

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Is it permitted to tell a white lie? If a murderer is at large, brandishing a gun, and his intended victim takes refuge in your house, are you obligated to tell the truth when the would-be killer knocks on your door and asks, "Is he here"? Immanuel Kant, the greatest philosopher of modern times, said Yes. We should always tell the truth, whatever the circumstances and consequences. Judaism says No. Not only is it permitted to tell a white lie to save a life. It is also permitted to do so for the sake of peace.

The sages derived this from two episodes, one in this week's sedra. Jacob has died. The brothers fear that Joseph will now take revenge for the fact that they sold him into slavery. They devise a stratagem:

"They sent word to Joseph, saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father.' When their message came to him, Joseph wept."

There is no evidence that Jacob ever said the words attributed to him. The sages therefore assumed that what the brothers said was a lie. They concluded that "It is permitted to change [to tell a white lie] for the sake of peace." They derived the same principle from a second source as well.

When three visitors came to Abraham in his old age and said that in a year's time Sarah would have a child, Sarah laughed, saying to herself: "After I am worn out and my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure?" G-d tells Abraham that Sarah disbelieves: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" Tactfully, He omits reference to Sarah's remark about her husband being old. This too served the sages as proof of the rule.

Both sources are necessary. If we only had the evidence of Joseph's brothers, we could not infer that

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what they did was right. Perhaps they were wrong to lie. And if we only had the evidence of G-d's words to Abraham, we could only infer that a half-truth is permitted [G-d does not say anything false;

He merely omits some of Sarah's words], not an actual falsehood. Putting them together, the rule is established. Peace takes precedence over truth.

To understand a civilization, it is necessary not only to know the values and virtues it embraces, but also the order of priority among them. Many cultures value freedom and equality. The difficult question is: which takes precedence? Communism values equality more than freedom. Laissez-faire capitalism values freedom more than equality. They share the same ideals, but because they assign them different places in the ethical hierarchy, they result in completely different societies.

Truth and truthfulness are fundamental values in Judaism. We call the Torah "the law of truth." The sages called truth the signature of G-d. Yet truth is not the highest value in Judaism. Peace is. Why so? For this, there are two reasons.

The first is the extraordinary value Judaism attributes to peace. The nineteenth century historian, Sir Henry Sumner Maine, said: "War is as old as mankind. Peace is a modern invention." He had much evidence to support him. Virtually every culture until modern times was militaristic. Heroes were mighty men of valour who fought and often died on the field of battle. Legends were about great victories in war. Conflict (between the gods, or the elements, or the children of light against the children of darkness) was written into the human script.

Against this, the prophets of ancient Israel were the first people in history to see peace as an ideal. That is why the words of Isaiah, echoed by Micah, have never lost their power:

"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

This vision of a world at peace was not centuries but millennia ahead of its time.

At the same time, Judaism took a more subtle view of truth than did the philosophers of antiquity. In logic, a sentence is either true or false. There is no third alternative. In Judaism, by contrast, truth is many-

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faceted and elusive. Of the disputes between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, the Talmud says, "These and those are the words of the living G-d." Some believe that, though now the law is in accord with the school of Hillel, in the Messianic Age it will follow the view of Shammai. Ultimate truth forever eludes us. Maimonides held that we can only know what G-d is not; not what He is. "If I could know G-d," said one sage, "I would be G-d."

There is such a thing as truth in the eye of the beholder. The school of Hillel held that one should always say at a wedding, "The bride is beautiful and gracious." But what if she isn't, asked Shammai? Will you tell a lie? In the eyes of her husband, she is beautiful, answered Hillel.

Truth matters, but peace matters more. That is Judaism's considered judgement. Many of the greatest crimes in history were committed by those who believed they were in possession of the truth while their opponents were sunk in error. To make peace between husband and wife (Abraham and Sarah) and between brothers (Joseph and Jacob's other sons) the Torah sanctions a statement that is less than the whole truth. Dishonesty? No. Tact, sensitivity, discretion? Yes. That is an idea both eminently sensible and humane. © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Vayechi marks the end of the story of the house of Yaakov and the conclusion of the book of Bereshith - the book of the patriarchs and matriarchs of our people. The parsha tells us of the end of an era that spanned many long centuries. People alive at the end of an era oftentimes are unable to realize that they are at the end of what has been so normal and expected for centuries.

