

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yisroel bowed towards the head of the bed” (Beraishis 47:31). “[Yaakov was bowing towards G-d, giving thanks] that his bed was complete, without anybody wicked [from] it” (Rashi). Although Yaakov had always been very concerned that just as his grandfather Avraham had a son Yishmael, and his father Yitzchok had a son Eisav, perhaps he too would have a wicked son, or sons (see Pesachim 56a and Sifre, Devarim 31), now, towards the end of his life (and after seeing that Yosef was also righteous), Yaakov was confident that this was not the case, and that his “bed” was “complete.”

Rashi continues by explaining how Yaakov knew “his bed was complete,” “for Yosef was a king, and also had been a captive among the nations, and [yet] he remained righteous.” While we can easily understand why Rashi included Yosef maintaining his righteousness in a foreign culture as a way Yaakov knew “his bed was complete,” Yosef being a king does not have as obvious a connection to this realization. Several commentators (e.g. Maharik, Maysiach Ilmim and Be’er Yitzchok) explain that it is much more likely for a king to have moral and ethical lapses. Therefore, upon seeing that despite his power and status, and despite spending so many years in Egypt, Yosef was still righteous, Yaakov thanked G-d that all of his children had stayed true to the Abrahamic mission.

“Bowing towards the head of the bed” referring to Yaakov giving thanks that all of his children were righteous is mentioned in Chazal (the aforementioned Sifre on Devarim 6:4). However, it is not Yosef whom Yaakov is expressing gratitude about, but Reuvain. Yaakov was concerned that Reuvain had not repented for his sin regarding Bilhah (see Beraishis 35:22), and was therefore not considered righteous. After realizing that Reuvain had in fact repented, Yaakov thanked G-d that “his bed was complete.” It is not unusual for Rashi to take a thought or idea from Chazal and apply it

elsewhere (or differently), so Rashi taking the more straightforward approach, that it was Yosef’s righteousness that had been (but was no longer) in question, and was the reason Yaakov now realized that all of his children were righteous, comes as no surprise. The Midrash attributing Yaakov’s gratitude to his realization that Reuvain had repented, however, does. Reuvain wasn’t even there, and his repentance had been done many years earlier. What led Yaakov to first realize now that Reuvain was also righteous, so that after his private conversation with Yosef he thanked G-d for “his complete bed?”

Rabbi Naftali Katz (the Maharal’s grandson) is quoted in “Meira Dachya,” a commentary on Rashi by Rabbi Mordechai HaLevi of Slavits (and the first of two commentaries printed in “Dikdukay Rashi”) as having a different approach as to how Yosef being a king made Yaakov realize that “his bed was complete.” When the brothers first wanted to kill Yosef (Beraishis 37:20), Reuvain saved him by convincing his brothers to throw Yosef into a pit (alive) instead, intending to return later and take him back home to their father (37:22). Chazal (Beraishis Rabbah 84:15) tell us that the reason Reuvain saved Yosef was based on Yosef having 11 stars in his dream; “I thought I was pushed out (of the family and its mission) because of that incident, [yet] he counts me among my brothers, and I shouldn’t save him?” While most understand this to mean “he was nice to me so I’ll be nice to him,” Rabbi Katz suggests that Reuvain meant much more than that. If Yosef’s dream was a form of prophecy, it would mean that included in G-d’s message to/through Yosef was that he had 11 brothers, not just 10, and that Reuvain was still a part of the family (at least when the dream is fulfilled). If, on the other hand, it was just the silly dream of a silly youngster, it wouldn’t have any bearing on Reuvain’s status. When the brothers wanted to kill Yosef, Reuvain realized that this would nullify the dream, as Yosef would never become a king, and the 11 stars in the dream could not be part of a divine prophecy. He therefore saved Yosef, hoping that the dream would someday be fulfilled, thus indicating that he was forgiven. Based on this, Rabbi Katz says that Yaakov also realized that if Yosef’s dream came true, Reuvain must have repented, and “his bed was complete.”

