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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYECHI - 5763

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From: Ben Kelsen <benish@att.net> Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2002 To: parshas_hashavuah@yahoogroups.com Subject: [parshas_hashavuah] HaGaon HaRav Ahron HaLevi Soloveichik, zt"l on Parshas Vayechi

HAGAON HARAV AHRON HALEVI SOLOVEICHIK, ZT"L
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon & Yeshivas Brisk, Skokie
Parshas Vayechi

Editor's Comment: These notes are based upon a private conversation between myself and Rav Ahron, zt"l in his apartment at YU in Rubin Hall in December of 1992. Because I have tried to keep as much of Rav Ahron's "voice" in these notes as possible there may be many similarities to this piece and Rav Ahron's own written version in "The Warmth and The Light" which contains a more complete version of the ideas that follow.
BGK

In Parshas Vayechi Yaakov, at the end of his life, follows the practice of his father and grandfather and gathers his children together in order to bless them. It is rather perplexing, however, that some of Yaakov's brochos to his children do not seem to express blessing. For example to his bechor Reuven Yaakov says, "Reuven, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of ascendancy and the excellence of power" (Bereishis 49:3). According to Rashi this means that Reuven, being the firstborn of Yaakov, was entitled to ascend to the Kehunah, the priesthood, and the power of Malchus, kingship. Yet because Reuven was "unstable as water" (Bereishis 49:4), he did not receive these brochos. The great tragedy of Reuven, his failing, so to speak, was that he possessed too much ethical quality. It was this middah, character trait, that prevented Reuven from rising to the position that he was theoretically entitled as the firstborn of the Shivtei Koh. Reuven's failings manifested themselves in that he was too humble and modest. If Reuven had been aware of his own strengths he would have been able to stand against his brothers when they rose up against their brother Yosef. Reuven would have been able to reprimand them stop the others from selling Yosef. Yet because of his nature, Reuven could not act in this manner.

This concept also explains Reuven's actions after the death of Rachel. Despite the simple reading of the passuk, Reuven, did not, chas v'shalom, commit adultery, as a simple reading of the verse in the Bereishis 35:22 would suggest. The Bavli in Maseches Shabbos (55b) tells us that anyone who claims that Reuven sinned in this instance is incorrect. Rather, Reuven was acting in defense of his mother, Leah's, honor. After the death of Rachel, Yaakov moved his couch to the tent of Bilhah. Reuven felt that this was a disgrace to his mother and on his own moved

his father's couch into her tent. This is another example of Reuven acting inappropriately because of his ethical sensitivities. Because Reuven failed in his duty as the bechor, he forfeited the title. Because Reuven was really the "Mishneh l'Melech" the second highest member of the family after Yaakov, his failings take on greater proportions than the failings of someone of lesser stature. This is similar to the case of Shaul HaMelech, who committed a similar blunder. The Gemara (Yoma 22b) tells us that while Dovid HaMelech sinned twice and was forgiven, Shaul sinned only once yet was not forgiven. Rav Yosef Albo, in his Sefer Halkkarim, explains that when Dovid sinned, he did so as an individual. His sins were committed in his private life and not to his role as king, and could therefore be forgiven. Shaul, however, committed his sin in his capacity as king and could, therefore, not be forgiven. The Rambam makes the importance of the role of the king very clear in the beginning of Hilchos Melochim, based on the Gemara in Sanhedrin (21a): [The Children of] Israel were commanded in three precepts when they entered the Land of Israel: to appoint a king over themselves, to destroy the seed of Amalek, and to build the Temple.

In other words, the concept of malchus is higher than that of destroying Amalek, the epitome of evil in this world.

Furthermore, according to some Rishonim, the mitzvah of destroying Amalek is incumbent upon the king. Since Shaul did not completely destroy Amalek, as he was commanded in his role as king he could not be forgiven.

It was for this reason that Yaakov was so strict with Reuven.

Though Yaakov did not want to deny Reuven the rewards of the bechor, he realized that he had to do so. While his brothers behavior in the selling of Yosef was wrong they had a false notion of Yosef because they thought that Yosef wanted to destroy them. Reuven, however, understood Yosef's actions, but still failed to save him because of his overabundance of ethical quality, thereby setting a bad example for his brothers. He failed in his role as bechor, to serve as an example and a leader for the others. It was for this reason that Reuven was denied the priesthood and kingship.

The halacha that the firstborn inherits pi shnayim, a double portion, from his father has been criticized by many so called liberal thinking people. In reality, however, this concept is a very ethical notion. The double portion is compensation for the firstborn because he has such a great responsibility. Additionally, a father tries to compensate for his failings through his children. Very often, the victim of the father's frustrations is his bechor. Once a father realizes that he cannot live his sons' lives for them, he does not treat his next sons as he did his eldest, thereby benefitting the younger children. As compensation for this the bechor is given a double portion of the inheritance from his father. If Reuven been truly aware of his responsibility and mission as the bechor, he would not have acted in the way that he did. Though it is true that Reuven's brothers Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah committed even greater sins, their sins were committed as individuals, while Reuven's sins were committed in his role as the bechor. Reuven was not a fighter, as he should have been. He did not stand up against wrongdoings with righteous indignation. In order to assume a position of leadership Reuven needed to exercise the middah of gevurah at certain times. Without the middah of gevurah he could not become the leader of Klal Yisroel, and therefore forfeited his position as bechor.

Yaakov himself represented the middah of Tifferes, which is the combination of both chesed and gevurah. The Medrash asks how is it possible that Yaakov intended to bless his sons but actually rebuked some of them instead? The answer, Chazal teach us, is

that Yaakov withheld Reuven's brochah until the time of Moshe. The Medrash says that Reuven would be forgiven later, when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai. Yaakov himself hints at this when he uses the word "ascend," in connection with Reuven (Bereishis 49:4).

It would also appear that Shimon and Levi also did not receive blessings from Yaakov. The Medrash, however, says that, as in the case of Reuven, Yaakov desired to bless Shimon and Levi but withheld their brachos until the time of Moshe because both Shimon and Levi possessed the middah of Kana'us, zealalousness. It was the anger that resulted from this middah that led them to wipe out the entire city of Shechem and to be cursed by Yaakov. However, if they were to vindicate themselves by conquering this middah, they would be worthy of receiving their appropriate blessings. The brochah implied by Yaakov, that "I will divide them among Yaakov and spread them among Yisroel" (Bereishis 49:7), would later be expounded by Moshe.

The Zohar HaKadosh on our parshah points out that some middos of HKB"H are on the "right side" and some are on the "left side." We are to devote ourselves to emulating only the middos of the right side, such as being merciful and forbearing but not those of the left side, such as punishing for sins. It is for this reason that during the Torah reading on a fast day, the entire congregation recites aloud the thirteen attributes of G-d but stops in the middle of a verse, before the words "lo yena'keh." Normally, such a practice is forbidden because of the halacha that we cannot to end a passuk where Moshe did not end it (Ta'anis 27b). However, in this case, because it is so important for us to emphasize the idea that we are not to emulate the middos following the word "venakeh" meaning, "and He holds guiltless," Chazal ruled that we should end our recitation of the passuk where we do.

We can now understand Yaakov's message to Shimon and Levi. Because they had misused their Kana'us in wiping out the city of Shechem, Yaakov postponed their brochah until such time that they learned to focus this middah properly. If Yaakov's blessing to Shimon and Levi taken effect immediately, they would have abused its power. Levi eventually proved himself capable of conquering his kana'us, and therefore he received the blessings of kehunah and Leviyah. Shimon also was able to later sublimate his kana'us. When Moshe Rabbeinu blessed Sheivet Yehudah before his death, he included Sheivet Shimon in Sheivet Yehudah's blessing. This joint brochah related to the conquering of the middah of Kana'us.

