

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayechi

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / 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

ETERNAL 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.

JOYFUL TRANSFORMATION

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.

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.

RECOGNIZING EXILE

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

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

Rashi comments that the beginning of this *parashah* is “closed” (a technical term, meaning that only one space separates it from the previous *parashah*, unlike other *parashiyos*, which are separated by a space of at least nine letters) to suggest that as soon as Yaakov died, the eyes and hearts of the Jews closed because of the suffering and despair of the harsh bondage which began then.

Two questions present themselves: First, at the beginning of the *parashah* Yaakov was still alive. Why is this allusion to the “closing” of their eyes and hearts placed here? Secondly, even after Yaakov’s death the bondage did not commence until after Yosef and all the other brothers died. Why is the despair of the bondage associated with Yaakov’s death, when it did not start until much later?

In answer we may say that Hashem began to find fault with the Jews for failing to appreciate that they were in exile. Even though they lived amidst luxury and plenty - for the king of Egypt treated them kindly - they should have realized that Hashem had not brought them to Egypt to enjoy its pleasures and that merely being under the jurisdiction of other nations is itself a great exile, even when those nations treat us with kindness and generosity.

But the Jews did not see this fundamental fact during Yaakov’s lifetime, while they still enjoyed the abundance Egypt offered them. They first recognized this after their father died and they realized that without Pharaoh’s permission they would not be able to bury Yaakov with his fathers. Then the shock of being in exile sprang upon them, and suddenly they became bitterly aware of its implications. It was then, even though the bondage had not yet started, that their eyes and hearts closed from the pain of exile.

Yaakov, however, with his sensitive soul, had begun to feel the exile from the moment he left his home in the land of Canaan to set out for Egypt. For this reason he did not want to go to Egypt at all, in spite of the famine, until Hashem promised him (Bereishis 46:4), “I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up.”

THE NEED FOR EMPATHY

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

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

Rashi, in his opening comments to Parshas Vayechi, observes something peculiar about this parsha - that it is סתומה, or “closed” in the Sefer Torah. Other *parshiyos* begin either a line below the end of the previous parsha, or on the same line, but after an empty space (specifically, the space needed for nine letters) that separates each parsha from the previous parsha. Parshas Vayechi, however, begins without any empty space after the previous parsha, Parshas Vayigash. It is thus “closed,” without any space introducing it.

Rashi explains that this is done to allude to us that after Yaakov’s death, which is told in Parshas Vayechi, נסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל מצרת השעבוד - Bnei Yisrael’s “eyes and hearts were closed due to the pain of bondage.” The “closed” beginning of Parshas Vayechi hints to the “closing” of the people’s eyes and hearts as a result of their state of enslavement which followed Yaakov’s passing.

What exactly does Rashi mean when he speaks of the “closing” of Bnei Yisrael’s eyes and hearts?

Rav Yechezkel Weidenfeld answers by noting Rashi’s comments in Parshas Shemos (2:11) explaining the Torah’s description of Moshe leaving the palace to observe Bnei Yisrael’s suffering - וירא בסבלותם. Rashi writes, נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם - Moshe directed his eyes and heart toward the people, empathizing with their plight.

When our eyes and hearts are “open,” we are mindful of others’ distress, and we share their pain. But when the bondage began, Bnei Yisrael’s eyes and hearts were “closed,” unable to empathize with each other. When a person is overwhelmed by his own pain and suffering, he becomes self-absorbed, focused entirely on his own emotional burdens, unable to feel the pain of other people.

And this, Rav Weidenfeld writes, is the worst *galus* of all - when we cannot see or feel the pain of other people, when we are entirely self-absorbed, alone, unable to connect to our fellow. The process of *geulah* (redemption) began when Moshe Rabbeinu “opened” his eyes and heart, when he showed empathy, when he went out to observe, take note of, and feel the pain experienced by his brothers and sisters.

Modern psychology has found that this is true also of “redemption” from emotional distress. Patients suffering from depression, wallowing in sorrow, are often encouraged to volunteer, to find opportunities to help others. Counterintuitively, we can alleviate our own pain by working to alleviate the pain of others.

When we share the burden of other people’s hardships, we ease our own suffering. Opening our minds and hearts is a crucial key to redemption.

A similar comment was made by the Chiddushei HaRim regarding the ninth plague that G-d brought upon Egypt, the plague of חושך (darkness). The Torah tells that during this plague, לא ראו איש את אחיו - the Egyptians could not see each other for three days (Shemos 10:23). What made this plague so harsh, the Chiddushei HaRim taught, was the fact that the Egyptians could not see one another. Being self-absorbed, living without looking out for others, is the severest form of *galus*. Redemption comes when we follow Moshe Rabbeinu's example of נתן עיניו ולבו להיות - opening our eyes to see what other people are going through, and opening our hearts to feel their pain so we do everything we can to alleviate it.

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.

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.

EQUAL IN EXCELLENCE

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"...and the days of Yaakov - the years of his life - were one hundred and forty-seven years." (47:28)

Generally the Torah recounts the life span of a person immediately prior to or following his death. It is unusual that Yaakov's days are mentioned at the beginning of this *parashah*, still some time before his death.

This count is placed here, however, to teach us that each day of Yaakov's life was uniform in terms of his dedication to Hashem and to Torah, from the days of his youth in his father's house, through the years he studied in the academies of Shem and Eiver, the years he spent in Lavan's house, and the years of his anguish over Yosef's absence, and throughout his years in Egypt.

In his youth he had attained the same spiritual level he was to attain in his old age. It was in the merit of these accomplishments that his image was engraved on the Throne of Glory (see Bereishis Rabbah 82:2), for he was able to take pride in all his days.

Thus the length of his life span is related well before his demise to show that all of his days were equal in spiritual content.

