

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**ll of these, the Tribes of Israel, twelve [of them], and this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them, each man according to his blessing did he bless them” (Beraishis 49:28). After quoting the words Yaakov said to each of his sons, the Torah reiterates that he blessed all of them. It would seem, however, that the three oldest sons did not receive a blessing, but a rebuke. In order to address this, Rashi breaks the verse down into several parts. “And this is what their father spoke to them” refers to the words previously stated, directed at each son individually, including the rebuke directed towards Reuvain, Shimon and Levi; “and he blessed them” refers to a blessing that included all twelve sons; “each man according to his blessing” refers again to the individual blessings directed at the individual sons; and “did he bless them” groups them all together again, with each individual blessing applying to each of the other sons as well. Sound confusing? There is much discussion among the commentators regarding what Rashi is trying to say.

The Sifsay Chachamim, probably the most widely used commentator on Rashi, quotes the Nachalas Yaakov, who asks how Rashi knew that Yaakov also blessed Reuvain, Shimon and Levi. Implied in this question is the assumption that it is possible for the “them” to only refer to the other sons, but not those three. The Nachalas Yaakov then adds that if Rashi knew from the second “them” that “all of them” were included, why did the Torah write “them” twice? These questions are left unanswered (by both the Nachalas Yaakov and the Sifsay Chachamim).

The Or Hachayim does not comment on Rashi, but directly on the verse, where he explains how each and every son did receive a blessing. Although Reuvain was criticized for being too impatient, by still calling him a “firstborn” (49:3) Yaakov was saying that he would eventually reclaim his position of serving in the Temple,

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by
Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg
in memory of
Mr. Hyman Weisberg ז"ל
חיים ניסן בן יצחק אייזק ז"ל
נפטר ט"ו טבת תש"כ

as in the Third Temple the firstborn will serve alongside the Leviim. Cursing Shimon and Levi's anger (49:7) was also a blessing, as it helped minimize this trait to the point that their level of anger was no longer greater than that of any of the others. The Midrash Seichel Tov also considers Yaakov's words to these three to include a blessing, as they were each concerned that their actions had caused them to no longer be considered part of Yaakov's legacy. When Reuvain heard that he “will not have anything extra” (49:4) he rejoiced, as it meant that at least he was still on the same level as the others, i.e. still one of the 12 Tribes. Similarly, when Shimon and Levi heard that they will be “scattered within Israel” (49:7), they realized that they will still be “within Israel,” not excluded from it. The Shaaray Aharon suggests that this is what Rashi meant when he said that everyone received a blessing, even Reuvain, Shimon and Levi. However, Rashi is pretty clear that the words recorded in the Torah that were said to each of the sons are separate from the “blessing” that each of them received, not a clarification that they were all blessings. According to the Maskil Ledovid, it is the fact that they are two separate statements (“this is what their father spoke to them” and “and he blessed them”) that led Rashi to conclude that besides these words they were each blessed.

Another point of discussion among the commentators is how each son can be said to have received his own blessing if, in the end, each blessing applied to all the brothers. By looking at the wording of the Midrash that was most likely Rashi's source (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:8), I believe we can answer this question, as well as those of the Nachalas Yaakov.

Discussing how it can be said that Reuvain, Shimon and Levi received a blessing from Yaakov being that his words to them were more like a scolding, Rabbi Elazar says that they got “nourishment” from the others. Because all the Tribes were connected to each other, part of one unit, if one part of the nation were blessed, it spread to all of them. A particular blessing may be most appropriate for one Tribe, and therefore bestowed because of the qualities and traits of that Tribe, but once bestowed, it then applies to all the Tribes. The strength of a lion that Yehuda was blessed with gave strength to all of them, just as the power of the ox that Yosef was blessed with and the speed of a gazelle that Naftali was blessed with applied to all twelve Tribes. Therefore, since Reuvain, Shimon and

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

Levi were part of the twelve, they received those blessings as well. True, they didn't get any blessings directed towards them. Nevertheless, as Tribes of the Nation of Israel, the blessings received by each of the other Tribes also applied to them.