Chazal teach us that the middah of kana'us can be utilized when battling Amalek. The Mechilta on Parshas Beshalach says that any nation which endeavors to destroy Klal Yisroel is to be judged to be the same as Amalek. The Canaanites were therefore included in this din, and it was thus proper to resort to the middah of kana'us in fighting them. It was for this reason that Moshe gave Yehudah and Shimon a blessing to use this middah in waging war against those who subscribe to the Amalekian ideology. In this way, they would sublimate the middah of kana'us by using it to destroy the enemies of Klal Yisroel.

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Parshat Vayechi
"He Crossed His Hands"
ROSH HAYESHIVA RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG SHLITA

When Yaakov blessed his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, it says, "Yisrael extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Menashe's head. He crossed his hands, because Menashe was the firstborn." (Bereishit 48:14) An obvious question arises here.

Since by crossing his hands Yaakov negated the natural order, it should have said, "He crossed his hands, even though Menashe was the firstborn."

Furthermore, the Netziv comments that it would have been more appropriate for Yaakov to switch the way the two lads stood, to place Ephraim opposite his right hand, and Menashe on his left side. Why did he leave them in position, and cross his hands instead? The Netziv explains that Yaakov did not intend to negate Menashe's status entirely, since he was the firstborn. Rather, Menashe's primacy is expressed mainly in the material realm, whereas Ephraim excelled in the spiritual and Torah realm. Therefore, in the arrangement of the camps in the desert, which was patterned after the arrangement of the heavenly chariot, Ephraim came before Menashe, since he leads in the spiritual realm.

The hand serves the head, and belongs to the spiritual, lofty, aspect of man. In contrast, the foot serves the body, and acts unconsciously, instinctively. Therefore, Chazal say, "A son is the leg of his father." The father's qualities are expressed in the son as the father's leg, i.e., in a natural manner without conscious thought.

Yaakov did not want to change the way in which the two lads stood, since then it would seem that Menashe's status of firstborn was entirely revoked. Instead, he stood them so that Menashe was opposite Yaakov's right leg, and Ephraim was opposite the left leg, since this is their standing in the natural realm. Menashe has the primacy in the physical world, corresponding to the foot, whereas Ephraim was opposite Yaakov's right hand, since he has the primacy in the spiritual world. Therefore Yaakov crossed his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's, instead of switching the way they stood – "because Menashe is the firstborn."

With this he also explains the change in the order of the census in the desert. In the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, Ephraim appears first, whereas at the end of Bamidbar, in the second count, Menashe is first. This is because in the desert Israel lived in a miraculous fashion, and there Ephraim leads. However, as they are about to enter the Land of Israel, the manner of Divine guidance changed; the miracles ceased, and everything occurred in a natural manner. There, Menashe leads.

The Netziv correctly points out a slight variation in Parshat Bamidbar (2:18-20): "The banner of the camp of Ephraim according to their legions shall be to the west ... Upon him is the tribe of Menashe." On the other hand, regarding the other tribes it says, "Those encamping near him are..." The latter phrase has the connotation of a little one who is dependent on the great one, so that the entire surrounding camp leans on him, on the center. On the other hand, the expression, "Upon him," has the opposite connotation, that the second one is above, and looks after the little ones. Thus, "Upon him is the tribe of Menashe," means that Menashe is the greater one and worries about the needs of the little one, Ephraim. Even though Ephraim is the head of the camp, still, in regards to all that pertains to the natural course, Menashe is the leader, and he takes care of Ephraim.

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HaGaon Maran HaRosh HaYeshiva HARAV CHAIM YAAKOV GOLDVICHT, ZT"L

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Kerem B'Yavneh
Parshas Vayechi

Editor's Note: The following is adapted from the Rosh Yeshiva's Tisch of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 11 Teves 5751, December 28, 1990, in honor of the Third Annual KBY Alumni Shabbaton in Teaneck, New Jersey this week. This year's Shabbaton is part of this year's celebration of the "Shnas HaYovel", the 50th Anniversary, of the founding of Yeshivas Kerem B'Yavneh in Eretz Yisroel.

The Torah tells us in Sefer Bereishis (48:21-22) that Yaakov Avinu on his death bed told his son Yosef, "Behold I am dying. Hashem will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. I have given you one share more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Rashi, commenting on this passuk teaches that Yaakov Avinu was telling Yosef that because you, Yosef, will take the trouble to occupy yourself with my burial, I will also give you an inheritance in which you will be buried, Shechem. Rashi learns this from the passuk in Sefer Yehoshuah (24:32) where it is written "And the bones of Yosef which the Bnei Yisrael brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem." Chazal, however, in the Medresh Rabbah (Shemos Rabbah 33:8) have a different approach than that of Rashi. Chazal teach that "Hashem will be with you" is a reference to the Mishkan which Klal Yisroel build in the Midbar Sinai and eventually take to the city of Shiloh. Even more puzzling is another Medresh which states that the city of Shechem is given over to Yosef as part of the Bechorah. "And Behold, I have given to you Shechem', this is the Bechorah, and 'the garments of Adam HaRishon that I took from the Amorite', this is Eisav...". Is there connection between these various teachings of Chazal? Is there a way to reconcile these seemingly disparate approaches? Is there a connection between the garments of Adam and the Mishkan?

Before being able to explore any possible connection between these ideas we must first understand the nature of the garments of Adam HaRishon. By eating from the fruit of the Eitz HaDa'as, Adam distanced himself from HKB"H. As this act was done by Adam voluntarily, HKB"H complied with Adam's will and "hid" Himself from Adam and Chava behind the veil of Nature. Therefore, as a result of the sin Adam created a veil which separates Man from the Ribbono Shel Olam, obscuring our ability to see Him clearly.

The epitome of this new perspective can be seen in Bereishis 3:8 where it is written that Adam and Chava hid themselves from HKB"H among the trees of the Garden. This raises the following question: How, exactly, does one hide from The Ribbono Shel Olam?! Essentially we are saying that following their sin Adam and Chava experienced a life in which HKB"H's presence is not readily apparent, a life in which a person can be deluded into thinking that he can hide his actions from the Melech Malchei HaMelochim and in which he can hide the existence of HKB"H from himself. Thus we have the introduction of falsehood and deceit into the World.

As punishment for Adam and Chava's actions HKB"H made for them Ketones Or -- "coats of skin". Rashi explains that according to some, these coats were actually a layer of thick skin which covered their bodies. Physically, a skin is a separation between that which the skin envelopes and the outside world. The coats of skin are therefore symbolic of the separation that Adam created between Man and HKB"H. A second explanation offered by Rashi

that Ketones Or means "a cloak of hiddenness". This translations is indicative of a second aspect of the partition which Adam created between Man and HKB"H.

Clothing is an external ornament, which hides within it Man's true image. So, too, though Man's eyes may perceive the world one way, the truth may be very different. Though his eyes see a world running according to the "Rules of Nature", by science, in reality we know the world to be guided by the hand of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Therefore one could say that HKB"H's influence and direction is hidden behind a disguising garment.

According to the Medrash in Bereishis Rabbah (63:13), Eisav obtained Adam's special garments from Nimrod. Symbolically, we mean to say that Eisav inherited the force which cloaks the presence of HKB"H from Man, reinforcing the partition which Adam created.

