

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**D**ifferent 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, the 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 Tanakh, 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 Tanakh 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 which he has journeyed for forty years but is destined not to enter – from afar.

Nevi'im, the second part of Tanakh, 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. (Gen. 50:26)

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?

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 civilisation based on forgiveness can construct a future that is not an endless repetition of the past. That, surely, is why Judaism is the only civilisation 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 the co-authors of the next chapter. ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"T**he scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the judicial interpreter's staff from between his feet, until Shilo shall come, and unto him shall be the ingathering of nations." [Gen. 49:10] While purchasing books in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Mea Shearim many years ago, the shopkeeper informed me that the Messiah was in the city. Despite my rationalistic bent, I excitedly went to pray at the Western Wall, searching devout faces in the hope of identifying the savior. At last, in despair, I returned to my bookseller in frustration and perplexity. “But didn't you tell me the Messiah was in Jerusalem?,” I accusingly asked. “Rabbi Riskin, you have it all wrong,” he replied. “You think that we are waiting for the Messiah. In reality, the Messiah is waiting for us!”

In fact, the first Biblical reference to the Messiah appears in our portion, Vayechi, when Jacob blesses each of his twelve sons. Jacob establishes the character of Judah by comparing him to a lion, and bestows upon him the gift and responsibility of the birthright: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the judicial interpreter's staff from between his feet, until Shilo shall come, and unto him shall be the ingathering of nations.”

The real linguistic difficulty of this verse is found in the middle of the blessing, where we come up against the etymological mystery of the word Shilo. It appears in this context only this once in the Bible (although it is also commonly used as the name of a city in Israel that housed the Sanctuary prior to the construction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem).

Rashi also refers to the word Shilo in its messianic implication, quoting first from Targum Onkelos, and then adding that the etymology is derived either from the Hebrew pronoun of possession (“until the coming of the one to whom [the kingdom] is his – shelo”) or a contraction of “the gift is his” (shai lo).

Ba'al Haturim shares a striking gematria between the phrase yavo shilo [Shilo comes] and the word mashiach (messiah), both of which add up to 358.

Seforno takes the word Shilo as being synonymous with shalom (peace) and writes that it refers to the ultimate peace at the time of redemption.

All these comments make it clear that our Sages understood that the initial reference to the

emergence of a messianic line in Judaism is to be found in the blessing to Judah, who is the progenitor of Boaz, Yishai and David, model and ancestor of the long-awaited Messiah.

Thomas Cahill, in his best-selling book *The Gifts of the Jews*, points out that it was the people of Israel who bequeathed to the world the idea of the progress of history, the ideal of the ultimate perfection of humanity and human society, the goal of a messianic age of peace.

Greco-Roman civilization saw the world and history in cyclical terms, iterating and reiterating much like the myth of Sisyphus, never truly reaching any kind of end-game. It is the Torah that provides a lineal imagery, insisting that there is purpose and significance to world history and human life.

What is important for us is that we constantly strive to be worthy of the period of perfection, understanding that with each passing year when the Messiah is not revealed, yet another opportunity has passed us by. Indeed, the Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 19th Century Slovakia) teaches that in every generation, there is an individual worthy of being King-Ruler-Messiah—but the generation must be worthy for him to be revealed.

Ultimately, we must continue to prepare ourselves in repentance and good deeds, especially in the realm of interpersonal relationships, in order for the Messiah to come. Hence the real commandment as expressed by Maimonides lies in our preparing ourselves for his coming, in making ourselves worthy of his majestic rule. And this is what my bookseller really meant when he said that the Messiah is waiting for us.

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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he traditional rabbinic approach as to why this portion of the Torah is titled “vayechi Yaakov” even though the subject matter of this Torah portion concerns itself with the death of Yaakov is that as long as his descendants – the Jewish people – are alive and functioning, then Yaakov is still considered to be alive.

The message here is one of immortality and continuity, family and generations. Like life itself and its counterpart, death, these words mentioned immediately above are difficult to define. Other nations and empires that are long ago extinct in terms of presence and participation in current world events, also have biological descendants alive and present in today's world population.

Nevertheless, we think of Rome and Babylon, Greece and Persia, the Holy Roman Empire and even the Soviet Union as being swept into the dustbin of history, never to rise to power again. So, the rabbis must be telling us a deeper message than mere

biological and genetic survival from the past until today.

I have often thought that a great part of the secret of Jewish survival lies in the fact that different – completely different – generations are able to bond together, recognize each other and have the same common goals, values and lifestyle. My father was born before the Wright brothers flew an airplane and he lived to see human beings walk on the moon.

In spite of the difference in age, background and even language, he had close contact with and a great influence on his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They somehow recognized who he was in his essence and beliefs and easily responded to his presence and later treasured his memory. So, to a certain extent we may say that he lived on through his descendants.