This is supported by the comments of several Rishonim (e.g. Chiskuni, Pa’anayach Raza, Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam), who say that Yaakov’s bowing to Yosef now was the fulfillment of that part of

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the dream. Midrash Lekach Tov takes it a step further, suggesting that the reason Yaakov bowed to Yosef was in order to fulfill the dream. Although Rabbi Katz was trying to explain why Rashi mentioned Yosef being a king, it is possible that this is why the Sifre says that Yaakov thanked G-d now for having a "complete bed" based on Reuvain being righteous; after Yaakov made sure the dream could be considered prophetic (by bowing to Yosef), he realized that Reuvain had repented, and that all of his children, including Reuvain and Yosef, were righteous.

After quoting Rabbi Katz, Rabbi Mordechai HaLevi adds that this gives added meaning to Yaakov "watching the matter" (37:11), which Rashi explains to mean, "was waiting and hoping for it to happen." Yaakov was not only anxious for Yosef to become king, but for the dream to come true, which would indicate that Reuvain was also righteous. Rabbi Katz's approach is also quoted in "Gan Raveh," with the commentary "Divrey Chanoch" adding that this is why, after seeing that Yosef was no longer in the pit, Reuvain said, "as for I, what will become of me" (37:30); since Yosef was gone, he couldn't become king, and if Yosef couldn't become king, he just had a silly dream not a prophecy, and if it wasn't a prophecy there was no indication that he was still part of the family. I would like to add two more thoughts based on Rabbi Katz's suggestion.

I have previously discussed why Reuvain was busy repenting for a sin he had committed nine years earlier specifically when the brothers were trying to get rid of Yosef (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5769/vayeishev.pdf, pg. 4). Although an earlier opinion in the Sifre in Devarim says that Reuvain was involved in repenting all of his days (so there need not be any connection between Reuvain repenting and what the brothers tried to do to Yosef), some indicate that this was when Reuvain started the process of repentance (or renewed his attempt). If Reuvain was trying to maintain the possibility that Yosef would become king so that the dream, including his still being part of the family, was prophetic, since his repentance was also necessary for the dream to come true, the brothers trying to kill Yosef prompted Reuvain to repent.

The Ramban (Bereshis 42:9) suggests that the reason Yosef never contacted his father all those years, despite having ample opportunity to do so, was because he wanted his dreams to be fulfilled first, and he knew

that his family would never bow down to him if they knew it was him. Many have questioned how Yosef could allow his father to suffer for all those years just to make sure his dreams came true, especially since fulfilling dreams and prophecies are G-d's domain, not ours (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/miketz.pdf, pg. 2). If Yosef knew that his father wanted the dreams to be fulfilled so that he could know that Reuvain had repented and that "his bed was complete," and thought it was so important to him that it outweighed the pain of thinking Yosef was dead, we can understand why Yosef waited for the dreams to come true. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Notified that his father Yaakov (Jacob) is sick, Yosef (Joseph) takes his sons Ephraim and Menashe to see their grandfather. As they enter, Yaakov proclaims "mi eileh?" "Who are these?" (Genesis 48:8) Having already been in Egypt for 17 years, is it possible that Yaakov didn't know the identity of his grandsons?

Some commentators suggest a physical reason for Yaakov's question. Bearing in mind that Yaakov could not see, he could not recognize his grandsons even as they stand before him.

Other commentators suggest that Yaakov's question "mi eileh?" does not refer to his grandsons themselves, but rather a question about their progeny. Prophetically, Yaakov discerned that amongst the descendants of Ephraim and Menashe would be evil people. Yaakov inquires, "who are they?" How is it possible that such evil men could come from good people like Ephraim and Menashe?

Other commentators insist that Yaakov asked "who are these?" to precipitate a "nachas report" from Yosef about the moral, spiritual and religious progress of Ephraim and Menashe. (Genesis 48:9) But there is another approach. Yaakov may not recognize his grandchildren because he has little relationship with them. This could be because Yosef rarely ever took them to Ya'akov.

Yosef may have denied his father this relationship because of possible ill will towards Yaakov for having sent Yosef to his brothers to make peace, a plan which, of course, backfired. Not to mention, of course, Yaakov's favoring of him (Yosef) in the first place. Upset with his father, Yosef never contacts his father for 22 years and blocks his children from developing a close relationship with their grandfather.

