

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**E**very 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 expected to see you again, and now God has shown me your children as well." (Gen. 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 the time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" (Gen. 48:20)

So we do to this day, with these very words. 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 God 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 Tanach 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 they do so with a full heart. That is why this blessing by Jacob to 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

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

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 their grandchildren Torah is regarded as if they had received the Torah from Mount Sinai, as it is said, 'Teach your children and your children's children.'" (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 parsha. One week he entered the bathhouse, and after he had begun bathing he remembered that he had not yet heard the weekly parsha from his grandson. So he immediately got up to leave 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 should not interrupt the process. He replied, "Is this such a small thing in your eyes? For whoever hears the parsha from his grandchild is as if he heard it directly from Mount Sinai" (Yerushalmi Shabbat 1:2).

According to the Talmud Bavli, it is a great privilege is to teach your grandchildren Torah. According to the Talmud 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 saying that both are true.

My late father, of blessed memory, had to leave school at the age of 14 to begin working to support his family, and as a result he never had the full Jewish or secular education that he would have wanted. I remember from my childhood that -- as we walked home from shul on a Shabbat morning -- I would be full of questions. "Dad, why do we do this?" "Why did we do that?" My father always gave me the same answer, and that was the answer that changed my life. He said, "Jonathan, I didn't have a Jewish education, so I can't answer your questions. But one day, you will have the education that I didn't have. And when that happens, you will teach me the answers to those questions."

The greatest gift you can give a child or a grandchild is what you empower and allow them to teach you. As parents, we strive to give our children everything. There's one thing we sometimes forget to give them which is the chance for them to give something to us. And that, frankly, is the most important thing there is.

Give your children and your grandchildren the

space to give to you. Let them become your teachers and let them be your inspiration. In doing so you will help them become the people that they were destined to be, and you will help create the blessings God wants them to become.

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: "May you live to see your children's children -- peace be on Israel." (Psalm 128:6)

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, who make war.

Jacob lives a life fraught with conflict and troubles. He knew of revenge and war, of grudges and strife. But he died serene, and full of blessings. And before he died, he blessed his children and grandchildren.

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. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Torah Lights

“**A**nd Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, so the whole age of Jacob was one hundred and forty-seven years. And the days of Jacob drew near to die...” [Genesis 47:28, 29] The final verse of the last portion of Vayigash summarizes the astonishing achievement of the Israelites in Egypt: ‘And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the country of Goshen and they took possession of it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly’ [Gen. 47:27]. Could anything be a clearer testament to the resilience of Jacob's descendants who, in a relatively short period of time, managed to grow rich in real estate, to be fruitful and to multiply?

Yet according to Rashi, this very next verse, the opening of Vayechi, sends us in the exact opposite direction, a 180-degree turn for the worse, informing us that the Egyptian bondage was then beginning! Interestingly, Rashi's interpretation is not based on the words of the verse itself [Gen. 47:28], but rather on the almost hidden or interior meaning of the Torah embedded in the white space – or lack of white space – between the final verse of Vayigash and the opening verse of Vayechi. The portion of Vayechi opens without a parchment hint that a new chapter is beginning, or that a new story is being told.

There are no paragraphs or indications of chapters in the text of the Torah scrolls. Rather, a white

space – anywhere from a minimum of nine letters wide to the end of the entire line – is the Torah's way of indicating that a pause or separation of some kind exists between the previous verse and the following section.

What is unique about Vayechi is that it is the only portion in the Torah with no white space preceding it, as the last verse in Vayigash flows right into the opening verse of Vayechi. This lack of a division leads Rashi to comment that the reason why our portion is setumah (closed) is because ‘...with the death of Jacob the hearts and eyes of Israel become closed because of the misery of the bondage with which they [Egyptians] had begun to enslave them’ [Rashi ad loc.].

For Rashi, the achievement of Vayigash lasts no longer than the blink of an eye, or the amount of time it takes to finish one verse and begin another. In one verse the Israelites may be on top of the world, but Rashi wants us to understand that the message of the lack of white space is that we are now witnessing the beginning of the end.

But the truth is that the slavery does not come until a generation – and a biblical book – later, when we are told of the emergence of a new king over Egypt, ‘who did not know Joseph’ [Ex. 1:8]. In the meantime we are still in the book of Genesis; Joseph, with the keys to the treasury in his pocket, is the Grand Vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and his kinsmen are doing astonishingly well on the Egyptian Stock Exchange. So why does Rashi's commentary appear to be ‘jumping the gun’?

Rabbi David Pardo explains in his commentary Maskil l'David that the first intimations of Jewish slavery are indeed to be found in the portion of Vayechi, but in a later verse describing an apparently uncomfortable situation in the wake of Jacob's demise:

“And when the days of mourning for Jacob were over, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh saying, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, my father made me swear, and he declared: I am dying. In my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me...’” [Gen. 50:4–5]

Does this request sound like the words spoken by the Grand Vizier of Egypt? Does the number two figure at a Fortune 500 company, who undoubtedly confers with the president on a daily basis, need an appointment to see him, forced to go through the usual hierarchy of secretaries that junior staff have to go through? Why not a simple knock on the door on the part of Joseph? Why does the Torah even go to the trouble of reporting the process by which Joseph presents a petition – through intermediaries – to have his father buried? And Joseph doesn't even go through a secretary; he begs (‘if I have found favor in your eyes’) the ‘house of Pharaoh’, which generally refers to the household staff, the servants of Pharaoh. The Grand Vizier asks a maid or butler to whisper his need to bury

his father in Pharaoh's ear. Is this the level to which a second-in-command must stoop in order to get time off for a parent's funeral? Seforno explains that in this particular instance, court etiquette prevented Joseph from making his request personally of Pharaoh because he was dressed in mourning clothes (and was presumably in need of a haircut and shave). However, Jewish law dictates that whatever one has to do in order to properly bury one's dead is permissible. Joseph certainly could have made himself presentable had his external appearance been the major problem. Maskil L'David maintains that a careful reading of the verse indicates a change in Joseph's status. His sudden loss of 'access' could well be a warning of new palace tremors which would eventually erupt into the enslavement of his descendants. Joseph had been demoted in position.

I would suggest another explanation. Perhaps the almost obsequious manner in which Joseph must arrange to have his request brought before Pharaoh indicates not so much a general change in Joseph's political position, as the delicacy of this particular petition. Therefore, it serves as a moment of truth for Joseph as well as for the readers of his story.

Joseph may have reached the top of the social ladder in Egypt. He speaks Egyptian, dresses as an Egyptian, has become renamed Egyptian (Tzafenat-Pane'ach), and is married to a native Egyptian (perhaps even to his previous master's daughter). From slave to Prime Minister, Joseph has certainly lived out the great Egyptian dream. Now, however, he is forced to face the precariousness and vulnerability of his position.

Ordinarily a person wants to be buried in his own homeland where his body will become part of the earth to which he feels most deeply connected. Indeed, in the ancient world the most critical right of citizenship was the right of burial. The wise Jacob understands that Pharaoh expected Joseph to completely identify with Egypt, to bring up generations of faithful and committed Egyptians after all that his adopted country has given to him. But this was impossible for Jacob – and the patriarch hoped that it would also be impossible for his children and grandchildren as well. They were in Egypt but not of Egypt. They might contribute to Egyptian society and economy, but they could never become Egyptians. Jacob understood that his burial in Canaan would be the greatest test of Joseph's career, and would define the character of his descendants forever. Hence, he makes his beloved son solemnly swear not to bury him in Egypt.

Joseph, too, understood that Pharaoh would be shocked at the request, a petition expressing the Hebrew rejection of the most powerful and civilized nation on earth. Indeed, it is such a difficult and sensitive matter that Joseph cannot face his patron Pharaoh directly with it. At that moment Joseph understands an even deeper truth: were he, his brothers, his children and grandchildren to make the choice to live as Egyptians

and to die as Egyptians, the chances are that they would be totally accepted into the mainstream of the land and life in that country. However, were they to choose to live as Jews, with their own concepts of life and death, they would never be accepted and would probably be persecuted. It is this realization in the aftermath of Jacob's death which Rashi correctly sees as the beginning of the slavery of the Israelites. In Egypt, Joseph's kinsmen may have everything: Goshen Heights and Goshen Green, progeny and patrimony. But as long as they are determined to remain Jews, servitude and persecution are inevitable. They may rejoice in their preferred Egyptian status, where 'they took possession of it and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly,' but they cannot ever pause to enjoy this good fortune. The realization upon Jacob's death of the transient and illusory nature of their good fortune comes upon them inexorably and imperceptibly, as in the blink of an eye, as in a following sentence without a change of paragraph.