This "method" of the blessings spreading to all of the Tribes is what the last part of the verse is referring to; "according to each man's blessing did he bless them," i.e. they all benefited from the blessings each of the others received. Rabbi Elazar, though, is expounding on the first part of the verse, namely how this applied not only to the nine Tribes that merited having a blessing directed towards them, but to the other three as well. Because "all twelve were the Tribes of Israel," when "Yaakov spoke his words to each of them," it resulted in "all of them [being] blessed." The first "them" ("and he blessed them") tells us that all the Tribes were included, while the second "them" ("according to each man's blessing did he bless them") tells us how they were included. Nine of the Tribes were blessed, but all twelve benefited from those blessings. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Describing the brothers' feelings after the death of their father Yaacov (Jacob), the Torah states, "Now Yosef's (Joseph) brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, 'perhaps Yosef will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him.'" (Genesis 50:15)

On a simple level the brothers concern was well founded. While Yaacov was alive, the brothers thought their father would protect them from any acts of revenge on the part of Yosef. Once Yaacov died, the brothers felt vulnerable. They feared that Yosef's anger would finally be unleashed at them for selling him.

However, it seems strange that the brothers would have such a fear, since Yosef had so embraced them in Egypt, providing for their every need.

Commenting on the words "now Yosef's brothers saw" the Midrash suggests that the brothers actually "saw" as they returned from burying Yaacov that Yosef stopped at the very pit into which he was thrown. (Midrash Agur quoted by Nechama Leibowitz) No doubt, they thought, he did so to plan an action

against them in the very place that his life hit such a low point. Rashi adds that the brothers "saw" that Yosef no longer invited them to dine with him. (Rashi, Genesis 50:15) No doubt, the brothers thought, because Yosef was still incensed at the way he had been mistreated.

In both cases, however, the brothers misunderstood Yosef's actions.

In the first, the Midrash notes that Yosef returns to the pit to thank G-d for having saved him. In the second, Yosef may no longer have eaten with his brothers, reasoning that after Yaacov's death, the Egyptian persecution was soon to begin. He, therefore, feared that dining with his brothers could provoke the Egyptians to suspect that he was allying himself with his brothers to rebel against Egypt. (Gur Aryeh)

Note in the text that after the reunion between Yosef and his brothers, the brothers never say a word to Yosef until their father's death. The coming together after a long separation was so traumatic that they may have run out of emotional energy for the important everyday communication.

In the case of Yosef and his brothers, the trend is compounded by the fact that the separation was due to a deep division. So deep, that even after the reunion, the brothers didn't feel free enough to talk openly with Yosef to express their deep feelings of fear. Had they been more open, Yosef would have told them that his intent was not to harm them. In the same breath, Yosef can be faulted for leaving false impressions rather than explaining his actions to his brothers.

Whether there has been a traumatic separation or not, often it is the case that disagreements arise because people don't express what is in their hearts. If we would only speak openly and honestly, we would find out that on many occasions, our concerns are based upon misunderstandings.

Although it exposes us to the risk of pain, openness is the pathway to healing and growth. © 2007 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Bereshith is completed in this week's Torah reading. The story of the emergence of first one person and then an entire family as being the spearhead of monotheistic belief in a pagan world is an exciting but difficult one.

At so many turns in the events described in the Torah the idea of monotheism and the few who championed its cause could have died at birth. Yet somehow the idea and the people advancing it survived and grew until, over the ages, it became the defining idea in the major religions of civilization. Truth somehow survived, unable to be crushed by the great

and mighty forces always aligned against it. Our patriarch Yaakov tells the Pharaoh that "my years are relatively few and very difficult ones." But Yaakov is not only speaking for himself in this statement. He speaks for the Jewish people as a whole in all of its generations and ages. And he also speaks for all those in the world who still value truth over falseness, accuracy over populism, reality over current political correctness and imposed intellectual conformity.

The Midrash taught us that the seal of G-d, so to speak, is truth. The book of Bereshith begins with truth inscribed in its opening words, the last letter of these first three words of the Torah spelling the Hebrew word *emet*- truth. Falseness requires publicity, media, excuses and greater falsehoods to cover and justify the original untruth.

In Yiddish there is a phrase that says: "The best lie is the truth." Truth needs no follow-up. It stands on its own for all eternity.

Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence stated that truths are self-evident. If we merely contemplate, even on a superficial level, the events as described in the book of Bereshith, we must stand back in awe to realize the power of truth and the tenacity of individuals who pursue it and live by it.

