

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Different cultures tell different stories. The great novelists of the nineteenth century wrote fiction that is essentially ethical. Jane Austen and George Eliot explored the connection between character and happiness. There is a palpable continuity between their work and the book of Ruth. Dickens, more in the tradition of the prophets, wrote about society and its institutions, and the way in which they can fail to honour human dignity and justice.

By contrast, today's fascination with stories like Star Wars or Lord of the Rings is conspicuously dualistic. The cosmos is a battlefield between the forces of good and evil. This is far closer to the apocalyptic literature of the Qumran sect and the Dead Sea scrolls than anything in Tenakh, the Hebrew Bible. In these ancient and modern conflict narratives the struggle is "out there" rather than "in here": in the cosmos rather than within the human soul. This is closer to myth than monotheism.

There is, however, a form of story that is very rare indeed, of which Tenakh is the supreme example. It is the story without an ending which looks forward to an open future rather than reaching closure. It defies narrative convention. Normally we expect a story to create a tension that is resolved on the final page. That is what gives art a sense of completion. We do not expect a sculpture to be incomplete, a poem to break off halfway, a novel to end in the middle. Schubert's Unfinished Symphony is the exception that proves the rule.

Yet that is what the Bible repeatedly does. Consider the Chumash, the five Mosaic books. The Jewish story begins with a repeated promise to Abraham that he will inherit the land of Canaan. Yet by the time we reach the end of Deuteronomy, the Israelites have still not crossed the Jordan. The Chumash ends with the poignant scene of Moses on Mount Nebo (in present-day Jordan) seeing the land-to

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in memory of
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חיים ניסן בן יצחק אייזק ז"ל
נפטר ט"ו טבת תש"כ

which he has journeyed for forty years but is destined not to enter-from afar.

Nevi'im, the second part of Tenakh, ends with Malachi foreseeing the distant future, understood by tradition to mean the messianic age:

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..."

Nevi'im, which includes the great historical as well as prophetic books, thus concludes neither in the present or the past, but by looking forward to a time not yet reached. Ketuvim, the third and final section, ends with king Cyrus of Persia granting permission to the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to their land and rebuild the Temple.

None of these is an ending in the conventional sense. Each leaves us with a sense of a promise not yet fulfilled, a task not yet completed, a future seen from afar but not yet reached. And the paradigm case-the model on which all others are based-is the ending of Bereishit in this week's sedra.

Remember that the story of the people of the covenant begins with G-d's call to Abraham to leave his land, birthplace and father's house and travel "to a land which I will show you". Yet no sooner does he arrive than he is forced by famine to go to Egypt. That is the fate repeated by Jacob and his children. Genesis ends not with life in Israel but with a death in Egypt:

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. But G-d will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, 'G-d will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.' So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

Again, a hope not yet realised, a journey not yet ended, a destination just beyond the horizon.

Is there some connection between this narrative form and the theme with which the Joseph story ends, namely forgiveness, about which I wrote in last week's study?

It is to Hannah Arendt in her *The Human Condition* that we owe a profound insight into the connection between forgiveness and time. Human action, she argues, is potentially tragic. We can never foresee the consequences of our acts, but once done,

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they cannot be undone. We know that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he always becomes "guilty" of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous the consequences of his deed, he can never undo it... All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom.

What transforms the human situation from tragedy to hope, she argues, is the possibility of forgiveness:

"Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover... Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."

Atonement and forgiveness are the supreme expressions of human freedom- the freedom to act differently in the future than one did in the past, and the freedom not to be trapped in a cycle of vengeance and retaliation. Only those who can forgive can be free. Only a civilization based on forgiveness can construct a future that is not an endless repetition of the past. That, surely, is why Judaism is the only civilization whose golden age is in the future.

It was this revolutionary concept of time-based on human freedom-that Judaism contributed to the world. Many ancient cultures believed in cyclical time, in which all things return to their beginning. The Greeks developed a sense of tragic time, in which the ship of dreams is destined to founder on the hard rocks of reality. Europe of the Enlightenment introduced the idea of linear time, with its close cousin, progress. Judaism believes in covenantal time, well described by Harold Fisch: "The covenant is a condition of our existence in time... We cooperate with its purposes never quite knowing where it will take us, for 'the readiness is all'." In a lovely phrase, he speaks of the Jewish imagination as shaped by "the unappeased memory of a future still to be fulfilled".