When Yaakov Avinu was forced to lie to his father Yitzchok's in order to claim the brochah of the Bechorah he could only do so after disguising himself in Eisav's special garments. According to Chazal these were the garments of Adam HaRishon which brought deception into the world.

Though the word "Or" (as in "Ketones Or") means "skin", the same letters--Ayin, Vav, and Reish, can be read as "Iveir," meaning "blind". Again we see the notion that skin represents the forces that blind a person. By raising himself to a spiritual level from which he has a clear perception of HKB"H a person can change that Or into a different "Or" - meaning "light" thus allowing the light of HKB"H's presence to penetrate the divide that normally blocks the ability to perceive the Shechina in this world. The Torah tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu descended Har Sinai his face radiated with light, the glory of the Shechina. One could say that the "Or", the skin of his face, had turned into "Or", light, through the removal of the partition which separates Man from HKB"H.

However, though Adam himself had now created a barrier between himself and HKB"H, he still had a much greater perception of HKB"H than anyone after him. In fact, the Gemara in Masseches Bava Basra (58a) tells us that when Rav Bana'ah entered the Ma'aras HaMachpeilah, in which Adam is buried, he found Adam's heels, most mundane part of the body, shining with a brightness greater than that of the sun.

The Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l, explained that these "garments of Adam HaRishon" were also the garments of Kohein Gadol. By using Adam's garments that came about because of the creation of a separation between Man and HKB"H for the Kohein Gadol we are attempting to repair the damage caused by Adam, to remove the partition. In essence we are taking the Gashmius, the physical, and using it as a tool to reach the greatest heights of Ruchnius, the spiritual.

This is the meaning of Yaakov Avinu's brochah to his son Yosef; "ben poras Yosef, ben poras alei ayin...", "A charming son is Yosef, a charming son to the eye..." Yosef was given the brochah of the Koach HaReiyoh, the Strength of Sight, the ability to see through the veil and perceive the Truth, that HKB"H is intricately involved in every aspect of the world. In this, he was truly the heir of Yaakov Avinu who embodied the concept of Emes, Truth. Yosef is able to see the Kedushah, the holiness, of HKB"H in everything.

It is for this reason, explained the Rosh Yeshiva, that we have a fascinating halachah. During the times of the Beis HaMikdash, which sat on the borders of the land of Sheivet Yehudah and Sheivet Binyomin, one could only eat Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini, two types of tithes, within the walls of Yerushalayim. However, when the Mishkan was the focus of Yehadus and was situated in Shiloh, one was permitted to eat Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini anywhere within sight of the City. This is because

Yosef HaTzaddik, within whose son's borders the Mishkan stood, had no partition between himself and HKB"H. Therefore within the borders of Yosef's inheritance we do not need to be secluded behind the partition of great walls in order to remain on the level required to partake of Kodshim Kalim and Ma'aser Sheini. The brochah of Yosef is the ability to remain on that level of perception of HKB"H no matter where we are physically, to perceive HKB"H's presence in this world. In other words, to no longer be hidden within cloaks of deception. May we all be able to attain such a level in the very near future and remain there forever.

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TorahWeb [from last year]

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

JUST HOW IMPORTANT YOU ARE

Parshas Vayechi contains a fascinating concept, that of zechus avos, merit of our fathers, which is worth consideration. Zechus Avos teaches us to draw from the account of our ancestors, so that even if we are not worthy of a particular divine response, we can invoke their righteousness and pray that in their merit we will be awarded our requests. It is for this reason that we begin every Shemonah Esrei with the bracha of Avos, and invoke the akeidah as a central theme on Rosh Hashana.

The Yitav Panim notes that upon reflection the converse of the above is also true. Hashem looks to the future, to the positive actions that will take place, and can influence the present. At the burning bush, Moshe asks Hashem, "Who am I that I should go to Paroh, and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt (Shmos 3:11)." Rashi understands this question to mean, "How have the Jews merited their redemption?" Hashem responds in the next verse, "There is a great happening in store for them, they will serve G-d on this mountain and receive the Torah there." The future receiving of the Torah enabled them to leave Egypt.

Similarly, the commentary Maasei Hashem explains the verse in Parshas Noach, "And Hashem smelled the fragrant odor [of the offerings Noach brought] "and said, I shall not again curse the land for the sake of man (8:21)." The use of the term "raiach ha-nichoach", fragrant odor, both here and the many times it occurs in the book of Vayikra, indicates that Hashem looked to the future. Just as one can smell an object from a considerable distance prior to either seeing or touching it, similarly, when one brings an offering, one is saying that they wish to change and correct either a particular act or character flaw. Thus, it is understandable that in the merit of future good deeds that a person will do, Hashem, who 'smells' them now, will pardon the individual. The Medrash Braishis Rabbah (34:9) interprets the smelling of Noach's offering to refer to the scent of Avraham emerging from the furnace in which Nimrod attempted to kill him. In addition, Hashem 'smelled' Chananyah, Mishael, and Azarya emerging from the furnace of Nevuchadnezar. Finally, the Medrash teaches that Hashem 'smelled' the generations of shmad (religious persecution) where Jews would be prepared to give their lives and resources to honor Hashem. Future generations are clearly saving the present.

The closing paragraph of Medrash Rabbah on Parshas Braishis (29:5) teaches in the name of Rav Simone, "it is known that Hashem will do kindness with later generations in the merit of earlier ones", as we find in Vayikra (26:45) "Hashem promises to remember the covenant of the first ones" referring to the tribes He took out of Egypt. Rav Simone then presents the source from which we know that Hashem will provide for those in need now in

the merit of future generations, i.e., the juxtaposition of the closing verse of Bereishis with the opening verse of Noach.

Why did "Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem"? Because of "these are the progeny of Noach". His children and their descendants saved him!

On the opening verse of Parshas Toldos, the Medrash (63:2) cites the verse from Mishle (17:6) "Fathers are a crown and protection (for) their sons, and sons are a crown and protection for their fathers". Moreover, Avraham, who saved Noach, was himself saved from the furnace in the merit of his grandson Ya'akov, as it says in Isaiah (29:22), "therefore says the Lord concerning the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham".

This startling concept is one that we participate in daily. The Siduro Shel Shabbos discusses the verse (Shmos 14:30), "and the Lord saved Israel on that day". He explains that Hashem performed the great miracle of splitting of the Red Sea, though both the Egyptians and the fleeing Jewish nation were idolators, because the Jewish nation would praise Hashem for their salvation daily ("az Yashir" in the daily morning prayers). This daily recitation at the end of pesukei d'zimar substantiates the historical acts.

This fascinating idea is highlighted in this week's parsha of Vayechi. When Yaakov insists on giving preference to Ephraim, though he was younger than Menasheh, he insists "I know, my son, I know (that he is the first born). He, too, will be a people, and he too will be great, Gideon for whom Hashem will perform a miracle is destined to come from him. But his younger brother will be greater than he, Joshua being destined to descend from Ephraim, will inherit the land and teach Torah to Israel" (Bereishis 48:19 according to Rashi). "And he placed Ephraim before Menashe." Though Menashe was the firstborn and perhaps superior to his brother, Ephraim took precedence because of the future.

If this is true based upon Yaakov's prophetic abilities, than certainly Hashem, who knows the future, operates with this principle. Hashem substantiates Yaakov's preference of Ephraim over Menashe when arranging the order of the princes bringing their gift offerings at the dedication of the mishkan (sanctuary). On the seventh day of the dedication ceremonies an offering was brought by the Prince of Ephraim and on the eighth day, by the Prince of Menashe (Bamidbar 7:48).