Another suggestion: Maybe "mi eileh," is an existential question. Having grown up in Egypt, Ephraim and Menashe must have, on some level, assimilated into Egyptian society. Standing before Yaakov as Jews living in Egypt, Yaakov asks, "who are these?" What he

is really asking is do my grandchildren identify themselves as Egyptians or Jews?

Whichever way one approaches Yaakov's "mi eileh" question, one point is certain: Yaakov is the first person to be recorded in the Torah as interacting with his grandchildren on any level at all. Not only does he interact with them, he actually gives each of them a blessing. In fact, the blessing is so powerful it becomes the standardized blessing of parents to children every Friday night. Placing our hands on our children, we say, "may G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe." (Genesis 48:20)

A grandparent's relationship to a child, on some level, is deeper than a parent/child relationship. Unencumbered by parental responsibility, a grandparent, blessed with wisdom and maturity of life can powerfully bestow blessings upon their children. In a brief instant, a grandparent asks, "mi eileh," who are these, not so much as a question but as an expression of thanksgiving to G-d for having been blessed with such glorious grandchildren.

Even if they are not specifically for grandchildren, may our lives be filled with many such utterances of "mi eileh"-expressions of thanks, awe and wonder of the incredible gifts given to us by the Divine.

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CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Every Friday night we re-enact one of the most moving scenes in the book of Bereishit. Jacob, reunited with Joseph, is ill. Joseph comes to visit him, bring bringing with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob, with deep emotion, says: 'I never even hoped to see your face,' said Israel to Joseph. 'But now G-d has even let me see your children.' (48: 11)

He blesses Joseph. Then he places his hands on the heads of the two boys. He blessed them that day and said, "[In time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" (48: 20)

So we do to this day. Why this blessing above all others? One commentator (Yalkut Yehudah) says it is because Ephraim and Manasseh were the first two Jewish children born in exile. So Jewish parents bless their children asking G-d to help them keep their identity intact despite all the temptations and distractions of Diaspora life.

I heard however a most lovely explanation, based on the Zohar, from my revered predecessor Lord Jakobovits of blessed memory. He said that though there are many instances in Torah and Tanakh in which parents bless their children, this is the only example of a grandparent blessing grandchildren.

Between parents and children, he said, there are often tensions. Parents worry about their children. Children sometimes rebel against their parents. The relationship is not always smooth.

Not so with grandchildren. There the relationship is one of love untroubled by tension or anxiety. When a grandparent blesses a grandchild he or she does so with a full heart. That is why this blessing by Jacob of his grandchildren became the model of blessing across the generations. Anyone who has had the privilege of having grandchildren will immediately understand the truth and depth of this explanation.

Grandparents bless their grandchildren and are blessed by them. This phenomenon is the subject of a fascinating difference of opinion between the Babylonian Talmud and the Talmud Yerushalmi.

The Babylonian Talmud says the following: Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, "Whoever teaches his grandson Torah is regarded as if he had received the Torah from Mount Sinai as it is said, 'Teach your children and children's children,' and then it says: 'The day you stood before G-d your Lord at Horeb.'" (Deut. 4: 10-11; Kiddushin 30a)

The Talmud Yerushalmi puts it differently: Rabbi Joshua ben Levi used to listen, every Friday, to his grandson reciting the weekly parasha. One week he forgot this, and entered the bathhouse. After he had begun bathing, he remembered that he had not yet heard the weekly parasha from his grandson, and he left the bathhouse. They asked him why he was leaving in the middle of his bathing, since the Mishnah teaches that once you have begun bathing on a Friday afternoon you do not have to interrupt. He replied, "Is this such a small thing in your eyes? For whoever hears the parasha from his grandchild is as if he heard it directly from Mount Sinai . . ." (Yerushalmi Shabbat 1:2)

According to the Bavli, the greatest privilege is to teach your grandchildren Torah. According to the Yerushalmi, the greatest privilege is to have your grandchildren teach Torah to you. This is one argument about which no grandparent will have the slightest difficulty is saying that both are true.

