved [hirschavta] me” (Tehillim 4:2); The distress itself is the cause of the expansiveness (harchavah) - the abundance of blessings that follow.

Tzaddikim are emissaries of the Shechinah (Divine Presence). Their role is to pray for the welfare of the Shechinah, which languishes in exile. When a tzaddik suffers from lack or from exile, he arrives at a fuller appreciation for the plight of the Shechinah. He is then in a better position to pray for the Shechinah.

This is alluded to in the Torah's description of the years that our patriarch Yaakov spent in Egypt: “Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” The Hebrew name for Egypt, Mitzrayim, is related to “meitzarim,” distress and constraints. Through the exile and constraints that Yaakov personally experienced, he understood how to pray for the equivalent experiences of the Shechinah.

This verse also alludes to the success of Yaakov's subsequent prayers. For the Shechinah is also referred to as “Yaakov.” In that case, the phrase “Yaakov lived” indicates that through his prayers, our patriarch Yaakov caused the Shechinah (“Yaakov”) to live - to unite with the supernal source of life. And all this occurred “in the land of Egypt” - as a result of his being forced to personally experience suffering.

GUARANTEED KINDNESS

Dubno Maggid

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)

The kindness shown to the dead is true kindness. (Rashi)

When dealing kindly with a living person one cannot know whether it was truly kindness, for often that which one thinks is an act of mercy and kindness results in harm. But the kindness one shows to the dead is always true kindness because this is loving-kindness that the dead truly require, and it therefore cannot possibly result in harm or evil.

LESSON FOR THE AGES

Reb Noson of Breslov

“A short time later, someone said to Yosef, ‘Behold, your father is ill.’ He took his two sons, Menashe and Efraim, along with him.” (48:1)

Until Yaakov, there was no illness prior to death. A person would sneeze and his soul would depart. Yaakov prayed for illness so that a person would have time to prepare a will for his heirs and say goodbye to his family before he passes away (Bava Metzia 87a).

The most important legacy one can bequeath to his children and descendants is the knowledge of serving G-d. Thus, when Yaakov was on his deathbed and called his sons together, they all accepted his charge and recited, “Hear, Yisrael! G-d is our Lord. G-d is One.” (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 48a)

The main purpose of a will is to command one's children to follow the ways of G-d. While Yaakov was blessed with children who were all pious and G-d-fearing, he knew he had to instill in them a greater feeling for G-dliness in order to ensure their continued allegiance to G-d after he was gone. Therefore, he prayed for illness, which caused his family to gather around him and gave him the opportunity to transmit his knowledge of G-d to them. (ibid., V, p. 262a)

Menashe and Efraim were born in Egypt, yet they remained tzaddikim. Their names reflect Yosef's own difficulties in Egypt and how he, too, overcame them. Menashe (מנשה) was so named “because G-d caused me to forget (נשני, Nashani) all my hardship” (Bereishis 41:51). Though Yosef found himself in very difficult circumstances, he realized that G-d was with him and He was helping him forget his travails so he could look forward to a better life. Efraim (אפרים) was so named “because G-d made me fruitful (הפריני, hifrani) in the land of my suffering” (ibid., 41:52). Despite all the evil around him, Yosef was able to find merit and grow. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 156)

SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Alshich HaKadosh

“And one told Yaakov and said, ‘Behold, your son Yosef comes to you.’ And Yaakov strengthened himself and sat upon the bed.” (48:2)

Anyone who visits a sick peer takes away one-sixtieth of his illness. (Nedarim 39)

Now, although Yosef was Yaakov's son, he was considered his peer, for it is written that G-d had said: “All that I will show to Yaakov I will also show to Yosef” (Rashi's comment on Bereishis 37:2). Therefore, when Yosef came to visit Yaakov, Yaakov's illness was diminished by one-sixtieth and Yaakov gained the strength to sit up in his bed.

NEEDED ENCOURAGEMENT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And now, your two sons who were born in the land of Egypt before I came to you to Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Menashe will be to me like Reuven and Shimon.” (48:5)

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks, how could Yaakov show special favor to Yosef's children by saying that they “shall be mine” - equating Yosef's children to Yaakov's own children. Surely, showing favoritism to Yosef was the main cause of the brothers' hatred against him? (In fact, the Gemara (Shabbos 10b) derives the principle not to favor one child over another from when Yaakov favored Yosef.)

The answer that Rav Yaakov suggests is that it was understood by all that Yosef's sons needed special attention, because they were born in Egypt, a land seeped in immorality. They never grew up in the holiness of Yaakov's home, and because of this, he feared that their surroundings would have had an irreversibly negative effect on them. By considering them as his own children, Yaakov hoped to instill within them the feeling that they truly belonged to his family and deeply connected to his traditions.

This, continues Rav Yaakov, is the reason why Yaakov placed Ephraim before Menashe (even though Menashe was older); because the name Ephraim is an Egyptian name (the פ and the ר in the name אפרים form the root of many common Egyptian words; for instance, “פרעה - Pharaoh” and “פוטופר - Potiphar”; see Emes L'Yaakov for other examples), a factor which demonstrates that Ephraim was further away from the ideals that Yaakov was trying to give over to his grandchildren, and was therefore in greater need of Yaakov's encouragement and support.

FINDING THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and said, ‘Who are these?’” (48:8)

Yaakov foresaw that both Menashe and Ephraim would have wicked descendants. Therefore, he said, “Who are these [who are unworthy for blessing]?” and did not want to bless them. Yosef disagreed and prayed for them. Then a Divine spirit rested upon Yaakov and he saw that tzaddikim, too, would descend from Menashe and Ephraim, and he blessed them. (Rashi)

The disagreement between Yaakov and Yosef lay in finding merit even in the most wicked people. When Yaakov foresaw these wicked descendants, he weakened to the point where he could no longer find any good in them and refused to bless them. Yosef, on the other hand, was able to find merit. He said, “They are my sons whom G-d gave me here” - here, even in the wicked, we must look for and find some merit, some redeeming factor. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 78a)

A GRANDPARENT'S EMBRACE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Yosef said to his father, ‘These are my sons...’ He [Yaakov] brought them near to him, and he kissed them and embraced them.” (48:9-10)

When Yosef HaTzaddik traveled to Goshen for the last time to see his father Yaakov, who lay ill on his deathbed, he brought along his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. The pasuk tells us that Yaakov “kissed them and embraced them.”

Presumably, Yaakov had seen his grandchildren many times before; Ephraim would even sit by his side and learn Torah with him. Why, then, must the Torah explicitly discuss Yaakov's kisses and hugs?

R' Avraham Kelman shlit'a derives a beautiful message from Yaakov's actions. This is the first time in the Torah in which we find a zaydie - grandfather, enjoying an intimate moment with his einiklech - grandchildren. As Chazal inform us: “Ma'aseh avos siman la'banim - the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children” (Sotah 34). While the Torah includes many exemplary interactions between children and parents, here, at least on a superficial level, we are able to glean something about the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.

Grandparents are unique in the manner in which they dote unconditionally on their grandchildren. Children who feel deeply loved will automatically be more receptive to the guidance of their elders. We can see from the Torah the beauty of the Jewish family and the manner in which the different generations live with, and for, each other.

LOYAL LINEAGE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“He [Yaakov] said to Yosef, ‘I dared not even hope to see your face, yet now G-d has even shown me your children.’” (48:11)

Yaakov intimated why he considered Ephraim and Menashe his own sons by referring to them as “your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before I came to you.”

