

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After Yosef agreed to bury his father in Chevron rather than in Egypt, Yaakov "bowed on the head of the bed" (Beraishis 47:31). Who did he bow to, Yosef or G-d? Either way, why was it on, or towards, the head of the bed, rather than to Yosef or to G-d?

Rashi brings two approaches, both based on Chazal (our Sages of blessed memory). First, he quotes from the Talmud (Megilla 16b) that Yaakov was giving respect to Yosef's royal position. As far as why the Torah says it was towards the head of the bed, he relies on a different Talmudic source (Nedarim 40a) showing that G-d's presence rests on the head of the bed of one who is sick, implying that although Yaakov was bowing to Yosef in deference to his royalty, he made sure to do so in the direction of the divine presence.

Rashi's second approach is based on the Sifray (Va-eschanan 31), that Yaakov was giving thanks to G-d because his "bed," referring to his children, was complete, i.e. all of them were righteous. Because Avraham had a Yishmael and Yitzchok had an Eisav, Yaakov was concerned that not all of his children would be worthy of carrying forth the mission either. He therefore thanked G-d after realizing that all of his children would be included in the Nation of Israel. Which leads us to a different question: What happened during this conversation that made Yaakov finally realize that all of his children were righteous? Didn't he already know that Yosef was righteous, that he was raising his children to fear G-d and not become assimilated into Egyptian society? Why did he wait until Yosef promised to bury him in Israel before thanking G-d for having brought up a complete generation of righteous individuals?

The Be'er Basadeh brings two approaches to answer this question. In his second, he says that it wasn't the substance of the conversation that caused his giving thanks now, but the topic of conversation.

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Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg
in memory of
Mr. Hyman Weisberg z"l
חיים ניסן בן יצחק אייזק ז"ל
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Had any of his children been at risk of assimilating, Yaakov would have had to be buried in Egypt to help protect them from doing so. Since they were all righteous, he was able to be buried in Israel, and after arranging for Yosef to make sure it happens, he thanked G-d for allowing it to happen. However, this thanks could have (and perhaps should have) been given earlier, including right before asking Yosef to take him out of Egypt. The context of the verses implies that it was Yosef's agreeing to do so that caused the thanks, not the topic of conversation. Rashi himself adds "for Yosef was a king and was also stuck in a foreign culture and yet upheld his righteousness," which would be irrelevant if this conversation didn't address Yosef's righteousness more than any of the other brothers. It therefore seems clear that somehow this conversation helped Yaakov realize that all of his sons, including the one he was most concerned about (Yosef), were indeed righteous.

In his first approach, the Be'er Basadeh says that Yaakov knew immediately that Yosef was still righteous, but from this conversation Yaakov realized just how righteous he was. After all, he agreed to bury Yaakov in Chevron without complaining that his mother (Rachel) wasn't buried there, or even asking why she wasn't. Nevertheless, if Yaakov already knew that Yosef was righteous (even if he didn't realize the extent of his righteousness), then he would have already known that his "bed" was complete, and given thanks for this earlier. Besides, Rashi's comments should have included Yosef's lack of complaining or questioning, not (just) his being king and stuck for so long in Egypt. The implication of Rashi's additional words is that until this conversation Yaakov was unsure of what effect, if any, the years in Egypt and being part of the royalty had on Yosef's righteousness, and therefore whether his "bed" was complete. So how did this conversation alleviate any of Yaakov's concerns?

The ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife, and the things they did to prepare for it showed that they were very concerned about it. From the preparation of the body to the material things buried with it to the incantations inscribed in the tomb, not to mention the tombs themselves (the pyramids), Egyptian culture had very specific ideas about how to convince the G-ds that the deceased was worthy of getting to the afterlife. It could be said, therefore, that how Yosef would insist that his father be "prepared" would be a

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defining moment. Was he a "Jewish Egyptian" who followed the rituals he grew up with but was, at his very essence, an Egyptian, or an "Egyptian Jew" who lived in, and was part of the royalty of, Egyptian society, but was at his very core a Jew.

Yaakov knew that Yosef was still doing all the things a Jew should be doing, but may have been unsure how he would react at a point of conflict, which his burial presented. The Jewish ideal was for Yaakov to be buried with his parents and grandparents in Chevron without concern for appeasing any Egyptian G-ds that might impede getting to the afterlife. But this would be an affront to the Egyptians and their culture. Did Yosef harbor any doubts about whether the Egyptian view of the afterlife had any validity, or was he prepared to disregard their pagan ways and give Yaakov a full Jewish burial. Especially being the Viceroy, where his actions would create a more severe conflict, would he try to convince his father to be buried in Egypt, at least temporarily, or acquiesce to bringing back to Israel right away. It was very specifically how and where Yaakov would be buried that created this potentially defining moment.