Tragedy gives rise to pessimism. Cyclical time leads to acceptance. Linear time begets optimism. Covenantal time gives birth to hope. These are not just

different emotions. They are radically different ways of relating to life and the universe. They are expressed in the different kinds of story people tell. Jewish time always faces an open future. The last chapter is not yet written. The messiah has not yet come. Until then, the story continues- and we, together with G-d, are its co-authors. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states that in giving Judah (Yehuda) his blessing, Jacob said: "Yehuda is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up" (Genesis 49:4).

Rashi, the premier commentator, tells us that Yehuda elevated himself by two actions: (1) he stopped his brothers from killing Joseph, and (2) he publicly embarrassed himself to save the life of his former daughter-in-law, Tamar. Why is it important for us to know how Yehuda behaved in a praiseworthy manner?

Yehuda is the progenitor of the tribe from which came the future kings of Israel. It was precisely because of these exhibitions of character that Yehuda merited this honor and responsibility. In Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, the question is asked, "Who is the mighty person?" and answered, "He who rules over his own desires." Such a person is worthy to rule over others because he will rule over them with the same righteousness as he rules over himself.

In saving Joseph, he ruled over himself not to be influenced by the other brothers who wanted to kill Joseph. In saving Tamar, he did not let personal pride stand in the way of doing the right thing. The ability to rule over one's own passions makes any person a true king. *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and torah.org*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Bar-on Dasberg; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

When Yosef and his sons came to visit Yaacov, there were two embarrassing moments. The first one happened after Yaacov spoke about Menasheh and Efraim, and then afterwards, "Yisrael saw Yosef's sons, and said: Who are these two?" [Bereishit 48:8]. The second moment took place when Yosef brought them forward to receive a blessing but Yaacov only hugged and kissed them. Yosef was forced to take them away and then bring the two boys forward a second time. What was happening here? Could it be that Yaacov's mind was no longer sharp?

The answer is that the very opposite is true. Yaacov was in complete charge of what was going on. When Yosef came to visit his father, he brought with him not only Menasheh and Efraim but also his other children, who are called "your offspring who were born after them" [48:6]. Yaacov does not recognize the other

children and asks about them. Later, Yosef brings all the children forward to receive a blessing, but Yaacov hugs them once again and maintains his position, that he will bless only Menasheh and Efraim.

The remarkable statement above appears in a discussion between Rabbi Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak in the Talmud. We are told that Rabbi Yitzchak makes three startling statements: One should not talk during a meal lest he choke and be in danger. Our Patriarch Yaacov did not die. Anybody who says 'Rachav Rachav' immediately has an ejaculation."

The Torah Temima explains this as follows: Rabbi Yitzchak did not say that one should not talk during a meal but rather that one should not cause his listeners to react excitedly, all of a sudden. This might indeed cause a person to choke. After the meal is over he demonstrates how it is possible to cause a person to react to a provocative statement. For example, when he says that Yaacov did not die, Rabbi Nachman immediately cries out, "Didn't they eulogize him and embalm him?" And Rabbi Yitzchak explains, "Just as his offspring are alive so is he." Another example is, "Anybody who says 'Rachav Rachav' has an ejaculation," and Rav Nachman reacts: "But I said her name and it didn't happen to me." Rav Yitzchak explains that this refers to "one who knows her and recognizes her."

When you want to discuss this surprising explanation at the Shabbat table, please make sure that nobody has any food in his or her mouth.

When Yosef's brothers talk to him about his being sold, he tells them, "You thought to harm me but G-d planned it for the good, so that I would be able to act as today, to provide for a large number of people" [Bereishit 50:20]. The brothers are looking at the circumstances of the sale, while Yosef looks at the final result.