LOSING A LEADER

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"For I will lie down with my fathers..." (47:30)

Rashi comments that Yaakov used this expression to refer to his death, rather than to his burial. Why did he speak of death in these terms?

We can say that the Torah wishes to inform us that certain very great men embody the best qualities of the era they live in. As long as they are alive, it is as if their great predecessors are also still alive, and when they die, it is as if an entire generation dies with them, because there is no one left to exemplify the stature of that generation. So it was with Yaakov; as long as he lived, the greatness of Avraham and Yitzchak lived on in him, but when he passed away that greatness passed away with him.

This also explains what Yaakov meant in telling his sons that if any misfortune should befall Binyamin on the way to Egypt, Yaakov would feel as though Rochel and Yosef had both died at the same time.

Similarly, when Moshe died it was as though Aharon and Miriam died with him, as the prophet Zechariah says (11:8), "I cut off three shepherds in one month," referring to Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam (see Taanis 9a). During the Jews' journey through the desert, manna fell in the merit of Moshe, clouds of glory accompanied them in the merit of Aharon, and a well accompanied them in the merit of Miriam. After Miriam and Aharon died, all three miracles continued in the merit of Moshe. But when Moshe died, all three were suddenly lost at once and it was as though all three leaders had passed away in one month.

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, Menasheh and Ephraim, 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.

Menasheh and Ephraim were born in Egypt, yet they remained *tzaddikim*. Their names reflect Yosef’s own difficulties in Egypt and how he, too, overcame them. Menasheh (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. Ephraim (אפרים) was so named “because G-d made me fruitful (הפרני, 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 Menasheh 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 Menasheh (even though Menasheh 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 “פוטפאר - 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.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died suddenly in Canaan... I buried her there, along the road to Efrat, which is Beis Lechem.” (48:7)

Yaakov knew that his son Yosef trusted his judgment completely and accepted his decision to bury Rachel in Beis Lechem rather than in Chevron. Nonetheless, Yaakov was not at ease until he had explained his reasons for doing this to Yosef.

The lesson here is that students are both allowed and encouraged to be bothered by their teacher’s puzzling decisions. Along with trusting the teacher completely (see Sanhedrin 110a), they must seek to understand the teacher’s ways and teachings.

This is the necessary approach to Torah study in general. Although it is important to trust the wisdom of the Torah’s teachings, we must also appreciate and understand the Torah’s wisdom. (Hitva’aduyot 5746, vol. 2, p. 312) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

FINDING THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

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

Yaakov foresaw that both Menasheh 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 Menasheh 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 Menasheh 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 Menasheh 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 - Ephraim with his right [hand], to Yisrael’s left, and Menasheh with his left [hand], to Yisrael’s right. And he drew close to him.” (48:13)

Menasheh corresponds to the “dwellers above” - those *tzaddikim* who search for G-d on the highest of levels. Menasheh (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 Menasheh transcended this physical world.

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

When Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov for a blessing, he placed Menasheh next to Yaakov’s right hand and Ephraim next to Yaakov’s left hand. Since Menasheh 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 Ephraim’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)

INSPIRING PASTS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yosef took the two of them -Ephraim with his right [hand], to Yisrael’s left, and Menasheh with his left [hand], to Yisrael’s right. And he drew close to him.” (48:13)

According to Rabbi DovBer (the Maggid) of Mezeritch, Ephraim represents consistently saintly individuals while Menasheh represents penitents. Each group is inspired by their pasts, but in different ways:

Consistently saintly individuals are inspired by the fact that G-d has made them successful in the past. Their past experience spurs them on to continue to do good.

In contrast, penitents recall the fact that they have in the past betrayed or forgotten about G-d, and are thereby fired with a greater yearning to become close to Him. This serves as their inspiration to do good.

We all embody both perspectives - that of Ephraim and that of Menasheh - and can therefore focus on both aspects of our past in order to glean the inspiration necessary to live up to our spiritual potential. (Ohr Torah 59) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menasheh; he switched his hands since Menasheh 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 Ephraim and his left hand on Menashe.

Reb Noson provides insight into this gesture, explaining that Yosef, the father of Ephraim 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 Ephraim, 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 Ephraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menasheh; he switched his hands since Menasheh 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 Ephraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menasheh; he switched his hands since Menasheh was the firstborn.” (48:14)

Yaakov chose to place his right hand on Ephraim, the younger son, over Menashe, the older son. By doing so, Yaakov indicated his intention of giving the preferred *brachah* to Ephraim as opposed to Menashe. Many ask why Yaakov chose to do this and what exactly Yaakov saw in Ephraim.

The Chofetz Chaim suggests, based on the wording in the *pesukim*, that Yaakov saw a unique character trait in Ephraim, which caused him to choose Ephraim over Menashe. In the context of Yaakov’s *brachos*, Ephraim 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 Ephraim was younger than Menasheh in regard to sibling order, but rather the Torah is sharing how Ephraim viewed himself.

Ephraim 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 Ephraim, which caused him to bless Ephraim 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.

BLESSED WITH INTELLECT

Rebbe Nachman

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menasheh; he switched his hands since Menasheh 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)

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TO EACH THEIR OWN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Yisrael sent forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim, the younger one, and placed his left hand on Menasheh; he switched his hands since Menasheh 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 Menasheh and Ephraim into the room to receive a *brachah* from Yaakov. As we know, Menasheh was placed to the right of Yaakov, given that he was the firstborn, and Ephraim was placed to the left. Yet, Yaakov switched his hands and placed his right hand upon Ephraim's head and his left hand upon Menasheh'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 Ephraim represented spirituality (there are many proofs to this idea), Menasheh represented the material world. Yaakov placed his right hand on Ephraim to indicate that spirituality takes precedence over physicality. Yet, materialism also has value; therefore, Yaakov kept Menasheh 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, Ephraim preceded Menashe. However, when Klal Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael and had to conquer the land, confronting the physical world, Menasheh preceded Ephraim.