The Yitav Panim explains that this provides further incite into the blessing we recite prior to lighting the Chanukah menorah. In the blessing, we thank Hashem for the miracles performed on behalf of our ancestors, in those days at this time. The final phrase, "bazman hazeh", is understood by the Yitav Panim as not only clarifying the date, but that it is in the merit of nowadays. Hashem performed the miracle of Chanukah then, though they were not fully deserving of it, because of "bazman hazeh", His seeing that in the future generations would sing His praises, thanking Hashem for this miracle and salvation from our enemies. Once again the future saved the past!

The powerful, insightful lesson that emerges is the phenomenal worth of each individual. Every action is important and significant, not only for the individual and future generations, but to vindicate the kindness that Hashem did for our ancestors, after all Hashem puts his trust in us!

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Sent: Tuesday, December 17, 2002

KING OF THE WORLD

AARON FEIGENBAUM

In this week's parsha, in perhaps one of the most touching scenes in the Torah, Yaacov Avinu, lying on his deathbed, gathers his children together to bless them. One by one Yaacov goes through the ranks divvying out the blessings that would shape the future of each tribe. Upon reaching his fourth son, Yehuda, Yaacov blesses, "Yehuda Yoducha Achecha", "Yehuda your brothers will know you" (□). Rashi comments that the blessing refers to the future appointment of Yehuda's descendants to be the kings of Klal Yisrael. Indeed, Ramban a few pesukim later on the words "Lo yassur shevet meyehuda" comments that this affirmed that the monarchical chain of Klal Yisrael would run through the descendants of Yehuda.

The Medrash on location (98:6) offers a different interpretation of this pasuk. Yehuda yoducha achecha means not that your brothers will know you, but that they will be known by you, that is to say, they will be called by your name. It should not surprise us then that throughout the generations Jews have indeed been called in some way or another "Yehuda". In Modern Hebrew the term for a Jew is Yehudi, in German Jude, its Yiddish counterpart Yid, and even the terms English Jew and Judaism are all obvious variations of the name Yehuda, or Judah. It behooves then to understand what it was about Yehuda that was so special that until this day we are called by his name.

It is quite obvious that the largest portion in the Torah dedicated to Yehuda is the story of Yehuda and Tamar. One of the interesting things about this story is its placement in the Torah. Parshas Vayeshev deals solely with the story of Yosef. The parsha begins with Yosef's dreams and ends with Yosef being sold as a slave to Egypt and his eventual imprisonment there. What is interesting is that breaking up Parshas Vayeshev, and the story of Yosef, at almost the exact midpoint, is the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Rashi on location (□) tells us that these two sections of the Torah, the stories of Yosef and Yehuda, are juxtaposed to tell us that after the sale of Yosef the brothers began to look down at Yehuda. They saw that the sale of Yosef, a plan conceived by Yehuda, had brought tremendous pain and suffering to their father and they pinned their guilt on Yehuda. The brothers said to Yehuda, "you told us to sell him, had you told us to return him to our father we would have listened to you", and thus the pain that Yaacov now feels is your fault. It is due to this change in attitude towards Yehuda that the Torah tells us now the story of Yehuda and Tamar, so that we too, if only for a short while, should look down at Yehuda.

This Rashi, and in reality the claim of the brothers against Yehuda, is phenomenal. The brothers wanted to kill Yosef, and under the advice of Reuven, unaware of his true intent to save Yosef, they threw Yosef into a pit of certain death. It was Yehuda who stepped out from amidst his brothers and saved Yosef. By convincing the brothers to sell Yosef, Yehuda had spared his life from his brothers who were going to kill him. How then could it be that the brothers blamed Yaacov's pain over the loss of Yosef on Yehuda? After all, had it been up to them Yosef would have been dead.

What arises from this exchange between the brothers and Yehuda is a tremendous life lesson. Yehuda was what for our purposes we can call the 'coolest' guy in the bunch. For some reason whenever he spoke everyone listened. Indeed, "if you would have told us to return him to his father, we would have listened to you", and returned him unharmed, despite our volition to kill him. Yehuda was a leader, and in the episode of Yosef's sale, Yehuda failed his people and thus lost popularity amongst them. Yehuda though would regain his status through accepting the responsibility of his actions with Tamar, and assuming responsibility of Binyamin, assuring him a safe return to his father.

It should not surprise us then that Yehuda, on an individualistic as well as nationalistic level, is given the blessing of yoducha achecha. On an individualistic level Yehuda was the natural leader amongst the brothers, the one they all looked to in their time of need, and it is thus only logical that Yehuda's descendants would serve as the leaders, the kings, of Klal Yisrael. On a nationalistic level as well it is the nature of Klal Yisrael to be a world leader, an ohr lagoyim, and thus we too as a nation are called leaders, Yehudim.

What we have to realize however, is that just as Yehuda was looked down upon by those whom he was supposed to lead because he failed to lead them in the proper direction, so too if we fail to lead correctly we will be looked down upon, individually by our friends, and nationalistically by the nations of the world. Individually amongst our own friends and communities, and as a nation as a whole we must be ever so careful to set a proper example of how to act in any and all situations so that we can avoid the shame of being failed leaders, and assume our rightful position as kings of the world.

From: Rabbi Riskin's Shabbat Shalom List [parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il]
Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2002 To:
Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il Subject: Shabbat Shalom:
PARSHAT VAYECHI BY RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - The Book of Genesis concludes with this week's Torah portion, delineating the specific blessings - and prophetic descriptions - which Grandfather Jacob, Yisrael Sabba, bestows upon each of his twelve sons, destined to become the twelve tribes of Israel, and then describes the death and funeral of the last of the patriarchs as well as the death of his beloved son Joseph, Grand Vizier of Egypt.

Indeed, the very last picture we have of Joseph is of this most successful Jew - a penniless immigrant from the land of Canaan who has risen to fame and fortune in his adopted country as the most powerful individual in Egypt - doubtless seeing his picture in the cover of the most popular Egyptian magazines and his economic and international expertise cited in every learned Egyptian journal. Joseph has even become the patriarch in his own right of a new dynasty developed in Egypt: ...And Joseph lived one-hundred-and-ten years. Joseph saw grandchildren born to (his son) Efraim, and the children of Makhir the son of Menashe were born on the knees of Joseph (Genesis 50:24).

In the heels of such spectacular professional and familial success in the land of Egypt, the ringing declaration of Zionism and devotion to the homeland of Israel in the very next verse - a verse with which the Book of Genesis virtually concludes - takes the superficial reader with surprise and hardly seems a logical outcome for the situation at hand: And Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die; G-d will surely remember you and will bring you up from this land to the land which was sworn to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And Joseph abjured the children of Israel, saying: G-d will surely remember you; you must bring up my bones (to Israel) from this (place) (Genesis 50:25). The very last - and following - verse of Genesis merely records in a dispassionate fashion Joseph's death and embalment - which would make the transport of his remains easier - at age 110.