How did Yosef respond? "I will do as you have spoken" (47:30). The Ba'aley Tosfos bring a midrash that says that Yosef was saying that "I too will do as you are doing, for I will ask my brothers to bring my body with them back to Israel." Yaakov had no reason to be concerned with Yosef's philosophy of the afterlife, for he too would insist that his body be brought back to Israel, not entombed in Egypt. Yaakov still insisted that Yosef make an oath, not because he didn't trust him, but because he knew that Paro would insist that the Viceroy's father be treated in a manner consistent with Egyptian royalty, lest it be taken as an affront to all of Egypt and its culture (see Ramban and Midrash Hagadol). This fear turned out to be justified, as it was only because of this oath that Paro allowed it (see Rashi on 50:6).

In any case, any fear that Yosef was a "Jewish Egyptian" that had assimilated into Egyptian culture despite maintaining Jewish rituals was allayed, as even though he was "a king and was stuck in Egyptian society" for decades, he was still the righteous Yosef. And knowing that his "bed" was indeed complete, Yaakov thanked G-d. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the most memorable human scenes portrayed in the Torah is that of Yaakov blessing his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephrayim. Yaakov takes the occasion and transforms it from being a purely personal one to becoming a national and eternal paradigm. In you, my grandchildren, shall Israel always bless [future generations,] saying: May the Lord bless you as Ephrayim and Menashe. Thus, from that moment onward, Jews bless their sons and grandsons with the words of our father Yaakov: May the Lord bless you as Ephrayim and Menashe. I find it noteworthy that the blessing of generations in the Torah is one of a grandfather blessing grandchildren. The blessings of parents to children do not figure in the overall perspective of Jewish continuity and eternity in quite the same fashion and importance, as does the blessing of grandparents to grandchildren. We are all aware of the fact that there exists a special relationship and bond between grandchildren and grandparents. Only half-jokingly I have attributed this relationship to the fact that they have a common enemy. But the fact is that it is much less tension ridden and less difficult to be a grandparent than a parent. And the grandparent always sees ones self beyond the grave through ones grandchildren. Therefore, the accomplishments of grandchildren bring greater satisfaction to grandparents than to parents. Parents have a tendency to be less tolerant of their childrens independence and adventurism, while grandparents take a longer view of the situation. In the words of the Talmud: Even if great wisdom may not be present in me, age and experience [also have their say.]

The Talmud teaches us that if there be three consecutive generations of Torah scholars in a family then the Torah always finds an ability to make a home for itself in that family. I have found this statement to be true even when there is a later gap of generations regarding Torah scholarship or even observance within that family. I think that this is one of the reasons that Yaakov emphasized his blessing to his grandchildren. Yaakov has done his spiritual best as has his son Yosef. Now it is up to the next generation, to Menashe and Ephrayim. If they will continue in the ways and path of Yaakov, then the Jewish future is assured in the family and tribe of Yosef. The Torah will always come knocking at that familys door and eventually someone will open that door to it. One of my great teachers in the yeshiva that I attended long ago defined success in life to us as follows: If your grandparents and your grandchildren are both proud of you and your accomplishments, then you can claim success in life. Yaakov strives for this success and therefore concentrates his blessings on his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephrayim. By so doing, he also instructs

all later Jewish generations to concentrate their blessings on their grandchildren as well. Building the three-generation cord is the certain key to Jewish survival and success. It is the ultimate blessing of past generations to the future leaders and builders of Israel.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This concluding portion of the Book of Genesis is fraught with poignant dreams: rapprochement between father and son after 22 years of alienation, rapprochement between siblings after complete lifetimes of jealousy and hatred, and the eventual unity of a family upon whose unity depends the future history of all of humanity. Within the context of these most significant resolutions are two issues which require further analysis: firstly, with all of the dominant and dominating personalities of Genesis, why does Joseph alone merit the "surname" of "the Righteous (haZaddik)"-especially after we have been given such a close glimpse into the ups and downs of his familial relationships; and secondly, if indeed this eldest son of Jacob and Rachel is the righteous one of the family, why does the ultimate prize of "the sons of your father shall bow down to you... the scepter and lawgiver shall not depart... from between his feet" (Gen. 49:8,10) elude Joseph and go instead to Judah? Yes, to Joseph is bequeathed material prosperity (Gen. 49:22-26) and even a double inheritance of land in Israel (Gen. 48:22), but the majority of religious leadership and the ultimate Abrahamic vision of the magnetic ingathering of all nations is reserved for Judah (Gen. 49:8,10)! What happens to Joseph's dream, according to which all the brothers and even the universal cosmos must bow down to him?!