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.

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 Menasheh and Ephraim, *“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.)

HIDDEN PROVIDENCE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

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

Yaakov blesses his children and grandchildren, including the famous *“Ha'malach Ha'goel” brachah* (blessing) for Yosef's two children, Ephraim and Menasheh, to be protected (48:15-16). Curiously, Yaakov's *brachah* starts by acknowledging the G-d of his father and grandfather, but the blessing itself is for the angel that protected Yaakov to protect the children. Why would Yaakov's *brachah* call for an angel to protect the children when G-d's protection would presumably be preferable?

The Limudei Nissan (Rav Nissan Alpert) explains that while G-d's intervention typically involves open miracles, the children headed to exile would benefit from subtle influence. Throughout Yaakov's life, he struggled with Eisav, Lavan, Dinah, Yosef, and others. While each

circumstance's resolution was positive, achieving that fruitful result often seemed stressful and traumatic.

Seeing G-d's indirect influence in our lives requires patience and focus on the silver lining that can sometimes be hiding in difficult situations. It could also be why the blessing itself is for us to multiply like fish - we are to grow naturally, with hidden guidance from conduits of G-d, namely angels, nature, and the world around us. If we recognize the positives in our lives, we will merit a life filled with personal and communal redemption.

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)

PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yosef said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head.'" (48:18)

A blessing relates to the beneficence that G-d has already designated for a person. The blessing removes spiritual or physical obstacles that might otherwise delay the beneficence or prevent it from reaching its destination. A prayer, on the other hand, is a request for G-d to alter what He has in store for a person: to increase the good or rescind the bad.

When Yaakov foresaw that Ephraim would surpass his older brother Menasheh in some way, he saw no reason to try to change this; he therefore did not pray that Menasheh receive the future destined for Ephraim. But he knew that his blessing would facilitate the full and effective transmission of already-ordained Divine beneficence to each of his grandsons, and this is what he hoped to accomplish.

This teaches us that besides praying for others, it is important to bless them, as well. We pray for them with the hope that our prayers will increase the amount of Divine beneficence set aside for them, and then bless them that they indeed receive this beneficence quickly and without hindrance. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 10, p. 38) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yaakov said,] 'But his younger brother will become greater than he.'" (48:19)

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

Ephraim, 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 Ephraim.

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

AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL

Bnei Yissaschar

"With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" (48:20)

Why should Yaakov have wanted all his descendants to bless their children with the example of Ephraim and Menasheh 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 Ephraim, the younger son, before Menashe, the firstborn, Ephraim didn't become arrogant, and Menasheh didn't grow jealous. Noticing this, Yaakov expressed hope that all of his descendants would be like Ephraim and Menashe, free of both arrogance and envy.

ASKING FOR TODAY

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover

"And he [Yaakov] blessed them [Ephraim 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?

EMBRACING OUR ROLE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, ‘May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.’” (48:20)

Parashas Vayechi contains many blessings that Yaakov bestowed on his family, a few of which are widely used today. One of the popular ones is “May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasheh” (48:20), ironically given to Ephraim and Menasheh. What makes Ephraim and Menasheh special? Furthermore, Yaakov crossed his arms when blessing them, such that the younger one (Ephraim) got Yaakov’s right hand while his left hand rested on the older one (Menasheh). After having experienced sibling jealousy with his own brother Eisav and the brothers’ jealousy of Yosef, one would think that Yaakov would be sensitive about showing favoritism toward a younger sibling. Why would he create more sibling resentment?

The answer lies in the timing of this blessing. Yaakov places his crossed hands on Ephraim and Menasheh (48:14), he blesses them (48:15-16), Yosef tries to correct Yaakov (48:18), Yaakov refuses (48:19), and then Yaakov blesses his grandchildren. As the Bnei Yissaschar explains, the fact that the two brothers accepted their fate without complaint or harboring any ill feelings in the future is what made them great - and is the reason why it is the very blessing that we bestow on our children today. Accepting our roles without letting jealousy or ego get in the way is a true blessing, not just for our own well-being, but for our family and community as well.

DESIRABLE TRAIT

Reb Tzvi Zolitzner

“With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, ‘May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.’” (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, Ephraim did not become arrogant, and Menasheh 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 Ephraim and like Menasheh.”

FREE OF JEALOUSY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, ‘May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.’” (48:20)

Why will the Jewish People be blessed through Ephraim and Menashe, and not any two of the other shevatim? Surely, the kedushah of Levi, the royalty of Yehudah, or the Torah scholarship of Yissachar (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 Ephraim - 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, Ephraim, will be “greater from him” - he will be greater due to his completeness of character.

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

Thus, when the *pasuk* states, “He put Ephraim before Menashe,” it is an explanation of the blessing, “May Hashem make you as Ephraim and Menasheh.” Bnei Yisrael will give blessings in the name of Ephraim and Menasheh because Yaakov’s placing Ephraim before Menasheh did not kindle conceit in Ephraim 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.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And he [Yaakov] blessed them [Ephraim 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 Menasheh and Ephraim with the *brachah* of ha’yom - today. Yaakov was communicating that the ideal way to approach life is to focus on today. Yaakov blessed Menasheh and Ephraim 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 Menasheh and Ephraim 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.

TO EACH THEIR OWN

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" (48:20)

The custom is to bless our sons on Friday night with the blessing: ישמך אלוקים כאפרים ובמנשה. Why do we specifically want our children to be like Ephraim and Menasheh as opposed to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, or Moshe, Aharon, and David?

One answer suggested by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin is that when Yaakov Avinu placed his right hand on Ephraim, clearly indicating that although he was younger than Menasheh it was he who was to have the main *brachah*, what was Menasheh's reaction? Does the Torah record that he was upset with his grandfather? Did he bear a grudge against his younger brother from that moment on?