If any thing, we might have expected Joseph to command his siblings and progeny to remain patriotic to Egypt, the country which had enabled him to rise to unprecedented heights and which had saved the entire family from ignominious death by famine. Remember that it was Joseph who had apparently felt constricted and constrained in the sheep-grazers' land of Israel, who had dreamed of economic success in the form of sheaves of grain in the more sophisticated and agriculturally-oriented center of Egypt, who had even dared dream of international if not cosmic recognition and obeisance as a world leader. To be sure, a final plug for Zionism certainly seems in consonance with the Book of Genesis, wherein the first patriarch Abraham is given the commandment of aliyah as his very first charge from the Divine: Get you forth (for your own good) from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house to the land which I shall show you (Genesis 12:1). But such a message seems to ring false coming from Joseph at the crescendo of his success - no longer a stranger

in a strange land of Egypt but as one who has more than earned the right to call Egypt his home!

It seems to me that a more careful reading of the text will reveal the source of Joseph's disillusionment with his adopted country and explain his death-bed request to be buried in Israel. The last chapter of the Book of Genesis opens immediately following the death of Jacob, upon which

Joseph falls upon the face of his father, weeps over him and kisses him (Genesis 50:1). He then commands the doctors to embalm the body and decrees a seventy-day mourning period throughout Egypt. What now follows in the text, however, is almost inexplicable in its between-the-lines insinuation: "...And Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh (the servants, according to most commentaries) saying, 'If please I have found favor in your eyes, speak please into the ears of Pharaoh, saying that my father made me take an oath, saying, behold I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me. And now may I please go up to bury my father, and then I shall return' " (Genesis 50:4,5).

This hardly seems like the expected manner of preparation for an imperial trip to bury one's dead. Does the Vice-Roy of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, have to obsequiously beg the servants of Pharaoh to whisper into the despot's ear the oath his aged father made him swear to uphold? Should Joseph not have been able to speak to Pharaoh directly about his own father's funeral? Indeed, the very round-about nature of the request causes one of the Biblical commentaries, Rav David Pardo, to suggest that Joseph had lost his exalted position at this juncture - that he has been fired as Grand Vizier!

The true explanation may be much simpler: Joseph didn't lose his job, but he did become aware of the sensitive nature of his position. As long as he was involved in issues relating to the welfare of Egypt, he was the Vice-Roy of Egypt, the Grand Vizier. However, the moment he had to deal with a personal matter of burying his father in Israel, he became the Jew who was suspected of dual loyalty. That's why, according to the Ramban, Joseph had to trouble his aged father to take the arduous journey to Egypt in order to feed his family rather than visit his father himself and send grain from Egypt to Israel to sustain his relatives. That is why he must beg the servants to prepare Pharaoh for his burial trip to Israel. Now, perhaps for the first time, Joseph realizes that despite his apparent power he still remains the Jew, the eternal outsider, whose true loyalty to Egypt will always be suspect. He has learned that it is in Egypt, not in Israel, that a Jew must feel constrained and constricted. And so he, Joseph, commands his family with his dying breath to bury his bones in Israel, which is our only true homeland.

Moreover, Joseph probably also realized that all of his grandiose cosmic dreams can only be realized from Israel, the source of ethical monotheism for the world. After all, Jacob's dream of uniting heaven and earth can only be realized - according to the vision of the patriarch - when G-d restores him to Israel. You will remember that in Jacob's dream the Almighty is standing above the ladder uniting heaven and earth, and is guaranteeing that Jacob will return to Israel. Indeed, it is the land of Israel which will unite all of humanity as well as heaven and earth when the Torah which comes from Zion and Jerusalem will inspire swords to be turned into plowshares, and the knowledge of G-d to fill the earth. The mission of Israel is indeed to transform and perfect the world in the image of ethical monotheism - but this will only be accomplished by Israelites living in Israel and Jerusalem, true to their tradition, with their national lifestyle expressing the message of peace and harmony which will inspire all of humanity to accept the seven laws of Biblical morality.

Shabbat Shalom.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at:

<http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>

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From: RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY [rmk@torah.org] Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2002 To: drasha@torah.org Subject: Drasha - Vayechi - Mixed Blessings
Parshas Vayechi Mixed Blessings
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
People usually learn from their mistakes. It seems, albeit on the surface, that our father Yaakov does not.

The Talmud in Shabbos 10b explains: "As a rule, one should never differentiate between children. For it was due to Yaakov's favoring Yoseph that led to our exile in Egypt." The Talmud, of course, is referring to the tragic chain of events that were spurred by the special display of love shown to Yoseph. Jealousy ensued amongst his brothers. Eventually they sold him to Egypt, and the spiral of events led to a 210-year exile in that land. We would think that Yaakov would have resolved never to favor one child over another. He doesn't. This week the Torah relates to us that Yaakov blesses Yoseph's children, Menashe and Ephraim. In addition to singling out those grandchildren for a blessing, he does another provocative act. He switches the order of their blessings, as he blesses Ephraim, Yoseph's younger child, before Menashe, the older one. There are two points we must analyze. Why did Yaakov, still reeling from the terrible ordeal he endured due to favoring Yoseph, overtly display his preferences towards the next generation? Was he not fearful of evoking jealousy among all his grandchildren who were first cousins of Menashe and Ephraim? Also, why did he switch the first and second child in the same family? Was he not fearful of, once again, evoking jealousy among brothers?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l had one steadfast rule subsequent to delivering his daily lecture at Yeshiva Kol Torah in Jerusalem. After he finished discussing a particular sugya (Talmudic topic), and proceeded to the next sugya, no one was allowed to ask a question about the previous one. This approach would prevent confusion among the many students in attendance. It was therefore to the amazement of all the pupils when Rabbi Auerbach entertained a question from an otherwise very quiet student on a topic he had finished discussing twenty minutes prior. He proceeded to backtrack to the earlier topic and reexamined the entire thought process in intricate detail. All the students were astounded. They had distinctly remembered their Rebbe explaining everything clearly the first time. After the lecture a few of the older students approached the sage to question his favoring the younger student with his departure from an otherwise sacred rule.

Suddenly they realized that the student in question had been at the Yeshiva for almost a year without ever asking a question in the middle of a discourse. Today was the first time he mustered the courage to ask. Had the Rosh Yeshiva dispensed with the question as normal procedure would have dictated, he may never have asked again. Rav Auerbach departed from protocol and fear of invoking jealousy to give the young student a new confidence that would help him emerge as a true scholar."

My grandfather zt"l, once explained to me that there are certain actions that must be taken without fear of invoking jealousy. Certain children need more attention, more care, and more encouragement. You must do what is correct in certain circumstances and hope that the other siblings will understand. Yaakov's grandchildren all lived under his tutelage in the relative security of a traditional society. There were scores of cousins, uncles and aunts whose presence lent an atmosphere of ancestral observance. Yoseph's children were unfortunately raised in a society wrought with idolatry. Their only link to tradition was the steadfast memories that Yoseph brought with him in his sojourn. Thus, Yoseph's children needed special blessing.

Reb Yaakov continued, "Yaakov Avinu also understood that even in Yoseph's family there was a difference in the children. Menashe, the first-born was thus named as a grace to Hashem who allowed Yoseph to forget the terrible hardship he endured both in Egypt and in his father's household. Ephraim, on the other hand, is so named as a recognition of Yoseph's prosperity in a difficult land.

"Menashe represents the memories of the 'Old World.' As long as there is an attachment to that world, perhaps there is less need for the blessing of the sage. But if the child represents the prosperity of the 'New Country,' it is very likely that he may cast off his heritage and seek a totally new culture and inheritance. That child needs special warmth and blessings -- before any other child"

There are times when conventional protocol is out-of-place. When dealing with special needs, special conduct must overrule the norm. One must weigh the needs of the individual and the reactions of others. The proper decision will benefit both.