Yaakov recognized the different personalities, qualities and talents of each of his children and grandchildren. His blessings to his children and grandchildren, as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, clearly indicate this fact. He had no one-size-fits-all blessing to bestow. And it is perhaps that fact that guarantees that as long as his descendants are alive, Yaakov also lives.

For every one of his descendants could say in response to the blessing that each one received – all of them different and personal – that their old father and grandfather understood them and recognize them for what they were. And because of that, they treasured his memory and championed his cause throughout the ages.

Relationships that bridge time and space, generations and world upheavals can only be forged upon the recognition and acceptance of the uniqueness of the parties involved. There is no blessing ultimately in national and personal life that is brought about by conformity. The pithy remark of the great Rebbe of Kotzk was: “If I am I and you are you, then I am I and you are you; but if I am you and you are me, then I am not I and you are not you.” The blessings of Yaakov to his future generations reflect the wisdom of this truism.

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#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**W**hy does Yaakov (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 Yaakov'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 Yaakov addresses his comments. Note that Yaakov 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 Yaakov 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, Yaakov 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? ©2017 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

**T**he Torah states: "And the days of Israel (Jacob) drew near to die; and he called his son Joseph, and said to him: If now I have found favor in your eyes, please... deal with me kindly and truly; bury me not in Egypt." (Genesis 47:29).

What does the phrase "kindly and truly" come to teach us?

Rashi enlightens us as to the meaning of "kindly and truly." Kindness which is shown to the dead is true kindness, for one who does chesed (kindness) for a dead person certainly does not look forward to any payment. When someone does something for another person so that the person will in turn do him favors, the action cannot be considered true kindness. Rather, it is a form of bartering in which the merchandise is not objects, but favors.

When Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin was seven years old, there was a severe famine in Lithuania. Poor people wandered from village to village in search of food. Many of them flocked to the home of Rav Moshe's mother, who readily cooked and baked for them. Once a very large number of the poor came to her home and she had to cook for them in shifts.

When some individuals grew impatient and insulted her, she began to cry, since she felt that she was doing her utmost for them. Her young son, the future Rabbi of Kobrin, said to her, "Why should their insults trouble you? Don't their insults help you perform the mitzvah with sincerity? If they had praised you, your merit would be less, since you might be doing the kindness to gain their praise, rather than to fulfill the Almighty's command." *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

**HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L**

## Bais Hamussar

**R**av Wolbe points out that a number of the brachos of Yaakov Avinu focus on single individuals. When he blessed Dan he had Shimshon in mind, when he blessed Gad he was referring to Yiftach, and when he blessed Binyomin his focus was on Shaul, Mordechai and Esther.

Since every sheivet is made up of many thousands (and cumulatively over the generations adds up to millions) of people, why would Yaakov focus on single individuals? While every Jew is crucial since each Jew has an irreplaceable purpose, certain individuals are pivotal for bringing the world to perfection. The Alter of Slabodka once commented that he founded his Yeshiva in order to produce one single "Aharon Kotler." While the Slabodka Yeshiva produced many tremendous Talmidei Chachomim and Torah leaders, there was probably no alumnus whose impact rivaled the impact that Reb Aharon Kotler had on Torah Jewry. Most of the Torah learned today in America, and a sizable portion of the Torah studied in Eretz Yisrael, can be accredited to him.

The Torah focuses on the individual because the Torah focuses on quality and not quantity. Although almost all Jews throughout the centuries were not directly referred to in Yaakov's blessings, certainly every Jew has an individual purpose that only he can fulfill. The lesson to be gleaned from Yaakov's

blessings is that, we too, should focus on the quality as opposed to the quantity. A single mitzvah performed wholeheartedly, surpasses many mitzvos performed halfheartedly. We should give particular attention to the quality of our brachos, tefillos, chassadim and Torah study. Instead of counting your many mitzvos, make every mitzvah count!

After Yaakov passed away, the brothers were afraid that Yosef would take revenge for all that they had done to him. Yosef allayed their fears and declared, "Although you intended me harm, Hashem intended it for the good" (Bereishis 50:20).

Rav Wolbe comments that the idea conveyed by Yosef is one of the most phenomenal aspects of the workings of our world. It is simply impossible to affect an outcome that runs contrary to Hashem's plans. The brothers sold Yosef into slavery to rid themselves of having to deal with his dreams, and it was this very action of theirs that paved the way for those dreams to be fulfilled.

This is a concept that we must bear in mind every single day of our lives. There is absolutely no way to bring about a result that Hashem does not want to happen.