How easy and understandable it would have been for any of our patriarchs and matriarchs to have become disappointed and disillusioned by the events of their lives. Yet their ultimate faith, that truth will survive and triumph, dominates the entire narrative of this first book of the Torah. Bereshith sets the pattern for everything that will follow.

All of the Torah is a search for and vindication of truth. G-d's revelation at Sinai was an aid in this quest for truth, otherwise so many people could not have arrived at that moment of truth all together. But falseness, human nature, greed and apathy continually whittle away at the idea of truth as the centerpiece of human endeavor.

The rabbis taught us that the acts of the patriarchs, which are the main story of the book of Bereshith, guide us for all later generations. This Shabat we will all rise and say "chazak"-be strong-at the conclusion of the Torah reading. The never ending pursuit of truth requires strength of purpose and will. May we really have the strength of purpose and belief to "be strong." © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the blessing of the tribe of Dan, Yaacov adds a short phrase: "I hope for Your help, G-d"

[Bereishit 49:18]. The commentators have difficulty explaining why the prayer appears at this point. Many feel that it is related in some way to the future of the tribe of Dan, either in general (Rashbam) or with respect to specific events (Rashi, who explains that the prayer is related to Shimon's final request from G-d). But it is still not clear why Yaacov prays about the tribe of Dan even though his blessing gives no hint of any trouble. In general, Yaacov's blessing to Dan about his military success ("Dan is a serpent on the road, a snake along the path, who bites the heels of a horse so that his rider falls backwards" [49:17]) is quite similar to the blessings of Gad ("Gad will gather into a battalion and he will pursue it by the heel" [49:19]) and Binyamin ("Binyamin is a preying wolf, in the morning he will devour his prey, and at night he will distribute the spoils" [49:27]). Why didn't Yaacov feel the need to add an additional prayer to these blessings too?

In view of this question, Yaacov's prayer might be understood in a simpler way. Perhaps his prayer was not linked specifically to Dan but was a general one for all the tribes, as part of Yaacov's blessings to his children. If this is true, it can teach us about a novel aspect of Yaacov's blessings. The sequence of the blessings corresponds to the order of the children. First Yaacov blesses the six sons of Leah and he ends with Rachel's two sons, putting the sons of the maidservants in the middle (we have discussed this sequence in the past). If Yaacov's prayer was meant as a general prayer it should have been in the middle of all the blessings. However, it really appears after the seventh tribe? the six sons of Leah and the tribe of Dan ? and before the remaining five sons? the three of the maidservants and the two sons of Rachel. Why was this asymmetric place chosen for the prayer?

The answer is that the sequence is indeed very reasonable. Yaacov's words to the sons of Leah refer to six tribes, but in practice they are given to us in only five blessings, since Shimon and Levy are included in a single statement, when he rebukes them ("Shimon and Levy are brothers..." [49:5]. In addition, here is what Yaacov tells these two tribes: "I will divide them among Yaacov, I will disperse them in Yisrael" [49:7]. This is the opposite of the other brothers, for whom the proper heritage is an important element of the blessing. For example, see the blessings of Yehuda (an abundance of wine? see 49:11), Zevulun ("He will dwell on the seacoast" [49:13]), Yisachar ("The land will be pleasant" [49:15]), and Yosef ("The blessings of the heavens above, the blessings of the depths below" [49:25]). This subject is also hinted at in the blessing of Reuven ("You will not be first" [49:4]) ? You will not receive the double portion of the firstborn, but rather your regular inheritance. Thus, Yaacov's prayer for help is indeed at the center of the blessings of tribes, referring to those that received a specific heritage: five before his prayer and five afterwards.

RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

In this week's portion, Jacob is on his deathbed and tells his children: "Gather around, and I will tell you what will happen at the End of Days" (Genesis 49:1). However, this information is never disclosed! Instead, Jacob blesses each one of his sons, and no further mention is made of the prophetic vision he promised to reveal.

According to Rashi, the Divine Presence left Jacob as he was about to tell his sons what would happen at the End of Days. Since Jacob was unable to prophesy without Divine assistance, he blessed his children instead. But why would the Divine Presence depart from Jacob precisely at this time?