With an exquisite sense of symmetry, just as we begin Shabbat with a grandparent's blessing so we end it, in Maariv, with the words of Psalm 128: 6: "May you live to see your children's children- peace be on Israel."

What is the connection between grandchildren and peace? Surely this, that those who think about grandchildren care about the future, and those who think about the future make peace. It is those who constantly think of the past, of slights and humiliations and revenge, make war.

To bless grandchildren and be blessed by them, to teach them and to be taught by them - these are the highest Jewish privilege and the serene end of Jacob's troubled life.

To defend a country you need an army, but to defend an identity you need schools - Credo - the Times - December 2010

History itself has a history. What events seem to signify at the time is not how they are seen in the full perspective of hindsight. Take Hannukah, the festival we are in the midst of celebrating today.

Open the First and Second Books of Maccabees and you find yourself reading a story of military courage. Since the days of Alexander the Great, Israel had been under the rule of the Greeks, first under the Ptolemies based in Egypt, then a century later under the Seleucids who ruled from Syria.

One Seleucid leader, Antiochus IV, decided to force the pace of the hellenisation of the Jews, publicly banning the practices of Judaism. In its place he installed a statue of Zeus in the precincts of the Temple and had swine sacrificed to it. To the Jews it was the "abomination of desolation."

Led by an elderly priest Mattityahu and his sons, a group of Jews known as the Maccabees rose in revolt. They won a victory, reconquered Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple and relit its candelabrum, the menorah. That remains the most visible symbol of the festival to this day. We light it in our homes for eight nights, adding an extra candle for each night.

That is how history seemed at the time: a story of armies, battles, and physical heroism.

But the Books of Maccabees never found their way into the Hebrew Bible. That is not how Jews came to remember the past.

The reason is that the victory was relatively short-lived. Jews won their confrontation with the Greeks, but they lost it with the Romans. A century later Pompey invaded Israel, which then came under Roman rule. When this too became oppressive, Jews twice rose in revolt, in the first and second centuries. Both were national disasters. After the first, the Temple was destroyed. After the second, Jerusalem was laid waste. Taken together, these were the worst Jewish catastrophe until the Holocaust.

But the Talmud tells a fascinating story. In the first century, shortly before the destruction of the Temple, a rabbi called Joshua ben Gamla organised the creation of a national network of schools, providing for the education of children throughout the country. It was the first system of universal education in history. The Talmud says that were it not for him "the Torah would have been forgotten in Israel." There would have been no Judaism, no identity, and no Jews.

Joshua ben Gamla understood that the real battle Jews faced was not military at all. It was cultural and spiritual. Did they care enough about their faith to hand it on to their children? Did they believe that despite the great achievements of the Greeks in art, architecture, literature and philosophy, Jews still had a contribution to make to the world that was distinctively their own?

A new Jewish identity began to emerge, based not armies but on texts and teachers and houses of study. Jews became a people whose citadels were schools, whose heroes were teachers and whose passion was education and the life of the mind. And they survived. That was the remarkable thing.

The transformation of meaning over time is echoed in the very name of Hannukah itself. It means "dedication," what the Maccabees did to the Temple after it had been cleansed. But the same word, in the form Hannukh, also came to mean "education," the dedication or consecration of the young as guardians of a sacred identity. The lights of Hannukah came to symbolise the holiness of the Jewish home.

The West today is fighting some difficult military battles. But there is also, as there was for Jews twenty-two centuries ago, a cultural and spiritual battle to be fought: not to impose our values on others, but to teach them to our children.

Do we still have a clear sense of who we are as a nation? Do we have shared values? Do we still believe in the sanctity of the family? Do our lives have spiritual depth and moral beauty? Do we see ourselves as guardians of a tradition that we hand on with pride to our children? The future of the West may turn on our answers to those questions. To defend a country you need an army. But to defend an identity you need schools. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Bereshith ends this week on a seemingly upbeat note. The family of Yaakov, united and now more numerous, live in an apparently friendly Egyptian environment, rather smugly protected by their political influence and their growing wealth.

