

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Jacob called to his sons and said, 'Gather together and I shall tell you what will happen to you at the end of days' "(Genesis 49:1).

The last two portions of the book of Genesis poignantly describe two moments of reconciliation between Father Jacob and his children, the first when Jacob is reunited with his beloved son Joseph after twenty-two years of separation and alienation, and the second when Father Jacob must be reassured by his sons that they will indeed continue in his footsteps. Fascinatingly enough, in both instances, the Rabbis of the Midrash insist that the verse of the Shema—"Hear O' Israel the Lord Our G-d, the Lord is One"—is a critical factor. Let us analyze each dramatic meeting in order to understand in greater depth the nature of parent—child relationships.

The Bible records that when Joseph hears that his aged father has succeeded in making the difficult journey to Egypt, the Grand Vizier himself "harnesses his chariot...and goes up towards Israel his father; and he appears before him, and he falls on his neck, and he weeps on his neck very much" (Genesis 46:29). Who falls on whose neck and who weeps? Rashi cites the Midrash that it was Joseph who fell upon Jacob's neck and it was Joseph who wept. But then what was Father Jacob doing at that most sensitive meeting? Explain our Rabbis, Jacob was reciting the Shema.

Many are the possible interpretations of this central Biblical commandment of the unity of the Divine, and many are the possible interpretations of why Jacob used that precise moment to share that particular Biblical verse with his son Joseph. One thing is certain: Joseph had been separated geographically, emotionally and even culturally from his father's house for more than two decades; he looked like an Egyptian, he spoke like an Egyptian and he acted like an Egyptian, (at least externally). I would imagine that at least one of the reasons that Joseph had not gotten in touch with his father during the years that he was a powerful leader in Pharaoh's court was because he feared that too great a gulf separated the two of them, that his father would not be able to accept such an "Egyptian" son. Hence, Jacob teaches his son, the essence of Judaism: "Hear O Israel, The G-d (Hashem) of Love, our Lord of Justice, are (both in actuality) the One Hashem of Love." Jacob is emphasizing that although G-d may sometimes

appears as a G-d of strict judgement, the real essence of the Divine is accepting and unconditional love. And if G-d loves His children unconditionally, Jacob will certainly love Joseph the "Egyptian"—and even his brothers the deceivers—unconditionally and the beautiful paradox is that when we love freely and unconditionally, our children often respond the way we really would have wanted them to in the first place. And so Joseph not only resumes his place as an integral part and even savior of his family, but he also teaches Pharaoh about the G-d of Abraham who interprets dreams and directs the world, and he even makes his final request to be buried in Israel.

In this week's Torah reading, the Rabbis of the Midrash attempt to explain why our portion begins without an empty parchment space announcing a new subject. I would suggest a special twist to the Talmudic commentary (B.T. Pesachim 56a). Resh Lakish maintains that Jacob's eyes were clouded over with fear and anxiety as he looked at the very Egyptian—appearing sons assembled around his deathbed. " 'Perhaps invalid and improper fruits have emerged from my loins, just as Yishmael emerged from Abraham and Esau emerged from Isaac', thought Jacob. The sons replied, 'Hear O' Israel the Hashem of Love, Our Lord of Justice, are the one Hashem of love'. Just as you love Joseph unconditionally so do we hope that you will love us unconditionally. And then the result will be that, despite external appearances, just as in your heart there is only One, so in our hearts will there be only One' ". And so it was: all twelve sons, including Reuven, succeed in establishing the 12 tribes of Israel.

When I first arrived in Efrat, I began to visit the Masiyahu Detention Center just north of Jerusalem every Thursday. The first time I taught the prisoners Bible, I was amazed to participate in an evening Maariv service led by one of the inmates which turned out to be one of the most soul-filled, inspired and inspiring prayers I had ever experienced. In a private conversation afterwards, he told me his story. "Although my grandfather was a famous Hakham in Morocco and my father is an observant Jew, I committed just about every sin imaginable. I got married and had a baby daughter; I was not really faithful to my wife, but I supported my family by stealing a few hours each day and serving as a night watchman for a factory. I arrived home unexpectedly one night to find my wife in bed with our next door neighbor, our baby daughter between them. I was enraged; I took my gun determined to

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murder my wife, her lover or both. I only succeeded in killing my child. My parents stopped talking to me; completely alone, and condemned as a monster, I attempted suicide—but failed. I was imprisoned for manslaughter and felt as if I was living in Joseph's black pit surrounded by snakes and scorpions.