Despite the conventional wisdom that Joseph is awarded the appellation of "the Righteous" because he successfully withstands the seductions of Potiphar's wife, I believe he deserves his "sobriquet" for an additional reason as well: Joseph demonstrates an almost superhuman quality to forgive, forget and even help those who sinned against him see the positive result of their action. Joseph places the sin of his brothers' desire to remove him from the scene even if it meant murdering him within the context of the Divine Plan to save the Abrahamic family from extinction by famine. Among the most generous words of the Bible are those of the Grand Vizier when he reveals himself to be Joseph:

"And Joseph said to his brothers: 'Come close now to me', and they came close. And he said, 'I am Joseph your brother whom you sold unto Egypt. But

now do not be aggrieved and let there not be anger in your eyes (against yourselves) because you sold me here, because it was G-d who sent me away from you in order that (the family) be sustained for life.'" (Gen. 45:4,5)

What gives Joseph the amazing capacity to rid himself of all natural and understandable feelings of revenge and to behave with such gracious forgiveness? Undoubtedly, part of the reason lies in Joseph's new-found understanding that neither he nor any other human being stands at the center of the universe; it is G-d Almighty who directs world affairs, even if He operates from behind the curtains of the stage. Remember that it was the "old" Joseph who saw himself as the object of the obeisance of the sheaves of grain as well as of the sun, moon and stars, but it is the "new" Joseph who stood before Pharaoh and declared: "It has nothing to do with me; G-d will give the answer (interpretation) in accordance with the welfare of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:16). The trials and tribulations of Egypt have not further contributed to his feelings of self-importance or his resentment towards his family; much the opposite, they have caused him to realize that the family destiny is guided only by G-d!

It also stands to reason that the mature Joseph also understands that he too contributed to the family dynamic of resentment, envy and hatred; yes, his father ought not have so blatantly demonstrated his favoritism, but Joseph should not have "played it up," informing his father of every detail of his brother's religious infractions and running to tell his brothers of the dreams in which they all bow down to him! He recognizes the arrogance of his youth and so is aware that he was not merely the innocent victim but was rather an active accomplice to the crime of his siblings.

However, despite the great-hearted noblesse oblige expressed by Joseph, the very grandiosity of his dreams exposed his fatal flaw-and was ultimately responsible for his ultimate loss of the grand prize of birth-right leadership. Joseph understood the universal vision afforded to Abraham, "through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3), and so he dreamt of Egyptian agriculture-for Egypt was the world's leading power at the time-and even reached out for cosmic dominion.

He thereby gave fuel to the brothers' fiery jealousy by overlooking the Land of Israel in his dreams and by placing himself-and G-d-at the center of his vision. In effect, they said to him: "If you want Egypt, we'll give you Egypt"-and they sold him into Egypt.

And Joseph miraculously succeeded in Egypt-and even brought G-d to Egypt, even if for but a brief instant. G-d and father Jacob understand that real redemption-and G-d recognition-can only emanate from Israel and Jerusalem. Joseph's goal was correct-but his way to reach the goal was flawed. Hence his dreams of familial dependency upon and gratitude towards him

were realized in-and limited to-Egypt, the world power of that generation. The ultimate Messianic dream of world redemption must await its fulfillment with a descendant of Judah, whose commitment to the Land of Israel and the centrality of the G-d of Israel remained constant throughout his life. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Ya'akov (Jacob) blesses his children, he tells his eldest, Reuven, that kingship will not come from him as he forfeited the birthright when he had relations with Bilha, Ya'akov's wife/maidservant. (Genesis 49:4)

Shimon and Levi suffer a similar fate in that their blessing, too, is a disappointment. Their mistake was the destruction of the entire city of Shechem after the rape of Dinah. (Genesis 49:5-7)

What is striking is that during both of these incidents, Ya'akov remained virtually silent. In the Reuven story the Torah tells us that Ya'akov heard what had happened but the text indicates no reprimand from the patriarch. (Genesis 35:22)

In the Shechem story, Ya'akov tells Shimon and Levi that they had made him look bad because the inhabitants of the city could retaliate. This was only a mild rebuke on the part of Ya'akov. (Genesis 34:30)

Why does Ya'akov hold back and say nothing or little until the end of his life?