This represents two different ways of viewing life in general. Rav Kook differentiates between "cause-and-effect understanding" as opposed to "ethical understanding" (Orot, Yisrael and his Resurrection). Rav Kook adds: "The chain of cause-and-effect is related to general stress," while "when the world of ethics is revealed to us, it raises the entire cause-and-effect world and pulls it towards it, influencing it from its light. The result is that it drowns in a sea of the light of life, the laws of ethics."

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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Before blessing his sons, Yaakov wanted to "reveal the end" to them, but G-d prevented him from doing so (Rashi on Bereishis 47:28 and on 49:1, based on many Midrashic sources). Most understand this "end date" to mean when Moshiach would come (see Targum Yonasan on 49:1). Although there is much discussion about how Chazal knew that Yaakov wanted to tell them when the "end date" was (Mizrachi says that they must have had a tradition, while the other commentators on Rashi give several reasons of how they could know from the verses themselves), there is little discussion about why Yaakov wanted to tell them exactly when Moshiach was coming. After all, it's now thousands of years after Yaakov gathered together his children to tell them when it would be, and it hasn't happened yet. Wouldn't hearing how far off Moshiach was be detrimental to the religious health of the emerging nation, and for the nation itself throughout its long history?

Another issue with Yaakov telling his sons when Moshiach would come is that there is more than one possible time that he could come, as even though there is an "end" date that Moshiach will come by, he can come earlier (and could have come much earlier) if we were worthy. How could Yaakov give a specific date when Moshiach would come, if he could come earlier, and whether or not he does is dependant upon our actions?

The Yifeh To'ar (Beraishis Rabbah 98:2, quoted by the Eitz Yosef and the Mei'am Lo'aiz) says that Yaakov was confident that his children were righteous enough that they wouldn't be negatively affected by knowing how long it would be until Moshiach came. In his commentary on Agadas Beraishis (81:2-3), the Eitz Yosef adds that Yaakov's intent was to increase the reward his children would get for staying close to G-d despite the final redemption being so far away. The reason G-d didn't let Yaakov tell them (according to the Yifeh To'ar and those that follow his approach) is because even though Yaakov's children were righteous enough to withstand knowing that the "end" was many years away, throughout the generations there would be those that would lose hope, and wouldn't keep the Torah if they knew that Moshiach wasn't coming in their lifetime.

Aside from it being difficult to suggest that Yaakov didn't realize how this knowledge would adversely affect his future descendants, the parable used by the Midrashim indicates that the reason G-d didn't want Yaakov to share this information was not because it would be detrimental, but because it was too valuable. The parable varies slightly among the Midrashim, but the idea is the same: A king gave his trusted servant control of the royal treasuries, or shared

with him royal secrets, or had given him the autonomy to take care of the royal business. When this servant was about to die, he called his sons around him to either give them the locations and keys to the treasuries, to tell them the royal secrets, or to free them so that they would no longer be servants. The king suspected something was up, so showed up to the meeting. When the servant saw the king there, he just told his children to make sure to give the king much honor. So too, the Midrashim conclude, when Yaakov saw the Divine Presence by his bed, rather than telling them when the "end time" would be, he told them to make sure to give the appropriate honor to G-d. If the parable is supposed to match Yaakov wanting to share this information with his children, Yaakov must have wanted to give them something of real value to them, not something he perceived to be of value that really wasn't.

The Tzaidah Laderech (on 47:28) says that the reason G-d prevented Yaakov from revealing the "end date" was because Moshiach won't come until we don't think he's coming anymore; if we knew the "end date," his not coming yet wouldn't affect our confidence in his eventual arrival. While he doesn't tell us why Yaakov wanted to tell them when he would come, it could be implied that it was precisely so that we shouldn't give up hope despite his not coming for so many years. However, this would only help for those that lived in the generation that Moshiach actually comes in; this knowledge would still seem to be counterproductive for every generation until then.

The Kli Yakar suggests that G-d prevented Yaakov from revealing the end date so that all those generations much before Moshiach arrives wouldn't become too settled where they lived. Since they didn't know that Moshiach wasn't coming any time soon, and hoped he was coming any day now, they could more easily make their physical lives "temporary" and focus on their spiritual growth. It could be suggested that Yaakov thought that by telling his children how far off Moshiach was, they, and each generation after them, would recognize how important it was to remain strong in their convictions. The taller a building is, the stronger its foundation must be; if the foundation we are building for our descendants must last a really long time, it would be easier to maintain the observance level of the previous generation (or become even stronger), rather than risking even slight generation losses adding up over time until we faded into religious oblivion.