And so this portion is closed just as Egypt will soon be closed to their children. Such is the ultimate fate of the children of Israel in every exile. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he conclusion of the book of Bereshith reaches its climax this week with the recording for us of the death of our father Yaakov and of Yosef. The era of the founders of our people ended in relative tranquility and contentment, albeit on foreign soil. It will be a long and arduous journey for the descendants of Yaakov to return home to the Land of Israel.

A dark and forbidding era is about to begin but, though still in the future, it was foretold already many years earlier to our father Avraham. From the simple meaning of the words of the Torah, it is apparent that the family of Yaakov found themselves comfortable and well settled in their home in Goshen.

The promise of Yosef that the Lord would take them forth from Egypt was certainly remembered and passed on from one generation to the next. Nevertheless there was no sense of immediacy regarding this promise and its fulfillment, and the Jews would view Egypt as their home rather than the Land of Israel for a long time.

They hastened to return home after burying Yaakov in the Cave of Machpela, seeing Egypt as their home and the Land of Israel as a far distant goal and dream that would somehow eventually be realized but that had no immediate bearing on their day-to-day living.

This attitude remained constant throughout the long history of the Jewish people and of its various exiles, in Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Europe and today the

entire world, outposts that have hosted and still host the Jewish people in our far-flung diaspora. The Jewish people were never in a hurry to leave any of these places and to return to the Land of Israel. This still seems to be the case in our time as well.

It is difficult to understand why the holy family of Yaakov seems so passive and unresponsive in relation to the Land of Israel. There are commentators who state that they were aware of the heavenly decree that they would have to be strangers in a strange land for many centuries and that they accepted their lot and decided to make the best of it under the circumstances.

However, as Maimonides points out regarding the Egyptian enslavement of the Jewish people, Egypt was not preordained to be the oppressor and enslaver of Israel. And, it was also apparently not preordained that those early generations of Jews living in Egypt were to fulfill the vision of Avraham to be strangers and slaves in a land that did not belong to them.

Apparently according to Maimonides the Egyptians had a choice as to whether to enslave the Jews, and the Jews before their enslavement occurred had an equal choice of leaving Egypt and returning to their ancestral home in the Land of Israel.

However we will deal with this baffling issue, there is no question that this represents a template for all later Jewish exiles and for Diaspora Jewry in all times and places. Apparently only tragedy moves the Jewish people...and throughout our history tragedies abound. Let us hope that somehow history does not repeat itself in our time as well. ©2023 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**W**hy does Jacob, in his blessings to Simon and Levi, say that they will be achalkem (separated) and afitzem (scattered) among all of Israel? (Genesis 49:7).

Rashi notes that as teachers of Torah, the tribe of Simon would spread out to teach children. Similarly, the descendants of Levi, in their role as collectors of tithes and heave offerings, would traverse all of Israel.

Another understanding of Jacob's words requires that we take into account two major incidents in the lives of Simon and Levi. These brothers avenged the rape of Dinah by killing the males of Shechem (Genesis 34). Some also ascribe to them a key role in the sale of Joseph (Rashi, Genesis 42:24). In both incidents, Simon and Levi displayed dangerous anger by taking the law into their own hands.

It is relative to their anger that Jacob addresses his comments. Note the two terms that Jacob uses with respect to Simon and Levi – achalkem (to separate) and

afitzem (to scatter).

Akedat Yitzchak seems to comment on afitzem 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 Simon 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" (translation by Aryeh Newman). When scattered, the anger will be dispersed and directed productively.

Yet, when considering the other term that Jacob uses, achalkem, another thought comes to mind. After all, achalkem means that Simon and Levi will actually be separated from one another. When living together, Simon 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 dwindle and eventually disappear. From this perspective, Jacob declares that anger of any sort is detrimental.

Of course, anger is an emotion. But while one cannot control what one feels, action can be controlled. And so, even if one feels anger, the ultimate goal is to refrain from reacting angrily. Optimally, we should wait a short while until our response is more levelheaded. As Rav Nachman of Breslov says, "You cannot make peace with anger."

Certainly, holding onto anger long-term is unhealthy; it demands energy, and we only have so much energy, so using it negatively is not wise. Indeed, holding on to anger means that the person I'm angry with is on some level controlling me – living in my head rent free, as they say.

Jacob's blessing leaves us with an open question: Does anger have its positive elements, as Akedat Yitzchak points out, or should anger be completely obviated, as Rav Nachman suggests? Or is it somewhere in between? ©2023 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

**"A**nd your progeny born after them will be yours; they will be called in their brothers' names for inheritance." (Beraishis 48:6) Yosef was told Efrayim and Menashe would be counted as Tribes, as if they were Yaakov's children instead of his grandchildren. However, any other children Yosef had, would be considered Yosef's children and not have the elevated status of being Tribal heads.

It could be that Yaakov had to clarify that although Yosef's two sons were given special treatment, with Yosef acting in his father's stead, so to speak, that

didn't mean that Yosef still had an inheritance of his own to leave to his offspring. All rights to the land of Israel were transferred through Menashe and Efrayim. Yaakov did not want Yosef to think that he could have more children and thereby acquire more land.

But did Yosef have more children? Some commentaries, such as the Ibn Ezra and Ramban say he did. Others say he did not. What can we learn from this, and the fact that the children were not listed in the Torah?

On the one hand, Yosef well understood the jealousy amongst siblings when some are treated differently. The fact that Efrayim and Menashe were singled out for Yosef to receive a firstborn's double portion, but his other children would not have that, might have been a reason for him to desist from having other children, lest they suffer the pangs of jealousy that led his brothers to hate him and sell him into Egypt, even though it was part of Hashem's Divine plan. That would comport well with those who said he had no other children. But for those who said he did have more, how do we explain this?

The answer is understood through the reason why we bless our children to be like Efrayim and Menashe. Though Menashe was older, he was not jealous of the fact that his younger brother was destined to be greater than he. He did not get upset that their grandfather Yaakov spent his time learning with Efrayim, and he did not feel slighted. He understood that each of us gets what we are supposed to get.

With that example, Yosef's other children, born after Yaakov came to Egypt and the famine subsided, would also not feel jealous or upset about what their brothers got. They did not even have to be mentioned in the Torah, and it didn't bother them. They would not succumb to jealousy as happened with the original sons of Yaakov, and thus Yosef had no qualms about having children even if they would not be given special status.

Perhaps, this was what Yaakov was alluding to in his blessing. He said that these lads, Efrayim and Menashe, should be called in his name. What attribute of Yaakov's did they possess? When Eisav met Yaakov, he did not accept Yaakov's gift until Yaakov said, "I have everything."

Yaakov was satisfied with whatever Hashem sent his way. Whether it was Yitzchak blessing Eisav, which is why Rivka had to intervene, or whether it was his acceptance of the attack on his daughter (see Now You Know), or his willingness to give up material things to Eisav, Yaakov was not jealous or desirous of more. This is the attribute of royalty which he passed to Yosef's children, and which we would do well to aspire to.