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From: Ohr Somayach [ohr@ohr.edu] Sent: Sunday, December 15, 2002
To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Vayechi
* TORAH WEEKLY * from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
Highlights of the weekly Torah portion
Parshat Vayechi For the week ending 21 December 2002 / 16 Tevet 5763
Sponsored by the Kof-K Kosher Supervision www.kof-k.org | info@kof-k.org

A Kind People

"Yosef's brothers perceived that their father was dead..." (50:15)

I once saw a cartoon in "Punch" magazine. A man was lying on a psychiatrist's couch looking disturbed. The psychiatrist said to him, "The trouble with you is that you're paranoid. Ask anyone!"

We are sensitive creatures. The smallest unthinking remark can wound us deeply. The Torah gives us a mitzva to be extremely careful not to hurt the feelings of others. On the other hand, we have a mitzva not to assume that other people are trying to do us down. We are commanded to judge the actions of others favorably and this is especially difficult, as with all things, when it applies to ourselves. It's all too easy to "read" the words and actions of others completely wrongly.

When the spies returned from scouting the land of Canaan, they reported negatively that it was "a land that devours its inhabitants." Why? Because everywhere they went, there were funerals going on. Rashi explains that G-d had arranged it that way so that the spies could go about their work unhindered. They, however, took this kindness and misinterpreted it. If we have a mitzva to judge our fellow Jew favorably, how much more should the spies have judged G-d's providential guidance favorably.

Similarly, in this week's Torah portion, after Yaakov's death, the brothers "perceived that their father was dead," meaning they perceived a change in Yosef's attitude toward them. During Yaakov's lifetime, Yosef often invited the family to dine with him and received them all with great warmth. With Yaakov's passing, the dinner invitations ceased.

The brothers then assumed that the only reason they had been invited during Yaakov's lifetime was out of Yosef's respect for his father. They thought that with Yaakov's demise, Yosef's latent animosity to them was now surfacing.

They were wrong. Yosef stopped inviting them for another reason entirely.

After his father's death, Yosef was faced with a dilemma. Whenever Yaakov would dine with Yosef, Yaakov would forgo his honor and insist that his son sit at the head of the table as befitted the viceroy of Egypt. After his father's passing, however, Yosef was uncomfortable at the thought of taking precedence over Reuven and Yehuda. On the other hand he could not easily demean his stature as viceroy by taking a "back seat."

To solve the issue he avoided the issue by not inviting them at all. When it comes to the feelings of others we must always try and think how this will "read" to the other person, to try and put ourselves in their place as much as possible. And when we feel slighted by our fellow Jew, we must always remember that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish People is that we are a kind people, a people whose nature is not to wound or to hurt.

Sources: Midrash Tanchuma

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
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From: Menachem Leibtag [tsc@bezeqint.net] Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2002

[Par-reg]PARSHAT VA'YCHI

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [http://www.tanach.org] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag
RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG

PARSHAT VAYECHI Blessings - we find so many of them in Sefer Breishit, particularly in Parshat Vayechi. What are they all about?

In our shiur, we will first distinguish between three different types of blessings that we have encountered thus far in Sefer Breishit ('bechira', 'bechora' and 'bracha'). Based on these distinctions, we will then attempt to better understand what transpires when Yaakov blesses Yosef in the first chapter of Parshat Vayechi.

INTRODUCTION Recall (from our shiur on Parshat Toldot) that we identified two categories of blessings to explain the nature of Yitzchak's blessings to Yaakov and Esav. Those were: (1) 'bechira' and (2) 'bracha'.

We used the name 'bechira' to classify G-d's special blessing to Avraham Avinu that his offspring ('zera') would inherit the 'promised' land ('eret'). G-d first bestowed this blessing upon Avraham Avinu at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha (see 12:1-3) and subsequently repeated it numerous times not only to Avraham, but also to Yitzchak and Yaakov. By tracing these blessings, we were able to show how the 'bechira' process emerged as a primary theme in Sefer Breishit. In contrast, we used the more general term 'bracha' to classify a blessing of personal destiny bestowed by a father onto his son [or sons]. As examples, we cited Noach's blessings to his three sons (see 9:26-27), and Yitzchak's blessing of prosperity and leadership that were intended for Esav, but 'stolen' by Yaakov [see chapter 27].

Now, in Parshat Vayechi, as the 'bechira' process nears its conclusion, we find how Yaakov bestows blessings of prosperity and success upon his children. Even though these would seem to fall under our category of 'bracha', when we take a closer look at these blessings, we will need to add an additional category to better appreciate their meaning.

YAAKOV'S BLESSING TO YOSEF - BECHIRA or BECHORA? Before Yaakov blesses all of his children in chapter 49, he first bestows a special blessing upon Yosef and his two children, as described in chapter 48.

To understand the purpose of this special blessing, we must consider not only its content, but also its context. We begin our study by examining Yaakov's opening statement to Yosef, when he arrives with his two sons (see 48:1-2). We quote this pasuk in Hebrew in order to highlight its textual parallels to earlier blessings to the Avot: [And Yaakov said to Yosef]: "KEL SHAKAI nir'ah eilai [appeared to me] be-Luz be-eret Canaan va-yevarech oti, va- yomer eilai, [and blessed me saying:] 'Hineni MAFRECHA ve-HIRBITICHA u-netaticha li-khal amim, ve- natati et ha-ARETZ ha-zot le-ZAR'ACHA acharecha achuzat olam'" (see 48:3-4).

At first glance, this blessing appears to resemble the blessings that we have defined thus far as 'bechira'. To show how, let's quote the almost identically blessing of 'bechira' that Yitzchak had bestowed upon Yaakov prior to his departure from Eretz Canaan (when running away from Esav):

[Textual parallels are highlighted by CAPS.] [And Yitzchak said to Yaakov]: "ve-KEL SHAKAI yevarech otcha ve-YAFRECHA ve-YARBECHA ve-hayita li-khal amim - va-yiten lecha et birkat Avraham lecha u-leZAR'ACHA itach, le- rishtecha et ERETZ megurecha..." (see 28:3-4).

Similarly, we find an additional parallel blessing when G-d officially confirmed this 'bechira' (to Yaakov) upon his return to Eretz Canaan (again at Bet El): [And G-d spoke to Yaakov saying] "ani KEL SHAKAI, PREH u-RVEH, goy u-khal amim yhiyeh mi-meka... ve-et ha-ARETZ asher natati le-Avraham u-leYitzchak lecha etna, u-leZAR'ACHA acharecha eten et ha-ARETZ" (35:11-12).

Considering these parallels, Yaakov's opening statement to Yosef in Parshat Vayechi would appear to convey this same message, i.e. that Yaakov is now bestowing the blessing of 'bechira' upon Yosef - and hence, possibly to the exclusion of his brothers! [If so, this would be quite problematic, for it implies that the 'bechira' process will now continue only through Yosef.] However, when we consider the context of these psukim (i.e. 48:3-5), it becomes quite clear that Yaakov is not blessing Yosef with the 'bechira'. [Recall that only G-d can confirm 'bechira', and not the Avot themselves.] Rather, Yaakov first informs Yosef about his own 'bechira' as background for the new blessing that is about to bestow - a blessing which we will now categorize as 'bechora':

THE 'BECHORA' GOES TO THE SON OF RACHEL To explain this point, let's take a careful look at what Yaakov now states concerning the status of Yosef's two children: "Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt... shall be mine; Ephraim and Menashe are to me like Reuven and Shimon" (48:5).