Rabbi Naftali of Rupshitz suggests that once Jacob looked into the future, he saw all the pain that the Jewish people would have to endure until the end of time, and this saddened him so much that the Divine Presence left him. The Talmud teaches (Shabbat 30b) that sadness prevents a person from being able to receive prophesy. Therefore, once Jacob was overwhelmed with sorrow for the Jewish people, he no longer had clarity about future events.

This teaches us a powerful lesson about what it means to feel the pain of others.

A story told about Rav Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev is instructive. Rav Levi Yitzhak once visited an ill person who was very worried about whether he would receive a place in the World to Come. Upon hearing the man's concern, Rav Levi Yitzhak called over some of his students to act as witnesses, whereupon he drew up a document transferring his own portion in the Next World to the ill man. His students signed the document, and a few moments later the man died.

The students were shocked by their rabbi's behavior, and they asked him why he had acted in such a manner. Rav Levi Yitzhak replied, "To make a Jew who is suffering feel calm and at ease, even for one moment, is worth more than the entire World to Come."

(It seems possible that the reward Rav Levi Yitzhak received for this great act of compassion far outweighed the reward that he signed over to the dying man!)

These examples show that holy people do not live for themselves; they live for others. We see this in the Torah when it states, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt" (Genesis 47:28). The Meshech Chochma explains that Jacob did not merely live in the land of Egypt for his own sake; his "life" was for everyone! His care for others, including the Egyptians, affected the entire world-since, at the time, the whole world depended on Egypt for their food supply. Thus, Jacob's complete lack of self-centeredness had a positive impact on the entire world.

We see this as well in the verse where Jacob tells Joseph, "I am giving you one shchem MORE THAN YOUR BROTHERS" (Genesis 48:22). What is the meaning of the word shchem? On a literal level, it means "portion." Rashi understands it to refer to the city of Shchem, which Jacob describes as conquering with his sword and his bow.

Onkelos, in his Aramaic translation, defines "my sword and my bow" as "my prayer and my requests."

According to Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Maharan), these prayers had an effect on all three worlds: the lower world (shafel) in which we live; the middle world (kochavim) of outer space and galaxies; and the highest world (malachim), which is the realm of the angels. The acronym of these three Hebrew words (SH-afel, K-ochavim, M-alachim) spells SHCHEM!

Thus we see again that Jacob did not live only for himself or his family. He did not pray only on his own behalf, or on behalf of the people and cities in his immediate surroundings. Jacob prayed for the acronym of Shchem- for everyone in all three worlds.

As we conclude the Book of Genesis, we should reflect on the lessons it teaches us. Over and over we see an emphasis on empathy for others-shifting the focus away from our individual, self-centered concerns in order to be as sensitive as possible to the needs of others. Our patriarchs and matriarchs exemplify this quality. It is a necessary foundation-a prerequisite that must be integrated into the Jewish national character before we can appreciate the redemption of the Book of Exodus.

May we integrate this lesson into our own lives and be blessed to develop unity, camaraderie, and compassion for each other, so that we merit the ultimate redemption, soon in our days. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.org

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

Right before Jacob passed away, he asked his son, Joseph, to promise him that he would be buried in Israel and not in Egypt. Joseph immediately said: "I personally will do as you have said" (Genesis 47:30).

We've all had the experience after being told that something will get done, that for one reason or another, it never happens. The person might have had all of the best intentions to do it himself, but quite often he asks others to assist him, or he delegates it to someone else entirely, and then someone drops the ball and it never gets done at all, or gets done poorly.

But when someone assures us that he will personally do something, taking full responsibility for the task, it almost always gets done right. This is because a piece of the person is now on the line. People who take explicit ownership for something will

feel a sense of healthy pressure to make sure that it gets done because their own self-esteem and self-respect are now all tied into the completion of this task.

Many people don't take personal responsibility because it's so much easier just to pass the buck. By verbalizing to others that you're taking on a task yourself, then you will now gain enormous self-esteem. This is because you'll now see yourself as someone who isn't afraid to commit and as someone who keeps his word.