When the Talmud (Pesachim 56a) discusses Yaakov's attempt to reveal the "end time" to his sons, the words used are "keitz hayamin." The letter "mem" in Hebrew often becomes a "nun" in Aramaic (the language of the Talmud), so "keiz hayamin" would be the same as "keitz hayamin," the end of days. Rashi leaves the "nun" intact, though, and says that Yaakov wanted to tell his children "the end of the right," referring to G-d's right hand. Without getting into what the

significance of G-d's "right hand" vs. his "left hand" is (see Tzelach for one approach), the fact that there is an "end of the right hand" indicates that there is also an "end of the left hand," i.e. there are two different sets of qualifications for when the "end" might come, based on G-d's different characteristics (the way He relates to us).

I would suggest that Yaakov never intended on telling his children the absolute "end date" when Moshiach would come. First of all, he couldn't, because he couldn't know for sure that Moshiach wouldn't come until the "end of the right hand," i.e. the absolute end time when Moshiach would come no matter what, because we may deserve Moshiach before that ("the end of the left"?). Additionally, giving an actual "end date" is counterproductive (as discussed above), so Yaakov wouldn't make it harder for his descendants to stay close to G-d. Rather, Yaakov wanted to give his descendants a strong incentive to bring Moshiach earlier, because if they just let things happen, Moshiach wouldn't come for a very, very long time. Not only would they have to build a strong foundation to last that long, but they would undergo terrible suffering before Moshiach finally came.

By telling his children how long they would have to wait for Moshiach to come if they weren't proactive in bringing him, Yaakov hoped that we wouldn't have to wait that long for his arrival. And since he could come at any time (if we deserved it), we couldn't fully settle down and wouldn't give up hope. Nevertheless, if we didn't bring Moshiach much earlier, as we got closer to the "end of the right hand," we might stop trying to bring him a bit sooner (thinking he's only a few years away anyway), so G-d prevented Yaakov from revealing it. Or, it would have been too much of an incentive, and G-d wanted us to choose correctly on a level playing field. In the process, though, we know that Yaakov knew the absolute end date, so know that one exists, without having any of the negatives that would have come with knowing exactly when it was. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**J**udah, to you shall your brothers give homage” (Gen 49:8) The climax of our Biblical portion of Vayechi - and indeed of the entire Book of Genesis - comes in the deathbed scene in which Jacob-Israel bestows blessings upon each of his sons, the future twelve tribes of our nation. The deepest Biblical conflicts arose in the competition for the birthright-blessings. Now we face the question: which son of this last patriarch will receive the Abrahamic mission-covenant, and why?

G-d promised Abraham that "through him all the families of the earth would be blessed." To achieve this, Abraham needed to ensure that the bearer of the

birthright would have "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Genesis 18:19) as well as profound G-d consciousness, and a commitment to the land and the mission of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). When our story reaches the third generation, and Jacob is blessed with twelve sons, it seems that another qualification for leadership is added: the ability to unite the family.

Jacob thought that beautiful, brilliant Joseph, firstborn son of his beloved Rachel, was the perfect candidate. However, Jacob's favoritism began a process of familial dissolution, which accelerated when Joseph reported dreams in which the whole family bowed down to him, as though he were their king (Gen 37:3-9). When Joseph brought tales of his brothers' transgressions back to their father, he bred even more resentment in his siblings, alienating them from him and fatefully fracturing the family of Israel.

Joseph is then sold into slavery. Jacob is suspicious of the role the brothers may have played in his beloved son's "disappearance," but he is wary of causing even more familial dissension by voicing his thoughts. The patriarch remains a disconsolate mourner in famine-stricken Canaan-Israel.