All of us expect things to continue apace and regularly as they have been.. Thus, great and sudden changes in circumstances always blindsides us for we are never prepared for the unknown and completely unexpected. The Jews were aware that neither Yaakov nor Yosef would live forever. But they did not ever imagine how drastically their situation in Egypt would change after the death of the generation of Yaakov and Yosef.

It becomes apparent that the presence of Yaakov and Yosef was the deciding factor in the "good exile" of Egypt. Therefore the Torah emphasizes that Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt. Yaakov's presence in the land of Egypt is the protection for his family and descendants from the natural resentment of the Egyptians to what they undoubtedly view as the undue power, wealth and influence of an alien group within its midst.

It is the old and worn down Yaakov that saves Egypt from five more years of terrible hunger not the young and confident and wise Yosef. So the emphasis on Yaakov's living in Egypt is the Torah's way of warning us not to be as certain as to why things happen and the real main catalysts for the situations of national and personal life.

Yaakov's farewell to his children, recorded for us in this parsha, indicates his awareness of the problems that will yet face his children. The Torah teaches us that he wished to reveal the entire story of Jewish history to his children even till the messianic era, but that the Lord, so to speak, prevented him from so doing. But Yaakov certainly indicated the immediate future that they would have to face - that there was going to be a change in eras and that the past remains the past and not the present and certainly not necessarily the future.

The blessings that Yaakov bestowed upon his children were all long range and meant to be fulfilled over many years and centuries. Yaakov cannot tell them of the end plot of the story of the Jewish people but he assures them that there is a bright ending somehow. It is again an indication that the central figure in the era of the patriarchs and matriarchs is Yaakov.

And, the first words of the parsha, which indicate that Yaakov lived, may also be understood to mean that Yaakov still lives. It is his personality and example that guides all Jewish history and life. We are all still under the influence of our great forefather on whose name -Yisrael - we are called. We should all be aware of this blessing. © 2008 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.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why does Yaacov (Jacob) in his blessings to Shimon and Levi say that they will be 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? © 2008 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

There are so many things happening in the world these days. It's almost enough to drive some people who are not used to praying to begin to pray! However, for many it is hard to start.

Many people mistakenly feel that they should only pray for big things- like medical emergencies. Not so. Prayer is about creating a relationship with the

Almighty; it's about understanding and appreciating that the Almighty is the Source of all blessing.

Praying for help with even little things focuses us on recognizing from where comes our good and strengthens the relationship. When the time comes to pray for the big things, it will come easier. Imagine the difficulties of asking your father or mother for help after not speaking with them for years?

God is the loving parent who wants only good for us. Unlike a loving parent who has been ignored for decades, God will listen to us when we call out to Him.

A prayer has three components: (1) Praise of God. (He doesn't need our praises; it focuses us on Who we are talking to.) (2) Our requests. (3) Thanks. It is the height of good manners to show appreciation. A short prayer might go something like, "Almighty, Master of the Universe, Who has given me all good things, please (make your request here). Thank you for this and for all that you have given me."

Whether the Almighty fulfills our requests in full or in part is determined by what will help us grow in our relationship with Him. That is why all prayers are answered-sometimes with a "Yes," sometimes with a "No" and sometimes... with a "Not yet." When we have grown in recognizing or strengthening our belief that everything comes from the Almighty and only the Almighty, the equation is changed. It may be the missing factor to make it good for the Almighty to grant our request.

We would love for all of our prayers to be answered in the affirmative. However, it is not always ultimately in our best interest. We can relate to this as parents. A child may beg for something that the parent knows is not in the child's best interest and may even be a danger to a child. The smart and caring parent will do the right thing, do the difficult thing and say "no."

If one has a simplistic definition of prayer as a form of barter-one puts in his requests and God is supposed to fill his list of requests, then one has the wrong definition of prayer. The story is told of a young boy playing on the roof of his home. He loses his footing and starts sliding towards a perilous drop. He starts praying, "Please God, save me!" He continues to slide. He ups the ante, "Save me-I won't fight with my brother anymore!" He continues to slide. "I'll do everything my parents tell me." He continues to slide. "I'll never do anything wrong again!" Immediately he stops sliding right before the edge of the roof! The boy then turns heavenward and cries out, "Forget it God! I got caught by a nail!" Prayer is not about barter.