And then a Hakham came to visit me. He told me that G-d describes Himself to Moses as Hashem, Hashem, which means that He is G-d of Love before one sins, and G-d of Love after one sins—the G-d who loves unconditionally. He told me that G-d loves each of us no matter what we have done because G-d knows that since we are made in His image, Each of us has G-d within us; and each of us can do better! Suddenly I felt myself worthy to be loved. He continued to explain that this world is fleeting and temporary; only the world to come is eternal! The only point to this world is for us to prepare for the next one, and that can be done even in prison. And he told me that even if no one comes to visit me, G-d is always ready to visit me; all I have to do is open my mouth in prayer and G-d will be right there for as long as I pray. Now do you understand why I love to pray so much? Now do you see why I can help bring others closer to the G-d who I love and who loves me so much." © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When Ya'akov blessed his grandchildren, he put his right hand on the younger one, Efrayim, and his left hand on the older one, Menashe (Beraishis 48:14). This troubled Yosef, who asked that the right hand, which indicated the more significant of the two, be placed on Menashe- since he was the firstborn (48:18). The question is asked why this first bothers Yosef when Ya'akov is actually blessing them, rather than earlier (48:5), when Ya'akov informed him that Efrayim and Menashe would be considered full

tribes "just like Reuvein and Shimon." Since Ya'akov mentioned Efrayim before Menashe, shouldn't Yosef have asked right there and then why the younger one was given precedence over the older one? Why did he wait until the blessings were being given to protest?

When the Torah tells us that Ya'akov's vision was affected by his age (48:10), the Pa'aneach Raza (one of the latter Ba'alei Tosfos) explains, "like Yitzchok, for just as he [Ya'akov] had tricked his father [Yitzchok] by taking advantage of his vision impairment, so too did his son [Yosef] come to trick him by putting Menashe on his right side." In other words, Yosef knew that Ya'akov wanted to give Efrayim prominence- probably from the above conversation- and tried to circumvent this by causing his father to mistakenly think that Menashe was on the other side.

Rashi tells us (48:1) that Efrayim had moved to Goshen to learn Torah with his grandfather. Yosef, who remembered how jealous his older brothers had become when his father learned more Torah with him than with them (see Rashi on 37:3), was afraid that Menashe would also become jealous of his younger brother. Hearing Ya'akov put Efrayim first reinforced this fear, and rather than confronting his father, he decided to try to trick him into giving Menashe the prominence of his right hand, to avoid arousing any jealousy of Efrayim.

Usually, when Yosef would walk with his two sons, the more prominent one (i.e. Menashe, the firstborn) would be on his right side, with the younger Efrayim on his left. Yosef knew that his father had seen this "formation," and may have even reinforced it when he brought his sons close to him (48:10). However, when they pulled back "from his," i.e. Ya'akov's "knees" (48:12), Yosef made sure that Menashe was now on his left (Ya'akov's right), even though every other time it was Efrayim on the left. Ya'akov, however, realized this, and moved his hands across his body so that his right hand ended up on Efrayim. Even so, the Malbim points out that he put his left arm over (i.e. on top of) his right arm before placing his left hand on Menashe, so that Menashe could be given some prominence as well.

After Yosef saw that his father had caught on, he finally said to him that the firstborn was on the other side, to which Ya'akov responded that he knew, and explained why he was putting Efrayim before Menashe (48:19). © 2004 *Rabbi D. Kramer*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why does Yaacov (Jacob) in his blessings to Shimon and Levi say that they will scattered amongst all of Israel? (Genesis 49:7) Rashi notes that as teachers of Torah, the tribe of Shimon would spread out to teach children. Similarly, the descendants of Levi, in their role as collectors of tithes and heave offerings, would go around to all of Israel.

But a deeper understanding of Yaacov's words requires that we take into account two major incidents in the lives of Shimon and Levi. These brothers were the ones who avenged the rape of Dinah by killing the males of Shehem. (Genesis 34) They are also ascribed by some to be the key brothers who conspired to kill Yosef (Joseph). (Rashi, Genesis 42:24) In both these incidents, Shimon and Levi displayed dangerous anger by taking the law into their own hands.

It is relative to their anger that Yaacov addresses his comments. Note that Yaacov uses two terms with respect to Shimon and Levi --- afeetzem (to scatter) and ahalkem (to separate).

Akedat Yitzchak (R. Isaac Arama, Spain 15 c) seems to comment on afeetzem when stating: "Anger and temper, though undesirable qualities, may sometimes prove useful in arousing the heroic in man...It was advisable that the qualities of anger and passion that had been concentrated in Shimon and Levi should be dispersed among all the tribes of Israel...A little spread everywhere would prove useful, but if concentrated in one place, it would be dangerous." When scattered, the anger will be spread out and directed productively.

Yet, when considering the other term that Yaacov uses, ahalkem, another thought comes to mind. After all, ahalkem means that Shimon and Levi will actually be separated from one another. When living together, Shimon and Levi could wreak havoc, as each would feed off the other's anger, creating flames of unlimited destruction. But apart, it is possible that their individual anger would fizzle out and eventually disappear. From this perspective, Yaacov is declaring that anger of any sort, is detrimental.

Of course, anger is an emotion. While one cannot control what one feels, action can be controlled. And so, even if one feels anger, the ultimate goal is not to act angry for, as Rav Nahman says, "you cannot make peace with anger."

Which is it? Does anger have its positive elements as Akedat Yitzchak points out, or should anger be completely obviated as Rav Nachman suggests. What do you think? © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins by focusing on the parsha's first four words: "Vayechi Ya'akov be'Eretz Mitzrayim..." ("Ya'akov lived in Egypt..."). The Sfas Emes sees special significance in the Torah's decision to start the parsha with the word 'Vayechi' Why? Because the word "Vayechi" comes from the same Hebrew root as the words "chiyus" and "chayim". Those words resonate with a unique importance for the Sfas Emes. They signify 'truly' living; that is, living connected to one's Shoresh (root), i.e., to HaShem.

A basic question. How was Ya'akov Avinu able to experience chiyus (vibrancy; vitality) in Mitzrayim, a country well known to be a cesspool of tum'a (spiritual impurity)? This question—and the Sfas Emes's answer to it— are of great practical interest to us. For, as we know, "ma'aseh avos siman lebanim". That is, the lives of our Patriarchs provide a paradigm for us, their descendants, to follow in our own lives.

The Sfas Emes answers : Ya'akov Avinu was able to live in the mode of chiyus— i.e., to flourish spiritually—even in Egypt because his identifying quality was Emes (truthfulness). That is, we know that Avraham Avinu's identifying trait was chessed—loving kindness. Likewise, Yitzchok Avinu had a signature trait—gevura (discipline). Ya'akov Avinu's special trait—the feature that he lived with special intensity— was Emes. In that vein, the pasuk (Micha, 7,20) tells us: 'Titein Emes leYa'akov' ('Grant truthfulness to Ya'akov'). That quality of truthfulness enabled him to live with chiyus— even in Mitzrayim.

How did this work? The Sfas Emes does not elaborate, presumably because he considers the answer to this question to be self-evident. I suggest that what he has in mind is the following. First, through his strict adherence to truth, Ya'akov Avinu was able to recognize that the ideas concerning metaphysics that were then current in Mitzrayim were falsehoods. We should not underestimate the attractiveness of those ideas. At that time, Egypt was the world's intellectual center. For this reason, the ideas circulating within that country's intellectual elite came with great persuasive power. But Ya'akov Avinu's firm grip on truth enabled him to know that those superficially plausible ideas were in fact intellectual booby traps.

I suggest that another way through which his quality of Emes enabled our forefather to live with chiyus even in Mitzrayim was his truthfulness to himself. To understand what I mean when I say that Ya'akov was truthful to himself, consider the opposite situation wherein we do not acknowledge to ourselves that we are doing wrong. Such intellectual dishonesty precludes the possibility of Teshuva. Indeed, the person may continue doing wrong, and do so with an air of self-satisfaction—thus adding ga'ava (haughtiness) to his/her portfolio of aveiros.

Continuing his discussion, the Sfas Emes notes another condition that enabled Ya'akov Avinu to succeed: Simcha (joy). (I have the impression that the kind of Simcha that the Sfas Emes has in mind here is not ordinary, garden variety joy, but rather "transcendental simcha". I use this term to describe joy that transcends the particular circumstances or conditions that a person is experiencing. In transcendental simcha, the person simply glows, perhaps because he/she feels at one with the Cosmos).

As the Sfas Emes recounts Ya'akov Avinu's experience in Egypt, Emes brought chiyus—a closer connection with HaShem. Chiyus, in turn, brought

Simcha. On this key point, the Sfas Emes cites the pasuk (Bereishis, 45:27): "Vatechi ruach Ya'akov avihem." ('The spirit of their father, Ya'akov, took on new life.')

The Sfas Emes introduces the explanation of the Zohar, which focuses on the word 'Vatechi' in that pasuk. The Zohar corroborates the Sfas Emes's interpretation that with chiyus—to which the pasuk's word "Vatechi" refers—Simcha also came to Ya'akov Avinu.

Simcha, in turn, had a marvelous effect. Because Ya'akov had been despondent over the loss of Yosef, he had lost the capacity for ruach hakodesh. For joy is one of the conditions necessary for a person to achieve that close contact with HaShem. With the advent of joy, Ya'akov was able to reconnect with ruach hakodesh. Further, as this account indicates, Chiyus and Simcha can be mutually-reinforcing. Starting with Emes, a person may generate a self-sustaining upward spiral. Thus, adherence to truth can help a person live his/her life with joy. And unburdened of negative feelings to life, the person can come still closer to an awareness of reality; that is, to recognition that the entire Cosmos draws its existence from HaShem.

Now the Sfas Emes moves on to a new topic. And since we are still in the first paragraph of the ma'amar of the year 5631, we will follow him to see what he says.

Rashi, following Medrash Rabba, comments on our parsha's first pasuk, and tells us: Ya'akov Avinu wanted to be megaleh (to reveal) 'the keitz' (the time of Moshiach's coming, and the end of golus) to his sons. But HaShem did not want him to do so; and blocked Ya'kov Avinu's access to the necessary information.

The Sfas Emes quotes his Grandfather—the Chidushei HaRim—who, in turn, quoted the Rav of Parshischa—a great Tzaddik of the previous generation—who asked a basic question: why did Ya'akov Avinu want to reveal the keitz to his sons? What good would it have done to Ya'akov Avinu's descendants if he had revealed the keitz to them?

To which question these three Tzaddikim respond with the following answer. In standard usage, the phrase 'to be megaleh the keitz' means: to reveal when Moshiach will come and the golus will end. By contrast, the Sfas Emes and his illustrious predecessors read this phrase as meaning: to reveal the fact that a keitz exists.

Now we know why Ya'akov Avinu's descendants would have benefitted if he had revealed the keitz to them. For, the Sfas Emes explains, knowing that the golus will end makes it easy ('be'nakeil') to experience the whole golus period—regardless of how long it will last and when it will end. Indeed, says the Sfas Emes, if the fact of the keitz had been revealed, 'lo haya golus klal' (it would not even have been golus.) Why not? Because knowing that there is a keitz will give meaning to history, removing the impression that history is nothing but a sequence of random, painful events.

Thus, knowing that there is a keitz would make it readily apparent that what we have been experiencing is only Hester, behind which HaShem is truly there. © 2004 Rabbi N.C. Leff and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Before his death, Yaacov gathers his sons for parting words of rebuke (to the first ones) and blessings (to the others). There are two surprising aspects of the order in which the sons appear in Yaacov's words. First, he mentions Zevulun before Yissachar (Bereishit 49:13-15) in spite of the fact that Yissachar was Leah's fifth son and Zevulun was her sixth one (30:17-20). Second, in the earlier passage Dan and Naftali, the sons of Rachel's maid Bilhah, appear before Gad and Asher, the sons of Leah's maid Zilpah, while in this week's portion the sequence is Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naftali (49:16-21). What is the reason for these changes in sequence?

The second difference seems to be easier to explain. It is reasonable to assume that in the earlier portion the sons of Bilhah were mentioned first as a unit and then the sons of Zilpah, since Leah followed Rachel's lead and gave her maid to Yaacov. But the chronological sequence of the births was that Bilhah first gave birth to Dan, and then Zilpah had Gad and Asher, and finally Bilhah gave birth to Naftali. Thus, Yaacov blessed his sons in the sequence of their ages. This possibility, that Naftali was the youngest son of the maids, seems to correspond to the fact that Nafatli appears last in all the lists of tribes in the book of Bamidbar (except for the list of the scouts, which deviates in many ways from the other lists).

The sequence of Yissachar and Zevulun seems to be more problematic, since there can be no doubt that Yissachar was born before Zevulun, and they appear in the correct chronological sequence in almost all the lists of tribes in Bamidbar. One exception is at the end of Bamidbar, in the list of tribes that were to inherit the land, where the head of Zevulun appears before the head of Yissachar. Another one is in Moshe's blessing before his death:

"Let Zevulun be happy with your departure, and Yissachar in your tents" [Devarim 33:18]. The same is true in the book of Yehoshua, where the heritage of Zevulun (19:10) appears before that of Yissachar (19:17). Why is Zevulun listed in these places before Yissachar, who is older?

Evidently the explanation for the sequence is related to the common feature of these four places. They are all concerned with taking possession of Eretz Yisrael. Yaacov is concerned with the difference in principle between Zevulun and Yissachar. "Zevulun will live dwell on the coast, and his ships will reach as far as Tzidon. Yissachar is a strong donkey, he rests between the borders. And he saw that resting was good and the

land was pleasant, and he turned his back towards suffering and became a laborer." [Bereishit 49:13-15]. Thus, Zevulun is more involved with external affairs, related to the borders of the land, while Yissachar stays in one place. For this reason, the one to appear first is Zevulun, representing the external boundaries, and he is followed by Yissachar, within the internal area, which is made possible by the maintenance of the external borders.

The above explanation, which can easily be linked to the simple meaning of the verses, seems to be the background of the well known Midrash which is also concerned with the sequence. "Zevulun appears before Yissachar, even though Yissachar was born before Zevulun. Why is this so? The answer is that Zevulun was involved in commerce while Yissachar was occupied by Torah study, and Zevulun would come and feed him. For that reason, he is mentioned first... Yissachar would remain within while Zevulun would import goods on ships and sell them, and provide him with all his needs. That is why Moshe said, 'Let Zevulun be happy with your departure'—Why is this so? It is because 'Yissachar is in your tents'—the tents belong to you, since you provide him support to sit in them." [Bereishit Rabba 99:9].

Our Father Yaacov Did Not Die

by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

The Talmud describes a discussion between the Babylonian sage, Rabbi Nachman, and the sage from Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yitzchak. The latter repeats one of the teachings of his mentor, Rabbi Yochanan: "Our father Yaacov did not die" [Taanit 5b]. But Rabbi Nachman is surprised to hear this: "Was it in vain that he was eulogized, that the embalmers embalmed him, and that the buriers buried him?" Rabbi Yitzchak replies, "I have derived this from a verse, as is written, 'And you, do not fear, my servant Yaacov, G-d says, and do not be afraid, Yisrael, for I will rescue you from far away, and bring your offspring from the land of their captivity.' [Yirmiyahu 30:10]. Just as his offspring remain alive, so does he." [Taanit5b].

The simple meaning of the above verse is not complicated at all. "Yaacov" and "Yisrael" represent the community of Bnei Yisrael, a collective identity that exists beyond the boundaries of time and space, unifying the nation in the past, the present, and the future, wherever they live in the world. The people of Yisrael are the specific group of people that happens to live in one generation. The redemption will serve as salvation for the people of that specific generation and at the same time as redemption for the nation as a whole. The Midrash, on the other hand, views "Yaacov" and "Yisrael" in the verse as referring not to an entire community but to our forefather Yaacov in person, with the implication that he will join together with his offspring in the future salvation. This then means that Yaacov himself has not died.

The interpretation of the verse poses no difficulty, and the Midrash seems to be unnecessary. Before attempting to explain in more detail, let us first try to understand the situation. Did Rabbi Yitzchak really mean for his statement to be taken literally? Many of the commentators indeed thought that he did, but the phrase the he uses, "I have derived this from a verse," implies that he meant something else. He uses the word "doresh," to interpret in a Midrashic fashion. The homiletic approach creates a virtual world where Yaacov continues to live. But this world also hints at a symbolic world which is hidden within this one. Can we enter this hidden symbolic world? I will try to do so using a key that can be seen in one of the sayings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

"Anybody that has a son who toils for Torah can be considered as if he has never died" [Bereishit Rabba 49:4]. Rabbi Shimon bases his words on the verse, "For I know him, that he will command his sons and his household after him, to observe the path of G-d, doing charity and justice, in order that G-d may provide for Avraham what He promised to do for him" [Bereishit 18:19]. He explained, "It is not written 'to do to him'—eilav—but 'for him'—alav." Avraham will not only receive a prophesy of redemption, he will take part in it himself!

Rabbi Yochanan, who was quoted by Rabbi Yitzchak, follows the path set by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in many ways, and this implies that in this case too we can learn from Rabbi Shimon about Rabbi Yochanan's approach. What the two rabbis say about Yaacov is startlingly similar, but Rabbi Shimon gives more detail in his explanation. To understand them in depth, it is necessary to discuss the concepts of existence and continuation. What is needed so that an object that exists now can be viewed as a continuation of something that has existed in the past? This is a philosophic question that in my opinion has ramifications for the laws of ritual impurity: When does a utensil lose its identity? How is its identity defined across the boundaries of time? The question is of course much more complicated when it is asked about a whole nation. How is the identity of a nation preserved? Many nations define themselves in terms of geography. Those born in a given political-geographical area are considered as the extension of those who came before them. This is clearly absurd. This is seen from the example of the writing found on a tombstone of a Jew from central Europe: "He lived in four countries, but he never left the city where he was born." What then can replace this definition? Can it be based on origins? Many of the inhabitants of Egypt today are undoubtedly descendents of the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Does this mean that they belong to the ancient Egyptian nation? Does the Egypt of the times of the Bible still exist? No, as is shown by the rhetorical question, "Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" [Shemot 10:7].

And this leads us to the answer given by Rabbi Shimon: "Anybody that has a son who toils for Torah can be considered as if he has never died." In addition to biological continuity, there must also be a spiritual link. If this condition is not met, the chain is broken. This is also the true meaning of the words of Rabbi Yochanan. Yaacov has not died, since his sons continue on his path, and they express his continued life with the words, "Listen, Yisrael"—Yisrael is Yaacov.