Even though Ephraim and Menashe were born and raised in Egypt before Yaakov's arrival, they grew up true to their grandfather's ideals. Therefore, Yaakov considered them as loyal to him and his ideals as his own children. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, p. 435) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DRAWING CLOSE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Yosef took the two of them. With his right hand, he placed Ephraim to Yisrael's left, and with his left hand, he placed Menashe to Yisrael's right. Then he came closer to him.” (48:13)

Menashe corresponds to the “dwellers above” - those tzaddikim who search for G-d on the highest of levels. Menashe (מנשה) was so named “because G-d caused me to forget (נשני, Nashani) all my hardship and all my father's house” (Bereishis 41:51) - implying that Menashe transcended this physical world.

Efraim represents the “dwellers below,” those who feel connected to this world. Efraim (אפרים) was so named “because G-d made me fruitful (הפרני, hifrani) in the land” (ibid. 41:52) - that is, despite his connection to the world, Efraim still remembered G-d and knew that he could always find Him.

When Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov for a blessing, he placed Menashe next to Yaakov's right hand and Efraim next to Yaakov's left hand. Since Menashe was the eldest and the “dweller above,” Yosef assumed that he would receive the stronger blessing (represented by the right hand). But Yaakov crossed his hands, placing his right hand on Efraim's head to give him the greater blessing. For the world is sustained through those who are distant from G-d yet who still wish to draw close to Him. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 332-167a)

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Efraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menashe; he switched his hands since Menashe was the firstborn.” (48:14)

This week's Parshah, Vayechi, recounts the moment when Yaakov blesses his children before his passing. In this poignant scene, a significant detail is highlighted: the crossing of Yaakov's hands as he places his right hand on Efraim and his left hand on Menashe.

Reb Noson provides insight into this gesture, explaining that Yosef, the father of Efraim and Menashe, intended to convey a profound message. Yosef aimed to emphasize that the child who represents greatness, symbolized by the elder, should be the one to lead. However, the act of crossing the hands symbolizes a departure from the conventional expectation that the elder child receives the greater blessing.

Yaakov, in his wisdom, recognized a deeper lesson in this gesture. He understood that true G-dliness is often revealed through the seemingly ordinary actions of the “little guy.” By placing his right hand on Efraim, the younger of the two, Yaakov imparted a powerful teaching - that G-dliness can be uncovered through the deeds of even the simplest individuals.

In doing so, Yaakov challenged the notion that only the prominent and powerful can serve as vessels for revealing Hashem's greatness. Instead, he asserted that every individual, regardless of their stature, has the potential to unveil the divine through their actions, especially when engaging in acts of kindness and fulfilling mitzvot.

In our own lives, we are reminded by Yaakov's blessing to appreciate the significance of each person's contribution to revealing G-dliness. The “little guy” who earnestly performs a mitzvah becomes a conduit for divine light, emphasizing that true greatness lies in the sincerity and humility with which we approach our spiritual endeavors.

BOUND TO HASHEM'S WILL

Likutei Megadim

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Efraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menashe; he switched his hands since Menashe was the firstborn.” (48:14)

He filled his hands with wisdom. (Targum)

Yaakov had trained his limbs to such an extent that they were incapable of acting contrary to G-d's will. Thus, his hands placed themselves in this reverse position (left hand on the firstborn and right hand on the younger) of their own accord, because it had been G-d's will.

HUMBLE GREATNESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Efraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menashe; he switched his hands since Menashe was the firstborn.” (48:14)

Yaakov chose to place his right hand on Efraim, the younger son, over Menashe, the older son. By doing so, Yaakov indicated his intention of giving the preferred brachah to Efraim as opposed to Menashe. Many ask why Yaakov chose to do this and what exactly Yaakov saw in Efraim. The Chofetz Chaim suggests, based on the wording in the pesukim, that Yaakov saw a unique character trait in Efraim, which caused him to choose Efraim over Menashe. In the context of Yaakov's brachos, Efraim is described as the tzair - “the younger one,” and the achiv ha'katan - the “smaller brother.”

The Chofetz Chaim explains that the Torah isn't just telling us that Efraim was younger than Menashe in regard to sibling order, but rather the Torah is sharing how Efraim viewed himself. Efraim was a humble person who never saw himself as anything other than a simple individual. He considered himself a katan - a small person; he had no ego or arrogance. It was this middah of humility that Yaakov saw in Efraim, which caused him to bless Efraim with the greater brachah.

The Chofetz Chaim is sharing a powerful lesson. Humility is a core ingredient of success. One who is arrogant is less likely to learn from others and take ownership of mistakes. As Jews and as people, it is incumbent upon us to remain grounded and humble. We must realize our successes come from Hashem and that without Him we are sure to fail. With this in mind, we are sure to be the beneficiaries of tremendous brachos from Hashem.

TO EACH THEIR OWN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Efraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menashe; he switched his hands since Menashe was the firstborn.” (48:14)

In this week's parshah the Torah shares the brachos that Yaakov gave to his children before he died. Yosef escorted Menashe and Efraim into the room to receive a brachah from Yaakov. As we know, Menashe was placed to the right of Yaakov, given that he was the firstborn, and Efraim was placed to the left. Yet, Yaakov switched his hands and placed his right hand upon Efraim's head and his left hand upon Menashe's head. Yosef attempted to correct Yaakov, but Yaakov made it clear to Yosef that he knew what he was doing.

The Netziv (Ha'Emek Davar) asks why Yaakov didn't simply switch the position of the children instead of his hands. The Netziv explains that Yaakov was communicating a very important message to Yosef, and to us. While Efraim represented spirituality (there are many proofs to this idea), Menashe represented the material world. Yaakov placed his right hand on Efraim to indicate that spirituality takes precedence over physicality. Yet, materialism also has value; therefore, Yaakov kept Menashe to the right of him to give him credibility as well. Both values exist and are important. While Torah and mitzvos are at the forefront, understanding and utilizing the material world is integral to avodas Hashem. The Netziv points out, in his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar, that this is why when the tribes were encamped around Har Sinai, where Klal Yisrael's existence was purely spiritual, Efraim preceded Menashe. However, when Klal Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael and had to conquer the land, confronting the physical world, Menashe preceded Efraim.

Yaakov's actions provide us with some very important parenting and educational advice. We must take notice of the different talents and abilities that each of our children and students possess. It is our responsibility to help our children develop their individual abilities to serve Hashem and to excel in whatever they choose to focus their energies on. As the pasuk in Mishlei (22:6) states, “Chanoch I'naar al pi darko - Educate the child according to his path” This value must serve as a parenting and educational compass for us in order to help our children and students maximize their potential given to them by Hashem.

BLESSED WITH INTELLECT

Rebbe Nachman

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Efraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menashe; he switched his hands since Menashe was the firstborn.” (48:14)

Sikheil (שכל, crossed) is similar to Seikhel (שכל, intellect). Intellect is the principal blessing that a person can bestow. Therefore, Yaakov channeled intellect into the blessings that he gave to his grandchildren. (See Likutey Moharan I, 24:5)

PARENT'S GREATEST BLESSING

Shelah HaKadosh

“And he [Yaakov] blessed Yosef and said...” (48:15)

The blessing that follows was actually addressed not to Yosef but only to Yosef's two sons. Why, then, does the Torah say that Yaakov blessed Yosef?

In order to show that there is no more important blessing for a father than the wish that his children will take after him and become good people. Hence, Yaakov's blessing to Menashe and Efraim, “The angel who redeems me from all evil bless the young children, and let my name be named in them and the name of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak” (pasuk 16), is the best blessing their father, Yosef, could possibly have received. (Based on the teachings of the Rambam.)