Perhaps Ya'akov's approach teaches us something about speech. On the one hand it is speech which makes us unique. Rabbi Yehuda Halevy in his *Kuzari* labels the human being as a *medaber*. Speaking is central to human relationships. As long as a couple for example, is speaking to each other even acrimoniously, the relationship is soluble. But if they are silent, unable to talk, trouble is at hand.

There are occasions when it is best not to speak, as saying something could destroy a relationship. Good judgment is needed to know when the timing is appropriate to reveal a deep hurt. But it often takes great wisdom to know when it is best not to talk and not to reveal a deeper emotion.

It may be that Ya'akov does not speak as these incidents unfolded, fearful that whatever he would say could possibly ruin his relationship with his eldest children. Only years later, when the relationships were solid, was it the time right to speak out. Openness is often best displayed in a safe environment and silence can sometimes preserve relationships.

Silence also sometimes is a reaction, when words simply will not suffice. It is told of the Klausenberger Rebbe that after losing his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust that he gave the following *dvar Torah* at a *brit* (circumcision ceremony): He proclaimed that the words *be-damayich chayi*, by your

bloods shall you live, the verse said twice in the *brit* ceremony, should be understood to mean by your silence you should live. The word *dam* can mean blood, but it also could come from the word *domem*, which means silence. There are times in our relationships, even in our relationship with G-d that it is best to remain silent, for words simply cannot express the profound pain that is sometimes felt in times of tragedy. This may also have been the feeling of Ya'akov as he stood by and watched his sons commit tragic mistakes.

As horrific incidents in the world unfold, we bite our tongues and struggle to find the words, but the silence, as that of Ya'akov of old, shows our deep shared love and pain toward our brothers and sisters.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah records the last moments of Dovid Hamelech's life and his parting charge to his son, the newly anointed Shlomo Hamelech. Dovid told his son, "Be strong and in full control of your emotions and guard all the Torah's precepts." (2:2,3) He assured Shlomo that if he and his descendants walked perfectly in the path of Hashem they would be guaranteed their prestigious position royalty forever. Dovid digressed then and reminded Shlomo about two powerful men, Shimi and Yoav, whose behavior could never be forgiven. Each was guilty of disgracing and publicly shaming the king. Shimi Ben Geira cursed Dovid and hurled stones at him while he fled from his conspiring son, Avshalom. Yoav ben Tzruya executed two opposing generals despite Dovid Hamelech's warm acceptance of their sincere peaceful gestures. Dovid, now on his death bed, instructed his son Shlomo to be sharp and alert and secure the execution of these two powerful figures. He said, "And do as your wisdom dictates and do not permit him to die an old man." (2:6) After completing his instructions Dovid left this world with these parting words of revenge.

This final episode of Dovid Hamelech's life is perturbing. Although we undoubtedly recognize the need for such instructions their timing is very disturbing. Couldn't the aged king choose a more appropriate moment for these instructions? Wouldn't a more gentle climate be appropriate for Dovid when parting with his precious son? It seems that Dovid intentionally reserved these words to leave an impressionable image on his son.

In search for an understanding of this we direct our attention to Dovid's mild request inserted in the midst of these harsh commands. He said, "Act kindly towards the Barzilai children and host at your table because their father was close to me when I fled from your brother Avshalom." (2:7) Barzilai was very gracious to Dovid Hamelech and provided him food and shelter in his grave time of distress. Dovid was forever

indebted to Barzilai for this and hosted the entire family at his royal table. Now that Dovid was leaving the world it became Shlomo Hamelech's responsibility to perpetuate this kindness. Dovid's parting request conveyed to Shlomo a keen sense of continuity-to view himself as Dovid's extension. He therefore instructed Shlomo to perpetuate this kindness and continue the royal practice of hosting the Barzilai family at his table.

Conceivably, this mild request was interspersed here to place these other commands in proper perspective. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech charged his son with the responsibility of perpetuating his father's name and honor. He sought to instill in Shlomo a sense of perfect continuity, to follow closely his revered father's path. For this same reason Dovid chose his parting moments to instruct his son about Shimi and Yoav. They brought Dovid much humiliation and indignation and certainly deserved execution. Yet, Dovid did not deem it appropriate to respond to their actions during his lifetime and left this matter an unfinished affair. Now that Dovid was leaving this world it became Shlomo's role to act on his father's behalf. Dovid reserved this difficult command for his last moments to convey to him his true role. He envisioned Shlomo following his fathers' perfect path and therefore left him with a powerful image of continuity. Dovid instructed Shlomo to begin his reign by completing what his father could not accomplish and to continue this path throughout his lifetime. Dovid informed Shlomo that if he perpetuates his father's honor and accomplishments he will never stray from the path and Dovid's household will be guaranteed royalty over Israel.