*R' Meir Chodosh z"l gave an intriguing moshol. Imagine a fellow wants to borrow money. The lender asks what he will do with it, how he will pay it back, and for more information on the business plan. When satisfied, he writes the check.*

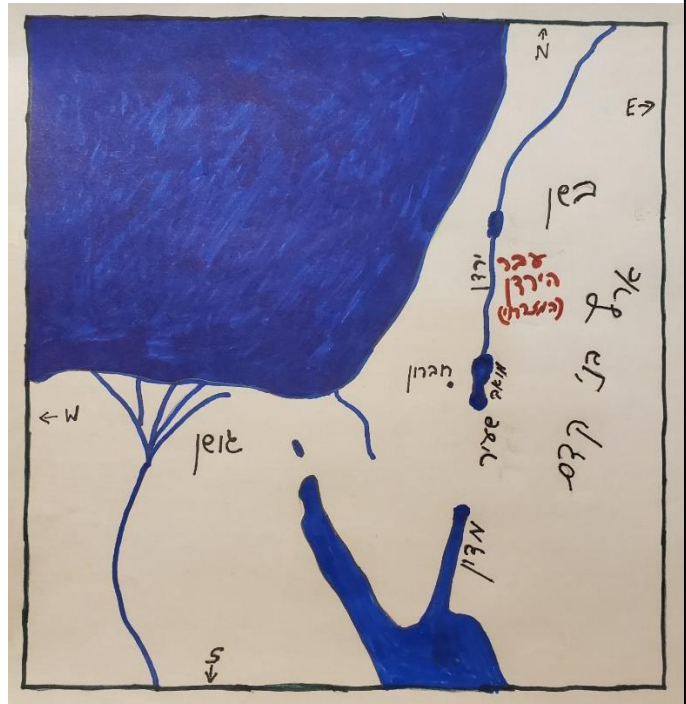
*When the time comes to repay the loan, the borrower says, "I'm ready to pay you back but first let me ask you, "What will you do with the money?" It's laughable. When you owe someone something, you can't ask them questions.*

*Every person is created in Hashem's image. You OWE him honor and respect. Why should you be upset or hesitant to give him his due? ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

**Jewish Geography**

“A When Yaakov was brought to חברון to be buried, they stopped at גן האטד, which is described as being בעבר הירדן (Bereishis 50:10). However, to get to חברון from Egypt, there's no need to cross the ירדן. As a matter of fact, since חברון is west of the Dead Sea, and the ירדן empties into it, in order to get to the other side of the ירדן from Egypt one must either pass near חברון before crossing the ירדן, or travel well south of חברון, continuing east past the southern end of the Dead Sea and then north past its northern end. Why did they go so far out of the way?



Chizkuni suggests that the "dwellers of the land, the Canaani" (50:11) refers to Sichon and Og, whose land was on the east side of the ירדן. From their perspective, "עבר הירדן" was the west side of the ירדן, not the east side. [Even though חברון is parallel to the middle of the Dead Sea, and therefore south of where the ירדן ends, since Sichon and Og are north of the Dead Sea, to get to חברון they would cross the ירדן.] However, this only addresses the second reference to גן האטד being

הירדן (in 50:11). Until these “dwellers” were referenced, how could it be described as being בעבר הירדן? Besides, why mention that it’s בעבר הירדן at all if it refers to the same side the mourners were on the entire time? (If the point was to teach us which “dwellers” are being referred to, they should be the ones who were בעבר הירדן, וגרן האטד נט, בעבר הירדן)

The Talmud (Bechoros 55a) says that after the ירדן reaches the Dead Sea, it continues to the Mediterranean. Since this would be from east to west, in order to get from Egypt to חברון one would have to cross this part of the ירדן from south to north. If גרן האטד is north of this part of the ירדן, it would be “the other side” from Egypt’s perspective. (If it was south of it, it would be “the other side” from Canaan’s perspective.) The obvious issue with this approach is that the ירדן doesn’t continue past the Dead Sea (see ArtScroll’s footnote #41 and the notes in the back of the Mesivta). And describing גרן האטד as being בעבר הירדן isn’t really helpful, since we don’t know whose perspective it’s coming from.

In Places in the Parasha, Yoel Elitzur quotes the approach of his father (Yehuda Elitzur, ז”ל, co-author of Atlas Daat Mikra), which has two elements to it. First he points out that when the expression עבר הירדן is used in Tanach, it usually includes which side of the Jordan River is being referred to (east or west). He suggests (bringing supporting evidence) that when we aren’t told which side is under discussion, the expression refers to the Jordan Rift Valley, i.e. “the side of the Jordan,” as opposed to “the *other* side of the Jordan.” (Bear in mind that the word “עבר” means “side.”) It could be either side, as long as it’s right next to it (in the Jordan Rift Valley). In this case, it would be the west side, since there was no need to cross the Jordan.

This isn’t enough to resolve our difficulty, though, since the Jordan Rift Valley adjacent to the ירדן is northeast of חברון, and is therefore still out of the way. So he adds a military element.

At that time, Egypt controlled Canaan, and had military outposts there. It was time to rotate the troops stationed at these outposts, so the Egyptian military accompanied Yosef and his family to Canaan (see 50:9), with גרן האטד being near an outpost in the Jordan Rift Valley. The troops stayed there, while the family continued to חברון (50:12-13). However, why would Yaakov’s family go out of the way and follow the troops past חברון to their outpost? Additionally, we are told explicitly (50:14) that it wasn’t only the family who returned from חברון to Egypt.

In 5773 (<http://tinyurl.com/a4panzkm>), I also incorporated a military angle to explain why this entourage of mourners went all the way around the Dead Sea and then north before crossing the Jordan (from east to west) to get to חברון, adding another element as well. Yosef knew that if he went straight to חברון with the chariots and horsemen that were being sent to accompany his father, it would be perceived as a military

attack. He also wanted to give his extended family – those related through Eisav, Yishmael, Keturah and Lot – an opportunity to mourn for Yaakov without having to travel all the way to חברון. So instead of going straight to חברון, he went to the east side of the Jordan, passing Eisav’s home (southeast of the Dead Sea), to the area where Lot’s children (Ammon and Moav) had settled, near where the descendants of Yishmael and Keturah lived. As suspected, thinking this was an invading Egyptian army, these nations (as well as Canaan) joined together to attack the entourage. But when they saw Yaakov’s coffin, and realized it was a funeral procession rather than a military maneuver, they joined in the mourning (see Rashi on 50:10).

It’s certainly possible that some of the Egyptian troops remained in Canaan, while those they replaced continued with everyone else to חברון and then back to Egypt. It’s also possible that גרן האטד is in the Jordan Rift Valley (and why it’s “בעבר הירדן”). But in order to include the extended family in the mourning, it makes sense for Yosef to have followed the same route that the nation would eventually take after the Exodus – south of the Dead Sea then north to the other side of the Jordan – to get to the Promised Land. ©2023 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Shimon and Levi

Just before Ya’akov died, he blessed his sons and described their individual characteristics. He did not appear to bless Reuvein but described his impetuous behavior as “haste like water.” In this description, Ya’akov explained why Reuvein was disqualified as the future leader of the tribes. Reuvein had consistently responded first without carefully thinking through his response. He acted on emotion alone, a poor substitute for rational behavior. The leadership, then, should have gone in order of age to Shimon and then Levi, but they also had a flaw in their behavior which disqualified them. It should be noted that HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch insists that Shimon and Levi had “a character trait that was prominent which really would quite specially have qualified them to be placed at the head of the future nation. They were brothers, had the feeling of communal brotherhood developed to a high degree, which, completely free from egoism, made them feel affected by any wrong done to the least important member of the family circle, as if it had been done to themselves.” Had they balanced that characteristic with understanding the effect of their actions, they would have made excellent leaders. Our discussion will involve why Ya’akov’s assessment of Shimon and Levi, whom he grouped together, disqualified them from that leadership role.

Ya’akov said, “Shimon and Levi are brothers, stolen tools are their weapons. Into their design, may my soul not enter! With their congregation, do not unite, O my honor! For in their rage, they killed a man and their



wish, they hamstringed an ox. Accursed is their rage for it is mighty, and their wrath for it is harsh; I will divide them in Ya'akov, and I will disperse them in Yisrael." All of the final blessings of Ya'akov were said in poetic form, and the various commentators help to explain their meaning.