The last seventeen years of the life of Yaakov are the most serene of his existence. He studies Torah with his descendants and the Lord does not allow him, so to speak, to truly envision the disaster to his people and family that looms in the coming years. In the back of everyone's mind is the haunting vision shown to Abraham that his children will be enslaved and brutalized, but that prophecy apparently does not yet weigh heavily on the minds and behavior of Jacob's children and family living currently in Egypt.

The nature of humans is to postpone acting on troubling signs and biter forecasts. So the immediate troubles of the book of Shemot do not make their appearance or mark here at the conclusion of the book of Bereshith. The Torah itself apparently wishes to dwell on the good part of the narrative of Israel in Egypt before continuing later to detail the horrors of slavery and persecution that are already lurking in the wings.

Why is this so? Why is the Torah not more straightforward early on in the Egyptian section of the

story of the Jewish people? And even more puzzlingly why didn't G-d speed up the process, so to speak, and begin the bondage sooner so that the redemption would also have happened earlier? What was this 130 year delay meant to accomplish?

There is a pattern set here that continues to appear throughout Jewish history. Our story always goes in waves and not in lurches. The problems that befall us may seem to be sudden and unexpected but in the long view that retrospective history provides, they arrive inevitably and gradually. The Lord, so to speak, provides us with respite between tragedies.

The 130 years of good times in Egypt enabled the Jews to somehow survive the eighty years of slavery and persecution. Spanish Jewry enjoyed a golden age? of centuries before its three century decline into expulsion and forced apostasy. Polish Jews also enjoyed hundreds of years of autonomy and governmental favor and protection before declining in the three centuries which ended with its destruction.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century anti-Semitism clearly laid the groundwork for the murderous Holocaust. Yet, at the same time Western and Central European Jewry enjoyed civil rights and great social and economic success and achievement. In the constant turbulence of First Temple times, the Bible nevertheless records for us peaceful and prosperous times? forty years, eighty years? and diplomatic and military stability.

Nothing lasts forever but the history of Israel as a people provides us with the understanding that G-d's will will be done but that the periods of respite afforded us are necessary for our survival and development as a people. Far be it from me to analyze our current situation and what wave of history we are in. But whatever it is we should attempt to make the most of it for now and for our future. © 2010 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 SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Just before Yaakov's death, he gathered his sons and told them (49:1), "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days." Then, after they had gathered around him, he did not discuss the End of Days at all. Chazal explain that just as Yaakov was about to reveal when the redemption would take place, the Divine Inspiration left him. At that moment, Hashem said to Yaakov (in the words of Mishlei 11:13), "He who reveals a secret is a talebearer, but the faithful of spirit conceals a matter."

What was G-d teaching Yaakov at that moment? R' Chaim Moshe Reuven Elazary z"l (20th century; Canton, Ohio and Israel) explains as follows:

Both Ralbag and the Vilna Gaon interpret the quoted verse in Mishlei to mean that a teacher must teach his students on their own level. If one speaks to students above their level, i.e., if he reveals that which should be kept secret, he is harming them, just as one who bears tales hurts others.

In a similar vein, writes R' Elazary, Pirkei Avot (1:11) teaches, "Wise men! Be careful with your words, lest the students who follow you will drink and die." Rather, one must teach lessons that are on the students' level.

For whatever reason, Yaakov's sons were not fit to know when the redemption would be. Thus, if Yaakov would reveal the secret, he would be harming them. (Netivei Chaim p.429) © 1998 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

standards of sanctity served as a shining example for Yaakov's entire household and oriented them to their new home for the next two hundred and ten years.