Our purpose on earth is to grow as human beings, to develop our souls by doing the mitzvot (the Almighty's commandments in the Torah), to work on refining our character and perfecting the world. Prayer is a means for us to fulfill our purpose.

We Jews believe that there is a God Who created the world, loves us, gives us what is best for

us, has a covenant with us which obligates us to fulfill His commandments, deals with us with both justice and mercy. We are finite;

God is infinite. We do not presume to know the whole picture. We do know based upon our understanding of Torah and history that God has a plan for history and a track record of fulfilling His promises - be they for reward or punishment. We understand that the Almighty acts in this world with purpose, meaning and good.

Prayer gives us hope. Prayer is a means of integrating into ourselves that life has meaning and that we are not alone. Prayer focuses us on what we want out of life and helps us clarify what is good for us.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Yehudah, your brothers will praise and acknowledge you... the sons of your father will bow down to you... the scepter shall not depart from Yehudah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until peace will come; unto him shall be the ingathering of the nations" (Genesis 49:8-10).

Despite the cloak of striped colors Yaakov had given his beloved Yosef decades earlier, symbolizing the bestowal of the birthright upon the son of Rachel, the aged Yaakov makes it indubitably clear that it is Yehudah - and not Yosef - who will receive the birthright (bechorah),

To be sure, Yosef does receive the double blessing of material prosperity (berakhah - Gen. 22-26, esp. 25); but this is only a consolation prize, a back-seat gift to the bequeathal of majesty and messianic leadership, the birthright portion of Yehudah. What made the patriarch Yaakov change his mind?

I'd like to suggest that the first glimmering of doubt arrives with the announcement of Yosef's dreams: the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf, and the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him. These arrogant visions add an ideological basis to the jealousy of the brothers, theoretically providing them with just cause for getting rid of this upstart 'Jacobson' who hankers after the agricultural achievements of more sophisticated Egypt and sees himself - and not G-d - eventually assuming center stage and receiving universal, even cosmic, obeisance. When we remember Yaakov's dream of a ladder uniting heaven and earth, G-d standing at its apex and the patriarch requesting safe return to Israel, Yosef's dreams seem sacrilegious at best and idolatrous at worst. "The brothers were jealous of him, whereas his father observed the matter [Hebrew hadavar] closely," (37:11), waiting to see the outcome, reserving judgment.

Yaakov was certainly aware of the 'problematica' that emerged from his son's dreams, but

he was also enamored of the universalism and lofty ambition the dreams revealed. If only Yosef would recognize G-d as the center and director of human affairs, if only Yosef would stop bragging about his dreams and start listening to the dreams of others and help them realize those dreams, if only Yosef would become more humble, leaving room for G-d as well as for other people, then Yosef's universalism and ambition could be seen as crucial ideals and characteristics for the King Messiah who must ultimately teach the world to accept a G-d of morality, compassion and peace. But this would all depend on how the young, brash and callow Yosef matures, and Yaakov had patience... And Yaakov desperately wanted to believe in this first son of his first love and favored wife.

However, there is one more crucial element necessary for the birthright: its recipient must be able to unify the sons of Israel. After all, only a united Israel has a chance to influence the nations of the world. Tragically, until this point, Yosef has been the symbol of divisiveness among the brothers, he above them, and they against him. It is in order to change this situation that, Yaakov sends Yosef on a mission to look after the welfare of his brothers, to make strides to look after their shalom (peace, welfare) after his arrogant actions and dreams prevented them from speaking to him in shalom (37:14, cf to 37:4), and then to bring back to his father *davar*, the crucial matter (*davar*) that he was closely observing (37:11, 13, 14).

But this well-intended mission only exacerbates the division, the disunity of the brothers emphasized by the return of a bloodied cloak of striped colors in place of the arrogant dreamer. Alas, one brother of the twelve has been crushed, a limb from the collective body of Israel cruelly torn off.

This aborted mission to "test" Yosef's ability to unite his brothers - and his response of *hineni* despite the apparent danger inherent in his task - will haunt Yaakov for the next several decades as he bears the guilt for having initiated, albeit unwittingly, the "Sacrifice of Yosef" (Leon Kass's phrase).

Eventually, as a direct result of his humiliations and journeys, Yosef matures and comes to understand that, despite his eminence in Egypt, he is hardly as powerful as his dreams predicted. By the end he succeeds in placing G-d at the center (Gen 41:16), ultimately recognizing Israel as his homeland when he requests to be buried there (Gen. 50:2,5).