It's also comforting to hear someone say he'll personally take care of something. It shows just how much the person cares and the importance he places on our request. So the next time you're asked if you can do something, don't just agree. Say "I will personally do as you have said," and watch the contentment and ease flush the requester's face. And since taking full, total, and complete responsibility will also dramatically increase your own self-esteem, you'll feel even better than the requester does. © 2007 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.ocm

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

It is an intensely Jewish and awe-inspiring spectacle. The father lifts his hands, and the child bows his head. The father places his hands on the child's head, closes his eyes and begins to whisper his blessing. It matters not if the father is a great sage or a simple man, the blessing draws its power from the sincerity of the father.

Come, let us move a little closer and listen to the words he is saying. "May the Lord establish you like Ephraim and Menashe! May Hashem bless you and protect you..." These are the words our Sages, based on Jacob's instructions, have instituted as the formula for the paternal blessing. But why Ephraim and Menashe? What was so special about Joseph's sons that they have become the paragons to which all Jewish children aspire?

In this week's parshah, we witness the emotional scene of Jacob blessing his grandsons Ephraim and Menashe from his deathbed. As Jacob reaches out to place his hands on their heads, he sees that Joseph has positioned the older Menashe to receive his grandfather's right hand, which is considered predominant, and the younger Ephraim to receive the left. But Jacob sees greater things in Ephraim's future, and he "maneuvers his hands," crossing over with the right hand to place it on Ephraim's head and the left on Menashe's.

We would not have been surprised had the elder Menashe resented the preeminence accorded to his younger brother, but there is not the slightest hint of such a reaction in the Torah. Nor do we find any hint of Ephraim feeling suddenly superior. On the contrary, Menashe and Ephraim were both perfectly content with

the roles they had been assigned to play in the destiny of the Jewish people. There was absolutely no discord between these two brothers, only a desire to fulfill their own individual destinies to the best of their abilities and a selfless dedication to their common goal of doing what was best for the Jewish people as a whole.

This, the commentators explain, is the perfect blessing a father can give his son. The most blessed state a person can achieve is to reach his own full potential while maintaining a sense of equilibrium-or in our contemporary parlance, to be a "contented overachiever." This is quite an accomplishment, but we can attain it if we rise above the pettiness of coveting what Heaven has chosen to grant someone else. If we look inward at what we ourselves can be, we can focus on our growth and, at the same time, relate to other people in a positive, giving and compassionate way. If, however, we look outward at what others have been given, we will never find contentment and the growth that it fosters. Ephraim and Menashe found that rare harmony of achievement and contentment, and we bless our children that they should find it as well.

A weary traveler was returning home after a long journey. As he trudged along the road, he tried not to think of the blisters on his feet. Instead, he thought only about his younger brother's wedding, which was to take place the following day. One day's march more, and he would be home.

Suddenly, he heard the clatter of hooves, and he turned and saw a beautiful coach. "My good man," he called out to the coachman. "Can I catch a ride with you for a ways? I'll sit beside you on the bench, and I'll tell you where I have to get off."

"Today's your lucky day," said the coachman. "No one's using the coach. You can ride inside."

The traveler couldn't believe his good fortune as he sank into the plush upholstery. Within moments, he was fast asleep.

He slept for hours while the coach followed a bewildering course of highways and roads. Finally, the coach pulled to a halt, and the traveler awoke. The sun was sinking in the sky as he rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

"Where are we?" he asked.

The coachman mentioned the name of a town.

"What!?" the traveler cried out in anguish. "I'll never get to my destination in time. We've been riding in the opposite direction!"

"Well, look at the bright side," said the coachman. "At least your ride was comfortable."

A comfortable ride is not much consolation when one is going in the wrong direction. And if we devote too much of our energy to comfort and status, we may very well lose sight of the true destination in our journey through life. Especially in our own times, when there is such peer pressure to focus on the accumulation of comforts, we would do better to focus

on the activities that help us reach our destination. And when we sit down to define the goals of our lives, we will surely find that we care more about who and what we are than about what we have accumulated. Of one thing we can be sure- we have all been given the tools we need to fulfill our personal destinies. © 2007 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

For many parents, the highlight of the Friday evening home celebration and meal, indeed the highlight of the entire week, is the moment when they bless their children. However, even this could be tension-producing if one's son suddenly wants to know why his sister is blessed to grow up like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, while he has to settle for Ephraim and Menashe, Joseph's Egyptian-born sons, instead of the patriarchs. Is it possible that boys are finally getting the short end of the blessing?