The Torah makes no mention of Menasheh's reaction because there was no reaction. Menasheh did not allow the situation to cause any rift between him and his younger brother. He did not use it as an excuse for sibling rivalry. Therefore, we bless our sons with the blessing of ישמך אלוקים כאפרים ובמנשה - that in the same way that they did not suffer from sibling rivalry or jealousy, we wish for our sons to likewise grow up in harmony and love without the pettiness of jealousy and rivalry! (Torah Lights, p. 317)

The Dubno Maggid says that Menasheh learned this lesson from Yaakov Avinu himself. When Yaakov Avinu wanted to give the blessing to Ephraim, the younger grandchild, he could have just placed Ephraim on his right and avoided the necessity to cross his hands. Why did he keep Menasheh on his right and Ephraim on his left and cross his hands? It was to teach an important lesson: that not every child needs to get the same from their parents, but every child needs to get what they need.

By keeping Menasheh on the right, Yaakov Avinu was informing him that, "you are still the older grandchild, and you will always receive what it is that you need as the older grandchild. It is just that at this particular time, I need to place my right hand on Ephraim and not on you."

Menasheh was thereby reassured that he would receive what he needed and that his brother would likewise receive what he needed, and therefore any ill-feeling was avoided, and the incident passed without adverse effects.

WHAT GENERATION GAP?

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" (48:20)

It is a tradition that every Friday night, we bless our sons with the words ישמך אלוקים כאפרים ובמנשה.

Why specifically Ephraim and Menasheh as opposed to any of the other great men in Jewish history? Why not Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov to parallel the blessing of Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah that we give our daughters?

Rabbi Yisroel Moshe Fried infers an answer from a previous *pasuk* where Yaakov says (48:5), אפרים ומנשה - כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי - "Ephraim and Menasheh shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon."

We know that every generation is said to experience a spiritual decline from the previous generation, a phenomenon called *yeridas ha'doros*.

Yaakov saw that this was not the case with Ephraim and Menasheh. They had not experienced a drop in their spirituality and were כראובן ושמעון, on the same level as their uncles, one generation before them.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 105) tells us that בכל אדם מתקנא - "A person is jealous of everyone other than his son and his pupil." A father is never jealous of a son, and therefore he hopes that his son will one day grow to be spiritually higher than he is.

Therefore, every Friday night, the father blesses his son that he should outshine his father. The father hopes that there will be no *yeridas ha'doros* and that the son will reach up to and even exceed all that the father has accomplished. The father's wish is that his son should emulate Ephraim and Menasheh, two Jews who did not experience spiritual decline but were instead כראובן ושמעון! (Shalom Rav, p. 254)

Therefore, the blessing is ישמך אלוקים כאפרים ובמנשה.

DIVINELY UNITED

Rabbi Ari Ciment

"With you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May G-d bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" (48:20)

"It is a great love that it was made known to man that he was created in the image of G-d, as it is stated, 'For in the image of G-d (אלקים) did He make man' (Bereishis 9:6)." (Avos 3:14)

Questions: How many of us really go around and think about how lucky we are to be created in the image of G-d? Also, is there any specific reason that G-d's name used here is אלקים?

Answers: ישמך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה - "G-d will place you like Ephraim and Menasheh." Yaakov blessed Yosef's children saying that Yisrael would bless their children to be like Ephraim and Menasheh. The custom of blessing the children on Friday night is in fact based on this *pasuk*. But why are we blessing our children to be like the two sons who were ultimately not so overtly successful? In fact, eventually the tribes of Ephraim and Menasheh were both lost, as in the "the ten lost tribes."

The answer is hinted in the cantillation marks of the *pasuk*: a *zakef katon* as seen here אלקים should be registered as a pause by the reader. Since the *zakef katon* is by the word אלקים, the *pasuk* should be understood as follows: "Place G-dliness [in your lives]," pause, "[as exemplified] by Ephraim and Menasheh." As opposed to being the "goal," Ephraim and Menasheh are actually examples of G-dliness, which is the object/goal here.

And how are Ephraim and Menasheh the paradigm of G-dliness? In the midst of brotherly fights and jealousy that mark the first *parshiyos* of Bereishis, Ephraim and Menasheh are two brothers who are, at the very least, nearly always mentioned in unison. Do you ever talk about the Biblical Menasheh without talking about Ephraim, or vice versa? And so we bless our children, "You should have G-dliness [in the sense of coming together and working as one unit] as Ephraim and Menasheh."

The "plurality" inherent in the singular G-d's name is not accidental. He wants us to emulate Him and went so far as calling Himself by a plural name, אלקים, thus potentially adding critical fodder to sectarians, all to teach us that we need to yearn for plurality. He wants us to work together and not try to succeed alone. And thus, the great love that G-d shows us in creating us in the image of אלקים, according to Rabbi Akiva, may be that we are guaranteed to never be alone if we truly emulate G-d as in His Name of אלקים. How comforting it is to know that we all need each other and thus can rely on each other; it is also no coincidence that the author (Rabbi Akiva) of this statement is also known for his comments of "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Takeaway Messages: G-dliness and spirituality, along with an emulation of G-d, are best accomplished by working together. Like Ephraim and Menasheh are always in unison, we bless our children to be teammates with one another and others - working together is truly being בצלם אלקים!

בצלם אלקים means knowing that to be G-dlike is to be able to work with others in unison, like Ephraim and Menasheh!

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

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.

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.

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.

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 THE DISTANT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in 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 Halachot 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.

MASHIACH IS WAITING

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days.'" (49:1)

Rashi says that Yaakov Avinu wished to reveal the date of the arrival of the Mashiach, but Hashem did not wish him to do so, so Hashem removed the *Shechinah* from Yaakov Avinu, and he moved on to a different topic.