Probably the most common application of this idea relates to business dealings and money matters. If one is supposed to make the money then he will, and thus there is absolutely no reason for him to cheat or cut corners in order to achieve this end. Likewise, if we are not supposed to make the money, then even if it seems that one turned a profit in a fraudulent manner, the money will ultimately leak out of his pocket. Why go through the effort of going against Hashem's will by trying to earn money dishonestly and then end up spending it on dentist fees, when dealing honestly will yield any profit one is destined to make? ©2017 Rav S. Wolbe z"l and The AishDas Society

#### **RABBI DOVID GREEN**

### **Dvar Torah**

**P**ayer is a very personal thing, and it means many things to many different people. Nevertheless, there is a perspective which we learn from this week's parsha which may qualitatively enhance our time we spend in prayer.

After the dramatic events which lead to Yaakov and his son Yoseif reuniting, the Torah describes the things Yaakov does near the time of his passing away. Yoseif is summoned to his father Yaakov with the news that his father is ill. Yoseif brings his two sons, Efraim and Menashe with him, so that they may receive Yaakov's blessing. Yaakov brings them close; hugs them and kisses them, and exclaims "I never thought it possible that I might see you (again), and G-d has even shown me your children" (Genesis 48:11).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th cent. Frankfurt) comments on Yaakov's words. "I had not

thought possible." Rabbi Hirsch points out that the root word for "thought possible", "Peelail" (Pey, Lamed, Lamed), is related the word "Tefilah", prayer. The root word is also phonetically related to the word "Beelail," which means mixing two substances together to make them one. For example, if one mixes water with flour, the mixture results in a new substance; dough. The two substances don't remain separate entities, such as when mixing oil with water.

Rabbi Hirsch teaches us that "Beelail" (mixing) is to material substance what "Peelail" is to ideas, thoughts, facts, or principles. Hence, prayer, in the Jewish sense means "to penetrate oneself ever afresh again, with eternal, everlasting truths and facts", to prevent them from becoming unclear and obscure in one's mind and heart. According to this explanation, prayer is not from within outward, but from without inward. It is a time of reflection on truths, which in turn become part of our essential being. This is the reason why Jewish Prayer involves the use of a liturgy, and not just spontaneously pouring out one's heart in prayer. Of course, there is a prominent place for spontaneous prayer as well, but even the nature of that form of prayer will be different when practiced by someone who embodies the truths which Rabbi Hirsch mentions. The liturgy is filled with ideas and perspectives which with daily review, makes us the embodiment of the principles and ideals which we live by. Rabbi Hirsch also points out that this is the nature of communal prayer. If prayer was only from within outward, it would only need to be practiced when one is moved by the desire to pray, which precludes communal prayer.

Another attitude toward prayer is written in the book *Nesivos Shalom*, by Rabbi Shalom Noach Bresovsky. He illustrates a point using the following parable. A king who was celebrating a joyous occasion decreed that all requests from subjects would be granted. Some requested honor, and others riches. All requests were honored. One subject asked only to have the opportunity to have an audience with the king three times daily. The king was so moved and flattered by the request that he granted it as well as that the treasures should be opened, and this subject should be allowed to help himself to its contents. We can learn to have the same attitude toward prayer as this subject did toward being with his king. That is, just to value the opportunity to have an audience with The King. If this is our attitude in prayer, then we may hope that G-d will treasure our prayers and meditations, and may He open his treasures and grant us our requests for our good. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

#### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

### **Parsha Insights**

**T**his week's parsha, Va'y'chee, concludes the Book of Breishis, also known as the Sefer Yetzira (The Book of Formation). The Ramban explains that it's

called this because it consists of 1) the formation of the world and 2) the happenings of the Forefathers which 'formed' and shaped the future destiny of their descendants.

"Va'y'chee Yaakov"—And Yaakov lived—"b'ereetz Mitzraim shva esrei shana (47:28)"—in the land of Egypt for seventeen years. These were joyous, anguish free years for Yaakov, having been reunited with his beloved son Yosef. The Baal Haturim points out that Yaakov lived this type of existence only during the first seventeen years of Yosef's life, until Yosef was sold, and for the last seventeen years of his own life, after having been reunited with him. This total of thirty four years is contained within the gematria (numerical value) of the word "va'y'chee"—and he lived -- (vav = 6, yud = 10, ches = 8, yud = 10) -- the essence of Yaakov's 'life'.

Seeing his strength ebb, Yaakov summons his twelve sons to bless them before his death. Yehuda was ordained with the blessing of 'malchus'—the royal lineage until the coming of the Moshiach. Yaakov also prophesied of the abundance that the portion of Yehuda would contain. "Chachlili einayim miyayin" -- the eyes will be reddened from an abundance of wine—"u'l'ven shinayim maichalav (49:12)"—and the teeth whitened from an abundance of milk.

The Talmud (Kesuvos 112B) offers an alternative understanding. It is greater to 'whiten your teeth' to a friend ("u'l'ven shinayim") than to give him milk to drink ("maichalav"). The power of a smile! Often it is both the easiest and the greatest gift that we can offer.

The Mishna (Avos 4:15) states that one should always endeavor to initiate a greeting. The Aley Shor explains that to return a greeting is 'derech erez' proper respect—but to initiate a greeting is "hazrachas shemesh" - sunshine! The Torah wants us to know, he writes, that everyone is waiting and hoping for this little bit of 'sunshine'. It is each and every person's responsibility to, as much as possible, illuminate the lives of others.

A small infant already differentiates between a smile and a frown. A smile prompts the glow of his delight. An angry face brings almost immediate tears. I believe that studies have shown that a healthy, cheerful, nurturing environment contributes at least as much to a child's well-being and development as does proper eating and nutrition.

Everyone needs this sunshine of a friendly and encouraging smile. Spouses need it to maintain and build on their relationship. Children (of all ages!) bask in the glow of a parents proud smile. The mood of parents often depends on a smile, or lack of one, from their children. Friends, acquaintances, teachers, students, bosses, workers all need this to coexist happily and productively.

A person's face has been called a 'rshus harabim'—public property. We all have issues that we are dealing with and often a dour expression is a true representation of our feelings. At the same time, how often is our own mood spoiled by seeing such an expression on the face of another... The strength that it takes to assure that our problems don't become someone else's...

The story is told of Rav Avrohom Grudzinsky, a close talmid (disciple) of the Saba of Slabudka, who toiled for two years to acquire this attribute of a smiling countenance. All those who saw him, throughout the many different hardships that he endured, testified as to the beautiful, radiating smile that adorned his face. Even during the torturous years spent in the ghetto, his face was aglow while his heart mourned.

On a Friday in Yerushalayim one has many opportunities to give charity to others less fortunate than ourselves. Normally, in our rush to accomplish the many pre-Shabbos errands, a few coins are blindly dropped into a cup, accompanied by a mumbled wish for a good Shabbos. One time, having noticed a despondent look on the face of an elderly man collecting charity, I paused as I handed him the coins. Looking into his eyes I smiled, asked him how he was feeling, and then, shaking his hand, I warmly wished him a good Shabbos. The transformation that took place in this man was incredible. He didn't want to let go of my hand! He literally followed me out of the bakery, holding my hand, thanking and blessing me. I was very moved by this encounter as I realized that the relatively small mitzva of giving a few cents to charity could be increased exponentially by a simple smile and a few kind, caring words. [The Gemorah in Bava Basra (9b) quotes Rabbi Yitzchak who says "A person who gives a prutah (the smallest coin) to a poor person is blessed with six blessings, but a person who verbally appeases a poor person is blessed with eleven blessings."]

So often, what really matters isn't necessarily what we do or how much we do but rather the way we do it. We've discussed before that often, many aspects of our acts are beyond our control. However, our attitude and the way we do things is clearly within our control.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 31A) teaches that a person can feed his father plump chicken and be punished and a person can have his father work grinding a mill and earn reward in the world to come. Rashi quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi which illustrates each case with a story. A son was feeding his father plump fowl. When his father asked him where he was getting it from, his response was, "Old man! What do you care? Just be silent and swallow!". Another son was employed as a flour grinder and thus would support his family and his elderly father. When his father was drafted into the king's service, he

volunteered to go in his place. The father took over his position as the flour grinder. As we said, it's not necessarily what we do but how we do it.

Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust tells of a well-to-do Chasidic Rabbi who would take a daily morning stroll. It was his custom to greet every man, woman and child that he encountered on his way with a warm smile and a cordial "Good morning". Over the years he became acquainted with many of the townspeople and he would greet them with their proper name and title.

In the fields near the town he would exchange greetings with Herr Muller, a Polish ethnic German. "Good morning Herr Muller", the rabbi would call out. "Good morning Herr Rabbiner", would come the good-natured response.

When the war began, the strolls abruptly ceased. The rabbi lost most of his family in the Treblinka death camp and he, after great suffering, was sent to Auschwitz. One day, during a selection at Auschwitz, the rabbi was lined up with hundreds of other Jews. A wave of a finger to the right or left would determine if one would live or die. Suddenly the rabbi felt an urge to see the man who was deciding the fate of so many. He lifted his eyes and heard his own voice pronounce: "Good morning Herr Muller!". "Good morning, Herr Rabbiner", responded the voice of the S.S. man. The hand signaled to the right—to life. The next day, the rabbi was transferred to a safer camp.

The power of a smile. The power of "Good morning".

A sincere and heartfelt "Good Shabbos"!

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### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his 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 & torah.org



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