I believe the reason can be found if we study Genesis from the perspective of family psychology. Sibling rivalry constantly surfaces as a powerful motif, love-hate relationships that end up more bitter than sweet. Right from the opening pages in the Bible, Cain is jealous of Abel, whose offering to G-d was found more pleasing than his own. Before we know it, Abel is dead, killed by his own brother - the Torah's first recorded murder.

Things get worse. Jacob spends 22 years away from home because he's afraid Esau wants to kill him. Upon returning from his long exile, richer, wiser and head of a large household, he makes all kinds of preparations to appease his brother. If that should fail, he devises a defense strategy should Esau's army of 400 men attack. And all of this hatred came about as a result of Jacob having deceived his father, at the behest of his mother, in order to wrest the birth-right and blessings away from his less deserving brother.

Jacob's own sons live through aspects of their father's sibling experiences; since Jacob felt unloved by his father, he lavished excessive favoritism upon his beloved son, Joseph. As a result of the bitter jealousy that the brothers harbor toward Joseph, they take the radical step of slow but inevitable death by casting their defenseless brother into a dangerous pit. Had Judah's last minute advice to sell the boy to a caravan of Ishmaelites been ignored, Joseph would have been torn to death by some wild animal.

When the Torah commands ". . . do not hate your brother in your heart" (Lev. 19:17), it could have easily used the word "friend" or "neighbor." But the word "brother" is deliberate; the people we are most likely to hate are the ones closest to us. If the natural affection between brothers backfires, the very same potential for closeness turns into potential for distance. No silence is more piercing than brothers who refuse to

speak to each other because of a dispute. Unlike a feud between strangers, family members don't bury the past - they live with it. Indeed, there is even a custom, retained by many old Jerusalemite families, that children should not attend their father's funeral. And one reason may very well be that if the children are going to fight over the inheritance, it should not begin at the gravesite.

There is, however, one remarkable exception to the pervasive theme of sibling hatred in Genesis. In contrast to their ancestors, Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Menashe, do not fight when Jacob bestows the younger brother, Ephraim, with the double blessing. Joseph even tries to stop Jacob. "That's not the way it should be done, Father. . . The other one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head" (Gen. 48:18). Jacob knows what he is doing. "The older one will also become a nation. . . But his younger brother will become even greater. . ." (Gen. 48:19).

As a result of this seeming rejection, one might expect a furious reaction from Menashe, lashing out like Cain. But Menashe overcomes his personal feelings. He understands that the birthright is a function of merit, and that Jacob's choice testifies to Ephraim's greater merit - or least to Ephraim's expertise in the highest Jewish Vocation.

The Midrash fills in the gaps regarding the characters of each of these sons of Joseph. Menashe is the worldly brother, the viceroy's assistant in running affairs of the state, a talented linguist with a PHD in languages and political diplomacy from the University of the Nile. He serves as his father's interpreter and righthand assistant in all important affairs of state (Gen. 42:23, Rashi Ad loc). Ephraim, on the other hand, is studious, devoting his time to learning Torah with his old and other-worldly grandfather, Jacob. In fact, when we read in this week's portion, Vayechi (Gen. 48:1), of how Joseph is brought news of his father's illness, the text does not reveal the messenger's name. Rashi identifies him as Ephraim returning from Goshen, where he's been studying with his grandfather.

Menashe, the symbol of secular wisdom, also receives a blessing, will also achieve greatness, but it is Ephraim the Torah Scholar who must receive the birthright of familial leadership. Both branches of wisdom much compliment each other, secular wisdom and international expertise on the one hand and the Divine Torah with its ethical and moral direction on the other, and they must even be combined together in the educational and personality makeup of each Jew: "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe, but he placed Ephraim before Menashe" (Gen. 48:20)

When parents bless their daughters to be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, what's being evoked is the very bedrock of Jewish existence - our matriarchs. But when they bless their sons to be like Menashe and Ephraim, the blessing evokes the long slow

process of Genesis, which finally finds fruit with the sons of Joseph, the only brothers who overcome sibling rivalry in order to achieve the unity which will lead to redemption. © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

The final parsha in the book of Genesis contains Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons. He saves a special place for his beloved son, Joseph. He has a special blessing for him and for his sons, Ephraim and Menasheh. His blessing is well known but its meaning is far from clear.