At the same time, although he magnanimously forgives his brothers, one might argue that because he does not admit his part in the 'crime' and doesn't seek their forgiveness, Yosef can never truly walk the path of humility. Neither does he inform his father that he is alive - perhaps because he continues to harbor resentment towards him for mis-managing the family. Yosef places no responsibility upon himself. A great

measure of supercilious haughtiness seems to cling to his person. Such arrogance cannot pave the way to family unity!

Yehuda on the other hand does manage to earn the voluntary acceptance of his brothers with his plan. Swayed by his argument the brothers agree to sell Yosef instead of leaving him to die in the pit (Gen. 37:26,27). Yehuda is also willing to stand as a guarantor for Benjamin thereby winning his father's trust... (Gen. 43:8-10) Moreover Yehuda is truly humble, willing to publicly admit regarding Tamar, "she is more righteous than I..." (Gen. 38:26).

Finally, Yehuda is the only brother clever enough to see through the masquerade of the Grand Vizier, figuring out that he must be the missing Yosef, and thereby crafting a defense of Benjamin in a way that compels and inspires Yosef to reveal himself to his brothers and his father so that the family does eventually reunite.

In the end, Yehuda's unique qualities pave the way for the aged patriarch's decision that only he, of all the twelve brothers, is worthy of bearing the birthright of Israel. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Yosef brought his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, to Yaakov, their grandfather, for a final blessing. In Judaism, the right hand is symbolically more prestigious than the left hand. Therefore, Yosef placed his first-born son (Menashe) opposite Yaakov's right hand and he placed his younger son (Ephraim) opposite Yaakov's left hand. However, Yaakov crossed his arms and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head.

Although Yosef protested, Yaakov assured him that he knew what he was doing and informed him "the younger brother shall become greater than he, and his offspring's fame will fill the nations" [Bereshis 48:19]. (Rashi notes that this prophecy related to Yehoshua, who descended from Ephraim.)

A simple question may be asked: Why did Yaakov execute the awkward motion of crossing his arms to bless his grandchildren? Why did he not merely ask the two boys to reposition themselves so that Ephraim was by his right hand and Menashe by his left hand?

The Chizkuni explains that Yaakov purposely and wisely crossed his hands. The Chizkuni says that the Hebrew word "Sikel" used in the expression "sikel es yadav" [he crossed his hands] is related to the word "sechel" [wisdom; understanding]. Yaakov did this, the Chizkuni suggests, to preserve the dignity and self-esteem of Menashe and to give him at least a bit of the respect due him as the older brother. It was less embarrassing for him to have Yaakov cross his arms than to have asked the brothers to switch places.

Even if we have to do something that is painful, we should try to carry out the unpleasant task in as nice a way as possible. If a person must fire a worker, he should do it in a way that minimizes the hurt to the greatest extent possible. If a person is dating and decides to terminate the relationship, he should do this in as gentle and delicate a fashion as possible, always sensitive to the feelings and emotions of the other person. A person must be careful how he says "no". "No" hurts. If a person must say "no," it should be done by inflicting as little pain as possible.

The Almighty is called "Kel Emunah [the Faithful] G-d, v'Ayn Avel [without iniquity]" [Devorim 32:4]. G-d administers justice, but He does it in a way that is without vengeance or cruelty, only administering the absolute degree of judgment necessary.

When Yosef needed to go down to Egypt and be sold as a slave, he was transported by Arabs who were carrying spices with them [Bereshis 37:5]. Rashi notes that Arabs were usually oil merchants, but since it was more pleasant for Yosef to sit in the back of a spice wagon than a petroleum wagon, Providence decreed that these merchants should be selling spices rather than oil. Although there was a decree that Yosef had to undergo exile and suffering, only the absolutely decreed amount of suffering was part of the Judgment and therefore beyond that, Providence "rewarded" him with a "pleasant journey".

This is similar to the idea expressed by the Chizkuni regarding Yaakov crossing his hands. Sometime a person has an unpleasant task that must be carried out, but even "unpleasant matters" should be administered with kindness and mercy.

Yaakov's blessing to his grandsons was "With your (names) will the Jewish people bless (their children) saying: May G-d make you be like Ephraim and Menashe..." [Bereshis 48:20]. Many people have the custom of reciting this blessing to their children every Friday night while placing their hands on the heads of the children. Some have the custom of reciting this blessing under the Chupah when marrying off a child.

The Torah says us that before Yaakov died, he elevated Ephraim and Menashe to "Shevet" status. He equated their status with that of his own sons Reuven and Shimeon, although in fact they were from a younger generation. We may ask? if these two grandsons were equated with the other tribes? why is the traditional blessing amongst the Jewish people not "May God make you like Yissacher and Zevulun" or "like Gad and Asher"? Why specifically like "Ephraim and Menashe"?

Over the years we have given many answers to this question. I would now like to share a new insight I found in "Sefer haMatzpun". Let us consider how Menashe felt when he heard the words of his

grandfather "his younger brother will surpass him". Menashe did not utter any words of complaint. He did not turn around and complain to his father. He did not issue any words of protest to his grandfather. His attitude was "If this is how my grandfather wants it, I accept his position with a cheerful attitude. So be it."

"May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe" is the greatest blessing we can give our children. It is the blessing that they should get along with each other and should not be jealous of one another. A parent's greatest desire is that his children should be able to live together in harmony. This is the blessing we recite Friday night and under the wedding canopy: May you emulate Ephraim and Menashe who were not jealous of one another.

However, this explanation only addresses Yaakov's praise of Menashe. Menashe is the one who was willing to accept the superior blessing given to Ephraim and did not manifest any sign of jealousy. But Yaakov specifically said that the blessing invoked by future generations would be "May G-d make you like EPHRAIM and Menashe." How does this explanation address the role of Ephraim as a role model in this blessing for all future generations?

The answer is that Ephraim had a role to play here as well. When a person receives preferential treatment, such as a higher status that someone else does not receive, he might flaunt it. He might rub it into the other person's face, show off, and make him feel bad. Certainly, if Ephraim would have turned to his brother and said "Ha, ha grandfather gave ME the better blessing," Menashe would never have accepted his status with such equanimity.

It is the fact that Ephraim accepted his blessing with humility and modesty that allowed Menashe to accept the situation. This is also beautiful. "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe" means the following: If you are an Ephraim and you are fortunate to have more, know how to use it, know how to hide it, and know how to deal with a blessing. And if you are a Menashe, accept the hand that the Almighty has given you.

This is an especially poignant message for Yaakov to give to his grandchildren, considering all the suffering he endured as a result of the rivalry between Yosef and his brothers, Yaakov's own children. Given the sibling rivalry that Yaakov witnessed with his own sons, when he saw such model behavior in his grandchildren, he was thrilled and blessed them that every Jew should aspire to have them as role models for their own children. © 2008 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd I, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the Land of Canaan on the road, when there was still a distance to go to Efras,

and I buried her there on the road to Efras, which is Bais Lechem" (Beraishis 48:7). The commentators give several different explanations for "kivras," the word I translated as "distance." In "The Living Torah," Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan z"l translated it (on our verse) as "a short distance," while translating it as "some distance" when Rachel's death actually occurred (35:16). And he is not alone when it comes to translating the same word differently in the two places. Rashi gives three possible explanations for "kivras" in Parashas Vayishlach, rejecting the second as not possibly being a correct translation while preferring the third. In our parashah, he gives another possible explanation that could just be a more specific definition of either the first or third previous possibility, then repeats the second possibility without rejecting it before finally quoting (and discussing) Unkolus' translation. Why did Rabbi Kaplan and Rashi translate the same words, which are used describing the same exact distance (how far from Efras Rachel was when she died), differently? To break the question down even further, why did Rashi accept the explanation in our parashah which he had earlier rejected, why did he give a more specific definition the second time, and why did he only quote Unkolus the second time?

In Vayishlach, when Rachel died, Rashi first quotes "Menachem," referring to "Machberes Menachem," a dictionary of Biblical words written over 1,000 years ago which quotes the verses that use the word he is translating. For words with the shoresh (root) of "kaf-bais-raish" he says there are four different uses: (1) already (i.e. in the past); (2) a sieve (a vessel with holes used to separate smaller pieces that fall through the holes from the larger ones that do not fit through them) (3) a large amount; and (4) the proper name of a river. Included in the verses listed for the third category is Beraishis 35:16, meaning that the verse is saying that there was still a ways to go to get to Efras. How long it was is not indicated, only that it was not close.