For some reason, Yaakov decides to grant Yosef a special status. Indeed, all twelve brothers are 'chosen'; nonetheless Yosef receives a DOUBLE portion ("pi-shnayim"). Ephraim and Menashe are to be considered 'shvatim' (tribes) - a status equal to that of Reuven and Shimon.

In 'Torah terms', we conclude that Yaakov has awarded Yosef the 'bechora' - for "pi- shnayim" [the double portion] is the special Biblical rights of the firstborn son. [See Devarim 21:17 re: 'mishpat ha- bechora'.] This neatly explains why Yaakov prefaces this blessing of 'bechora' by first quoting G-d's blessing of 'bechira'. Before bestowing the 'bechora', Yaakov

must first explain to Yosef that his special status of 'bechor' is being granted within the framework of the 'bechira' process (see 48:4). It is because the 'bechira' process has reached its completion (with G-d's choice of Yaakov and all of his children), that it is now incumbent upon Yaakov to grant the 'bechora' to one of his twelve children. Yaakov thus neither chooses nor rejects any of his children. He simply awards Yosef with the 'bechora', even though Reuven was born first. In essence, Yaakov has chosen the first-born child of Rachel over the first-born child of Leah. To prove that Yaakov's blessing is 'bechora' (and not 'bechira'), simply note Yaakov's next statement: "But children born to you after them shall be yours; their inheritance shall be included under the name of their brothers" (48:6).

Should Yosef have any additional children, their portion must be included within the portions of Menashe and Efraim. Had Yosef been the only chosen son; then all of his children should have received special status. However, since he has now become the family 'bechor', he receives a double portion, but no more. Any other children that he may have must be included within this double portion. This interpretation also neatly explains the reason for Yaakov's next statement concerning Rachel's death (which otherwise would seem to be totally unrelated): "When I was returning from Padan, Rachel died suddenly during that journey, while we were still some distance from Efrata [and thus even farther away from Chevron!], and therefore I buried her on the road..." (48:7).

This mention of Rachel's burial most probably relates directly to Yaakov's choice of Yosef as the 'bechor'. By choosing Yosef over Reuven, Yaakov has essentially chosen Rachel over Leah as his primary wife. However, this may come as a surprise to Yosef, for not only was Reuven born first, but Yosef's own mother (Rachel) was buried along the roadside, while Reuven's mother Leah was buried in Ma'arat Ha-Machpela - in the same burial spot where Yaakov himself wishes to be buried! [See 47:29-30.] Therefore, Yaakov now explains to Yosef that Rachel's burial on the roadside (rather than in Ma'arat Ha-Machpela) was due to unforeseen circumstances, and thus should not be interpreted as an indication of a lower status. On the contrary, despite Rachel's somewhat disrespectful burial, Yaakov still considers her as having been his 'primary' wife. [Note then when Yaakov had earlier expressed his concern about sending Binyamin to Egypt, he had made a similar statement: "And your servant, my father, said to us: As you know, MY WIFE bore me two sons, but one is gone..." (Yehuda quoting his father in 44:27).]

Therefore, even though Reuven is the firstborn of Leah, Yosef is awarded the family 'bechora', since he is the firstborn of Yaakov's primary wife, the "isha" whom he had originally intended to marry. A 'FLASHBACK' FROM PARSHAT TOLDOT At this point in the narrative (i.e. after 48:7), we find an interesting transition. Now that Yaakov has completed bestowing the 'bechora' upon Yosef, the focus of his blessing now shifts to his grandchildren, Efraim and Menashe - who consequently have now attained the status of 'shvatim' (tribes). As such, they also deserve blessings of personal destiny from Yaakov (i.e. 'bracha'), just as he will later bless all of the tribes (in chapter 49). However, when we read how Yaakov grants these blessings (in 48:8-20), we find several rather obvious 'flashbacks' to the blessings of Yitzchak in Parshat Toldot (see chapter 27). For example, both narratives describe an aging father who can barely see (48:10 vs. 27:1), and the 'switching' of blessing between two sons to the consternation of their father (48:17-19 vs. 27:6-9). Furthermore, in both narratives, we find the use of many similar verbs.

One could suggest that the manner by which Yaakov grants these blessing to Menashe and Efraim reflects his own traumatic experience, when he was instructed by Rivka to 'steal' the blessing that Yitzchak had intended for Esav. Even though Yaakov understands that Efraim may reach higher levels than Menashe, he insists upon blessing both of them together. Yaakov does not want these slight differences between Efraim and Menashe to cause strife between them in the future (as was the case between Yaakov and Esav). At this initial stage, he places both children together, bestowing upon them a joint blessing, while providing a small indication (by switching his hands) regarding the potential prominence of Efraim. Despite their different destinies, Efraim and Menashe will need to work together, as they will be part of the same nation, and Yaakov would like this unity to begin already at this initial stage.

'HA-MAL'ACH HA-GOEL' Now that we have discussed the general framework of Yaakov's blessing to Efraim and Menashe, let's take a closer look at the blessing itself (familiar to us from "kriyat shema al ha-mita"). To appreciate this blessing, we must consider the fact that Efraim and

Menashe had grown up with no contact with their uncles and cousins. To facilitate their integration with the rest of the family, Yaakov adds a special blessing: "ha-mal'ach ha-goel oti mi-kol ra - yevarech et ha-nearim" [G-d's angel who protected me (Yaakov) from all those who wanted to harm me, He should bless these children (to help them 'blend in'), "ve-yikare ba-hem shmi, ve-shem avotai - Avraham ve-Yitzchak..." [And they should be known by my name, and by the names of Avraham and Yitzchak (for they are part of the chosen family.) "ve-yidgu la-rov be-kerev ha-aretz" [and they should multiply within the land...] (see 48:15-16).

Yaakov very much wants Yosef's two sons to be identified with the rest of his family name; he therefore blesses them so that G-d should look over them with the same providence that helped Yaakov survive his confrontations with Esav and Lavan.

A TIME WILL COME... Yaakov concludes his blessing to Yosef by reminding him that a time will come when the 'chosen family' will return home: "And Yisrael said to Yosef: I am about to die, but G-d will be with you and return you to the land of your fathers..." (48:21).

Now that Yosef has been appointed as 'bechor', it becomes his responsibility to inform the future generations of this Divine promise. Yaakov is not sure how long it will be until G-d will lead them back to Eretz Canaan. Nevertheless, his children must transmit this tradition to THEIR children, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared to meet their destiny. It is precisely this message that Yosef repeats to his brothers and family on his deathbed, at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit: "And Yosef told his brothers, behold I am about to die, 've-Elokim pakod yifkod etchem' [G-d will surely remember you] and bring you from this land to the land which He promised by oath to give to Avraham, Yitzchak..." (50:24).

[Compare with 48:21, 46:3-4 & Shmot 13:13-22.]

Yaakov concludes this blessing with one last 'cryptic' statement to Yosef (that obviously requires some explanation): "And I am granting you one - SHCHEM - over your brothers, that I [will] have taken from the Amorites with my sword and bow" (see 48:22).