Indeed, Shlomo accepted his father's charge and fulfilled it to the best of his ability. In fact, Scriptures mention earlier Bas Sheva, Shlomo's mother's special bracha to her husband Dovid Hamelech. She said, "My master the king should live forever." (1:31) Malbim (ad loc) explains that the words, "live forever" refer to perpetuating Dovid Hamelech's reign through his son, Shlomo. These words had a major impact on her son as we clearly see from our haftorah's concluding words. Scriptures records Dovid Hamelech's forty year reign and concludes, "And Shlomo sat on his father Dovid's throne his kingdom was firmly established." (2:12) Ralbag and Malbim explain that this refers to the glaring phenomena that Shlomo ruled for exactly forty years. He followed so closely in his father's footsteps that he merited his exact years of reign. Dovid's dream was realized and Shlomo did become the extended image of his perfect father.

This lesson runs parallel lines with Yaakov Avinu's parting bracha to his beloved son Yosef. Moments before leaving this world Yaakov Avinu gathered his children and blessed them revealing to each his unique quality and role amongst the Jewish people. Yet, he showered an abundant bracha upon

one particular son Yosef. The Torah expresses this in the following words. "Your father's blessings that superseded those of his predecessors... shall rest upon Yosef's head, the premier amongst the brothers." (B'reishis 49:26) Rashi explains that Hashem's bracha to Yaakov Avinu distinguished itself from those given to Avrohom and Yitzchok Avinu. Their brachos were of limited nature whereas Yaakov's bracha was unlimited and spanned the entire world. Yaakov now continued this tradition and bestowed upon Yosef this unlimited bracha.

We can appreciate this by analyzing Yaakov's introductory words to this bracha. He describes Yosef's superb inner strength in the following words, "And he firmly settled his power and adorned his arms with gold; this came from Yaakov's strength from where he became the shepherd of Israel." (Breishis 49:24) Rashi quotes the Sages who interpret this to refer to Yosef's incredible self control displayed during the irresistible seductive scene with Potiphar's wife. They reveal Yosef's true source of inner strength during his life's most trying challenge. Rav Yishmael said that at that crucial moment of overpowering temptation Yaakov Avinu's image appeared before his son and reminded him of his illustrious predestined position amongst his brothers. (see Rashi ad loc from Mesichta Sota 36b)

The upshot of this is that Yosef dedicated his life to personifying his father's supreme qualities. He was so similar to his father that his life's experiences echoed those of his father and even his facial features reflected Yaakov Avinu. (see Rashi to Breishis 37:2) His life's goal was to be a perfect extension of his father, disseminate his lessons to all and perpetuate his sterling character. Yosef's focus served as a constant reminder to him of his father's perfect ways. Even after total alienation from his entire household Yosef remained loyal to all his father's teachings. Although Yosef was subjected to the fierce immorality of Egypt he drew inner strength from his father and resisted the most powerful seduction of life. At that impossible moment he suddenly envisioned his father beckoning him not to succumb to passion. The mere image of Yaakov Avinu sufficed to release Yosef from the clutches of sin and flee from its tempting environment.

Yosef's unprecedented achievement earned him the title Yosef the righteous one. His fierce encounter with the repulsive Egyptian behavior helped shape his moral character into one of sanctity and purity. Yaakov alluded to this, as well, in his elaborate bracha to Yosef. He says, "Graceful son whose grace rose above the eye; maidens climbed the walls to catch a glimpse." (49:22) The Sages interpret this verse to refer to Yosef's supreme level of sanctity. Egyptian maidens tossed Yosef jewelry and ornaments for him to gaze their way but Yosef's eyes rose above this and never roamed freely throughout his entire reign in Egypt. (see Bamidbar Rabba 14:6) This purity and

sanctity set the stage for Yaakov's household's descent to Egypt. Yosef's relentless commitment to the highest standards of sanctity served as a shining example for Yaakov's entire household and oriented them to their new home for the next two hundred and ten years.