READY TO BE INSPIRED

Rebbe Nachman

“May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the young children...” (48:16)

“The young children” can be understood as a reference to the cherubim engraved on the Ark in the Temple, through which an angel would deliver G-d's prophecy. So too, Yaakov blessed all Jews that they should have the potential to be like the cherubim and receive Divine inspiration. (Likutey Moharan II, 1:6)

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[Yaakov said,] ‘But his younger brother will become greater than he.’” (48:19)

As we have seen, Menashe represents our obligation to protect ourselves from the negative influences of our surroundings.

Efraim, in contrast, represents our obligation to influence our surroundings, to redeem ourselves and the world from exile.

Since before influencing the world we must ensure that we are protected from its temptations, Yosef named his firstborn Menashe, and wished to give him precedence in receiving Yaakov's blessing, as well.

In granting his blessing, however, Yaakov focused on the purpose of our descent into exile: not mere spiritual survival, but the spiritual growth that results from our successful encounter with exile. Yaakov therefore gave precedence to Efraim.

Likewise, in our exile: although - just like Menashe is the firstborn - securing our Jewish identity is the first step, our main purpose is to be an Efraim, to positively influence the world around us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 432-434; vol. 5, pp. 459) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And he [Yaakov] blessed them [Efraim and Menashe] on that day, saying...” (48:20)

Rav Moshe of Kobrin (Toras Avos) suggests another way of understanding these words. He explains that Yaakov blessed Menashe and Efraim with the brachah of ha'yom - today. Yaakov was communicating that the ideal way to approach life is to focus on today. Yaakov blessed Menashe and Efraim to have the ability to devote their attention to the job at hand and not get caught up with what will happen in the future.

The Kobriner Rebbe is teaching us that we need to focus on our growth and development one day at a time. While we certainly need to be mindful of the future results of our current decisions, we often think too much about what will happen tomorrow and forget about what we must work on today. Let's internalize the brachah of ha'yom that Yaakov gave to Menashe and Efraim and work to improve ourselves each day. This approach will help strengthen and deepen our relationship with Hashem and allow us to accomplish everything we set out to do each and every day.

DESIRABLE TRAIT

Reb Tzvi Zolitzner

“By you shall [the people of] Yisrael bless saying, ‘May Hashem make you as Efraim and Menashe.’” (48:20)

The Jewish people will bless their children that they should grow up like the children of Yosef and not the children of the other tribes.

There are two principles in the Torah that we are requested to follow. The first is that we should not feel and behave as though we are greater than another, and secondly that we should not be jealous of another.

When Yosef informed his father, “Not so, Father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head” (48:18), Yaakov answered, “I know, my son, I know; he, too, will become great; however, his younger brother shall become greater than he” (48:19). Yaakov noticed that although he had promised the younger one greatness, Efraim did not become arrogant, and Menashe did not become jealous. Both brothers were as before - no change in character.

That is why Yaakov promised, “By you shall Yisrael bless.” The Jewish people will bless their children for the same attributes of Yosef's children: “May G-d make you like Efraim and like Menashe.”

AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL

Bnei Yissaschar

“By you shall [the people of] Yisrael bless saying, ‘May Hashem make you as Efraim and Menashe.’” (48:20)

Why should Yaakov have wanted all his descendants to bless their children with the example of Efraim and Menashe rather than with that of some other two of the tribes of Yisrael?

Because Yosef's two young sons had conducted themselves following Torah's fundamental law; namely, that one should neither consider oneself greater than another nor envy another. Even though Yaakov had put Efraim, the younger son, before Menashe, the firstborn, Efraim didn't become arrogant, and Menashe didn't grow jealous. Noticing this, Yaakov expressed hope that all of his descendants would be like Efraim and Menashe, free of both arrogance and envy.

FREE OF JEALOUSY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“By you shall [the people of] Yisrael bless saying, ‘May Hashem make you as Efraim and Menashe.’” (48:20)

Why will the Jewish People be blessed through Efraim and Menashe, and not any two of the other shevatim? Surely, the kedushah of Levi, the royalty of Yehudah, or the Torah scholarship of Yissaschar (to name just three) are worth emulating?

Rabbeinu Azaryah Figo zt'l (Binah L'Ittim) expounds on the reason why Yosef objected to his father having placed his right hand on the head of Efraim - the younger son - and his left upon the older son, Menashe. Yosef was alluding to the suffering he experienced on account of being preferred by his father over his older brothers. He did not want the same thing to happen to his children. But Yaakov answered, “I know my son, I know” - meaning, I know all that you experienced, and yet I am not concerned. Menashe, too, will emerge as a great tribe; only the younger son, Efraim, will be “greater from him” - he will be greater due to his completeness of character.

As Chazal comment: Efraim was the rosh yeshivah of Yaakov's yeshivah. He did not become great through belittling his brother, but rather by elevating himself. Even Menashe will acknowledge his younger brother's greatness, and not experience any jealousy.

Thus, when the pasuk states, “He put Efraim before Menashe,” it is an explanation of the blessing, “May Hashem make you as Efraim and Menashe.” Bnei Yisrael will give blessings in the name of Efraim and Menashe because Yaakov's placing Efraim before Menashe did not kindle conceit in Efraim nor jealousy in Menashe.

Jealousy, desire and conceit are what destroy a person, yet Yosef's sons displayed no such tendencies and thus are timeless transmitters of Bnei Yisrael's blessings. (Igra D'Kallah)

ASKING FOR TODAY

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover

"And he [Yaakov] blessed them [Efraim and Menashe] on that day, saying..." (48:20)

Why does the pasuk mention that Yaakov blessed them "on that day"?

Yaakov was teaching his children a lesson that when you pray for your needs, you should pray only for that specific day's needs.

You should not worry about what will be in the future; just focus "on that day" in conformance to the famous dictum: The past is done, the future is yet to come, the present is like the blink of an eye. If so, what is the point of worrying?

SPIRITUAL WEAPONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yaakov said to Yosef,] 'I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.'" (48:22)

A sword is used to kill an enemy who is close by, whereas a bow and arrow are used to kill an enemy who is far away.

Spiritually, our "close enemies" are the flaws in our manner of thinking, speaking, or acting that we can recognize easily.

Our "distant enemies" are our subtle imperfections, of which we are often unaware and can only identify by means of deep introspection.

Allegorically, Yaakov was teaching Yosef how to conquer both types of spiritual flaws.

We battle them both - and identify the more subtle ones - by following the inward path of meditative prayer. (Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat, vol. 1, p. 321) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

BOW AND SWORD

Reb Moshe of Primishlan

"[Yaakov said to Yosef,] 'I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.'" (48:22)

Yaakov Avinu blessed his son Yosef with an extra portion which he took from the Emori - "with my sword and my bow." Chazal tell us that this refers to Tefillah - prayer. Thus, all prayer incorporates both the "sword" and the "bow."

Like a bow and arrow, the pesukei d'zimra - preliminary psalms of praise, cut through all obstructions, preparing the way for the Amidah, which may then reach its mark with all the efficacy of a sharp sword.

ARROW OF PRAYER

Kotzker Rebbe

"[Yaakov said to Yosef,] 'I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.'" (48:22)

"Which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" - With my prayer and with my will. (Targum Onkelos)

Why is the "bow" likened to prayer? Because just as the more one tightens a bow the further the arrow will fly, so too, the more one applies one's mind to prayer with true devotion, the further and higher will it soar into the Heavens.