"And he (Jacob) blessed them (Ephraim and Menasheh) on that day saying: 'Through you (singular) shall the People of Israel bless, saying: May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menasheh.' And he placed Ephraim before Menasheh." (Genesis 48:20)

"Through you shall the People of Israel bless"- RASHI: "When one comes to bless his children, he will bless them with their blessing. And a person will say to his son, 'May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menasheh.'"

In many homes it is customary for the father to bless his children on Friday evening with these words: "May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menasheh." It would seem to be based on this Rashi. There are several questions that come to mind as one looks at this verse and its Rashi-comment. Rashi says, "When one comes to bless his children he will bless them with their blessing." What does he mean with their blessing? He was to bless them with the words, "May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menasheh." Is that their blessing? That is not their blessing. Those words seem to mean your son should grow up to be like Ephraim and Menasheh. It's your son's blessing, not Ephraim and Menasheh's blessing. Why then does Rashi say "bless them with their blessing"?

A Question on the Verse: It says "He blessed them." Where does this verse contain their blessing? The verse speaks of "The People of Israel's" blessing, not Ephraim and Menasheh's.

To complicate matters even more, look above at verse 15. There it says: "And he blessed Joseph and he said..." Read the rest of that verse and you won't find any blessing for Joseph. It says rather "[may] He bless the lads," etc. It seems like a lot of confusion.

Our Final Question: What's bothering Rashi that prompted this comment? Hint: See the plural-singular usage here. An Answer: Rashi notes the switch from plural, "And he blessed them" to the singular, "Through you (singular) shall Israel bless."

How does his comment deal with this? This is very difficult! An Answer: Actually, the verse has to be read in two parts. "And he blessed them" refers to the blessing they received above in verse 15, where the lads were blessed. This, then, is their-Ephraim and

Menasheh's-blessing. Rashi tells us that this is the blessing that a father is to give to his son- the blessing that Joseph's lads received. What was that blessing? That their forefather's names should be called upon them, and that they should multiply like the fish of sea.

Now the plural-singular discrepancy is cleared up. Through Joseph (singular) a child will receive their-Ephraim and Menashe's (plural) blessing.

We say, "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasheh." Meaning not that the son is to be like Ephraim and Menasheh (whatever that could mean!), but that their blessing should be the same as that received by Ephraim and Menasheh.

The blessing that Joseph received (verse 15) was that his children, the lads, multiply like the fish of the sea. The ultimate blessing is that our children shall also have children who will follow in the ways of our fathers. As it says: "My name and the name of my fathers, Isaac and Abraham." This is what Rashi is teaching us. A verse that seemed self-evident was, on closer inspection, much more complicated-until Rashi clarified matters. © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Vayechi, the last in the first Sefer (book) of Bereishit, is where Yaakov (Jacob) gives all of his sons their blessings. Ironically, though, Yaakov starts with the blessings for Ephraim and Menasheh, who were Yosef's sons that were born to him in Egypt. It all started when Yosef found out that Yaakov was sick (48:1), Yosef "took his two sons with him?" (presumably to bring them to Yaakov, although it doesn't say that anywhere). When Yosef and his sons got there, Yaakov "strengthened himself" (48:5) (which also seems strange), sat up on the bed, and told Yosef that his two sons would now be considered like Yaakov's children, and will get a portion in the land just like the rest of the brothers. Yaakov then called over the 2 children, placed his hands on their heads, and started blessing YOSEF, giving him the famous "Hamalach" blessing (48:16), that the angel that protected Yaakov from evil should also protect Yosef's sons, and that Yaakov's name should be associated with them, along with Avraham and Yitzchak, and they should multiply in the land. All these events seem inconsistent, unless we understand what they all mean...