Rabbeinu Avrohom Ben HaRambam explains that these outstanding qualities of self control and sanctity earned Yosef his special blessing. Upon reflection we realize that Yosef's perception of himself as his father's extension earned him his abundant bracha. Hashem bestowed upon Yaakov an unlimited bracha because he attained the highest levels of sanctity and piety. (see Breishis Rabba 69:2,3 and Ohr Hachaim to Breishis 28:13). Now that Yaakov was leaving this world he sought to share this unlimited bracha with one who attained similar levels of piety and sanctity. Yosef who achieved outstanding piety and sanctity through maintaining his father's image became the perfect candidate for this bracha. Yaakov therefore transmitted to Yosef the unlimited bracha he received from Hashem for outstanding success and fortune in every aspect of life. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we read that Yaakov descended to Egypt with his family, thus beginning the long period of exile, and later, bondage, in Egypt. Our Sages tell us that the famine that was "supposed" to last for seven years ended after only two years because Yaakov's arrival in Egypt brought blessing to that country.

When we read last week's and this week's parashot, G-d's plan seems relatively straightforward. The Jewish people needed to be enslaved in Egypt, so G-d caused a famine that would bring about Yaakov's migration to that country. That is apparently why the famine ended as soon as Yaakov arrived-its purpose had been accomplished.

At the end of this week's parashah, we read that the famine caused nearly all of the wealth of Egypt and the surrounding nations to become concentrated in Pharaoh's hands. Why does the Torah relate this information? Seemingly, the story of the famine has ended with Yaakov's arrival in Egypt!

The Zohar informs us that G-d's plan for history is not as obvious as might appear. In fact, the famine had another purpose other than bringing Bnei Yisrael to Egypt. More than two centuries after the events described in this week's parashah, Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt carrying fabulous wealth. Where did that wealth come from? The Zohar tells us that a key purpose of the famine was to bring wealth to Egypt in order to fulfill G-d's promise to Avraham (Bereishit 15:14): "Afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." This explains why the Torah adds the additional details about the famine that we find at the end of the

parashah. More importantly, perhaps, it teaches us an important lesson about hashgachah pratit / G-d's "hands-on" direction of history. It goes without saying that we often do not perceive G-d's plan as history is developing. However, we sometimes think that we do understand history after the fact. Even this may not be so, the Zohar teaches. We thought we understood the famine when we saw Yaakov descend to Egypt. In fact, a primary purpose of the famine was not revealed until 210 years later. (Based on a lecture by R' Shlomo Naiman shlita)

"Then you will have brought me in my old age in sorrow to she'ol." (44:29)

One meaning of "She'ol" is Gehinom. In the "olden-days," observed R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Shanghai in the 1940's), people truly believed in the existence of Gan Eden and Gehinom. Thus, as long as Yaakov thought that Yosef was dead, Yaakov had no doubt at all that he would descend to gehinom. (This was because he believed that he had failed in his mission to create the twelve tribes of Israel.) Similarly, Yosef's intention in acting cruelly to his brothers was, according to Ramban, to lessen the punishment which they would receive at the hands of G-d. He had no question at all that G-d does punish people for their sins and he therefore considered it to be in their best interests to suffer at Yosef's hands in this world.

Today, continued R' Levenstein, we have lost this strong faith. We ignore the fact that death is inevitable and every person will have to answer for his deeds. The Gemara (Berachot 31a) relates that the sage Mar Zutra was once asked to sing at a wedding. He sang, "Woe to us that we will die." Apparently, this was not considered inappropriate by the other guests. Imagine, in contrast, the uproar that would ensue if a rabbi were to give such a speech at a wedding today! (Mi'mizrach Hashemesh)

"When they related to him all the words that Yosef had spoken to them, and he saw the agalot / wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." (45:27)

Why was Yaakov's spirit revived when he saw the wagons that Yosef sent? Rashi explains: As evidence that it was Yosef who was sending a message to Yaakov, the Egyptian viceroy had informed Yaakov's sons of the Torah subject he had been studying with his father Yaakov when he last left him. It was the section of the eglah arufah / the heifer that had its neck broken [when a corpse was found murdered on the road-see Devarim 21:6]. This is why the Torah says, "He saw the agalot that Yosef had sent," rather than, "that Pharaoh had sent." [Yosef made a play on words, as agalot can mean both wagons and heifers.]

R' Yishayah of Tirani (Italy; 13th century) asks: Why had Yaakov been studying the law of eglah arufah with Yosef when they had parted 22 years before? He explains (based on the Talmud Yerushalmi):

When Yosef left Yaakov's home, Yaakov accompanied him. Yosef said to him, "Father, please go home so I will not be punished for troubling you."