When the brothers come to Egypt to purchase food, the siblings are reunited. Joseph is hidden behind the mask of the Grand Vizier, so his brothers are unaware of his presence. But we, the readers are aware, and we see the potential for family reconciliation. Now Joseph faces Judah, the other candidate for the birthright. Each protagonist has come a long way in developing the traits necessary for leadership. The incident with Tamar has taught Judah the importance of taking responsibility for one's siblings and for familial future, and it has established his credentials as a paragon of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Joseph too, has proven his moral rectitude by escaping the advances of Mrs. Potiphar and developing greater modesty. But will Joseph or Judah succeed in repairing their broken family?

At the end of the portion of Miketz, which we read two weeks ago, Joseph seemed to have made a decision. He had given up on the brothers who cast him into the pit, and even on his father, whose favoritism had set in motion some of the family struggles. Recalling how Jacob had rebuked him for his dreams and then sent him to find his brothers, Joseph may have even wondered whether the patriarch was part of the plot to get rid of him. Now, he wishes to spend the rest of his life in Egypt with his only true brother, Benjamin, child of the same mother Rachel, who was too young to have had any hand in the near-fratricide. "To blaze with my family," he thinks. "I now have a new, Egyptian family!"

Initially, Judah thought that G-d was sending all the trials and tribulations to the brothers coming to purchase food in Egypt because they had sinned in having sold their brother Joseph into slavery. But when Joseph rejects Judah's proposal that all the brothers

become his slaves on account of the stolen goblet, he wonders why they had been singled out in such a punitive fashion by the Grand Vizier. Who in Egypt might be out to get them? Unless, the Grand Vizier himself is actually Joseph!

Now that Judah thinks that he has uncovered the true identity of the vizier, he understands that he must find a way to bring Joseph back into the bosom of the family. He must effect a rapprochement between father Jacob and all of his sons, in such a way that everyone will understand the futility of dredging up history, which would only exacerbate personal recriminations.

And so Judah faces Joseph, the Grand Vizier, ostensibly pleading for Benjamin's freedom, but using the opportunity to describe their old father who deeply loved the two sons of Rachel, and still mourns for Joseph who he believes has been killed by a wild beast (44:28). Not only does he disabuse Joseph of any suspicion that Jacob had been linked to the plot, but he also subtly tries to impute guilt upon Joseph for not contacting his old, grieving father. How can Joseph now inflict further pain on the patriarch by keeping Benjamin from him?

By offering himself as a slave in place of Benjamin, Judah is also proving that he, who had initially proposed the sale, has finally learned the lesson of brotherly love. Judah succeeds; Joseph reveals himself and rejoins the family. Jacob-Israel and his children are now reunited - by Judah, who has proven that he is the most worthy recipient of the coveted birthright. © 2009 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Sure Losers

Nobody likes a loser. But in Parshas Vayechi we read about a different type of loser-not one who fails repeatedly, but rather a city named Looze and though it should have remained a loser in obscurity, somehow, in Vayechi, Yaakov makes it famous.

Let me explain. Yaakov was old and was nearing his end. He called his son Yosef to his bedside to give him and his children a special blessing. The Torah relates: "Yaakov said to Yosef, "G-d Almighty had appeared to me in Looze in the land of Canaan and He blessed me. He said to me, 'Behold-

I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make you a congregation of nations, and I will give this land to your offspring after you as an eternal possession.'" (Genesis 48:3-4). Yaakov recounts the death of Rachel and her burial in Beis Lechem, and then blesses Yosef's children.

I have a simple question. Sixty years before the events in this week's portion, Yaakov was running from his brother Esav. He stopped in a city called Looze. He slept there and dreamt of angels going up and down the great ladder. G-d appeared to him and blessed him. He

woke up. Amazed at the sanctity of the place, he brought a sacrifice and renamed the city, Beit-el. For sixty years since then, the city was called Beit-el, not Looze. Who even remembered it was once called Looze? Moreover, even if it was once called Looze, Yaakov changed the name immediately after receiving the aforementioned blessing! Even the Torah mentions the fact that it was once called Looze name as an aside! "[Yaakov] named that place Beit-el, but Looze was the original name of the city"(Genesis 28:-19). Since the hour that Yaakov woke from his dream-even sixty years later when Yaakov blessed his son Yosef, the city had been known as Beit-el. Why did Yaakov even mention, "G-d Almighty had appeared to me in Looze in the land of Canaan and He blessed me." Call it Beit-el. Use your name! Use the name everyone knows it by. Looze is ancient history that ended with Yaakov!