As we saw earlier, the statement of "Shimon and Levi are brothers" could be understood in a positive way. Sforno explains that they were deserving of the same honor and respect as Reuvein, but that they also fell from this exalted position when they attacked Shechem after the rape of their sister, Dinah. HaEmek Davar explains that Ya'akov was not telling us an obvious fact; everyone knew they were brothers. Instead, "brothers" was meant to indicate that they had the same inclinations, they thought alike, and acted as one unit. This was not only obvious from their actions in Shechem, but later in their quickness to condemn Yosef to death, and they would have acted were it not for the restraint of Reuvein and Yehudah. The reference to "killed a man" was with Shechem, and the "hamstrung an ox" clearly referred to Yosef, who is likened to an ox.

The word, "m'cheiroteihem," was translated by Rashi as "weapons." Onkeles, a holy translation of the Torah into Aramaic, understands this phrase as, "in the land of their sojourns (they did mighty deeds)," which is quoted as an alternate translation by Rashi. Rashi's explanation of stolen weapons refers to the act of "killing," for which Ya'akov rebukes them for having learned this negative characteristic from Lavan. Onkeles appears to be concerned with their having brought this "killing" into the Holy Land of their dwelling place. Ibn Ezra explains that the sin of Shimon and Levi was in the vile way in which they made a treaty with the men of Shechem and then promptly slaughtered them, breaking that treaty. This placed Ya'akov and his family in jeopardy, as no one in their homeland would feel that they could trust Ya'akov and his family.

HaEmek Davar explains that Shimon and Levi displayed two different kinds of anger: (1) *charon af*, an anger that boils and explodes quickly into action, and (2) *evra*, an anger that has time to quiet down but involves a standing anger that will cause one to plan revenge at an opportune time. Both types of anger can cloud one's judgment. Shimon and Levi exhibited *charon af*, that explosive anger, when "they killed a man," Shechem, as well as all the men of his village. The more calculated anger leading to revenge, *evra*, Shimon and Levi exhibited when they captured Yosef and sought to have him punished by death from their court. Fortunately, they were deterred by Reuvein and later Yehudah, who changed the death penalty into selling their brother into slavery.

The Ramban explains Ya'akov's criticism of Shimon and Levi for the death of the people of Shechem. While it was true that Shechem, the son of Chamor, had raped Dinah and kidnapped her, the people of his city had not done anything actively wrong. Their sin was that

they did not intervene and punish Shechem for his deed. Ya'akov agreed to Shechem's treaty in which all the men would be circumcised and convert. After they circumcised themselves and were weak, Shimon and Levi slaughtered them. Ya'akov was angry with them for the violence that they showed against innocent people, yet he was more disturbed that people might think that he was part of their counsel, that he had approved of their decision. Therefore, he said, "Into their design, may my soul not enter!"

Shimon and Levi's behavior resulted in being separated from each other as well as members of the same tribe were separated from each other. Shimon's inheritance was not a unified area of Israel, but was, instead, a series of disassociated cities that were swallowed by the land assigned to Yehudah. Levi received the forty-eight cities, but the cities were divided within the land assigned to other tribes. It is clear that there was a great fear that should all of Shimon's tribe be together, or that they be near Levi's tribe, that anger would resurface with devastating results.

Ya'akov attempted, with these blessings, to describe for each of his sons those traits which each exhibited. His hope was to highlight, for each, those aspects of behavior which each could use to his benefit. Some aspects of each son's behavior needed to be understood so that his tribe would be able to hone that trait to serve the entire nation. But every characteristic, whether positive or negative, can be controlled and focused for the needs of the people and for the benefit of all. This was part of Ya'akov's message to Shimon and Levi. He said, "Accursed is their rage for it is mighty, and their wrath for it is harsh." Ibn Ezra explains that this may have been a prayer, "that their anger should diminish and then it would be good for them."

Ya'akov's message is true for each of us. We are born into a set "tribe," a determined characteristic which guides our actions. But we are all capable of using that characteristic for positive results that will benefit all. May we become aware of our own traits and learn to focus them for the benefit of all Israel. ©2023 Rabbi D. Levin

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### A Sick Person

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**W**hen our forefather Yaakov became sick and bedridden (*choleh she-nafal le-mishkav*), he became the first such person mentioned in the Torah. What are the various laws dealing with such a *choleh*, and when is he exempt from certain *mitzvot* because of illness and its accompanying weakness?