The Rambam expresses a similar thought in explaining the verse, "For just as the new heaven and the new earth that I have created remain standing before me, G-d says, so will your offspring and your name continue to exist" [Yeshayahu 66:22]. He writes, "There are times when the offspring remain but the name does not..." [Moreh Nevuchim 2:29]. For the name to remain it is necessary to maintain spiritual continuity, in our case by observing the Torah, "which is the reason that we have a special name ('Yisrael')" [Rambam, *ibid*].

This Midrashic interpretation is what gives meaning to the verse, "I will rescue you... and... your offspring," quoted above. In order that "Yaacov," the community of Yisrael, will be redeemed together with his descendents, Yaacov must continue to live as part of his descendents. And that is what Yirmiyahu has promised. Yaacov's offspring are alive, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. This means that Yaacov himself is still alive.

Gather Together and Listen, Sons of Yaacov

by Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, Center for Spiritual Services in the Diaspora, the World Zionist Federation

This week, the Fifth World Congress of the Orthodox leadership will meet in Jerusalem, sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Services in the Diaspora, part of the World Zionist Federation. Three hundred rabbis and community leaders from 42 states will gather to hear lectures and discuss current problems that face the Orthodox communities in Israel and abroad.

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the death of Yaacov, who in his life taught us how to struggle against a foreign culture and against an atmosphere with an evil influence. Before Yaacov left for Egypt, we are told, "he sent Yehuda ahead to Yosef, to show the way" [Bereishit 46:28]. The sages taught that "he went to establish a house of study which would be a source of teaching." Yaacov feared the general atmosphere in Egypt and he therefore established a house of learning that would teach the light of Torah, since a small source of light is sufficient to dispel a large measure of darkness.

Yaacov did not consider it enough to just send Yehuda ahead to establish a school. On his way to Egypt, he paused in Be'er Sheva. "And Yisrael and all those that were with him traveled, and he came to Be'er Sheva" [Bereishit 46:1]. The reason that is given in the Midrash is that he wanted to cut down the cedar trees

that Avraham had planted in that city. The purpose of the trees was to provide physical sustenance to visitors to the city, but Avraham also had a spiritual goal, as is noted by the Torah: "And he called out there in the name of G-d" [21:33]. Avraham taught all those who passed by to call out in the name of G-d.

Yaacov knew that the spiritual level of Bnei Yisrael might be decreased in Egypt because of the negative cultural influence of the foreign atmosphere. Therefore, he took along with him the trees that had helped Avraham bring people closer to the Almighty and to elevate their spiritual level. He hoped that they would help restrain the influence of the surrounding culture on his large family. Yaacov did not depend only on promises from the past, on making use of the cedar trees planted by Avraham. He also took care of the future, by sending Yehuda ahead to establish a house of study. And we have been taught, "The actions of the forefathers are a symbol for the children."

During the four days of the conference this week, the rabbis and community leaders will be blessed with the Torah of Eretz Yisrael. When they return to their homes, they will carry back with them some of the cedars of the land, each one to his own surroundings, adding light to their houses of study, which are a local source of Torah.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

When Yaacov was stricken with his final illness, Yoseph was summoned to his father's bedside.

As the last moments of Yaacov's life ebbed away, Yoseph entered his Father's chambers. Yaacov mustered his final bit of strength and sat up to honor Yoseph. However, Yaacov's courageous effort actually was self-detrimental. For by willing himself to sit up—the true state of his failing health was concealed. Thus Yoseph was unaware that his father's death was imminent. Whereas, if Yaacov would have lain motionless, instead of forcing himself to arise, Yoseph would have been moved to offer heartfelt prayers for his dying father. Yaacov, however, understood that the level of honor due to a king takes precedence over his own life. He therefore chose to sacrifice his own welfare (by concealing his need for the prayers of Yoseph) in lieu of honoring the king.

The exemplary conduct of Yaacov Avinu during the final moments of his life, gives us an insight to the type of honor that we should grant to our fellow man. For when a person leaves this world he stands before the Heavenly court and is asked a series of questions. One of the questions he is asked is: "Did you honor your friend as if he was a king?" Hence, Torah requires us to honor every human being as if he was a king.

What's more, since a king's honor, takes precedence over one's life, then our dedication to honor our fellow man should outweigh any of our personal

needs and honor. Rav Arye Levin, the tzaddik, visited prisoners in the Yerushalayim jail every Shabbos for over twenty years, without accepting any remuneration. Nothing could deter him from these visits. On one occasion, when he was quite old he arrived in the middle of a snowstorm. The inmates berated him for endangering his health to come to them. Rav Arye answered, "Every man has his pleasure. My great delight is to see my children. Do you know anyone who would willingly give up his own pleasure?"