Toward the end of his life, my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory lived with my Uncle and Aunt, Rabbi and Mrs. Avraham Kamenetsky (sic) in Flatbush. During that period, he would still see many people who would come to ask his advice on an endless variety of matters.

A man came and needed a letter of approbation concerning a certain matter. He asked if the letter could be placed on Rav Kamenetzky's personal stationary. Rav Yaakov took out his stationary and began to write. Suddenly he stopped. "The stationary gives my Monsey address." He said. "I no longer live there. I am reluctant to sign a letter that is not 100 percent accurate."

There may have been a difference of five minutes. Indeed Yaakov got the blessing in Looze. He woke up and changed the name. Sixty years later he tells his son, G-d blessed me in the City of Looze. He did not take credit by citing the city with the name he gave-a name that still remains thousands of years later.

Yaakov, the Prophet Micha declares, is the man of truth. "Give truth to Yaakov" (Micah 7:20). Yaakov told it the way it happened. Moments later, it was named differently, but in all honesty, G-d appeared to Yaakov and blessed him while the city was still named Looze. And thus he told Yosef "G-d Almighty had appeared to me in Looze in the land of Canaan and He blessed me." For Yaakov, the only way a blessing would transmit properly would be if it was said in total truth. And so he told it like it was and did not mention his own appellation, Beit-el. Because even if for blessings he was a Loozer, in honesty, Yaakov Avinu was a winner. © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.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 Menashe, 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! © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The end of the era of the Avot and the twelve brothers that created and formed the Jewish people takes place with this week's parsha. The family of seventy - the house of Yaakov - will grow and multiply and face centuries of pain and slavery in Egypt before being redeemed. None of this is yet apparent in this week's parsha.

The deathbed scene of Yaakov is one of the most poignant and inspirational in all of Torah. Yaakov wishes to tell his children and family what yet lies before them in Egypt and afterwards till the end of time. Heaven does not allow him to do so. As troubling as it is not to know the future it is perhaps even more troubling to know it. It is only the ignorance of the future that

allows humans somehow to exploit the present and live a productive life.

Knowing the future makes of life an exercise of fated existence. It robs people of their G-d given choices in life and certainly stultifies any impulse towards creativity and discovery. Yaakov tells his children of an ultimate future - "until Shiloh arrives" - but the germane immediate future is hidden from him and his descendants.

There are many times in the Jewish story where the immediate future lurking just around the corner of time is hidden from an otherwise intelligent and seemingly practical generation. Heaven's motives in so dealing with us are unknown. But this fact of life - the future is always an unknown - governs our attitude and actions towards the present. We can only deal with the known that and not with an unknown future.

However the present can instruct us somewhat about the future. Yaakov blesses his children individually according to their present personal traits and accomplishments. Yet this assessment of them becomes the blueprint for their future as well. It is as though Yaakov analyzes the DNA of each of his sons and sees his genetic potential that will be realized in the future. Yehuda is already the king of his brothers and Yaakov is confident that this trait of leadership will continue throughout the generations of Israel.

Yissachar is now the student and the scholar and Zevulun is already the consummate commercial expert. Yaakov does not see the unknown future but he is a shrewd and perceptive judge of the present. Thus even the unknown future can be vaguely glimpsed simply by a realistic and wise understanding of the present. Heaven did not allow Yaakov to view the future through prophecy or other supernatural means.

But Heaven never interferes with the basic instinct, wisdom and analysis of the present by human beings. And this is what is clearly represented in the blessings of Yaakov to his sons. The Torah emphasizes this point when it will say to us at the conclusion of the book of Dvarim: "The hidden things belong to the Lord our G-d but the revealed things - the things that we ourselves can know through our own powers of wisdom and observation of the present - remain within our powers in order to fulfill all of the values and obligations of this Torah." © 2009 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

RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI

TorahWeb

On Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur we read about the execution of the ten greatest Talmudic sages by the Romans. This was to atone for the sin of the

tribes who sold Joseph into slavery. The Talmud says that the heavenly angels protested the injustice of this, but G-d said, "Keep silent! This is My decree!"