A *choleh* is exempt from the mitzva of living in a *sukkah*, as are his caretakers. This is true not only for someone who is dangerously ill, but even for someone who merely has a headache or sore eyes. (This exemption is specific to the mitzva of *sukkah*, and one

should not extrapolate from it to other *mitzvot*.) A *choleh* is also exempt from traveling to Jerusalem for the three major festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot (*aliyah le-regel*). Those who can travel are obligated, while those who cannot are exempt. There are *mitzvot* from which a *choleh* is exempt because it is assumed he will not be able to summon the requisite levels of concentration, such as the mitzva of *tefillin*. Additionally, a person wearing *tefillin* must be able to control his bodily functions (*guf naki*). Somebody sick is likely to be unable to do so.

Normally, people are required to stand out of respect for a king or prince, an elderly person, or a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar). Sick people are exempt from doing so. This is either because they are understandably preoccupied with their pain, and thus cannot show the proper respect, or because when sick people stand, it is not seen as showing honor. The difference between these two reasons comes into play in a case where a sick person chooses to stand. If the reason that sick people are exempt is because they are preoccupied with their pain, one choosing to stand would indicate he has overcome this difficulty. However, if the reason is that the rising of someone in a weakened state does not show honor, then perhaps he should be asked to sit.

The Talmud (*Moed Katan 27b*) states that if a sick person stands up for a king, we do not tell him to sit. Some understand this to mean that a sick person may stand up if he wishes. This fits with the behavior of our forefather Yaakov, who exerted himself and sat up in bed (*Bereishit 47:31*).

However, others explain that the reason we do not tell a sick person to sit down is that it might sound as if we are saying, "Sit in your illness," meaning "Stay sick," which would be insulting. According to this approach, the Talmud does not permit a sick person to stand. As we said above, it is even possible that such standing does not show respect. If this is the case, why did Yaakov act as he did? A close reading of the verse indicates that Yaakov did not stand, but rather sat up in bed. Out of respect for the king he sat up, but went no further than that. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

## Cross-Currents

All the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in the bracha that Yehudah is given by his father Yaakov -- with one exception: the zayin. That fact is pointed out by Rabbeinu Bachya, who notes that zayin is not only a letter but a word -- meaning "sword" or, more generally, "weapon."

He writes: "The reason is that the malchus Yisrael, which emerges from Yehudah, will not score its essential victory through the use of weapons like [victories achieved by] other nations. Because the sword is Esav's heritage but [not] that of the Jewish malchus, which will not inherit the land with their swords. And is

not conducted by natural means, with the strength of the hand -- but rather, through the... sublime power of Hashem.

"And that is why one finds in the name Yehudah, the source of the Jewish kingdom, the letters of Hashem's name..."

That fundamental message is always important to internalize, but it is particularly timely today. We have seen, in the Jewish fight against unspeakable evil, failures of military tactics, intelligence and weaponry, and the use of the latter bringing only more hatred against Klal Yisrael.

May we soon merit to see the success that can ultimately only come from Above. ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

#### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (Gen. 48:7).

Rashi says that Jacob was explaining to Joseph why he did not bury Rachel in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, though he was requesting that he be buried there. Jacob said, "It was not because the distance to Hebron was long, because Bethlehem is near Hebron. It was also not because of bad weather that I did not take her to Hebron, because it was the dry season. I buried her there because G-d instructed me to do so, so that when Jews would be driven into exile, they could pass her grave site and beseech her to intercede with G-d on their behalf."

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz asks, "Why all this lengthy explanation? Had Jacob simply said, 'G-d told me to do so,' Joseph would have believed him." Rabbi Shmulevitz derives an important lesson from this: If we have a personal reason and a strong interest in doing something, we may convince ourselves that it is the will of G-d that we do so. We are very clever in rationalizing and deceiving ourselves. Only when we have no personal gain, when it is not for our comfort or convenience, can we be sure that it is indeed G-d's will and not our own.

How cautious we must be not to deceive ourselves about our motivation for our actions. Not only must we be careful not to justify a wrong action, but we must also make certain that the right things we do are for the right reason! *Dvar Torah from Twerski*

*on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