Implement: Envision yourself placing a crown on your friend's or family member's head. *[Based on the Ohr HaZafon of Rav Nosson Zvi Finkel]*

RABBI ARON TENDLER

Rabbi's Notebook

How long do first impressions last? The Talmud states that teaching the young is like writing on new parchment, parchment that was never used or erased. Teaching the "not-young" is like writing on previously erased parchment, something always remains from the old writing. How long do first impressions last? They last forever they can never be completely erased.

For how long must we express appreciation? In a conversation this past week with a person struggling with her obligation of Kibud Av V'Em (honoring father and mother), I explained that the Mitzvah of honoring parents is predicated on the concept of appreciation. A child abandoned at birth or given up for adoption is obligated to show his biological parents all aspects of Kibud Av V'Em. Why? Because they, and they alone, partnered with G-d in giving him life and the gift of life demands life-long appreciation. (Of course, the level of honor and appreciation owed the adopting parents is beyond measure. It is a kindness that qualifies at the highest level of chesed— a Chesed Shel Emes.) For how long must we express appreciation? Forever.

Upon returning from Yakov's burial in Canaan, the brothers became concerned. With Yakov gone they feared that Yoseph would exact revenge for their having sold him into slavery. The Medresh Tanchumah explains that while Yakov was alive Yoseph insisted that the family eat with him as often as possible, but upon returning to Mitzrayim Yoseph stopped inviting his brothers over. They began to fear Yoseph's retribution. (50:15) Perhaps Yoseph will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him." The brothers decided to lie (see Rashi) to Yoseph. (50:16-17) "Your father said, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers, brother's request he wept and then reassured them that they had nothing to fear.

Seventeen years had passed since Yoseph revealed himself to his brothers. At that time Yoseph assured them that they were all pawns on G-d's celestial chessboard and that he harbored no resentments against them for the miracle of their

ultimate survival and redemption! For seventeen years Yoseph had cared for his brothers and their families with loving concern. He treated them with respect and dignity caring for every need and want. In the caste system of Egypt he elevated them to the status of "priests" with all the attendant advantages. For the sake of their comfort and safety, both spiritual and physical, he had reorganized the entire Egyptian society so that every citizen became a slave and every community was then transplanted from their place of origin and resettled elsewhere in Egypt. How could the brothers think that Yoseph would punish them after the death of Yakov?

First impressions are never fully erased. The early years of conflict and ill will that prevailed between Yoseph and his brothers left an insidious distrust in the hearts and minds of the brothers. Yoseph never distrusted his brothers until he was sold into slavery. Once sold, his life became the stuff of fantasy and legend. He had all the time to consider his situation and discover the not so hidden hand of G-d directing his and their destiny. He had the time to wait for G-d's plan to come together. He could anticipate an eventual reunion and was prepared for the emotional fall-out. As a seventeen year old he may not have agreed with their approach to certain issues of family / national concern, however, he never believed that their intentions were evil, misguided no. On the other hand, during those early years the brothers considered Yoseph a real threat to their spiritual existence. They were not as generous in their assessment of his intentions. Their first impressions were very distrusting, suspicious, and hateful. Given cause, the first impressions easily reasserted themselves. But there's more to the story.

Why did Yoseph stop inviting them over? (See ArtScroll 50:15-21) The Medresh Tanchumah and the Gur Areyeh offer insight into Yoseph's all encompassing insight and wisdom. The Medresh says that while Yakov was alive, Yoseph insisted that he sit at the head of the table. Regardless of the fact that Yoseph was Viceroy of Egypt, Yoseph insisted that Yakov occupy the seat of honor. With Yakov's death, Yoseph still felt that he did not deserve to sit "at the head of the table." The Talmud extracts from the way the Ten Commandments state the Mitzvah of Kibud Av V'Em that younger siblings must honor the oldest sibling; therefore, Yoseph did not want to sit at the head while Yehudah (real king) and Reuven (oldest) sat with the rest. At the same time, it would have been insulting to the honor of Egypt for a mere brother to supplant the place of honor otherwise reserved for the Viceroy; therefore, he decided that the best thing would be to avoid the conflict and stopped inviting them over. (Note: Imagine Yoseph's humility! In last week's Rabbi's Notebook I explained that Yoseph accepted Yakov's critique of his interaction with his brothers and assumed full responsibility for the negative impressions that he had fostered. Yoseph did not play at humility, he lived it. He truly himself as a pawn of G-d designated to serve his brothers and family. No other

honor was due him except for the political expediency of his station. That more so than anything else allowed Yoseph not to harbor resentment against his brothers.)