The outstanding condemnation of this heinous sin was by Reuven, who said, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not sin against the boy?'" (Genesis 42:22). These words of Torah continue to reverberate: "Do not sin against the child."

Children did not ask to be brought into this stressful world, one in which they must endure many hardships. Indeed, the Talmud says that it would have been better had man not been created (Eruvin 13b). The distresses that most people experience in their lives far exceeds their pleasures.

But for whatever reasons, we do bring children into this world, and we must be aware of the awesome responsibility this entails. Every bit of our conscience dictates that once we bring a child into the world, we have an obligation to provide the child with the means to achieve happiness. We cannot give our children happiness. All we can do is to give them an environment which will be conducive to their attaining happiness.

The greatest need children have is security, and this is provided when the home is truly peaceful and harmonious, and the children feel that the parents' care and love for them is primary in their lives, not second to anything, not even to their own wants. As I have said elsewhere, once you bring a child into the world, you have forfeited the right to insist on your own wants. Consideration of what is best for the child comes first. Bickering among the parents undermines the child's security and is a sin against the child. "Do not sin against the child."

Unfortunately, some marriages do not work out. If a couple separates, foremost in their thoughts must be, "What can we do to minimize the impact on the child of the dissolution of the marriage?" All other considerations, such as financial arrangements and custody must be set aside, and everything must be tailored to lessen the trauma on the child. Selfish demands that fail to take into consideration the effect on the child are a sin of the greatest magnitude.

It is unthinkable, yet it does happen, that in the bitterness of a divorce, the parents may use the children as weapons. Using children as human shields in war is a violation of international law, and using children as weapons in a divorce battle is a heinous crime. We react with horror when we hear that some animals kill and eat their young. Using a child as a weapon to further one's interests is no less an abomination! This puts a person into a status even lower than that of animals, who operate by instinct and do not have a conscience.

Yonah's and Esti's marriage got off to a rough start. From the very beginning, Yonah was a "control freak." He objected to Esti's desire to visit her mother, and was even critical of her phone conversations.

Under the guise of financial responsibility, Yonah had total control of the family finances. Esti could not sign checks and did not have a credit card. She worked as a teacher, and surrendered her check to him. He made insulting comments about her family. When Esti complained about him to her parents, they told her to try and "be nicer" to him, but Esti's efforts made no change in Yonah, whose control escalated.

They had a boy, and Yonah built a strong relationship with the child. The child began going to yeshiva at age six. When the child was eight, Yonah began to be lax in his Yiddishkeit. One time the child told Esti that his father had taken him to a restaurant of "all goyim." Esti was horrified, and told Yonah she wanted a divorce. In the negotiations, Yonah wanted the child every other weekend. Esti was reluctant, because Yonah no longer observed Shabbos, but Yonah said he had as much right to raise the child as she did. He said that unless she agreed to his having the child on alternate weekends, he would not give her a gett. In order to get the gett, Esti agreed to the weekends.

The child was going to yeshiva, where he learned that violation of Shabbos was wrong. The child would tell Esti about what he and his father did on Shabbos, and Esti would tell him that "we don't think that is right." The child reported that his father said that "mother's ways are old-fashioned and these laws are no longer necessary."

This is a fresh case. The child is not doing well in yeshiva and is chutzpadig to Esti, There is no prediction how this child is going to turn out, but being confused at age eight about what is right and wrong and being torn between two parents does not augur well for the child's future. Esti got her gett, but to do so she effectively sacrificed her son's spiritual future.

Children can suffer an entire lifetime because parents put their own needs before those of their children. Can there be a sin greater than ruining a child's future?

If a marriage terminates, mediation is far more desirable than litigation. In an adverse confrontation, neither lawyer gives due consideration to the children. A mediator can suggest ways to protect the children's interests and can help the parents focus on the children's welfare. Hopefully, both parents can be helped to maintain a positive relationship with the children in spite of their separation. © 2009 Rabbi Dr. A.J. Twerski and The TorahWeb Foundation