Rashi's second approach in Vayishlach is the Midrash's explanation (Beraishis Rabbah 82:7), which fits into Menachem's second category, that the land was full of holes like a sieve, i.e. it had been recently plowed. This occurs in the spring, after the winter rains but before the summer heat, and is consistent with Yaakov having spent a summer, a winter and a second summer at Succos (see Rashi on 33:17, based on Megillah 17a) and six months at Bais El (Megillah 17a), meaning he left Bais El and was on the road to Efras after the next winter. Although (as we shall see) this information would be pertinent to Rachel's burial, Rashi rejects it as the definition of the word "kivras," because the same word is used elsewhere (Melachim II 5:19) in a context where the land traveled being plowed (and the timing of the trip) is irrelevant.

Rashi's third (and preferred) explanation is simply that the term "kivras" refers to a specific, known, measurement used to describe how far one has traveled, although he does not tell us what that measurement is.

In Vayechi, where Yaakov is describing to Yosef where he buried Rachel, Rashi first tells us, consistent with his third approach in Vayishlach, that it is a measurement of land, but adds the specific measurement given by "Rabbi Moshe the darshan" of 2,000 cubits, the distance one is allowed to walk beyond his "home base" on Shabbos. Then, as part of the conversation between Yosef and Yaakov as to why he buried Rachel there, Rashi adds that it was not the weather conditions that prevented him from burying her in Efras, as the rainy season had already ended, and "the land was full of holes like a sieve." Finally, after continuing to describe the conversation between Yaakov and Yosef, Rashi quotes Unkolus' explanation that it refers to the size of a plowed field, i.e. Rachel was buried the distance of a field away from Efras.

Normally, when Rashi brings more than one approach to explain something, he separates them with words such as "davar acher," meaning here is a different way to understand it. However, when explaining the word "kivras" (in both places), Rashi does not do so, indicating that his first two explanations (in each location) are not mutually exclusive. Rather, he rejects the approach of the Midrash on a "pshat" level, as the word "kivras" cannot literally mean land that was recently plowed. However, he fully accepts it as "derash," that the term also hints to us the nature of the conversation between Yaakov and Yosef.

This conversation is described in the Pesikta Rabasi (3), and includes Yosef asking Yaakov directly whether the reason he didn't bury her elsewhere was because of the rains, to which Yaakov answered that it was between Pesach and Shuvuos, when the land is similar to a sieve, and the weather was not a hindrance. (Yaakov went on to explain that he wanted to bury her elsewhere, but G-d told him to bury right there, where she could pray for her sons as they were led into exile.) We can now understand why Rashi only pointed out in Vayishlach that the word "kivras" could not literally mean "like a sieve," as the "derasha" is irrelevant to her actually being buried. In Vayechi, though, where the conversation between Yaakov and Yosef took place and the "derash" aspect is important to the story, Rashi included it in his explanation.

The bottom line, though, is that Rashi defines the word "kivras" as a measurement of the distance a person travels. Yet, he only tries to define that measurement in our parashah. The Meshech Chochmeh references the Yerushalmi (Nazir 7:1) that says that a body can only be buried on the spot it is found if it is more than 2,000 cubits away from the nearest city; otherwise, it must be brought into the city

to be buried. Therefore, Rashi brings the opinion that would make the measurement 2,000 cubits as part of his explanation when he describes Yaakov telling Yosef why he didn't bury Rachel in Efras. Then, after finishing his description of the conversation, he brings Unkolus' approach to what the specific measurement was.

Similarly, Rabbi Kaplan translated "kivras" as "a short distance" when Yaakov was telling Yosef that he buried Rachel on the road to Efras-even though it was only a short distance away, while when describing her death, where being a short or long distance away was not as relevant, he translated it as being "some distance" from Efras. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

In this week's Torah portion we read about the blessings that Yaacov gave his sons, the Divine tribes, before his death. This practice was not unique to Yaacov. His father Yitzchak did the same when he blessed Yaacov and also Eisav when he felt his end was near. Generations later Moshe did the same. He gathered the community of Yisrael, treating his disciples as if they were his children, and blessed them before he passed away.

It is a common practice when a person feels that the time has come for him to leave this world to give some instructions to members of his household. Most often a will is concerned with monetary matters. A person gathers some physical wealth in his lifetime, and he is now about to move on to another realm, where possessions have no meaning. It is therefore reasonable for him to want to tell his descendents what to do with his property.

On the other hand, blessings from a deathbed are not so common. A blessing is not like a prayer, it is more a hope that the children will follow in their father's footsteps and give him pleasure, and it therefore does not seem to have any specific link to the time of death. In fact, the sages have taught us that "Our father Yaacov did not die" [Ta'anit 5b]. Any link between a blessing and the time of death of a righteous person is ambiguous, since "righteous people are considered alive even after they have died."

And this can give us the key to understanding the situation. Our discussion above is based on an assumption that a person has a feeling of ownership with respect to material possessions, and he therefore wants to take charge of them and distribute them before he dies. But the picture with respect to Yaacov and the other leaders of our nation is just the opposite. Their main possessions are spiritual, and material possessions have no importance for them.

This explains why the time of death is the most important time for these righteous people to pray for

others and bless them, as Elisha requests from Eliyahu, "Let twice your spirit rest on me" [Melachim II 2:9]. A man can only distribute what he controls, and with respect to the righteous it is the treasures of the spirit, holiness, and purity which they want to impart to their children and their disciples before they go on to higher stages of life. This is the meaning of what G-d said to Avraham, "You shall be a blessing" [Bereishit 12:2]. The keys to blessings and abundance are in your hands, handle them as if they were your very own.

This is the reason that "Yaacov did not die." As his physical death comes near, he gives his sons the keys to all of subsequent history: the heritage of the land, the crisis of repeated exiles, the hope for redemption, and the first signs of the kingdom of David. All of these elements belong to Yaacov, he laid the foundations for them. That is why the nation in all its later generations is named after him? the nation of Yisrael? and it continues to live forever. "The eternity of Yisrael will not be turned away or disbanded, for G-d is not a man, who will change his mind" [Shmuel I 15:29].

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Conflict Between Judah and Joseph

The prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars and the moon- of a time when he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

Joseph's dreams always come to fruition. In fact, whatever Joseph sets his mind to accomplish, he is successful. When he arrives in Egypt after being sold by his jealous brothers he works for an influential person in Egypt's government. When he is thrown into jail he finds favor with the head of the prison. And when he finally interprets Pharos dream he is elevated to the position of Viceroy, perhaps the most powerful position next to the king himself. Everything that Joseph touches seems to turn to gold.

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems to work out for him. He presents to his brothers his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and to be publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph, only to be humiliated into owning up to his mistake of initiating and carrying out his sale into slavery-and realizing that he is standing before his long

lost brother, the dreamer-and that his dreams have come true!

Yet despite the apparent shortcomings of Judah, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that this exalted position representing the forerunner to the Messiah would come from Joseph rather than Judah!

Our sages explain that perhaps one reason for this, is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who ultimately undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to Jacob his father that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as "Yhudim", Jews, and for his descendent, David, to be designated to herald the messianic times.

But even more important -and this is the character trait that is so compelling to me and brings me to identify with Judah-is his humanness and the fact that he makes mistakes in his lifetime yet has the strength and ability to confess his wrongdoings and start over. His descendent, King David has these same personality traits. David, on a simple level-displays poor judgment with reference to Bat Sheva, and a host of other incidences as stated in the book of Samuel, but is always able to rise up from his mistakes and begin anew. His character, which is essentially the character of his ancestor Judah, is one who is represented by the typical Jew who is faced daily with religious challenges and sometimes falters and sometimes is successful. The strength of the Jew is the ability to admit wrongdoing and then start anew.

This appreciation of the fallibility of the human being is one that parents should keep in mind when judging their children and placing undue burdens and responsibilities on them expecting them to be perfect in every way. Parents very often use their children as scapegoats to realize their dreams, without concern for what is really good for their children. Teachers also, often, have unreasonable expectations of their students not allowing them to falter even one bit, without concern that they are after all only dealing with children and that everyone should be given some slack at different times in their lives. I have seen parents who make sure that their children are enrolled in every conceivable activity after school, without keeping in mind that children need some down time and space for themselves and sometimes make mistakes.

One of the strengths of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet continually tries until he is able to ascend and reach great heights. *Rabbi Weiss is the Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford. Any comments may be e-mailed to him at Ravmordechai@aol.com*