The Gur Areyeh explains that Yoseph's concerns were even more profound and disturbing. Yoseph never trusted the Egyptians and their generosity. He knew their nature and knew how self-absorbed they were. He knew that their appreciation for him was tinged with fear and jealousy. He knew that many resented his rise to power and the manner in which he had manipulated their entire nation. True, if not for Yoseph they would have all starved and they would have never become the dominant world power that they had become; nevertheless, Yoseph did not harbor any illusions and did not trust anyone but G-d.

Yoseph's distrust of the Egyptians allowed him to sense the subtle shift in their attitudes once Yakov had died. He picked up that they were very watchful of his relationship with his brothers and decided to curtail some of the special attention he had become accustomed to showing them.

Imagine! A man miraculously appears and saves the nation. A man appears who is directly responsible for keeping your family alive and well. How long should you show appreciation to that man? Forever! Yet, Yoseph knew that appreciation and humility are one and the same. Someone who is not humble can never truly express appreciation.

Yakov's coming to Egypt helped Yoseph see the first signs of anti-Semitism. Seven years of plenty had come and gone. Two years of hunger had come and gone. In the two years of hunger Yoseph's reputation as the great "Sustainer" had been established and proven. During that relatively short period of time Yoseph had reorganized the entire social structure of Egypt. Yakov then arrived and the hunger stopped. True, the two years of hunger were so severe that the seven years of plenty were all but forgotten; however, the aftermath of the two years was everlasting. The Egyptians remembered Yoseph and his strong handed manipulation of the economy. Seven years of forced grain taxation and storage and then two years of rationing did not make him very beloved—feared and effective yes, beloved no. Nevertheless, Yoseph stayed the course because he knew it was G-d's plan to bring Yakov to Mitzrayim and begin the years of slavery.

With Yakov's arrival, Yakov became the new hero. Yakov had taken nothing from the Egyptians and had given them everything. Yakov did become the most beloved man in Egypt, and everyone mourned his death. With Yakov's death and burial in Canaan, the Egyptians could easily begin to forget. The Egyptians remember their reasons for unease and resentment, and Yoseph was concerned. Underlying their stated appreciation were the first impressions of a Hebrew slave who had mysteriously risen to become viceroy. The Egyptians conveniently forgot that Pharaoh

demanded Yoseph's appointment and only remembered the impressions that justified their resentments and subsequent actions. © 2004 Rabbi A. Tendler & www.torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This is the last parsha in the book of Bereishis. In it Jacob bids farewell to his twelve sons before his death. He gives them, individually, his blessings.

We will look at his blessing to his favorite son, Joseph.

"A son of grace is Joseph; a son of grace to the eye; girls mounted the wall (to see him)." (Genesis 49:22)

"Ben Porat"—Rashi: "[This] means a son of grace (Hebrew 'hain') (Rashi then cites an Aramaic phrase that shows that 'porat' means grace)." "Ben Porat to the eye"—Rashi: "His grace is directed towards the eye that sees him." "Girls mounted the wall"—Rashi: "The girls of Egypt mounted the wall to gaze at his beauty."

Rashi's interpretation differs from the Targum Onkelos's. Onkelos understands the word "porat" to mean "fruitful." Rashi prefers "graceful." Can you see why Rashi chose "grace" over "fruitful"?

An Answer: Joseph had only two sons. This is not particularly "fruitful" compared to his brother Benjamin who had ten sons. Also, Joseph was known to be a person with charm or grace ("hain"). See 39:4 and 39:21. So Rashi's interpretation would seem more in line with what we know about Joseph.

But we can question Jacob himself (not Rashi, this time). Even if Joseph was a charmer, is this the one trait that Jacob must pick to bless his son? Joseph had so many other talents—dream interpreter, prophetic dreamer, brilliant CEO of the world's most advanced country (Egypt) in a time of national disaster. Why would Jacob choose Joseph's beauty to emphasize?

An Answer: I would say that Jacob stressed it because the Torah had stressed his beauty up until now. See Rashi on 37:2 and see verses 39:4 and 39:21 and of course Pharaoh's love of Joseph. Granted this was due to Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, but Joseph must have related to Pharaoh in a way that found favor in his eyes. (His modesty among other traits and modesty is a major part of "hain."). Therefore, I think, Jacob stresses this aspect of Joseph. His beauty was his strength, when it could have been his downfall (had he given in to Potifar's wife's enchantments). It was his strength when God had him find favor in the eyes of those people who could propel Joseph forward. Joseph used this beauty—"hain"—in a modest way (see all his statements of disclaiming credit for his successes). So his beauty was the underlying aspect of his success and nevertheless Joseph does not take advantage of it nor does it go to his head.

So Jacob chose a central aspect of Joseph's personality which he wisely controlled and used exclusively in the service of Hashem. © 2004 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org