When Yaakov got sick, the Torah doesn't say that Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov, but that Yosef took his sons with him! What it could mean is not that Yosef brought his sons physically to Yaakov, but that Yosef kept them close to himself, so that they wouldn't be spiritually influenced by their non-Jewish surroundings. Yaakov recognized this, which is why he felt strengthened when Yosef came to him with his sons. That's also why when Yaakov claimed the sons

as his own, he made sure to stress that it was those two sons that were born in EGYPT (48:5), because their greatness and Yosef's greatness was that they were Jews DESPITE living in Egypt. And finally, although his hands were on the two sons, Yaakov's blessing was that Yosef's children, and anyone who has to live in a non-Jewish world, should be protected throughout history so that we can all be proudly called the children of Avraham and Yitzchak. But it won't happen unless we learn to put our hands on their heads and guide the next generation. The adults have a duty to take along and guide the kids, and the children have an equal responsibility to let themselves be guided.

Quotation of the Week: "Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending." © 2007 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Do you trust your best friend? What about your son? I hope you answered in the affirmative.

Then, why doesn't Jacob seem to trust Joseph with burying him in Ma'arat HaMachpaila-the Cave of the Patriarchs-in Hebron, in this week's Torah portion? Let's explore the issue.

Right in the beginning of the Parsha (47:29), we find Jacob feeling close to death and making plans for his burial. He calls for Joseph and makes him state that Jacob would not be buried in Egypt but would be buried in Hebron with Abraham and Isaac.

Joseph readily agrees. But that is not enough for Jacob. He makes Joseph swear on it, which Joseph does.

Why wasn't Joseph's word enough? Besides being Jacob's trusted son, Joseph was a supremely righteous individual. Would he violate his father's command? Why would Jacob feel the need to make Joseph swear?

We find apparent further worry from Jacob later in the story. After Jacob finishes blessing his sons, he again tells all of his sons that they should bury him in Hebron (49:29). Didn't Jacob already make Joseph swear that he would carry it out? Why command again to bury him in Hebron?

The explanation is that Jacob was afraid of excuses, even valid ones. Sure, he knew that Joseph would not willingly fail to carry out Jacob's wishes, but there may be a legitimate reason why Joseph could not fulfill it. In fact, Jacob may have reasoned that Pharaoh may not want to have Jacob buried outside of Egypt. Since Jacob was a famous personality, he would want Jacob's Tomb to be in Egypt. Therefore, Pharaoh may not allow Joseph to bring Jacob's body to Israel. So, Jacob had Joseph swear, not because he didn't trust Joseph, but because he felt that Pharaoh may let

Joseph do it if Joseph can tell Pharaoh that he swore on the issue.

Indeed, we find that when Joseph asks Pharaoh to take Jacob's body to Israel, Pharaoh only agrees based on the oath: Pharaoh said, 'Go up and bury your father since you swore to him' (Genesis 50:6).

This is also why Jacob mentioned his burial request to all of the brothers, not only to Joseph. If for some reason Joseph were unable to carry out the request due to his loyalties to Pharaoh, perhaps the other brothers would somehow find a way to make it work.

Jacob feared that excuses or rationalizations would prevent his wishes from being performed. Jacob desperately desired to be buried with his fathers in Hebron and used all avenues available to make it happen. He had to be buried in Hebron. Nothing could prevent it. 'No, it won't work' was not part of his vocabulary.

We all know that when we really want to accomplish something, nothing can stand in our way. If I am a diehard sports fan and the big championship is being played, I must find a way to get tickets to the game. I'll wait on line for 24 hours straight if I have to but I will get the tickets. And if my car breaks down then I'll walk. There will be no room for excuses.

Yes, there's that old cliché, 'Where there's a will, there's a way.' The question though is: what does our will really want? Can we honestly say that we are not studying Torah, praying, or performing acts of kindness well because we are too tired or too busy? Or is it that we don't have a strong will in these spiritual areas? Do we cave in when faced with even a slight obstacle or do we carry on with an 'It has to work at all costs' attitude?

John unfortunately became wrapped up in gambling. When he came to his senses and realized that he was destroying his soul as well as his life, he desperately needed to develop a plan to find a way that would guarantee that he never gamble again. He would not accept excuses for himself. He decided that he would make a vow to G-d to stop gambling, and that if he ever gambles, G-d should come and deal with him. That's a pretty heavy course of behavior and definitely not what everyone should do, but we can say one thing about this man: He definitely had a strong spiritual will!

What is our excuse factor in our lives? How much do we really desire spiritual growth? How often do we let excuses reign? We must always remember what a wise man once said: 'Do or Do not. There is no try.' © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