Why did Hashem not wish that Yaakov Avinu reveal the date of the "end of days"?

The Shnei HaMeoros quotes the Midrash that says that when Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal this information, Hashem said to him that since He had changed his name from Yaakov to Yisrael, he was not permitted to disclose the date!

What is the connection between his name change and the inability to reveal when Mashiach will arrive?

The Gemara tells us that there are two possibilities as to when Mashiach will arrive. It will either be בעתה - in its designated time, or, if we all do *teshuvah*, then אחישה - it will be hastened and will arrive before its predetermined time (see Sanhedrin 98).

The Jewish People have two names: Yaakov and Yisrael.

Yisrael appears after Yaakov Avinu had defeated the angel of Eisav and represents the Jewish People when they fulfill the will of Hashem.

The name Yaakov represents the opposite. It appears at Yaakov's birth and relates to him holding on to Eisav's heel. It represents an attachment to physicality and is used when we are not behaving as we should.

With this understanding, we can now approach the Midrash and answer our question.

The reason Yaakov was not allowed to reveal the *acharis ha'yamim* is because his name has changed to Yisrael, and as Yisrael, we can hasten Mashiach's arrival. As Yisrael, we do not have to wait for the predetermined date of Mashiach's arrival but through *teshuvah* we can bring him earlier than expected.

Therefore, says Hashem, do not reveal the date of *acharis ha'yamim*, because you can now ensure that the time is earlier, and to disclose the predetermined date is to negate the power you and your children have to bring Mashiach.

The message is that we have the ability to hasten the arrival of Mashiach. Not only do we have the ability, but we have the duty as well. Hashem did not want Yaakov Avinu to reveal the predetermined date, because Hashem expects us to do all that we can to hasten Mashiach's arrival. (Ma'ayanah shel Torah, p. 220)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin tells the story of the time that he was in Meah She'arim in Jerusalem and went to visit a bookseller by the name of Reb Shmuel.

Reb Shmuel was a mystic who used to abstain from talking and frequently entered into *taanis dibbur*.

On this particular occasion, when Reb Shmuel saw Rabbi Riskin, he greeted him warmly and even exchanged a few words with him!

Surprised, Rabbi Riskin inquired as to the reason for his unusual behavior, and Reb Shmuel informed him that "Mashiach has arrived in Yerushalayim."

Although not totally convinced, when Rabbi Riskin prayed later at the Kosel, he did so with more enthusiasm than usual.

Later that evening, Rabbi Riskin listened to the news, half expecting there to be a special announcement regarding the sighting of Mashiach in Yerushalayim.

The newscaster made no such announcement!

When he returned to the bookstore, Rabbi Riskin challenged Reb Shmuel and said that he had waited for the Mashiach in vain.

Reb Shmuel corrected him and said, "You are gravely mistaken. We do not wait for Mashiach; he is waiting for us!" (Listening to G-d, p. 300)

GATHERING TOGETHER

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in 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 fellow Jews as brothers and sisters and treat them as such, then we will succeed in bringing Mashiach early.

BEST KEPT SECRET

Yid HaKadosh

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in 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.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in 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)

UNITING THE PEOPLE

Rebbe Nachman

"Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in 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)

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."

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.

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 (יַעֲקֹב), from Eikev (עֵקֶב, 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.

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.

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.”

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 *mitzvot*. 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!

HEART OF A KING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yehudah is a lion cub. You raised yourself, my son, above the prey. You will crouch and lie down like a lion, and like a fearsome lion that no one would dare rouse.” (49:8)

Yaakov conferred the kingship on Yehudah because he refused to participate (“he raised himself above the prey”) in his brothers’ plans to murder Yosef, and because he refused to let his daughter-in-law Tamar suffer on his account even though doing so entailed publicly shaming himself. These acts showed that Yehudah was devoted to helping others, and this is the primary function of a leader.

Significantly, Yehudah’s elder brother Reuven also refused to participate in Yosef’s murder, but it was Yehudah who actually saved Yosef. Reuven was busy fasting and repenting for a previous sin when the opportunity arose to save Yosef.

This teaches us that we cannot be content with devoting ourselves only to our own spiritual perfection; we must also actively help others. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 442-446) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

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 Halachot 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

KEEP SMILING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“He is red-eyed from wine and white-toothed from milk...” (49:12)

As Yaakov feels that his time on earth is nearing an end, he calls for his children to bless them. Yaakov’s blessing to Yehudah is the longest, spanning five *pesukim*, and mostly acknowledges Yehudah as the leader (49:8-12). Among the blessings Yehudah receives is that he will be “white toothed from milk” (49:12). Rabbi Yochanan Zweig asks why having white teeth is a blessing, especially for a future leader?

Rabbi Zweig explains that white teeth represent the smiles that permeate our interactions with others. Yaakov gives Yehudah the blessing that his smiles toward family, friends, work, and community be genuine. Our smiles affect those around us, and even when we are having a bad stretch in life - whether it be a moment or longer - a gesture as small as a smile can change someone’s world or orientation toward it. Yaakov’s blessings to Yehudah is that he (and we) uplift each other whenever and however we can.

THE LION’S SMILE

Rabbi Ari Ciment

“He is red-eyed from wine and white-toothed from milk...” (49:12)

Shammai says: Do a lot, and greet everyone with a pleasant face. (Avos 1:15)

1. Is there any Biblical source for Shammai’s ethic?
2. Is עשה הרבה (Do a lot) a separate idea from והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות (and greet everyone with a pleasant face)?

Answers: The *brachah* that Yaakov gives Yehudah seems pretty straightforward; Yehudah’s descendants shall have plenty of wine and milk. As the white milk flows by one’s teeth, it will leave the white residue behind (as in the “Got Milk” commercials), and the teeth will shine bright.