PROPER PRAYERS

Rebbe Nachman

"[Yaakov said to Yosef,] 'I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.'" (48:22)

"Which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" - With my prayer and with my will. (Targum Onkelos)

Prayer is comparable to a double-edged sword because it contains two elements: praise and requests. Just as prayer was Yaakov's principal weapon, so will it be the principal weapon of Mashiach.

Yaakov represents judgment and charity. Thus, the verse speaks of "mishpat (justice or judgment) and tzedakah (charity) in Yaakov" (Tehillim 99:4). Both are conducive to prayer. A person requires judgment in order to speak and pray wisely, while being charitable gives him the ability to weigh his words and pray properly. (See Likutey Moharan I, 2:1-2)

Keshet (bow) also means "rainbow." The rainbow is composed of three primary colors. These three colors correspond to the elements of fire, air and water, which combine to bring forth song (via the "fire" or warmth of the throat, the "water" or fluids of the mouth, and the "air" expelled from the lungs). Throughout the Kabbalah, any grouping of three is said to parallel the Patriarchs.

When we sing to G-d in prayer, we arouse the merit of the Patriarchs and thus mitigate Divine decrees. In this way, our prayer corresponds to the bow with which Yaakov defeated his enemies. (See Likutey Moharan I, 42)

GATHERING TOGETHER

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Yaakov called his sons and said to them, 'Gather together, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days.'" (49:1)

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov gathered his sons in order to reveal to them when the End of Days would be. However, when he saw that the Divine Presence had departed from him, he did not make the revelation.

Rashi writes that after the Divine Presence left Yaakov, he “began to tell them other matters.” These words are mysterious, because we see clearly from the verse that Yaakov went on to tell his sons other things.

In fact, we have many verses detailing what he said to his sons at that time. If so, what is Rashi telling us?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) reveals that Mashiach can either come at its predestined time, or earlier if we merit it. Therefore, perhaps we can answer that Yaakov initially attempted to tell his sons when the allotted time for Mashiach to come would be; however, the Divine Presence left him in order to give him the message that his sons should not passively await the date of his arrival, rather they should be actively trying to bring his arrival. They should make themselves worthy of Mashiach coming early, rendering the predetermined date irrelevant.

With this understanding, perhaps we can understand Rashi's comments to tell us that Yaakov said “other matters” after failing to reveal when Mashiach would come. The “other matters” were the “other methods” of Mashiach's arrival - namely, bringing him early.

If this is true, we can look to what Yaakov said to his sons in order to see clear instructions how to bring Mashiach early. The Midrash learns that the verse above provides the answer to our question.

Yaakov tells his children to “gather together.” The message is clear: If there are no arguments among you and you bind yourselves together as one unit, then this will be the key to your swift redemption.

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for Mashiach; which means that we have not fully grasped this message. The Jewish People are scattered and diverse, but we are one family. If we can accept this idea and consider our fellows Jews as brothers and sisters and treat them as such, then we will succeed in bringing Mashiach early.

BEST KEPT SECRET

Yid HaKadosh

“And Yaakov called his sons and said to them, ‘Gather together, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days.’” (49:1)

There are Tzaddikim who wish to reveal the end of the Diaspora - that is, to hint as to when Mashiach will come.

The truth is that the coming of Mashiach is a secret.

The one who knows the secret will not reveal it. The one who does reveal the secret does not really know the secret.

GATHERING THE DISTANT

Reb Noson of Breslov

“And Yaakov called his sons and said to them, ‘Gather together, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days.’” (49:1)

Yaakov wanted to reveal the End of Days, but the Divine Presence left him. (Rashi)

At first, Yaakov called together his sons with the term *hei'asfu* (come together), which connotes a gathering of those who are nearby. This assemblage was meant to be one of *tzaddikim*. Yaakov thought that a gathering of *tzaddikim* would be sufficient to bring a conclusion to the exile. But when the Divine Presence left him, he realized that more was needed: one must make sure to include even those who are distant from G-d. Therefore, he added *hi'kavtzu* (gather together), referring to those who are distant from G-d.

G-d's compassion is unending, and He wants everyone to be rectified and redeemed. The Redemption will come because the Community of Yisrael will grow, and more and more people will join it in its service of G-d.

Therefore, Yaakov said to Shimon and Levi (referring to the rebellions of Korach and Zimri), “Let my soul not enter into their conspiracy” (Bereishis 49:6). Each soul that joins the holy community enhances it, but strife and rebellion demean the community and lessen its chances for redemption. (Likutey Halakhot VI, p. 54)

In contrast, the blessing Yaakov gave to Yehudah alludes to the battles that Yehudah will wage to spread G-dliness “until the coming of Shiloh” (Bereishis 49:10) - for Yehudah's teachings will cause those who are distant from G-d to draw near. (Likutey Halakhot VI, p. 58)

UNITING THE PEOPLE

Rebbe Nachman

“And Yaakov called his sons and said to them, ‘Gather together, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days.’” (49:1)

Yaakov wanted to reveal the End of Days, but the Divine Presence left him. He began saying other things. (Rashi)

If the prophecy Yaakov wanted to reveal is not recorded in the Torah because the Divine Presence left him, why does the Torah record his opening statement?

The answer is that Yaakov's intention, albeit thwarted, also contains a message which helps draw blessing. The *tzaddik* strives to gather Jews together. The more they unite, the greater the Torah he can reveal to them.

In order to effect this revelation, he must perform two devotions. The first is to gather the souls together. The second is to elevate those souls to a higher level; this ascent allows the *tzaddik* to draw Torah from a higher level. (See Likutey Moharan I, 13)

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And Yaakov called his sons and said to them, 'Gather together, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days.'" (49:1)

Every blemish that we find in the very great tzaddikim in the Torah stemmed from their forcing an issue rather than waiting patiently for G-d to answer them. Adam erred on the same day he was created - he should have waited until Shabbat began to engage in marital relations with Chava. Avraham demanded of G-d, "How will I know that I will inherit [the Land]?" (Bereishis 15:8). Yitzchak wanted to give Eisav the blessings so that Eisav could be subservient to Yaakov and support his Torah efforts - however, this result could not occur before the coming of Mashiach. Yaakov wanted to reveal the End of Days, and the Divine Presence left him (see Rashi on Bereishis 49:1).

When he began to bless his sons, Yaakov actually rebuked the first three tribes, Reuven, Shimon and Levi, to impress upon them the importance of patience. Reuven forced the issue by moving Yaakov's couch (see Rashi on Bereishis 35:22). Shimon and Levi attacked Shekhem without consulting their father (Bereishis 34:25). In Yehudah, however, Yaakov saw the progenitor of Mashiach, who would exemplify true patience and master the power of supplication and prayer.

A person should never force an issue, especially when he is praying to G-d. Instead, he should appeal constantly to G-d with various supplications and requests in order to draw close to Him and to draw upon himself the sanctity of Torah. One must endure many tests in order to properly attain Torah; being patient in prayer is the main way he can exercise his free will and learn to direct his will towards serving G-d. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 228a)

SEEKING COUNSEL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to Yisrael, your father." (49:2)

Unity among Jews will bring the Redemption. Thus, Yaakov indicated to his children that they must be "together." He continued, "Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov" - for the way to attain this unity is by guarding your counsel. Seek only good advice from the true tzaddikim and beware of faulty and improper counsel. This is hinted at in the name Yaakov (יעקב), from Eikev (עקב, heel) since advice is the "feet" upon which a person stands.