Yaakov answered: "In the future, there will be a law of eglah arufah through which the elders of a town will receive atonement for death of a murdered way-fairer. You might ask: why do those elders need atonement? The answer is that the elders of a town are responsible if a traveler is sent on his way without proper provisions and accompaniment, and he is killed [either by other travelers or while himself trying to rob other travelers]. Therefore, I, too, must accompany you down the road." (Nimukei Chumash Le'Rabbeinu Yishayah)

"[Yosef] appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck excessively." (46:29) Rashi comments: Yaakov, however, did not fall upon Yosef's neck, nor did he kiss him. Our Rabbis say that the reason was that Yaakov was reciting the Shema.

Numerous commentaries ask: Why was Yaakov reciting the Shema? If it was the time to recite the Shema, why did Yosef not do so? If, on the other hand, it was not the time for Shema, why did Yaakov recite it? R' Moshe Shick z"l ("Maharam Shick"; Hungary; 1805-1879) answers that it was not the time for reciting the Shema, and Yaakov recited it for a different reason. He explains: One of the basic lessons of the verse Shema Yisrael is that "Hashem is Elokeinu." By saying Shema, we acknowledge that there is only One G-d, despite the fact that we see various manifestations of Him. For example, Hashem is sometimes merciful and sometimes strict. (The Name "Hashem" represents G-d's Attribute of Mercy, while the Name "Elokim" represents G-d's Attribute of Justice.) Although we rarely understand how this is so, what we perceive as G-d's strictness is ultimately for our own good; in the long-run, it is merciful.

For the 22 years of Yosef's absence, Yaakov saw only the strict side of G-d's actions. But when he saw Yosef's royal entourage, he understood that Yosef's disappearance was part of Hashem's plan for saving Yaakov and his family from famine. Ultimately, everything that had happened was for the best; "Hashem is Elokeinu."

Realizing this, Yaakov recited the Shema. Yosef, however, had already learned this lesson when he was freed from jail and appointed viceroy. He had no reason to recite the Shema at this moment. (Maharam Shick Al Ha'Torah)

R' Asher Zelig Schwartz z"l (Romania; 1920's) offers another answer to the above question: In verse 28, immediately preceding Yaakov's reunion with

Yosef, we read, "[Yaakov] sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare the way ahead of him in Goshen." (Rashi explains that Yaakov sent Yehuda to establish a yeshiva for the arriving immigrants.) In verse 30, immediately following Yaakov's reunion with Yosef, we read, "Then Yisrael said to Yosef, 'Now I can die, after my having seen your face.'" The connection between verses 28 (establishing a yeshiva), 29 (reciting the Shema), and 30 (being willing to die) is as follows:

The Gemara states: "If someone meets the yetzer hara and cannot prevail against it, he should drag it to the bet midrash [where he should study Torah]. If he thus defeats the yetzer hara, good! If not, he should recite the Shema. If he thus defeats the yetzer hara, good! If not, he should imagine the day of death." Says R' Schwartz: Yaakov was afraid that seeing Yosef in all his glory as Prime Minister would make him (Yaakov) feel pride, or would bring out some other improper feeling. Yaakov therefore took all of the steps suggested by the Gemara: he established a bet midrash, he recited the Shema, and he imagined the day of death.

R' Schwartz adds: If imagining the day of death is an effective means of conquering the yetzer hara, why is it only the fall-back strategy? Why does the gemara suggest first learning Torah and reciting Shema? The answer is that we are expected to serve Hashem with joy, something to which the third strategy does not lend itself. (Bet Asher) © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Yaacov turns to Yosef twice. First, he asks Yosef to take an oath not to bury him in Egypt but only in the birthplace of his ancestors (Bereishit 47:29-31). Next, "after these events," Yaacov makes a special promise to Yosef that his two oldest sons, Efraim and Menasheh, will be given an inheritance in Eretz Yisrael just like Yaacov's own sons Reuven and Shimon (48:3-7). Yaacov ends this promise with a verse which at first glance does not seem to be connected to the oath: "And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died when she was with me in the land of Canaan, on the way, a short distance on the road to Efrat. And I buried her there on the road to Efrat, which is Beit Lechem." [48:7]. Why does Yaacov add this verse specifically at this point, how is it linked to his earlier words?

Many commentators explain that this verse is connected to Yaacov's request from Yosef that he should be buried with his ancestors, in contrast with Rachel, who did not have this privilege. "He said this to Yosef, meaning to say, you should not be angry that I ask you for an honor that I did not give your mother" [Ibn Ezra]. However, this explanation is difficult to

accept: Why didn't he say it to Yosef when he first turned to him and discussed where he would be buried instead of leaving it for his second request, which was not connected at all to the subject of Yaacov's burial?