Rabbi Motti Shifman points out that although many commentaries interpret this passage literally as a description of Yehudah’s suitability for royalty (that he was a man of regal appearance), the Talmud (Kesuvos 111b) offers the following homiletic interpretation:

“The person who makes his teeth white, i.e., by smiling affectionately at his fellow man, has done more good than the person who offers his fellow man milk to drink.” Rather than interpreting the verse, “לבן שנים מחלב” - teeth white from milk,” one should read, “ולבון שנים מחלב” - showing the whiteness of your teeth is more beneficial than milk.”

Rabbi Shifman pondered the connection between the homiletic and literal interpretations: Why should this message be relayed in the blessing of Yehudah?

Furthermore, the Gemara elsewhere (Kiddushin 82b) teaches that were it not that Hashem provided for the animals, each animal would be suited for a particular profession: The fox would be most competent as a storekeeper, the lion as a porter, etc. Why would the mighty lion be a porter (a person hired to carry burdens or baggage)? You’d expect a mightier job given to the king of the jungle!

An answer is that genuine Jewish might is defined in terms of being willing and able to help others. A mighty lion’s job would be a porter because true strength is seeing beyond oneself.

Like the lion he is named for, Yehudah was willing to be a slave to free Binyamin, again demonstrating the Jewish regal trait of trying to help others.

Yehudah is similarly blessed with “ולבון שנים מחלב,” greeting everyone with a smile; setting aside your own worries/thoughts to try and make others feel worthy is a trait worthy of a king!

Similarly, when Shammai says, “Do a lot and receive everyone with a pleasant face,” he may in fact be saying, “Do a lot, which is defined by how you treat others!”

Doing a lot in a Jewish ethical perspective is not about what you personally accomplish but by how you affect and receive other people! And so the “עשה הרבה” is defined by “הוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות.”

Takeaway Messages: When Yehudah is blessed with having an abundance of milk that would whiten his teeth, we are also taught about an important kingly nature that we should strive toward: “Show your white teeth and smile when you greet others!”

Making other people feel comfortable is the ultimate Jewish might. A lion would be a porter if he had a job.

Doing a lot in Jewish terms (עשה הרבה) is *defined* by how you affect others (הוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות). A kingly trait is to smile with white teeth when greeting others - to be a good king, you need a good dentist!

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 “boned” (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.)

UNWAVERING TRUST

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

“Dan will gain justice for his people, as one, the tribes of Yisrael... For Your salvation I long, Hashem...” (49:16, 18)

Rashi explains that Dan is represented by the judge Shimshon, who was the only one of the judges to emerge from the tribe of Dan. The Talmud explains the first verse to mean that Shimshon, who had descended from Dan, judged Israel justly just like the One, viz. Hashem.

We compare Shimshon to Hashem so that we should not judge Shimshon irreverently because of the many incidents recorded about him, which appear to denigrate him. We must know that everything he did was for the sake of Heaven although we do not understand many of his deeds. This is very much like the deeds of Hashem Himself, many of which we do not understand, yet we have faith that His works are perfect.

Then the Torah describes the greatness of Shimshon’s faith in Hashem, that, although he was incredibly strong, he relied solely on the salvation of Hashem, and he did not become proud of his physical prowess or his political power.

Therefore, when the men of Yehudah wished to deliver him into the hands of the Pelishtim, he implored them that they themselves should not harm him (Shoftim 15:12), for he did not wish to utilize his strength against his own people, knowing that the strength had been granted him by Hashem only to save Israel from the Pelishtim, but not to harm Israel.

Likewise, when he slew the thousand men with the jawbone of the donkey, he said (ibid. 18), “You granted the salvation through Your servant.”

Even after his strength had waned, he still trusted in Hashem that He would help him, as is evidenced by his final plea (Shoftim 16:28), “Give me strength now but this time.” He pleaded with Hashem to help him at this time, just as He had saved him in the past. When he was strong and mighty, he trusted only in Hashem and not in his own might.

This is a lesson for all of us, to realize at all times, even when Hashem grants us strength and riches, that we are in His hands, and there is no difference to Hashem whether He has not yet given us strength and riches, or whether He has already given us strength and riches. If we deserve His bounty, it will be granted us; otherwise, it will be taken away.

We detect this principle in the wording of the *birkas Kohanim*, the priestly blessing (Bamidbar 6:24): 'יברכך ה' וישמרך, "May Hashem bless you and safeguard you." Rashi explains that Hashem will bless you with physical possessions, and He will guard you from robbery. Thus, although Hashem grants a person blessings and wealth, He also must bless him that that wealth will be preserved. Otherwise, the recipient will lose it. Consequently, one must always trust in Hashem. This we learn from Shimshon, who trusted in Hashem at all times.

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.

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)

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.

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: This can be explained based on what I heard from my righteous master, R' Dov Ber, concerning our Sages' statement (Zohar 3:7b), "The Jewish people sustain their Father in Heaven." Pleasure is called "sustenance," and G-d receives pleasure from the Divine worship of the Jewish people, who thereby give pleasure to their Father in Heaven.

This idea is alluded to in the verse "and he will yield kingly delicacies." One who merits to serve G-d with total and consummate love, a love of delights, will "yield kingly delicacies," i.e., this will give pleasure to G-d, Who "will rejoice in His handiwork" (Tehillim 104:31).

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" (אֲשֵׁר) is related to the word for "see" (שׁוּר), 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" (שֶׂמֶנֶה לַחֲמוּ), 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” (שׂוֹשׂ אִשִּׁישׁ - 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.

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

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 Wisnefsky

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 Wisnefsky

VIP ACCESS

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"I shall be gathered to my people..." (49:29)

It is unclear to whom Yaakov was referring with the word "people." He could not have meant the Jewish people, since he himself was the first of them to die, and had he meant Avraham and Yitzchak he would have said, "I am about to be gathered to my fathers."