Yaakov rebuked the first three tribes for following improper advice. Reuven moved his father's couch and Shimon and Levi attacked Shekhem, each without seeking proper counsel. Yaakov gave his blessing to Yehudah, however, because Yehudah confessed his sin [with Tamar]. Confessing one's sins is the best advice, as it helps one to recognize his shortcomings and rectify them.

REDEEMED BY UNITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to Yisrael, your father." (49:2)

In order to explain the apparent redundancy in this verse we must preface with the explanation of the holy Zohar (3:196a) on the verse "Who among you fears G-d, listening to the voice of His servant?" (Yeshayahu 50:10).

The Zohar says that a tzaddik continually hears it proclaimed from on High that he is a servant of the King. See there for further elaboration.

Accordingly, when the Jewish people are meritorious and stand united, they hear this Heavenly announcement: "Give glory to the children of Yaakov."

This is what Yaakov told his children when he said, "Gather and listen, sons of Yaakov," meaning, "Hearken to the Heavenly declaration that says of you, 'The children of Yaakov are My servants.'"

Now, when the Jewish people assemble, their hearts are moved to repent - their hearts are purified. In the merit of repentance, they will be redeemed from their exile. For this reason the verse continues, "listen to Yisrael, your father," meaning, "pay attention to and understand my words, since I am about to intimate to you now the secret of when the Redemption will come."

UNITED FRONT

Avnei Ezel

"Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to Yisrael, your father." (49:2)

The Patriarch's actual name, which had been given to him at birth, was Yaakov. Hence, all Jews, regardless of the manner in which they conduct themselves, are regarded as "sons of Yaakov" by virtue of their descent from Yaakov and of their being part of the Jewish nation.

The name Yisrael, however, was not given to Yaakov until later in life, when he had attained the stellar moral level that made him worthy of it ("...for you have striven with G-d and with men and have prevailed" - Bereishis 32:29). For this reason, this name - when applied to the Jewish people as a whole - signifies the high moral level of the community of Yisrael as Yaakov's spiritual heirs.

A similar thought was expressed by Yaakov, by way of an introduction to his last words to his children:

"Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov." To begin with, you are to unite as Yaakov's children, all sharing one descent and nationality. But mere nationality ties are not enough. You must also listen "to Yisrael, your father."

Every gathering of Jews must have as its purpose to strengthen Judaism's spirit, so that the "sons of Yaakov" may hear the voice of Yisrael, their father, and, together with him, proclaim that "Hashem, our G-d, is One."

HOW TO BE HEARD

Mishmeres Itamar

“Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to Yisrael, your father.” (49:2)

When you will be united and remain close with one another, then Hashem, your Father, will listen.

UNITED STRENGTH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Gather together and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to Yisrael, your father.” (49:2)

Mashal: A wealthy man once traveled in a luxurious coach, pulled by four beautiful horses. Not long into his trip, the wagon driver lost control. The coach strayed off the road and sank into a muddy swamp. The driver whipped the horses and tugged at their reins, but he could not get the animals to extricate the wagon.

Then, a farmer drove by in his wagon, pulled by two sturdy horses. He stopped and offered to hitch up his horses to the wealthy man's coach.

“My horses can pull out your wagon. It'll just take a minute,” the farmer said confidently.

While the wealthy man appreciated the offer, he was skeptical about the farmer's confidence. “What makes you think your two horses can accomplish what my four horses cannot?” he asked.

The farmer smiled. “Tell me, where did you get these fine horses from?”

“Well, I bought them from the best dealers around,” the wealthy man said proudly. “Each one was the choice of the lot. I paid good money for them, too!”

“Aha!” said the farmer. “There's your answer. Each one of these horses was the pick of its respective dealer. Each one thinks that it is the best. However, none of them ever learned to work in unison, to be part of a team with other horses. When you whip one, the other three rejoice. But my two horses have worked together as a team. They know each other and understand that when one is down, the other must make a greater effort to help him. They know how to succeed!”

And, in fact, they did!

Nimshal: R' Chaim Volozhiner zt'l explained: Before Yaakov Avinu passed away, he called together his sons and told them that they must stay unified, and they would remain unconquerable.

This is what unity is all about. The nations of the world each pull their own way, but we, the Jewish people, who live together in harmony and unity, are invincible.

THINK IT THROUGH

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz

“[Yaakov said to Reuven,] ‘Unstable as water, do not take more.’” (49:4)

The Torah does not usually speak in metaphors. However, Yaakov is teaching Reuven, and all of us, the evils of impulsivity.

Just as water flows quickly, so does the behavior of an impulsive person who acts quickly without thinking. One who does not weigh the consequences of his actions will make harmful mistakes which can cause much damage.

The Torah's metaphor of water serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of being impulsive, so when one sees water he will know that he must slow himself down.

CONTROLLED ZEAL

Reb Naftali Zvi of Ropshitz

“Shimon and Levi are brothers...” (49:5)

The brothers were zealous for the sake of mitzvos. They did not fight for vain purposes. They defended the honor of their sister. Even though they were zealous for a good cause, nevertheless, Yaakov condemned their behavior. Yaakov said, “Accursed is their rage for it is mighty, and their wrath for it is harsh” (49:7).

One must learn to control both anger and zealousness even if one has the best of intentions.

TEACHING PATIENCE

Divrei Avraham

“Accursed is their [Shimon and Levi's] rage...” (49:7)

In Pirkei Avos we are taught: “The angry person cannot teach.” Rashi tells us that Shevet Shimon later became the schoolteachers of Bnei Yisrael. For this reason, Yaakov cursed their anger because had they remained with their anger, they never would have been able to become schoolteachers!

OUR TRUE POWER

Rabbeinu Bechaye

“You, Yehudah, your brothers shall praise...” (49:8)

In the pesukim that contain the blessings of Yehudah, we find every letter of the alef-beis, except for the letter zayin. This teaches us that the power of the kingdom of Yehudah does not come from weaponry (in Hebrew, “klei zayin”), but rather from the merit of Bnei Yisrael and the ever-vigilant protection of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

OWNING OUR MISTAKES

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Yehudah, your brothers shall concede to you." (49:8)

The Torah relates the brachos which Yaakov gave his sons before he passed away. Yehudah received the brachah of malchus. Why does Yaakov select Yehudah for this prestigious honor? Additionally, why does Yaakov use the language "yoducha achecha - your brothers will concede to you," when giving the brachah? Why not just say, "your descendants will be the kings"?

The Kli Yakar explains that the reason Yehudah was chosen for this role was because of a middah kneged middah reward for something which took place in Parshas Vayeishev. When Yehudah was ready to have Tamar killed, for what was believed to be a heinous crime of forbidden behavior, Tamar presented him with some items which indicated that it was he, Yehudah, who was at fault. Immediately, Yehudah publicly responded with the words "tzadka mimeni - she is right, they are from me." Though this admission was very embarrassing to Yehudah, he, nevertheless, admitted the truth, wholeheartedly, publicly and without delay. The Kli Yakar explains that just as Yehudah was willing to concede the truth without reluctance, his brothers will concede the leadership to him without hesitation.

In fact, the Midrash Rabbah points out that we are not called Reuvenim or Shimonim; rather, we are called Yehudim. It is possible to suggest that this is because as Jews we possess the unique quality of Yehudah: the ability to admit wrongdoing and be subservient to the truth.

As human beings, we are often resistant to admit and recognize our mistakes. Instead, we look for every opportunity to pin our failures on someone or something else. The Kli Yakar is teaching us that as Jews, we are always looking to grow and improve. We must be willing to take a hard look at ourselves and accept our weaknesses so that we can grow from them. It is with this approach that we are guaranteed to become the best versions of ourselves.