Thus, it seems probable that the matter of Rachel's burial at the roadside is connected to Yaacov's second discussion with Yosef, where he promised to give Yosef's sons a full heritage. There must be a link between these two issues: Yaacov explains that the reason he gives Yosef this special gift is to compensate for what happened to Rachel.

As is well known, the Torah views burying people in the heritage of their ancestors as an important value, as can be seen from what Yaacov says in his first talk with Yosef. Burial at other than an ancestral site is considered to be a curse ("Your body will not arrive at your fathers' gravesite" [I Melachim 13:22]). Burying somebody at the same site as his family, a common custom in the past, emphasizes the link between the living and the dead, together with the connection to their inheritance. For technical reasons, Rachel was not privileged to be buried with the rest of her family. Therefore, Yaacov promises Yosef that he will receive a double inheritance. This serves as a partial compensation for Rachel, in that the portions of her grandsons in Eretz Yisrael will be larger than those of Yaacov's other grandchildren. Thus, through her descendents, Rachel's name will be remembered on a relatively larger fraction of the land.

It is interesting to note that from that point on the Torah places special emphasis on the link between Rachel's offspring and their heritage. This starts with the love of the land shown by the daughters of Tzelofchad, from the tribe of Menasheh, who ask for "their father's heritage" [Bamidbar 27:7]. It continues with the fear of the men of their tribe, "The portion of our heritage will be decreased" [36:3]. In addition, it is specifically noted that Rachel's offspring are buried in their heritage: First is Yehoshua, from the tribe of Efraim, "And he was buried at the border of his heritage" [Yehoshua 24:30]. He is followed by Gidon, from the tribe of Menasheh, "And he was buried at the gravesite of his father Yoash, in Ofrah" [Shoftim 8:32]. In this way, Rachel in the end strengthened the link both to her offspring and to their heritage in Eretz Yisrael.

This Small One Will Grow to be Big

by Rabbi Shlomo Schock

In this world, where large institutions and huge monopolies have taken charge of our lives, which are worn away as time goes on, we can be viewed as small grains of sand wandering through the "global village" or as insignificant screws in the mechanism of the universe. But from this small and weak position into which we have been thrown we can peek out at life to find great hidden strengths in our souls. We are

capable of instigating a revolution and discovering that no matter how small we are, we can free ourselves from the chains with which external reality is trying to enslave us.

The force which pressures us will help reveal within ourselves the very strength that will allow us to oppose the force itself. We may discover that our own energies ignore the struggle completely and move beyond it to a revolution that is not affected by the frontal attack of the predatory institutions. We can channel our energies through the boundaries of our weakness, using them for building and creativity in a way that suits us, serving our life's journey in a positive and constructive way, completely ignoring the external struggle.

"Gad will lead a battalion, he will return on his heel" [Bereishit 49:19]. "Gad is related to being small. He was born very little, and he was therefore called Gad, meaning a small grain of sand. For this reason, Yaacov blessed him to be part of a group—that he should enjoy being in a group, so that when he joins the majority he will achieve perfection, since all the good and the power of courage is related to being joined together, with peace and unity" [Rabbi Mordechai Yosef, "Mei Hashiloach"].

Yaacov's blessing to Gad passes through the heel. The concept of the "Achilles' heel" is a well known model for the weakest point in a person's being. Yaacov dispels his weakness and small size as compared to Eisav through his heel, taking advantage of his own weakness. Yaacov squeezes his way through reality and gets possession of the birthright in spite of and by taking advantage of his own weakness. He blesses his little son, Gad, that he will be able to break into the wide open spaces of life, teaching him to join the majority by passing through the heel.

Our psychological inhibitions and feelings of inferiority with respect to the overpowering reality can be replaced by an outbreak of activity and becoming part of life based on our own small status. Life gives us greater opportunities than we could imagine for ourselves. The approach of Gad, little as he was, is what led him to climb higher and higher on the "magic bean stalk" and reach the sky.

The lowly status of the Jew in exile, giving the impression that he could be bent and trampled, is what created the resistance of the Jews. To act against the normal current requires moving the forces in a different direction, and the Jews were able to achieve the needed force and the change in direction by ignoring the current itself. Many of the enemies of Yisrael lost their own self control when faced with the Jewish disregard for the evil that surrounded them and with the Jewish custom of concentrating on Judaism alone.