To understand what Yaakov meant, I wish to suggest that even though a particular group may not be considered a distinct people in our world, in the world of truth a "people" is defined by the strength of its belief in Hashem and by the quantity and quality of merits accumulated through efforts in this world. Surely the *tzaddikim* who had made themselves known in the world until that time, including Adam, Sheis, Metsushelech, Shem, Eiver and, of course, Avraham and Yitzchak, would constitute such a group.

This is what Yaakov meant: "I shall be gathered to my people" - to the righteous ones who have a place together in the world of truth because they believed in Hashem, and therefore I wish to be buried with my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak.

WHEN NOT TO LISTEN

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"When Yaakov finished instructing his sons, he drew in his feet onto the bed; he expired and was brought in to his people." (49:33)

The Gemara (Sota 13a) relates that when Yaakov's children and their families arrived at *Me'aras HaMachpeila* with Yaakov's remains, preparing to bury him, they found their uncle, Eisav, standing there waiting for them. He tried preventing the family from burying Yaakov at the sacred site, arguing that the remaining plot in *Me'aras HaMachpeila* belonged to him. Yaakov's sons countered that as Eisav had sold the birthright to Yaakov, he relinquished his right to be buried in *Me'aras HaMachpeila*. Eisav persisted, contending that the sale of the birthright did not include burial rights. He demanded that his nephews produce the sale contract to prove that Yaakov had bought the right to be buried in *Me'aras HaMachpeila*, and he would not allow Yaakov to be buried there until the evidence was shown. Naftali, a swift runner, was sent back to Egypt to bring the contract which verified Yaakov's burial rights in *Machpeila* cave.

In the meantime, the Gemara continues, one of Yaakov's grandchildren - Chushim, the only son of Dan - inquired what was happening, why his grandfather's burial was being delayed. Chushim was deaf, and he thus did not hear the exchange between Eisav and Yaakov's children. When Chushim heard what was happening, he immediately arose and killed Eisav, so that Yaakov could be buried without any further delay.

The Einei Yitzchak commentary to Maseches Sota offers an explanation for this sequence of events, why it was specifically Chushim, Yaakov's hearing-impaired grandson, who arose to defend his grandfather's honor and kill Eisav. Some people know how to speak with manipulative deceit, how to make a clearly incorrect argument sound compelling. There are salesmen, for example, who can, as the saying goes, "sell snow to an Eskimo," convince a prospective buyer to buy something he clearly does not need or want. Eisav was such a person. The Torah in Parshas Toldos (25:28) says about Eisav, כִּי צִיד בְּפִיו - "hunt was in his mouth," which has been understood to mean that he "hunted" with his mouth, using words to control, deceive and manipulate other people.

And very often, when we hear such people talk, even our deepest-held beliefs and convictions could be compromised, at least to some extent. We begin questioning ourselves and wondering if perhaps there is some kernel of truth to what they're saying, if maybe their arguments aren't that absurd after all.

This is what happened to Yaakov's sons. Eisav used his power of persuasion to plant doubts in their minds, to make them question Yaakov's rights to *Me'aras HaMachpeila*. These doubts sufficed to make them send Naftali back to Egypt to retrieve the contract, while their father's remains awaited burial.

Chushim, however, did not hear Eisav's arguments. When he was told that Eisav was challenging Yaakov's rights to the burial plot, he immediately stood up and acted, without hesitation, because he, unlike everyone else, was not impacted by Eisav's manipulative talk.

As Chushim had not heard Eisav speak, his firm conviction was not eroded to even the slightest extent. He therefore did not wait for proof - and went ahead and killed Eisav.

Sometimes, we need to be "deaf," we need to stop listening. We need to stop listening to the pundits, the analysts, the "experts," all those who peddle lies and nonsense in a clever, sophisticated way, manipulating the minds of their readers, viewers and followers. There are certain simple truths that must be clear and evident to us without any complicated analysis or arguments. Listening to the commentators and analysts could lead us to second-guess ourselves, to wonder if maybe we're wrong. When it comes to our basic beliefs, tenets and truths which we hold dear, there can be no second-guessing. And so, we need to be like Chushim and stop listening.

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."

EMBRACING THE MOMENT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good: in order to do like this day, to keep the people alive..." (50:20)

After Yaakov passes away, Yosef's brothers fear revenge for what they did to him. Yosef reassures them that what happened was all part of G-d's plan, "In order to do like this day, to keep the people alive" (50:20).

"Like this day" doesn't seem to fit into Yosef's sentence; what do those few words add to his point?

The Be'er Moshe suggests that "like this day" alludes to Yosef being tempted by Potiphar's wife because the Torah used a similar phrase to describe Yosef's situation. Yosef reassures his brothers that their actions resulted in saving many lives and were part of a greater plan.

One could suggest a deeper connection between the repeated phrase and difficult situations: One way to overcome challenges is to be in the present moment (alluded to by the term "like this day"), embrace the circumstance, and do the best we can within the parameters we're given. This approach is what enabled Yosef to overcome his temptations with Potiphar's wife, is what made him an exceptional leader, and is how he imparted this message to his brothers and to us.

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)

WITHIN BUT APART FROM

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"G-d shall remember you and bring you from this land..." (50:24)

Before Yosef's death, he expressed to his brothers the wish that Hashem should bring the nation out of Egypt, and back to their home, Eretz Yisrael: *ואלוקים פקוד יפקוד* ואת הארץ הזאת אתכם והעלה אתכם מן הארץ הזאת - G-d shall remember you and bring you from this land..." (50:24).