PRIDE OF A LION

Chiddushei HaRim

"[Yehudah] stooped down, he crouched as a lion..." (49:9)

Yehudah's outstanding quality is that even if he falls and is bowed low, he remains as firm and fearless as a lion.

Even when he must kneel, he does so with pride. He doesn't succumb to despair, but readily admits his failure. By virtue of his repentance, he speedily rises again.

Yehudah, Yaakov's son, was honest enough to admit his sin with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Bereishis 38) and as a result, Peretz, one of the twins born of this relationship, became the forebear of the House of Dovid, from whom the Mashiach will descend.

MASHIACH IS EVERY GENERATION

Rebbe Nachman

"The scepter will not be removed from Yehudah, nor authority from between his feet, until the coming of Shiloh; then his will be a gathering of nations." (49:10)

Shiloh is another name for Mashiach; it is also a reference to Moshe, since the numerical value of both Shiloh (שילה) and Moshe (משה) is the same. (See Likutey Moharan I, 118)

Just as Moshe is compared to Mashiach, so too, every tzaddik partakes of the nature of Mashiach. (ibid., I, 2:6)

Thus, a Messianic presence exists in every generation. G-d considered Moshe a possible candidate for Mashiach because he devoted himself to the point of self-sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people. (See Likutey Moharan I, 79)

EVERLASTING RECORD

Reb Noson of Breslov

"The scepter will not be removed from Yehudah, nor authority from between his feet, until the coming of Shiloh." (49:10)

Even though Yehudah - who represents the Jewish nation - descends to the "feet" (i.e., the lowest levels), still, authority (mechokek) will not be removed from him. The mechokek (literally, an inscribing or engraving pen) represents all the good that was ever done by the Jews, and serves as an indelible record of the good points that can always be found in them. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 156)

THE WINE OF TORAH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He will launder his clothes in wine." (49:11)

Every time we observe a commandment, we create a spiritual "garment" for our souls. These garments, however, must be "laundered in wine" - our fulfillment of the commandments must be imbued with joy.

The way to achieve this joy is by studying the inner dimension of the Torah - the teachings of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah and Chassidism) - for this dimension of the Torah inspires us to love G-d and cleave to Him through observance of His commandments. It is for this reason that this aspect of the Torah is referred to as "the wine of Torah." (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5699, pp. 58-59; see Torah Ohr 46c-d) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

GREED FREE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Zevulun will settle the seashores. He will be a harbor for ships, and his border will reach Tzidon." (49:13)

The Tribe of Zevulun provided a livelihood for the Tribe of Yissachar, whose members dedicated their days to the study of Torah.

Because Zevulun broke his avarice and shared his wealth with the righteous, he merited to “settle the seashores” and receive territory on the northernmost border of the Land of Israel, in Tzidon. In other words, his territory represents the gateway to the Holy Land, which is attained by breaking one's avarice.

A person who breaks his desire for wealth (i.e., Zevulun) and gives charity to the tzaddikim (i.e., Yissachar) merits to the Holy Land, because “Tzaddikim will inherit the Land” (Tehillim 37:29). (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 254)

OVERCOMING MATERIALITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey...” (49:14)

This verse alludes to the following principle: Possessing a physical body that gravitates toward the physical enables us to earn a reward by overcoming its materialistic propensities.

This idea is alluded to in the name “Yissachar” (יששכר), which can be seen as being composed of the two words for “there is reward” (יש שכר). The following words in the verse “a strong-boned donkey” (חמר גרם) allude to the fact that it is the body that enables us to receive reward, by overcoming it. The word for “donkey” (חמור) is related to the word for “materiality” (חומר).

(The word for “bony” (גרם) also means “to cause.” Thus, allegorically, this verse is to be read, “There is reward for [overcoming] the materiality [of the body; and doing so is what] causes [the reward].”)

CROUCHING DOWN FOR OTHERS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey, crouching between the borders.” (49:14)

Yissachar took upon himself the yoke of Torah like a Chamor (חמור, donkey) takes on a yoke. In a deeper sense, this refers to the way that the tzaddik dedicates himself to reveal G-dliness even to those who are steeped in Chamriyut (חומריות, materialism), thereby elevating materialism into holiness. “He crouches between the borders” - because the tzaddik goes down to the lowest borders in order to reach those distant from G-d and draw them near. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 160a)

BEARING THE BURDEN

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

“For he [Yissachar] saw a resting place, that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bowed his shoulder to bear...” (49:15)

“For he saw a resting place, that it was good” - How can one attain true peace and rest? By bowing “his shoulder to bear”; i.e., by freely submitting to all that one is given to bear.

Once one has acquired patience, one has also attained true peace. (Similarly, once one has peace of mind, they can bear all sorts of situations.)

CONSTANT HOPE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“I await Your salvation, O G-d!” (49:18)

Yaakov foresaw the deeds of Shimshon (see Rashi) and the salvation that he would bring to the Jewish nation during his lifetime.

But he also foresaw that the Final Redemption would not take place at that time. Nevertheless, he exclaimed, “I await Your salvation, O G-d,” for tzaddikim never despair of G-d's salvation.

Even if it doesn't come at the moment we seek it, it will come. We must await it. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 154)

CONNECTING TO THE INFINITE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“As for Gad, a troop trooped forth from him...” (49:19)

It says in the Talmud (Bava Basra 10a) that a person should give charity before prayer. A property of charity is that it destroys the kelipos, enabling a person to pray afterward with a pure heart. Prayer - then, also meaning “connection” - propitiously leads to an attachment and a connection with G-d.

Man is finite, while G-d is infinite. Thus, through prayer a person ascends from a finite state to an infinite one.

This is what the verse alludes to with the name “Gad,” which denotes bestowing kindness on the poor. The name Gad (גד) is spelled gimmel dalet, which alludes to kindness, as our Sages say (Shabbos 104a), “The names of the letters gimmel dalet mean ‘bestow kindness on the poor’ (גומל דלים).”

The verse continues, “a troop trooped forth from him” (גדוד יגודנו). Taking the root גד in the sense of “cut down” (as in “Cut down (גודו) the tree” (Daniel 4:11)), this phrase means that the charity a person gives destroys (“cuts down”) the kelipos.

The verse concludes, “and it will troop (יגוד) back in its tracks (עקב).” Taking again the root גד in the sense of “cutting down” and the word for “back in its tracks” (עקב) in its literal meaning - “heel,” this phrase reads, “He will cut down the heel.” Thus, the verse implies that when a person cleaves to G-d, Who is referred to as “He,” G-d “cuts off the heel,” i.e., releases the person from his “heel” - his lowliness on account of being finite - and is enabled to enter into an infinite state.

THE PAUPER'S PRAYER

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"As for Gad, a troop trooped forth from him..." (49:19)

As is known, "more than the householder does for the pauper, the pauper does for the householder" (Vayikra Rabbah 34:8). When a person prays, he should consider himself impoverished, as if he were nothing, as it says (Tehillim 102:1), "A prayer for the poor man." This phrase can be understood to imply, "Prayer is something that one should approach as if he were a poor man."

The matter is as follows. When a person considers himself important, an accusation is leveled against him from on High. Furthermore, the only kelipos that such a person is able to cut off from their source of life force are those that are commensurate with his current stature, but not those that are either higher than his level or lower than it, since he has no connection to them. But when a person is humble, considering himself a pauper, then he is able to cut off even the kelipos that exist on the lower levels.

This, then, is what is alluded to in the verse: Gad - as explained above, this name alludes to the bestowal of kindness. By considering himself as poor and lowly, and then praying, he is actually "bestowing kindness" on G-d, for, as mentioned above, "more than the householder does for the pauper, the pauper does for the householder."