Rabbeinu Avrohom Ben HaRambam explains that these outstanding qualities of self control and sanctity earned Yosef his special blessing. Upon reflection we realize that Yosef's perception of himself as his father's extension earned him his abundant bracha. Hashem bestowed upon Yaakov an unlimited bracha because he attained the highest levels of sanctity and piety. (see Breishis Rabba 69:2,3 and Ohr Hachaim to Breishis 28:13). Now that Yaakov was leaving this world he sought to share this unlimited bracha with one who attained similar levels of piety and sanctity. Yosef who achieved outstanding piety and sanctity through maintaining his father's image became the perfect candidate for this bracha. Yaakov therefore transmitted to Yosef the unlimited bracha he received from Hashem for outstanding success and fortune in every aspect of life. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Later in the Parsha, the pasuk says, "And Yaakov called his sons and said: 'Gather, yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days.'" [Bereshis 49:1] Rashi elaborates that Yaakov wished to reveal that which would happen at the End of Days, but this knowledge departed from him and he then began speaking about other matters.

Millions of Jews over thousands of years have wondered about the End of Days. When will redemption come? Why did Yaakov wish to tell his children when the End of Days would come and why? if in the end was Yaakov unable to accomplish this? does the Torah need to mention it at all? Why was it so important for them to know the 'ketz' ('end')?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes that Yaakov had a terrible fear. His fear was that if the Jews would go down to Egypt and need to be there hundreds of years, they would give up hope. As the years and generations go by it is only natural for people to give up hope. When one gives up hope, one throws in the towel and ceases to maintain his Jewishness and his Jewish identity. This was Yaakov's mortal fear.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky uses this concept to explain the Medrash in Parshas VaYigash that before leaving Eretz Canaan Yaakov chopped down cedar trees planted by his grandfather Avraham and brought the wood with him to Egypt. Yaakov wanted his descendants to have? throughout the Egyptian exile? a tangible reminder of the "old country." Yaakov wanted them to have a tangible artifact to remind them of the "old grandfather," that would serve as a constant source of hope that those boards would one day yet house a

holy Tabernacle, which would be a home for the Divine Presence in their midst on the way back to their homeland.

So too, Yaakov's agenda in revealing to his children the whole of Jewish history was to give them encouragement not to give up hope in the darkest of times and to have faith that the end would be bright. The Almighty however intervened and suppressed Yaakov's prophetic knowledge of this information. Hashem told him that if his sons would learn the extent and severity of the Jewish exile, they would indeed throw in the towel.

"Plan A" was nixed by Hashem, but what was "Plan B"? Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that when the Patriarch called in his sons and started telling them who they are and about their strengths and weaknesses, he had an agenda. The agenda was to let them know that their descendants would each return to Eretz Yisrael and each one would fulfill a specific function (tachlis): "This is your job." He thereby gave his children a future to look forward to and a hope for a light at the end of the tunnel.

The prophet Zecharia used an expression "Asir Tikva" [Zecharia 9:12], meaning "a prisoner with hope". Without hope, one cannot survive. [Natan Sharansky was in solitary confinement in Russia for some 15 years. On the wall of his prison cell, he wrote the words "Asir Tikva." He was a prisoner, but a prisoner with hope. One who has hope can stand up to the KGB. Without hope, one will crumble.]

When "Plan A" of giving hope by revealing the End of Days was nixed by the Almighty, a "Plan B" was put into effect with the same ultimate goal. He told each of his sons what their future would be in Eretz Yisrael as part of Klal Yisrael. Each one received guidance towards his appropriate future contribution to the nation, commensurate with his own specific talents.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains: according to Yaakov Avinu, Klal Yisrael was not destined to be a uniform nation without differences of opinion amongst themselves. The Jewish people are not monolithic. We are not a single nation with one approach and one way of doing things. On the contrary, our destiny is to live together as 12 distinct tribes. We can each have our own opinions and approaches based on our own personalities. Moreover, when Yaakov Avinu called in his 12 sons; they were all there at the same time. He did not talk to each son individually. Yaakov talked to each son in front of everyone else.

Yaakov Avinu did that for a reason? so that each son should know that each of his 11 brothers also has a role that fits in with the larger needs and destiny of the nation. The patriarch validated each of the different future jobs of his sons and wanted to make sure that all of them knew that none of them had the exclusive claim to being on the "correct path set out for them by the patriarch of the family". We are all part of a bigger group and we should respect the talents and

strengths of each other and not try to usurp the individualized roles of one another or try to delegitimize the contribution of one another.