The commentators argue in regard the meaning of the word SHCHEM in this pasuk. Some understand that Yaakov is now giving the city Shchem to Yosef as an inheritance, but most explain that 'shchem' in this pasuk refers to an extra portion of inheritance that will be given to Yosef AFTER the conquest of the land. According to the latter interpretation, this final blessing forms an appropriate conclusion. After mentioning that G-d will one day return his offspring to Eretz Canaan (fulfilling 'brit bein ha-btarim' - 48:21), Yaakov explains that when that time comes, Yosef will receive an extra portion in the inheritance of the land, for the simple reason that he is the 'bechor' - congruent with the opening section of this blessing to Yosef. THE BLESSINGS OF PERSONAL DESTINY As the family 'bechora' has been awarded to Yosef, Yaakov now summons his entire family (see 49:1) in order to give a personal blessing to each of his sons. Although each son receives what the Torah describes as a 'bracha' (see 49:28 / "ish asher ke-virchato beirach otam"), not all these 'brachot' appear to be what one would call a 'blessing'. Reuven is told: "You are unstable as water, you shall no longer excel..." (49:4). Shimon and Levi are rebuked: "Let not my person be included in their council... For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen. Cursed be their anger..." (49:6-7). On the other hand, Yehuda and Yosef are emphatically blessed with both prosperity and leadership. Other brothers also receive blessings, albeit less promising than those of Yosef and Yehuda, but blessings nonetheless, as opposed to the sharp criticism hurled upon Shimon and Levi. What is the meaning of these 'brachot'? Do the individual traits of the brothers predetermine the fate of their offspring? Do Yaakov's blessings reflect the principle of determinism and negate the concept of 'bechira chofshit' (free will)?

One could suggest that Yaakov assumes the role of a 'father' (in his blessings to his children) more than the role of a 'prophet'. Let's explain: As a parent and the last forefather of G-d's special Nation, Yaakov must blend the goals of his family destiny with the realities of his life experience. His blessings, therefore, reflect the potential he sees within each of his children. The fulfillment of life goals requires a person to recognize his potential by considering both his good qualities and shortcomings. As Yaakov recognizes his children's varying strengths and weaknesses, he blesses them according to their individual capabilities and talents. Although these blessings do not necessarily guarantee the final outcome, they form a guide that can provide each son with a proper direction that can help achieve his potential. Yaakov does not intend his harsh castigation of Reuven, Shimon and Levi to result in ultimate condemnation.

Rather, he hopes that they will recognize their weakness of character and work towards its improvement. As clearly demonstrated in Levi's case, this sharp rebuke can later turn into blessing, as the Tribe of Levi later assumed an important leadership position (see Devarim 33:8-12!). Similarly, Yehuda and Yosef possess a potential for leadership that should be recognized by their offspring. However, this blessing does not guarantee that every descendant of Yehuda or Yosef will become a great leader. Even the kings of the House of David must be constantly conscious of their conduct, in order that they be worthy of exercising their leadership (see Yirmiyahu 22:1-5!). [This idea can help us understand most blessings (even 'birkat kohanim'!). A 'bracha' is not a simply mystic chant that determines a future set of events, rather it serves as a reminder to a person that he carries the potential to achieve a certain goal.]

Undoubtedly, the 'brachot' of Yaakov contain additional prophetic and metaphysical significance as well. Nonetheless, they do not negate the basic principle of 'bechira chofshit' [freedom of choice].

UNITY OR HARMONY In conclusion, our discussion can help us understand the underlying reason why G-d wanted Am Yisrael to consist of twelve distinct tribes. After all, if this nation's goal is to represent the ONE G-d, it would have been more logical that there be simply one tribe - thus forming one homogenous society! Furthermore, why must there continue to be friction between Yosef and Yehuda throughout the entire Tanach?

To explain why, recall our explanation of G-d's purpose in choosing a special nation (in wake of the events at Migdal Bavel). It was G-d's hope that this special Nation would lead all Seventy Nations towards a theocentric existence. For this purpose Avraham Avinu was chosen, and for this purpose the existence of 'shvatim' can serve as a model. Let's explain why: People, by their very nature, tend to group into individual societies, each developing its own national character, personality, goals and aspirations. These societies eventually develop into nations who may occasionally fight over opposing goals, or cooperate in working towards the realization of common goals. Through His agent, Am Yisrael, G-d hopes that all nations, while remaining distinct, will recognize G-d's purpose in His creation of mankind - and hence cooperate with each other towards the achievement of that goal. As we see in Yaakov's 'brachot' to his sons, each 'shevet' possesses its own unique character and singularity. The composite of all these qualities can be harnessed towards a common good. As G-d's model Nation, the cooperation between the 'Twelve Tribes of Israel' in the fulfillment of their Divine and national goals can serve as an archetype for the Seventy Nations to emulate. Through harmonious cooperation and the unifying force of a common goal (and with help of some good leadership), the Nation of Avraham becomes a 'blessing' to all nations (see 12:1-3). Mankind thus realizes its potential, and Am Yisrael fulfills its Divine destiny.

shabbat shalom, menachem

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This unexpected lengthening of the day for Chizkiyahu created a panic in the royal household of Babylon. The king, Merodach Baladon ben Baladon, was in the custom of dining three hours into the day and then sleeping until the ninth hour. When he arose that day the sun had retreated ten hours distance in the heavens and it was morning. Assuming that his servants had negligently allowed him to oversleep until the next morning he became so incensed that he wished to kill them. They then explained to him that it was still the same day which had been miraculously extended for the recovery of King Chizkiyahu. So impressed was he by this miracle that he sent a gift and letter of greeting to Chizkiyahu (Yeshayahu39:1). The letter was thus addressed: "Peace greetings to King Chizkiyahu, peace greetings to the City of Yerushalayim, peace greetings to the great G-d." Nebuchadnetzer, who would eventually become king and destroy the Beit Hamikdash, was the chief royal scribe at that time, but was away when this letter was written. Upon his return he asked his underlings how they had addressed the letter. "Is this how you address such a letter?" he challenged them. "You give G-d recognition as the Supreme Force and you list him last!" In response to his insistence that the order be switched they suggested that, as the critic of their effort, he personally pursue the messenger carrying the letter and change it. After taking four steps in that direction he was halted by the Angel Gavriel. Had he not been halted, noted Rabbi Yochanan, the power he would have gained from displaying such honor to Heaven might have enabled him to destroy. Maharsha and other commentaries point out that in midrashic sources it is recorded that he took only three steps, steps that gave him the power to destroy the Beit Hamikdash. This is why we conclude our central prayers by taking three steps back in honor of G-d and praying for the restoration of the Beit Hamikdash.

Sanhedrin 96a

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From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: Monday, December 16, 2002 To: dafyomi@ohr.edu Subject: Weekly DAFootnotes - Sanhedrin 93-99 * WEEKLY DAFOOTNOTES * from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu Historical and textual background from the week of Daf Yomi Sanhedrin 93-99 For the week ending 21 December 2002 / 16 Tevet 5763 Sponsored by the Kof-K Kosher Supervision www.kof-k.org | info@kof-k.org

Sanhedrin

THE THREE STEPS

Three passages in different parts of Tanach dovetail to reveal a fascinating historical incident that explains our custom of taking three steps back when concluding our silent prayer of Shmoneh Esrei.

After enjoying the miraculous delivery from the Assyrian forces of Sanncherib, the righteous King Chizkiyahu became mortally ill. He prayed to G-d for a recovery and was given a Heavenly sign by the Prophet Yishayahu that his prayers were accepted (Melachim II 20:1-11). That sign consisted of ten hours of daylight being added to the day. The significance of those ten hours emerges from another passage (Yeshayahu38:8) in which the prophet explained to the king that these were the hours withdrawn from the day his wicked father, Achaz, died and were now restored. The sun suddenly set ten hours before its time on that day in order that there would not be a lavish burial and eulogies.