"A troop trooped forth from him, and it will troop back in its tracks" - taking the word for "back in its tracks" (עקב) in its literal meaning, "heel," this phrase implies that such a person is able to destroy even the kelipos that exist on the lowest of levels, which is referred to as the "heel" of creation, so to speak.

KINGLY DELICACIES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give kingly delicacies." (49:20)

A delicacy is consumed not to satisfy hunger or nutritional needs but to provide delight. A king is used to having all his needs provided for amply and even having common delicacies readily available. Thus, a king's delicacy is something so rare and special that it can delight even royalty.

G-d has made us all "kings" over the part of reality that we can refine and elevate (Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction). We are therefore worthy of being provided with the rarest delicacies. Indeed, in the Messianic Redemption, not only will our basic needs be provided for in abundance, but "all manner of delicacies will be as abundant as dust" (Mishneh Torah, Melachim 12:5). The purpose of this abundance will be to free us from the distractions of work and to enhance our appreciation of G-d's goodness, enabling us to devote our energies to heightening our Divine consciousness.

Thus, by providing for the needs of our fellows - ensuring that none of them lack not only the necessities of life but even delicacies that befit a king - we can hasten the advent of the Messianic Era. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 32, pp. 186-191) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PRAYERS OF BEAUTY

Rebbe Nachman

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give kingly delicacies." (49:20)

When a person realizes that his income ("rich foods") comes to him through Divine Providence, he can pray and praise G-d ("words of beauty"). (See Likutey Moharan II, 16)

KINGLY PLEASURE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give kingly delicacies." (49:20)

When a person receives benevolence from G-d, his main pleasure should be derived from the fact that G-d receives joy because the person is receiving this goodness.

"From Asher will come rich food." This phrase may be read, "when a person receives abundant goodness," then, "he will yield kingly delicacies" - a person's principal pleasure, alluded to by the word "delicacies," should be "kingly," i.e., his pleasure should come from giving pleasure to G-d, King of the universe.

Another explanation of this verse: In principle, a person's main enjoyment should come from gazing, so to speak, at G-d, i.e., contemplating His greatness, His providence, His goodness, and so forth. We know, however, that any continual pleasure - even something that is essentially very good, immeasurably so - eventually diminishes, since a person grows accustomed to it.

Therefore, at times G-d condenses His brilliance to those who worship Him steadfastly. This enables them to rise to a higher level, so that the pleasure not be constant, thereby preventing them from stagnating.

This is the import of the verse "From Asher will come rich food." The name "Asher" (אשר) is related to the word for "see" (שור), as in the verse (Bereishis 49:22) "Girls used to walk along the wall to gaze [upon his beauty]." In other words, from looking at the greatness of G-d comes "rich food" (שמנה לחמו), literally, "fat bread," alluding to the "bread" of Torah, which is likened to bread since it nourishes the soul. In other words, when G-d imposes a limitation on Himself, as it were, so that we can apprehend Him somewhat, He is revealed, and we have "rich bread." We do not grow accustomed to His revelation and therefore become bored with it; it remains "rich."

The verse continues, "And He..." Taking the "He" to refer to G-d, referring to G-d in the third person alludes to how He is sometimes concealed.

He conceals Himself, as the verse continues, "to yield kingly delicacies," meaning, so that the tzaddik should receive pleasure from the subsequent, more intense revelation of Divinity. For certainly, "more than the calf wishes to suckle, the cow desires to suckle" (Pesachim 112a). Thus, the Almighty occasionally conceals Himself so that the pleasure of the tzaddik should not be perpetual.

Another explanation of this verse: I heard from my master and teacher, the righteous R' Dov Ber, of blessed memory, an interpretation of the verse (Yeshayahu 61:10) "I will rejoice with G-d." He interpreted the double form of the verb "to rejoice" (שׂוּשׂ אֲשִׁישׁ - literally, "to rejoice, I will rejoice") as follows: "I rejoice, and moreover, I am pleased that I was privileged 'to gaze at the pleasingness of G-d' (Tehillim 27:4) and to delight in worshipping Him. This itself gives me happiness, that I am privileged to get close to G-d and to enjoy serving Him with all that He has blessed me with." This is what the verse means when it says, "To rejoice, I rejoice" - "I rejoice and am pleased that I have merited to rejoice in G-d and derive pleasure from His service."

This is alluded to in the verse "From Asher will come rich food." The name "Asher" alludes to the quality of pleasure (Zohar 1:245b). From the very fact that we enjoy serving G-d, we are happy and pleased that we have merited to take pleasure in serving Him.

This is the meaning of the continuation of the verse, "will come rich food," for "food," referred to in the verse as "bread," alludes to pleasure. Thus, the verse means that from the fact itself that we have been privileged to receive pleasure ("from Asher") from serving Him, we have pleasure ("rich food") for having merited this.

Another explanation of this verse: It says (Shir HaShirim 1:2), "He will kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is better than wine."

There are two levels in serving G-d. Some people love G-d because He shows His love by gladly accepting our Divine service, repaying each person, commensurate with his deeds, with ample goodness. He rewards us generously, giving us a reward that "no eye can foresee" (Brachos 34b). Because of the reward a person receives for his service, he loves G-d with a consummate love.

But there is a loftier level of serving G-d. There are those who love G-d simply because G-d loves them, even if they receive no reward for serving Him. G-d's love is so cherished and so precious and so delightful, that on account of this love itself we love Him with a consummate love. The love that He has shown by having chosen us as His people is more precious to us than anything else. Contemplate and understand this well.

SAVING THE BEST FOR THE REST

Reb Zev Stritkover

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give kingly delicacies." (49:20)

We have a lot to learn from Asher. "His bread is rich" - though Asher's portion was a plain piece of bread, for others he gave a kingly portion.

Such must be the life of a Jew. He should lead a very plain life so that he can give the best to others.

SHARED WEALTH

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give kingly delicacies." (49:20)

On face value, this verse describing Yaakov's blessing is difficult to understand.

Yaakov blesses Asher that "his bread will be rich" - meaning that he will personally enjoy good quality food, but also that he "will give kingly delicacies," which indicates that his best quality food will be reserved for others...

Is it such a blessing not to be able to enjoy the best of one's own food?

Rav Moshe Sternbuch answers that Asher's blessing was that he would so appreciate the value of giving to others that he would limit his own intake in order to be able to have more to give away.

Thus, Rav Moshe answered that this was indeed a tremendous blessing: not only to have the wealth, but not to need it, and even to be happy to give it away!

One person who truly understood this point was the Rebbe of Kopishnitz who was once approached to help a Rabbi who had escaped the terrors of the Holocaust and had arrived in the city with nothing to his name.

The first necessity was to collect fitting attire for this Rabbi, and so, community activists came and asked the Rebbe if he had any old boots to donate.

The Rebbe opened his closet and handed them brand-new, unworn boots.

The embarrassed men were quick to explain that they would never have requested the Rebbe's new boots, they merely wanted some old boots.

The Rebbe answered them, "The clothing that a person wears in the World to Come are the mitzvos and good deeds that he did in This World. And you want me to go there with old boots?!"

We are all incredibly wealthy in at least some areas: whether it is in knowledge, experience, time, or financial means, we all have something that others are lacking. Perhaps, then, we too can accept upon ourselves Yaakov's blessing and take the resources that we have and use them to help others in need.

TRANSCENDING AND REFINING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Naftali is a deer let loose." (49:21)

In his blessings, Yaakov compares some of the tribes to wild beasts (e.g., Yehudah to a lion, Binyamin to a wolf) and others to domestic animals (e.g., Yissachar to a donkey, Yosef to an ox). The tribes compared to wild animals are characterized by a passionate love for G-d and a yearning to escape material existence to cleave to Him. The tribes compared to domestic animals - whose nature is to dutifully accept the work given to them - are characterized by submission to the task of revealing G-dliness within material existence.

Yaakov concludes by blessing all the tribes with the characteristics unique to each tribe individually. Thus, although each tribe preserves its particular emphasis on the Jewish people's Divine mission, it also can, and should, incorporate the other tribes paths within its own. Therefore, we all embody these two ways of relating to the world, both yearning to transcend it and working to refine it. (Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 5, 1092a-1093a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

CONQUERING THE WOLF

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Binyamin is like a wolf that preys. In the morning he will eat a portion, and in the evening he will divide the spoil." (49:27)

It would be sad if a father, at the point of death, could find no better description of his youngest, cherished son than to characterize him as a "wolf." It does not seem to be flattering. However, one must note that the words used in this blessing are not "a ravenous wolf" or "a wolf that tears [his prey] to pieces." Rather, "ze'ev yitrof" suggests that the wolf will actually be the object of the tearing. Thus, Yaakov was implying that his youngest son, Binyamin, will in fact "tear the wolf."

Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch zt'l explains that when Yaakov mentions a wolf, it is only because he is now taking a last look at his "flock." For twenty years, when he worked as a shepherd, he had to fend off attacks from real wolves upon his flock of sheep. Now he saw all his children before him.

He had given each his blessing; he had recognized and described the individual significance and strengths of each one of them for all time. And so, his final glance came to rest upon the end of days, when the last of the world powers will be overcome. He saw the bitter exile and the forces of galus against which his children would have to struggle, and he saw that it would be the smallest and the youngest among them, his very own Binyamin, who would repel the stalking "wolf," the eternal Amalek, from his flock.

Already, "in the morning," at the outset of the nation's history, it would be Binyamin who would deal the wolf a powerful blow at the hands of Yehoshua bin Nun; but in the "evening" of time, when the Final Redemption will draw near, Binyamin will destroy the wolf completely.

Indeed, Chazal have a mesorah that Amalek, our archenemy, will not be overcome by Yehudah, the strongest of the shevatim, but by the sons of Rochel, who have the least power of all, as the Navi writes: "The youngest of the herd will drive them off as spoil" (Yirmiyahu 49:20).

BLESSED WITH PATIENCE

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"...and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them; each one according to his blessing he blessed them." (49:28)

Even Shimon and Levi received a blessing. The fact that Yaakov cursed their anger and their wrath (Bereishis 49:7) is a blessing in itself, for "no curse cleaves to one who is blessed."

The circumstance that Yaakov eradicated their two great shortcomings is actually the best blessing Shimon and Levi could have received.

UNITY IN COMMUNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"...and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them; each one according to his blessing he blessed them." (49:28)

Although we each have our unique roles in our Divine mission to make this world into G-d's home, we are all involved to some extent in the roles played by others, as well.

There are three increasingly effective ways that we can do this:

- We all focus exclusively on our personal tasks, but since we are working toward the same goal, we all share in the results of our separate accomplishments.
- We invite and encourage one another to participate occasionally in the personal activity that we emphasize.
- When we periodically engage in tasks other than our forte, we immerse ourselves in them just as fully as we do when we engage in our personal task.

Participating in each other's endeavors fosters Jewish unity, making us worthy of G-d's blessings, including - and especially - the ultimate blessing, the Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 287-291) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

SELFISH CONSIDERATIONS

Yismach Moshe

"Egypt bewailed him for seventy days." (50:3)

The Egyptians did not go into deep mourning out of love for Yaakov. However, they remembered that when Yaakov came to Egypt, the Nile River overflowed into the fields and the hunger ceased. With the death of Yaakov, the Egyptians feared that the river would return to its previous state and a period of hunger would again return.

FOR HASHEM'S SAKE

Ateres Tzvi

"And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the G-d of your father..." (50:16-17)

Even if your father is dead, his G-d still lives. (Rashi)

The brothers believed that Yosef had refrained from punishing them while their father was still alive because he hadn't wanted to cause Yaakov grief. They therefore sent word to Yosef as follows: "Your father is dead, but his G-d is still alive. If you did not want to cause your father grief, you certainly can't grieve the Master of the Universe, Who is grieved by any suffering that comes to a son of Yaakov."

THE REAL DEAL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Yosef said to them, 'Fear not. For am I in the place of Hashem?'" (50:19)

Mashal: There was once a badchan who was renowned for entertaining his crowds by imitating voices of well-known rabbanim and Chassidishe rebbes. Of course, he was always respectful, but his flawless impersonations were a guaranteed crowd-pleaser.

He was once asked to perform at a wedding where the holy Satmar Rebbe, R' Yoilish Teitelbaum zt'l was present. Before he began, he went over to the rebbe and asked permission to impersonate the rebbe, all in the name of gladdening the bride and groom. The rebbe gladly consented. The badchan got up and began imitating the Samar Rebbe's voice, his hand gestures, every nuance down to his famous heart-wrenching groans. The crowd loved it. But the rebbe, he noticed, had tears coursing down his cheeks. Immediately, he ran over to apologize.

The Satmar Rebbe waved him away. "I am not upset at you. I was just thinking, that if you can imitate me so well - maybe I am just imitating myself!"

Nimshal: People often fool themselves into believing that they are something that they are not or have the power to do things that they cannot. Yosef HaTzaddik had no such pretensions. Although his brothers were afraid that he might now take vengeance on them, he reassured them by saying, "Am I in the place of Hashem? You may have intended me harm, but Hashem saw it for good."

SPEAKING TO THEIR HEARTS

Rebbe Nachman

"[Yosef said,] 'Now, do not fear. I will provide for you and your children.' He comforted them and spoke to their hearts." (50:21)

Yosef spoke words that were soothing and acceptable to his brothers' hearts. (Rashi)

In this manner, Yosef exercised the principal power of the tzaddik, which is to arouse people's hearts so that they may come to serve G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 34:8)

RISING ABOVE EXILE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yosef died and was placed in a coffin in Egypt." (50:26)

Throughout their lives, our patriarchs and matriarchs clung to G-d and His plan for creation. They were therefore unaffected by our world's concealment of Divinity. Although our Divine consciousness is much lower, we have nonetheless inherited some of their ability to rise above the limitations of this world. This is what has enabled us to fulfill the Divine mission described in the next book of the Torah, Shemos. In the Book of Shemos, we will see the Jewish people receive the Torah and begin building a home for G-d out of this world.

To provide us with this inspiration, our ancestors, too, had to live in a state similar to exile. This happened when Yaakov and his family descended to Egypt. Although they were never enslaved, they were still in "exile," banished from the Holy Land. By maintaining spiritual mastery over Egypt, Yaakov and his sons gave us the strength to overcome the spiritual darkness of our own exile. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 474; vol. 30, pp. 249) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HAFTORAH

BECOMING A MAN

Chida

"[Dovid said to Shlomo,] 'I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and become a man.'" (Melachim I 2:2)

This is Dovid's last will and testament, his charge to Shlomo, his son and successor. Shlomo must always say to himself: "I go the way of all the earth"; he must always remain aware of the end that awaits all of humanity. Then, surely, Dovid says to his son, you will "be strong" and "become a man." You will be able to control your evil inclination.

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