The Midrash (cited by Rashi, Shemos 3:18) comments that Yosef in this *pasuk* was giving Bnei Yisrael a *סימן*, a sign with which they would know that their period of exile in Egypt would end. He told them, *בלשון זה הם נגאליים* - that the redemption would be announced with these words, *פקוד יפקוד*. Indeed, many years later, Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to appear to Bnei Yisrael and proclaim, *פקוד יפקוד* - that Hashem remembered them and would now fulfill His promise to redeem them from bondage and bring them out of Egypt, back to their homeland. Rav

Shaul Alter, shlit'a, offers a brilliant insight into the significance of this phrase, based on the Gemara's discussion (Pesachim 33b) concerning the halachic status of wine extracted from a grape that was touched by a *tamei* (somebody in a state of halachic impurity). The Gemara brings two possibilities as to how to view the liquid inside the grape before it is extracted. One possibility is to view the liquid as *מיבלע בליעי*, entirely absorbed within the grape, as part of the fruit. According to this perspective, when the grape became *tamei* through contact with an impure individual, the liquid, too, became *tamei*, because the liquid is simply part of the grape. The other possibility is to view the liquid as *מיפקוד* - separate and apart from the fruit. According to this understanding, the liquid is inside the fruit, but not part of it, occupying its own pocket of sorts. It should be seen as distinct, comprising a separate identity. As such, it did not become *tamei* by virtue of the grape's contact with an impure person, and it becomes *tamei* only at the time it is extracted (which has certain halachic implications).

The Gemara here uses the root *פקד* to mean "separate and apart." This term normally denotes "counting," but it is also associated with separateness, as something which is counted has an independent, distinct identity.

Accordingly, Rav Shaul Alter explained, when Yosef told he, *ואלוקים פקוד יפקוד אתכם והעלה אתכם מן הארץ הזאת*, brothers his was telling them the precondition for *geulah*. In order to be worthy of redemption, we must live in exile in a state of *פקוד יפקוד*, separate and apart from the rest of society.

Even if, geographically and practically, we are in a foreign country and a foreign culture, we must retain our distinct identity. Like the juice inside the grape, we are situated within our host nation, but we are to see ourselves as separate from them.

We must never become מִבִּלְע בְּלֵיעִי, fully absorbed and assimilated into the host society. We must always remember that we are foreigners, that our home is Eretz Yisrael, that we are now in a temporary state of galus, and we must eagerly anticipate the time when we will be “extracted” from exile and return to our ancestral homeland.

UNTAINTED ESSENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yosef bound the sons of Israel by an oath, saying ‘G-d will deliver you, and you must take up my bones from here.’” (50:25)

The word for “bones” (*Atzamot*, עֲצָמוֹת) in Hebrew also means “essence” (*Atzmut*, עֲצָמוֹת). Thus, allegorically, placing Yosef’s bones safely in a coffin, where they will remain intact throughout the Egyptian exile, alludes to how our Divine essence always remains intact, impervious to any corruption or dilution that might conceivably result from our prolonged stay in exile.

Our incorruptible Divine essence is, first of all, our promise that, like Yosef, we will ultimately leave exile and proceed to the Promised Land. But moreover, it is our inspiration to resist the enticements of materiality in order to remain true to our true selves, thereby hastening our own personal redemption as well as that of the entire world. (*Hitva’aduyot* 5752, vol. 2, pp. 114-115) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

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

Our *parashah* and the book of Bereishis conclude with the death of Yosef. We are told that he was embalmed, not buried, and placed in a box in Egypt, with a promise to one day be buried with his forefathers (50:26). How is this state of limbo a fitting end to the story of Yosef?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky offers that Yosef knew the troubles that would befall his family and the Jewish people and was declaring that as long as his people were to be exiled in Egypt, he, too, would remain in exile.

This act of solidarity was meant to inspire hope, as he waited with his family and looked forward to leaving with them for the Promised Land. When we face troubles and challenges, focusing on a resolution gives us hope and enables us to persevere through the darkest of times.

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 Wisniefsky

HAFTORAH

BECOMING A MAN

Chida

“[Dovid said t o 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.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

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

This week’s *haftorah* epitomizes the ultimate will of *tzaddikim* - that all they want is for their children to continue on the correct path of Torah and *mitzvos*. As Dovid HaMelech’s life is drawing to a close, his son Shlomo is in line to take the throne. Dovid advises Shlomo on various components of kingship, including who may be a potential rebel and what action he would need to take in case of an uprising. He gives him valuable advice necessary for a king: “Be strong and become a man.”

He also seeks reassurance that his son will be able to gain the reverence of all the world dominions, as Shlomo was still young, only twelve years old, and potentially vulnerable to people taking advantage of him.

The most important thing that Dovid HaMelech commands his son, however, is that he should walk in all the ways of Hashem and follow all the *mitzvos* commanded in the Torah, similar to Yaakov Avinu in Parshas Vayechi, who, while lying on his deathbed, sought assurance from his sons that they would follow his ways of serving Hashem in the years to come.

Yaakov Avinu and Dovid HaMelech are both known as the "*bechi*" - the chosen one. Yaakov is the *bechir sheb'Avos* - the chosen one of the forefathers, while Dovid is the *bechir ha'Melachim* - the chosen one of the kings of Bnei Yisrael. One reason why they attained this stature is although they both had much to worry about close to their deaths, what weighed most on their minds was that their children should remain devoted to Hashem and follow the path of Torah and *mitzvos*.

In fact, Dovid HaMelech commands Shlomo not to preserve his kingdom through wealth or glory, but rather through fear of Heaven. A person who fears Hashem will ultimately have it all, as was the case with Shlomo HaMelech.

The lesson is quite clear. Even after 120 years of health, wealth and prosperity, Ultimately, we are left with only our good deeds. If we are careful to hold on to what is right and not to what is extraneous, our legacy will live on long after we are gone.

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