We may not always agree, but we should respect legitimate diverse opinions within Klal Yisrael. From his deathbed, Yaakov gave his sons the hope for such a destiny and the hope and aspiration that allowed them to survive the Egyptian exile. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Frand & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

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

The captivating Book of Genesis reaches its majestic climax with all the children of Jacob - each a forebear of one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel - standing united around the deathbed of their aged and prescient father, waiting to hear from his lips the final blessing, assessment and legacy he is leaving to each in turn. This deathbed scene is the culmination of all the past "sturm und drang," the rivalries and the rejections, the sacrifices and the successes, which went into the formation of an incipient G-d-enthused nation dedicated to the transmission of the message of ethical monotheism, a mission upon which hinges the very future of a world of peace, security and redemption. Jacob-Israel's final will and testament, a bequest of edifying and prophetic words rather than of material objects or lands, contains an outline of the program and the goals which will inform this burgeoning family-nation as it begins to take center stage in the drama of world history.

What is a bit jarring, however, in this consummately crafted final scene, is that Jacob blesses his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48), before he blesses his own children (Gen. 49). Why? I would argue that the blessings given to the grandchildren are a most fitting introduction to - and even provide an explanation for - the blessings to the children in general and the recipient of the birthright, in particular.

When Jacob blesses Joseph's children, he insists upon placing his right hand over the head of the younger child, Ephraim, and his left hand over the head of the older boy, Manasseh. He then gives them a joint blessing, although clearly indicating that while the elder will attain greatness, the younger will be greater still, and his seed will encompass a multitude of nations (48:19).

The personalities and goals of each of Joseph's sons are explained by the midrash cited by Rashi in his commentary. Manasseh served as Joseph's interpreter and his right-hand man in his dealings with the many nations who flocked to Egypt to acquire grain (Gen. 42:23, Rashi ad loc). When the aged patriarch Jacob

came to Egypt, Ephraim went to live with his grandfather, to learn from him and to tend to his needs; thus he was the one to inform his father that Jacob was ill (48:1). Manasseh was the linguist-politician, the competent economist who could handle world affairs; Ephraim was the devoted student of Torah whose life was dedicated to learning about the traditions of his ancestors.

Jacob placed his right hand - the bestowal of the birthright and religious leadership - on the head of Ephraim, and his left hand - the blessings of national prosperity - on the head of Manasseh. He recognized that each of these skills and vocations were important, and therefore he granted the individual blessings to each of them together, stipulating that in the future each Israelite be blessed with the joint blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh together (48:20), as parents bestow on their children every Friday night.

I believe that Jacob then had an epiphany. Just as he had not rejected the elder son in favor of the younger, but rather gave each his due, so perhaps his mother Rebekah may have been mistaken when she attempted to prevent Esau from receiving his father's blessing. Perhaps although Isaac had wished to give a blessing to the more materialistic Esau, he had always reserved the birthright of religious leadership for his younger son Jacob, the wholehearted dweller of tents. If this was the case, then Jacob could rest assured that his father had never rejected him completely; indeed he had recognized his spiritual strengths all along. The family never should have been split apart; why couldn't two sons - and even 12 sons - each receive their own special gift, and cooperate with the other(s) for the ultimate good of the united nation?

Jacob's newfound understanding, arising as it had from his experience of blessing his grandchildren, set the stage for the final and most significant act of his life, the blessings he bestowed upon his sons. In addition to the unique legacies he bequeathed to each head of a tribe, he bestowed the major material blessing - the double portion - upon Joseph, the beautiful and successful architect of the Egyptian economy and manager of international politics. And he bestowed the birthright, the mantle of the righteous and responsible ingatherer of a multitude of nations who will eventually bring ethical monotheism to the world, upon Judah, the sensitive unifier of the family.

The blessing and the birthright can go to two different brothers, without rejecting anyone, as long as the family is united and works together. Thus Patriarch Jacob paved the way for both the Messiah son of Joseph - who will reestablish a Jewish state with an economic structure, and a political system making Israel a nation amongst nations - as well as the Messiah son of Judah, who will rebuild the Temple and perfect the world in the Kingship of the Divine. © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin