

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet VAYECHI 5766

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THE THREE BARONS Rabbi Berel Wein -

In the nineteenth century in Jewish Europe there were three Jews whose wealth and social connections earned for them the title of nobility – of being a baron. Each of the three devoted efforts, wealth and time to help solve or at least alleviate the “Jewish problem” in Europe. But their tactics, aims and solutions were markedly different one from another. Baron Edmond de Rothschild of France was a scion of the famous and fabulously wealthy Rothschild banking family. He was a traditional Jew and in a most unlikely discussion with Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, the rabbi of Bialistok and one of the leaders of the Chovevei Tzion (Lovers of Zion) organization, he became interested in creating “colonies” for Jews in the Land of Israel. The “colonies” would eventually be self-sufficient, but the Baron was willing to foot the bills until that happened. Eventually there were thirty-nine such “colonies” many of which (such as Rishon Leziyon and Zichron Yaakov) have grown into major cities in Israel. Baron Rothschild was not a supporter of Theodore Herzl or of the early Zionist movement. He refused to advance to Herzl the fifteen million dollars that Herzl requested and that he wished to use in “buying” the Land of Israel from the sick and corrupt Ottoman Empire. Yet, he invested much more money than that in building the Land of Israel. His company, Carmel Wine Corporation, was founded in 1882 and continues to be the leading wine producer in Israel until this day. He later gave the company to the farmers and vintners of the company who ran it as a cooperative venture. The Rothschild family contributed funds for the building of the Knesset building in Jerusalem and there is a beautiful room in that building dedicated to the memory of the Baron. He was the *nadiv hayadua* – the great philanthropist of the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland.

Baron Moritz de Hirsch made his fortune in building railroads, especially in Russia for the Czar’s tyrannical government. Hirsch’s solution to the “Jewish problem” was to establish “colonies” for Jewish agriculture throughout the world except in the Land of Israel. He purchased land in South America, North America, Africa and attempted to recruit thousands of Russian Jews to move and populate those far flung locations. In the United States he established agricultural communities in the Dakotas, Tennessee, and New Jersey among other places. Most of his projects failed because they did not prove to be economically viable. One of his “colonies” was in Vineland, New Jersey, where a small Jewish community has survived until today. Vineland became famous as a center for raising chickens and distributing eggs. It also had vast asparagus farms. Perhaps Baron Hirsch’s most lasting memorial in the world to his efforts to solve the “Jewish problem” in Europe is the magnificent large synagogue and community of the Baron Hirsch Congregation in Memphis, Tennessee. It is one of the largest Orthodox synagogues and communities in the United States. I have visited there many times and the Baron’s picture may be found in the lobby. Nevertheless, in spite of all of his efforts and expenditures of vast sums of money, his dream of Jewish farmers the world over did not materialize. Needless to say, the Baron was not a supporter of Herzl or of the Zionist movement, deeming its program to be too fanciful, unrealistic and impractical.

The third Baron was Baron Horace Ginzburg. He was a resident of St. Petersburg in Russia and a person of significant influence in Jewish Russia in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His bent was towards assimilating the Jewish population into the general Russian population. He believed that with secular education, the modification of Jewish dress,

the acceptance of Russian language and culture by the Jews of Russia, the “Jewish problem” would be solved. He was one of the prime movers in the building of the great synagogue building in St. Petersburg, a synagogue that the more observant Jews there shunned. I visited that synagogue a dozen years ago when I was in St. Petersburg for a few days immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Baron Ginzburg’s seat in the synagogue, row one, seat one, still has his name attached to it by a plaque on the back of the seat. I sat down in his seat. It was most uncomfortable. I wondered what the Baron would think of the “Jewish problem,” the Jewish world, the State of Israel and his beloved Russia and St. Petersburg, as they exist today. Many are the thoughts and plans of humans, but the Lord’s plans are those that come to pass. This is true even when the human beings involved are barons.

Weekly Parsha VAYECHI Rabbi Berel Wein -

One of the most memorable human scenes portrayed in the Torah is that of Yaakov blessing his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephrayim. Yaakov takes the occasion and transforms it from being a purely personal one to becoming a national and eternal paradigm. “In you, my grandchildren, shall Israel always bless [future generations,] saying: May the Lord bless you as Ephrayim and Menashe.” Thus, from that moment onward, Jews bless their sons and grandsons with the words of our father Yaakov: May the Lord bless you as Ephrayim and Menashe.” I find it noteworthy that the blessing of generations in the Torah is one of a grandfather blessing grandchildren. The blessings of parents to children do not figure in the overall perspective of Jewish continuity and eternity in quite the same fashion and importance, as does the blessing of grandparents to grandchildren. We are all aware of the fact that there exists a special relationship and bond between grandchildren and grandparents. Only half-jokingly I have attributed this relationship to the fact that they have a common enemy. But the fact is that it is much less tension ridden and less difficult to be a grandparent than a parent. And the grandparent always sees one’s self beyond the grave through one’s grandchildren. Therefore, the accomplishments of grandchildren bring greater satisfaction to grandparents than to parents. Parents have a tendency to be less tolerant of their children’s independence and adventurism, while grandparents take a longer view of the situation. In the words of the Talmud: “Even if great wisdom may not be present in me, age and experience [also have their say.]”

The Talmud teaches us that if there be three consecutive generations of Torah scholars in a family then the Torah always finds an ability to make a home for itself in that family. I have found this statement to be true even when there is a later gap of generations regarding Torah scholarship or even observance within that family. I think that this is one of the reasons that Yaakov emphasized his blessing to his grandchildren. Yaakov has done his spiritual best as has his son Yosef. Now it is up to the next generation, to Menashe and Ephrayim. If they will continue in the ways and path of Yaakov, then the Jewish future is assured in the family and tribe of Yosef. The Torah will always come knocking at that family’s door and eventually someone will open that door to it. One of my great teachers in the yeshiva that I attended long ago defined success in life to us as follows: “If your grandparents and your grandchildren are both proud of you and your accomplishments, then you can claim success in life.” Yaakov strives for this success and therefore concentrates his blessings on his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephrayim. By so doing, he also instructs all later Jewish generations to concentrate their blessings on their grandchildren as well. Building the three-generation cord is the

certain key to Jewish survival and success. It is the ultimate blessing of past generations to the future leaders and builders of Israel. Shabat shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY—Parshat Vayechi

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from **Ohr Somayach** | www.ohr.edu

by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. Chazak!

INSIGHTS

Tranquility Base

"Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer." (49:14) Every year people pay over \$300 billion for prescription drugs.

Tranquilizers, sleeping pills, antidepressants and other Central Nervous System drugs account for an estimated \$76 billion of those sales. Approximately 10% - 20% of the world's population use tranquilizers and sleeping pills. Over the age of 60 years, the figure rises to 30%. Of this age group, many had tranquilizers prescribed at a much younger age and have become "accidental or involuntary addicts".

In the world in which we live, the price of tranquility is very high.

"He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer." Something doesn't quite make sense in this verse. If Yissachar saw that tranquility was good, why should he have "bent his shoulder to bear," why did he exert himself? If tranquility is so great, then why not take it easy? Kick back! Chill!

Obviously then the kind of tranquility of which Yissachar was thinking was not physical tranquility.

If we base our equilibrium on our physical well-being, we will always be a hostage to circumstance.

Imagine. You get to the airport and find that your flight has been delayed eight hours. When you finally board the plane, you discover that there's not enough food for you. You are sitting in an aisle seat and a quarter of an hour into the flight you discover that the person sitting next to you is suffering from chronic in-flight wanderlust (nasty, but fortunately not contagious). This person gets up and down from his seat on average about six times an hour. You arrive at your destination feeling like a shmatte. If our tranquility depends on our physical repose, life becomes a myriad of minor inconveniences sprinkled with some real bummers.

However, if we find our equanimity through bending our shoulders to bear the task of being better people closer to G-d, then we will have found our true tranquility base.

Sources; based on Ohr Yaheil, Tranquillizer information, Joan E. Gadsby, Market-Media International Corp. October 2003

Peninim on the Torah

by **Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum** -

PARSHAS VAYECHI

But 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 maneuvered his hands, for Menashe was the firstborn. (48:14)

Yosef placed emphasis on Menashe, because he was the firstborn, while Yaakov Avinu placed his right hand on Ephraim. Apparently, a deeper dialogue had ensued between the father and son to which the reader is not privy. What really happened here? The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, views this entire scene as a debate between Yaakov and Yosef concerning which of the two observances, Torah study or gemillus chasadim, performing acts of loving kindness, was more significant. Yaakov is known as the Amud haTorah, Pillar of Torah, for his devotion to Torah study. Clearly, for him, the study of Torah had the greatest significance. Yosef was the man devoted to acts of loving-kindness. He devoted himself to sustaining the world population during the years of famine.

Coinciding to Yaakov and Yosef, we find Menashe and Ephraim in similarly disparate functions. Menashe was his father's primary assistant. Consequently, his focus was on gemillas chesed. Ephraim spent his days in penetrating Torah study under the constant guidance and tutelage of his grandfather, Yaakov.

We now understand the basis for their debate. Yosef felt that chesed should precede Torah study. While Yaakov perhaps agreed in principle, he was concerned that a chesed that is not guided by Torah, one that is based upon compassion and humanitarianism, might lose its viability and legitimacy. It becomes a personal thing in which one acts kindly to those whom he feels are deserving of his favor. This is not the Torah's perspective on chesed. It must be Torah-oriented and Torah dictated. Thus, Yaakov placed Ephraim before Menashe, to indicate that Menashe's chesed must be guided by Ephraim's Torah.

Every day, in our daily Tefillah, we recite a selection from the Talmud Shabbos 127a, "These are the precepts whose fruit a person enjoys in This World, but whose fruit remains intact for him in the World to Come." The Baraisa continues with a detailed list of wonderful, social and humanitarian mitzvos, such as: honoring parents; early attendance in the synagogue; visiting the sick; arranging for the needs of a bride, etc. The Baraisa concludes with the famous words, v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam, "and the study of Torah is greater/equivalent to them all." Chazal imply that, regardless of the overriding significance of these mitzvos, the study of Torah takes precedence and supercedes them all. While this may certainly be true, the text seems to imply something else. The word k'neged is usually translated as opposite, as in "the study of Torah is opposite all of them." Essentially, the Baraisa should have said, v'talmud Torah oleh al kulam, "the study of Torah is above them." What is the meaning of the word k'neged, [standing] opposite them?

My rebbe, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explained that a significant lesson about living as a Torah Jew is being conveyed here. Every mitzvah, regardless of its humanitarian or social benefit, must be "stood up" opposite the Torah to determine the validity of the mitzvah. At times, one thinks and feels that his cause is noble and lofty, but after looking into the Torah and perusing its criteria for what is laudatory, one might perceive another aspect of the mitzvah. Involving oneself in building a shul is truly a lofty endeavor, but, if it is at the expense of another shul or if it will ultimately harm the unity of a community, it might no longer be viewed as an ideal mitzvah. The list goes on. Every wonderful undertaking must be held up to the Torah's purview. If it passes muster, then one should go for it. Otherwise, it does not only fail to be a mitzvah, but it might even be an infraction which will be more destructive than constructive.

"Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days." (49:1)

As Yaakov Avinu was about to take leave of this world, he blessed his sons, the Tribes of Klal Yisrael, individually, each coinciding with his personal character and G-d-given ability. Thus, each would direct his life towards achieving the mission for which he was most suitable and which would most complement the nation. Individualism is important, but, at times, if left unguarded, it can be the source of discord and rivalry. Yaakov emphasized each son's individuality in the hope that their separate missions would all focus upon one common goal. This was to be a heterogeneous community, each with its individual function, but each a part of the collective whole. No tribe was to infringe on another's function.

Throughout history, the results of such an impingement have proven disastrous. In a compelling, but poignant discourse, Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zl, addresses this reality. The disappearance of the Chashmonean lineage, according to the Ramban, was a direct consequence of this encroachment. As Leviim, they were to focus on the service in the Sanctuary - not on assuming monarchy, which was to be the sole domain of Shevet Yehudah. Each tribe must accept the individuality of its fellow tribe, or anarchy will result.

This idea, explains Rav Yaakov, applies to mitzvos as well. It is natural for one who excels in a particular mitzvah to develop a strong proclivity for that mitzvah, to the point that he feels it surpasses all other mitzvos. One who is well-to-do would naturally be inclined to feel that debt repayment takes a commanding role. Indeed, Chazal comment: "Hashem wanted Klal Yisrael to be meritorious. He, therefore, gave them the Torah and mitzvos in abundance." In his Pirush HaMishnayos at the end of Meseches Makkos, the Rambam explains this famous maxim to mean that if a Jew observes one solitary mitzvah with all of its detailed ramifications, it will lead to his eventual observance of all mitzvos. Over the years, individual groups have become identified with specific mitzvos, because of their special attention to fulfilling them properly.

Despite each group's unique method of observance, they must each realize that they are all part of an aggregate whole, and, thus, must respect the avodas Hashem, individual service, of their fellow Jews. It goes without saying that this applies only when they are all focused on serving Hashem in accordance with Halachah, as expounded by our Torah leaders throughout the ages. To underscore this point, Yaakov insisted that all of his sons be present when each son received his individual blessing. He was intimating to each son: take note of your brother's individuality, his distinctive character, his G-d-given talents and his specific role within Klal Yisrael.

Harmony is described as mutual respect. While we refer to shalom as peace, it does not necessarily mean a lack of difference. Concomitantly, machlokes, usually defined as dispute and contentiousness, does not necessarily have to be prohibited. In fact, quarreling in the name of Torah, whereby each group follows the opinion of a noted, reputed Torah scholar and sage, can even be beneficial. There is nothing wrong with one group leaning towards the Rambam, while the other tends to follow the Raavad.

Machlokes is ugly and evil when it originates from envy, rivalry, arrogance and pettiness. A machlokes l'shem Shomayim, a dispute for the sake of Heaven, not motivated by jealousy and antagonistic competitiveness, increases the glory of Heaven and promotes individuality and a multiplicity of thought.

This, says Rav Yaakov, was Yaakov's testament and legacy to his offspring. Each tribe is to have its own role. It was crucial that our nation not rest on the shoulders of one tribe. It must rest on the shoulders of all the Shivtei Kah. In the past, the gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, understood that in order to fight for the Torah ideal, it was critical to have a coalescence of outlooks, a diversity in Torah Judaism. This heterogeneity of opinion in Judaism is its source of strength. It is with regard to this divergence in perspective that Chazal say: Eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim Chaim. "These and those are the words of the Living G-d." Each group has its own unique concept of the "words of the Living G-d."

Rav Yaakov concludes with the words of Chazal at the end of Meseches Uktzim, "The Almighty found shalom as the only suitable vessel for His bounteous blessing." Shalom does not mean identical views. This is not only impossible; it is also impractical and undesirable. Shalom means harmony, where melody and counterpoint complement each other. There is no clashing - only understanding of the other's strength and an appreciation of their respective missions and contributions based upon the individual talents and abilities of each. Yaakov's goal was that all of his sons work in harmony with each other - cohesively - each contributing to further the Divine purpose. Harmony reigns when there is mutual respect. Discord is the result of small people interested only in themselves. Klal Yisrael achieves its zenith as a great nation when it is a cumulative effort of great people respecting each other.

Yehudah - you, your brothers shall acknowledge. (49:8)

Yehudah was elevated above his brothers. He would be the source of leadership and royalty. From him would descend the Davidic dynasty and Moshiach Tzidkeinu. The Midrash teaches us that Yehudah was to be so admired by his brothers that they would eventually refer to Jews as Yehudim, representing the entire nation. We wonder why the members of Klal Yisrael are not called Yisraelim, for the Patriarch who was renamed by Eisav's Angel after Yaakov exhibited incredible spiritual strength in overcoming him. Indeed, this question becomes more compelling when we take into consideration that our land is called Eretz Yisrael.

According to Targum Yonasan, the answer is given to us by Yaakov Avinu himself. Our forefather deferred the honor of having the nation named after him and, instead, gave it to Yehudah, because Yehudah confessed to his relationship with Tamar. This action indicated a strength of character that was so laudatory that Yaakov wanted the nation to be called by this name. We are called Yehudim, because Yehudah came forward and conceded his error.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, asks us to take a step back and reflect upon this statement. The entire Jewish nation goes by the name Yehudim, because Yehudah admitted guilt. This is an incredible statement. How often are we in a situation in which we seek every possible excuse not to concede guilt? How often do we quickly place the onus of guilt on everyone else - but ourselves? Undoubtedly, when one wrongfully places the blame on another Jew, this is sinful. I am referring, however, to the average person, who will go to any length to absolve himself of any guilt. He blames another person out of convenience, because he simply does not want to take the blame. This is the opposite of Yehudah, who resolutely came forward to accept liability for his actions.

A Jew must reflect upon his name and what it implies. Yehudi means concession and admission. It means accepting the burden and not looking to place it on others. This name was conferred upon us by Yaakov for a reason. We must learn to live up to our legacy if we are to be deserving of carrying the mantle of being a Yehudi.

He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear. (49:15)

The Daas Sofer distinguishes between tov, good, and naim, pleasant, in the fact that something which is tov, suggests an enduring form of goodness, while naim is of a more temporal nature. One who understands the depth of the Torah's goodness realizes that the joys of This World are ephemeral and do not last. Such a person will "lend his shoulder to bear" the yoke of Torah, regardless of the hardship that might be entailed in this endeavor. This is the underlying meaning of the pasuk. Such an individual sees menuchah, tranquility, which the Midrash interprets as a metaphor for Torah, as being good. He understands the true goodness of Torah and its enduring nature. He also sees that the eretz, the pleasures of This World, are na'emah, pleasant. Comprehending the fleeting character of worldly pleasure, he decides that it is only in the reflection of the absolute goodness of Torah that he will enjoy true serenity and joy.

Issachar is a strong-boned donkey... He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear. (49:15) Rashi applies the simile of a strong-boned donkey to describe Yissachar's spiritual role as the bearer of the yoke of Torah, regardless of how heavy it may seem. Is this true? What load does Torah entail? Is it not described as "sweeter than honey"? Certainly, the ben Torah, who devotes himself to Torah study, does not view this endeavor as being a toil. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains this with an insightful parable. A wealthy diamond merchant left for a business trip to a far-away country to purchase diamonds. He took with him three thousand dollars for the transactions and another four hundred dollars for traveling expenses. He was successful in his purchases, securing diamonds at a very reasonable price. He now had two hundred dollars for the return trip. As he was preparing to return home, he met another merchant at the hotel who approached him with an incredible opportunity. He had a few exquisite stones that he was willing to part with at a low price. The diamond merchant replied that while he normally would have been interested in such an opportunity, regrettably he was out of funds. The man listened and said that, nonetheless, he must view his diamonds and appreciate their brilliance. He explained that they were valued at thousands of dollars, but, since his reputation as a diamond broker had become tarnished by a group of irreputable dealers, he was compelled to sell at bargain prices any diamonds in his possession.

When the diamond dealer beheld the beauty of the diamonds, he was in a quandary. He had never seen such brilliant stones. Alas, what could he do? He was out of money. As a last resort, he decided to give the man a wild offer. "My friend, I have two hundred dollars left for traveling expenses. I am willing to forgo the luxuries to which I am accustomed when I travel. I will set aside twenty dollars to purchase the cheapest return ticket, and I will subsist on the least bit of food. I am doing all of this to purchase the diamonds. Are you willing to sell them for whatever money I have left?"

The man agreed to sell the diamonds, and the money exchanged hands. The diamond merchant placed the newly acquired diamonds in a special pouch as he prepared to leave for home. Allowing himself twenty dollars for his trip was the barest minimum, but he was willing to rough it in order to acquire the diamonds. Rough it, he did. Rather than purchase a first-class ticket, he opted to sit in the mail car. He ate no meals, existing only on whatever scraps he could pick up. Every time he became despondent over the lack of comfort, he would remove the pouch with the diamonds and just stare at their brilliance. This would console and encourage him. Sure, it was difficult now, but soon he would arrive home and be able to sell these diamonds at an enormous profit.

As he stood near the dining car waiting for some scraps of food, he was surprised to meet another wealthy merchant, a good friend with whom he had shared many business trips. "Why do you not join me for dinner?" the man asked. "The menu is impressive, and the food is exquisite." Not willing to cover up the truth, the merchant revealed the entire story to the man. He even showed him the diamonds, to support the reason for his austere demeanor. After listening to the story and seeing the diamonds,

the man basically agreed with the merchant. "I have a question, however," the man said. "of all people, you are used to luxury. You were raised in the cradle of wealth, and it has become a way of life for you. How could you give it all up? How could you control yourself during this long return trip home?"

The merchant replied, "You are absolutely correct. Under normal circumstances, I could never have done this. Every time I become depressed, or hungry, I take out my pouch filled with the incredible stones, and I just gaze at them. Suddenly, it all becomes worth while." This is what life is all about, writes the Chafetz Chaim. We descend to this world for the sole purpose of acquiring Torah and mitzvos, our spiritual diamonds. The criteria for acquiring these precious stones is clearly delineated by Chazal in Pirkei Avos 6:4, "This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation - but toil in the Torah! In other words, if one wants to achieve the greatest reward, he must relinquish something. His lifestyle must change, as he rejects the petty and the fancy, so that he can use whatever time and energy he has to acquire eternity.

While his neshamah, soul, is certainly in agreement with this lifestyle, his body which is spurred on by his yetzer hora, evil inclination, has a difficult time accepting the various encumbrances which this lifestyle seems to bring. What should he do when faced with this dichotomy of emotions? His response should parallel that of our diamond merchant who took out the pouch filled with the precious diamonds that he had acquired. So, too, one should delve into the enormous reward in store for him in exchange for eschewing a tempting lifestyle of luxury and squander. He should "bend over" his shoulder willingly and with great enthusiasm to carry the yoke of Torah.

This is the underlying meaning of our pasuk. Yissachar, who personifies the ben Torah, is to accept the yoke of Torah on a 24/7 basis, in a manner similar to a donkey who always carries his load. If you wonder, how does he do it, the answer lies in the conclusion of the pasuk: He sees the tranquility that is good, and the land that is pleasant, references to the Gan Eden Above and the gan eden of This World, represented by the life and peace and harmony, far removed from the strife and crisis that is so much a part of life on the "outside."

Va'ani Tefillah

Klal hatzarich l'Prat - if the generalization must be followed by a specification (for clarification purposes).

There are circumstances which impede the use of the Klal u'Prat or Prat u'Klal principles. In cases where the introductory Klal or Prat is not clear and needs an explanatory statement following it, we do not abide by the usual rules governing Klal u'Prat. A case where this rule comes to light is the mitzvah of Kisui ha'dam, covering the blood of a slaughtered fowl or chayah, non-domesticated animal, after Shechitah, Ritual slaughtering. The Torah writes V'kisahu b'afar, "He is to cover (its blood) with dirt." In this case, the Torah begins with a generalization that the blood is to be covered. Unless we apply the clarification of the Prat, b'afar, with dirt, however, we have no clue as to which substance may be used for covering the blood. One might think that it could be covered with anything - even placing it into a sealed box. Thus, the specification of "dirt" teaches us that a mere covering of any sort is invalid. It must be a covering of a "dirt-like" substance, whereby the blood is completely intermingled with the covering. Similarly, when the following Klal is essential for the purpose of clarifying the preceding Prat, it is not subject to the usual rules governing Prat u'Klal.

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"RavFrاند" List - Parshas VaYeChl -
King David Took His Precedent From Yaakov

The Yalkut Shimoni writes on the words “The L-rd is my shepherd” [Tehillim Chapter 23:1] that herding sheep is among the most lowly of professions. Every day, the shepherd is working hard out in the field with his staff and backpack. Yaakov our Patriarch himself described what a hard job shepherding is: “By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes” [Bereshis 31:40].

Why then does Dovid HaMelech [King David], in this most famous Psalm, compare the Almighty to a shepherd? Wouldn't we be surprised if we were to encounter a Psalm beginning with the words “Mizmor L'Dovid - The L-rd is my trash collector?”

The Medrash explains that Dovid HaMelech had precedent. Yaakov had already called the Almighty a shepherd, as it is written (in his blessing to Menashe and Ephraim in this week's parsha): “The L-rd who shepherds me (ha-roeh osi)” [Bereshis 48:15]. This Medrash implies that Yaakov's calling the Almighty a shepherd was itself a radical metaphor. Neither Avraham, or Yitzchak, nor even Yaakov, prior to this point, use this comparison. The use here is a chidush [novelty].

Yaakov was on his deathbed. He called his children in. This was one of his last opportunities to speak to his family. At this juncture in time, Yaakov suddenly decided to “break new ground” and refer to G-d as a shepherd. What is the meaning of this?

I saw a beautiful insight addressing this issue from Rav Matisyahu Solomon. In last week's parsha, Pharaoh asked Yaakov how old he was; Yaakov answered that he was 130 years old. But then Yaakov added something that Pharaoh did not explicitly ask: “Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the life spans of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns.” [Bereshis 47:8-9]

In his Torah commentary, the Ramba"n notes the strangeness of this dialogue. First of all, Pharaoh's question to Yaakov was somewhat inappropriate, if not rude, as the first question he asks when he first meets his distinguished foreign guest, the father of his Viceroy. Yaakov's response is even more puzzling. Why does he complain to Pharaoh? How does he even know that he won't live as long as his forefathers did?

The Ramba"n explains that Yaakov was actually primarily explaining, rather than complaining. Yaakov appeared exceedingly old, well beyond his actual age. Pharaoh was astonished to see such an old looking man, because most people in that era did not live so long. Yaakov was a sight to behold. He looked like he must have been 180! Pharaoh was startled at the peculiar sight and without thinking about diplomatic protocol, he blurted out “My gosh, how old are you?” Yaakov explained that he was not as old as he looked. He was actually “only” 130 years old, but he looked much older than he actually was because he had such a hard life. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos claim that it was still not proper for Yaakov to utter the words “Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life.” A Jew is not supposed to talk like that. The Heavenly response, so to speak, was: “You are complaining about your life? I saved you from Eisav and from Lavan. I returned Dina to you. I returned Yosef to you. How dare you complain that your years are few and bad?” The Medrash says that the number of words Yaakov uttered in this complaint (33 words) was deducted from his lifespan (33 years).

Rav Matisyahu Solomon explains that Yaakov is now on his deathbed. He is making an accounting for his soul (cheshbon hanefesh). He is reviewing the events of his life. Yaakov recalls that statement of complaint to Pharaoh. It haunts him. On his deathbed, he realizes that it was not right to talk like that. “In retrospect, I see now that all that I had imagined was terrible and bad and bitter was in the end all for my welfare. I now see the Master of the World in a light in which I had never viewed Him before.”

It was at this moment that Yaakov first saw the Almighty as his Shepherd. When the lamb strays from the flock, the shepherd comes and chases it back because he sees the wolf that is lurking in the background. The shepherd knows that if the lamb wanders off any farther, it will be killed

by the fox or eaten by the wolf or attacked by the coyote. Sometimes the shepherd must even hit the lamb with his staff.

There are times when the sheep wants to take an extra drink of water, but it is time to leave and the sheep cannot figure out why the shepherd is not letting him drink more. Sometimes the sheep wants to graze a little longer in a particular spot, but the shepherd knows that it is dangerous there and forces the sheep to move on. The sheep does not always understand the shepherd.

Yaakov calls the L-rd “the one who has been my shepherd.” Yaakov says, “I now understand and comprehend the nature of what He was doing to me during all those years. He was being my shepherd and always had my benefit at heart. He was never cruel or mean. Rather than depriving me, He saved me.”

How fitting is it that in the pasuk where Yaakov calls the L-rd his shepherd, the Hebrew word is not spelled in its “full form”: Reish vov ayin hay. Rather, it is spelled without the vov as if it were written Ra-ah (reish ayin hay) meaning ‘bad’. Ro-eh and Ra-ah are related. That which we perceive as bad (the ra-ah) is actually what the Shepherd (ro-eh) in His infinite, yet often humanly incomprehensible, wisdom and foresight knows is good for us.

This insight, which Yaakov Avinu gained on his deathbed, enabled him to be the first person in the history of mankind to call the Master of the Universe a Shepherd. And this then gave precedent to Dovid HaMelech to use the very same metaphor in the psalm beginning “Mizmor L'Dovid, Hashem Ro-ee lo echsar.”

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“So he (Yaakov) blessed them that day, saying, by you shall Israel bless saying, may Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Menashe. And he put Ephraim before Menashe” (Braisish 48:20). Many fathers follow Rashi's understanding of the above, and on special occasions (Shabbos, yom tov, and erev Yom Kippur) bless their sons with the formula of Yaakov. Interestingly, the Targum Yonasan says that this bracha is to be extended to an infant at his bris milah. What might the connection be between bris milah and Ephraim and Menashe?

Rav Pinchas Friedman shlit" of Belz suggests the following interesting relationship. The Sefer Parashas Drachim (drush 4) notes that Hashem judges man as he is now at this time, and does not look at the bad that the individual will do. Yet, in His abundant kindness Hashem does look to the future to see the good that the individual will do and incorporates that positively as part of present judgments.

Proof to the above may be found in the medrash (Shemos Rabbah 3:2) on the possuk (Shemos 3:7) in which Hashem said “ra'oh ra'isi - I have indeed seen the affliction of my people in Egypt. Commenting on the double expression “r'oh ra'isi”, the medrash cites Iyov (11:11) - “for he knows the men of vanity, he sees the wrongdoer and does not take note.” Rashi understands this possuk to refer to the extraordinary patience of Hashem who sees evil being perpetrated now, but delays judgment. The medrash understands the verse to mean that He sees bad in the future but does not consider it now. Thus you, Moshe, see the Jewish people accepting the Torah at Sinai, seeing the good in the future, which is their ticket to deliverance. I (Hashem) additionally see their sinning with the golden calf, but I do not take that into consideration.

Similarly, continues the medrash, Hashem answered Hagar and provided a well of water for Yishmael, despite the fact that Yishmael will cause many of Hashem's children to die of thirst when they will be exiled after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. When the angels protested to

Hashem's intervention Hashem responded "right now what is he - innocent or guilty?" They responded that he is innocent. Hashem then stated that He only judges "ba'asher hu sham - as he is now".

We find that when Yosef brings his sons to Yaakov to be blessed, Yaakov asks, "who are these?" (Breishis 48:8). It is difficult to accept that Yaakov didn't recognize his grandsons with whom he had been learning for seventeen years. The Medrash Tanchuma (6) explains that while he wished to bless them, the shechina departed from him, because Yeravam and Achav were destined to come from Ephraim, and Yayhu and his sons from Menashe. Yosef prayed, and the shechina returned to Yaakov and he blessed them.

When Yosef wants to remove his father's right hand from the head of Ephraim to that of Menashe, Yaakov protests, "I know my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will become great; however, his younger brother shall become greater than he, and his offspring's frame will fill the nations" (48:19). Rashi again cites the Tanchuma which says that Menashe will be great, as Gideon will come forth from him, through whom Hashem will perform the miracle of three hundred men destroying the army of Midyan of 135,200. However, Ephraim will be greater as Yehoshua will come from him, who will apportion the land and teach Torah to Israel, and the entire world will acknowledge Hashem when the sun will stand still for Yehoshua.

The Arugas Habosem asks, if Yaakov is basing his blessing on their future progeny, they both have wicked offspring, and if he is blessing them based on the present, then Menashe, the bechor, should get preference? He answers that Yaakov was acting on the principle that the future good be reckoned with now and the future bad not be noted currently, and praying that Hashem would emulate his ways! This is "b'cha Yivarech Yisrael." As his grandsons are being judged upon the future, so to will the Jewish people always merit to benefit now from what their positive and glorious future has in store for them.

That Hashem looks to our future may be seen in the mitzvah of milah. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim understands this mitzvah as a means of helping the Jew to be moral, assisting him in curtailing his sexual drive. The Ramban sees the mitzvah in a more positive way, for the Jews to carry with pride the sign of the covenant between G-d and Israel, and the seal of the King on his body. Interestingly, be it soor meirah or assey tov, it does not apply to the eight day old infant, but rather this mitzvah is unique in that it is performed now for the future. As the father performs this mitzvah on behalf of his child's future, so does Hashem look to our future to exonerate us.

With the above principle we may understand the Talmud (Menachos 43b), "when King David found himself naked in the bathhouse, he felt melancholy, bereft of mitzvos. When he remembered his milah he was appeased." On a deeper level, suggests Rav Pinchas Friedman shlit"a, David entered the bathhouse to immerse and purify himself from sin. He did a cheshbon hanefesh and found himself without mitzvos. He was depressed, until he remembered the mitzvah of milah, which signifies that Hashem looks to the future and sees the good he will yet do, and this encouraged him.

The connection, then, of the Targum Yonasan between Ephraim and Menashe and milah is: just as milah underscores His looking into the future regarding His nation, so did Yaakov regarding his grandsons. We can thus understand the teaching of Ben Azzai in Avos (4:3), "do not regard anyone with contempt, for there is no man who does not have his hour." Allow me to explain it referring to the potential of each individual. Finally, the concept of future good has halachic ramifications as well. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 344:1) teaches that one may exaggerate slightly in a eulogy. The Taz is troubled by this license, and asks why a slight lie is permissible? His answer is very perceptive. He postulates that if the niftar performed a mitzvah such as tzedakka or chessed in a particular way, if a circumstance arose requiring greater effort and exertion, he would have done it too. Therefore we have the right to say

that it is as if he already did it. We have the right to eulogize the future the niftar would have had.

Haftorah - Parshas Vayechi Rabbi Dovid Siegel

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M'lochim I 2:1

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

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

In search for an understanding of this we direct our attention to Dovid's mild request inserted in the midst of these harsh commands. He said, "Act kindly towards the Barzilai children and host at your table because their father was close to me when I fled from your brother Avshalom." (2:7) Barzilai was very gracious to Dovid Hamelech and provided him food and shelter in his grave time of distress. Dovid was forever indebted to Barzilai for this and hosted the entire family at his royal table. Now that Dovid was leaving the world it became Shlomo Hamelech's responsibility to perpetuate this kindness. Dovid's parting request conveyed to Shlomo a keen sense of continuity- to view himself as Dovid's extension. He therefore instructed Shlomo to perpetuate this kindness and continue the royal practice of hosting the Barzilai family at his table.

Conceivably, this mild request was interspersed here to place these other commands in proper perspective. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech charged his son with the responsibility of perpetuating his father's name and honor. He sought to instill in Shlomo a sense of perfect continuity, to follow closely his revered father's path. For this same reason Dovid chose his parting moments to instruct his son about Shimi and Yoav. They brought Dovid much humiliation and indignation and certainly deserved execution. Yet, Dovid did not deem it appropriate to respond to their actions during his lifetime and left this matter an unfinished affair. Now that Dovid was leaving this world it became Shlomo's role to act on his father's behalf. Dovid reserved this difficult command for his last moments to convey to him his true role. He envisioned Shlomo following his fathers' perfect path and therefore left him with a powerful image of continuity. Dovid instructed Shlomo to begin his reign by completing what his father could not accomplish and to continue this path throughout his lifetime. Dovid informed Shlomo that if he perpetuates his father's

honor and accomplishments he will never stray from the path and Dovid's household will be guaranteed royalty over Israel.

Indeed, Shlomo accepted his father's charge and fulfilled it to the best of his ability. In fact, Scriptures mention earlier Bas Sheva, Shlomo's mother's special bracha to her husband Dovid Hamelech. She said, "My master the king should live forever." (1:31) Malbim (ad loc) explains that the words, "live forever" refer to perpetuating Dovid Hamelech's reign through his son, Shlomo. These words had a major impact on her son as we clearly see from our haftorah's concluding words. Scriptures records Dovid Hamelech's forty year reign and concludes, "And Shlomo sat on his father Dovid's throne his kingdom was firmly established." (2:12) Ralbag and Malbim explain that this refers to the glaring phenomena that Shlomo ruled for exactly forty years. He followed so closely in his father's footsteps that he merited his exact years of reign. Dovid's dream was realized and Shlomo did become the extended image of his perfect father. This lesson runs parallel lines with Yaakov Avinu's parting bracha to his beloved son Yosef. Moments before leaving this world Yaakov Avinu gathered his children and blessed them revealing to each his unique quality and role amongst the Jewish people. Yet, he showered an abundant bracha upon one particular son Yosef. The Torah expresses this in the following words. "Your father's blessings that superseded those of his predecessors. . . shall rest upon Yosef's head, the premier amongst the brothers." (B'reishis 49:26) Rashi explains that Hashem's bracha to Yaakov Avinu distinguished itself from those given to Avrohom and Yitzchok Avinu. Their brachos were of limited nature whereas Yaakov's bracha was unlimited and spanned the entire world. Yaakov now continued this tradition and bestowed upon Yosef this unlimited bracha. We can appreciate this by analyzing Yaakov's introductory words to this bracha. He describes Yosef's superb inner strength in the following words, "And he firmly settled his power and adorned his arms with gold; this came from Yaakov's strength from where he became the shepherd of Israel." (Breishis 49:24) Rashi quotes the Sages who interpret this to refer to Yosef's incredible self control displayed during the irresistible seductive scene with Potiphar's wife. They reveal Yosef's true source of inner strength during his life's most trying challenge. Rav Yishmael said that at that crucial moment of overpowering temptation Yaakov Avinu's image appeared before his son and reminded him of his illustrious predestined position amongst his brothers. (see Rashi ad loc from Mesichta Sota 36b)

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

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

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

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

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion -

Vayeichi: Fishy Blessings

From: Elliot Goldofsky -

Realizing that his death was not far off, Jacob gave his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, the following blessing:

"May (God) bless the lads, and let them carry my name, along with the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac. May they increase like fish in the land" [Gen. 48:16].

Yes, fish have astonishingly large families. But so do frogs and many other animals. Why were Joseph's children blessed to be like fish? Furthermore, the phrase "increase like fish in the land" sounds like a very mixed-up metaphor. Fish do not thrive on land; they certainly do not increase there! What kind of blessing is this?

Immunity from the Evil Eye

The Talmud [Berachot 55b] explains that Joseph shared a special common quality with fish:

"The fish in the waters are concealed by the water, and thus not susceptible to the Evil Eye. So too, the descendants of Joseph are not susceptible to the Evil Eye."

What does it mean that Joseph was immune to the Evil Eye like the fish?

We explained previously that the Evil Eye is an example of hidden influences that exist between souls. An environment of jealousy and hatred can poison not only the atmosphere, but also the soul against whom they are directed. This, however, is only true for weaker souls that are easily influenced. The Evil Eye can only harm those whose sense of self-worth is not fully developed, people who need to live their lives in a way that meets the approval of foreign 'eyes.' But if we are secure within ourselves, and our life is focused on our inner truths, then we will not be susceptible to the Evil Eye of those around us. The Evil Eye has no power over those whose robust sense of self-esteem does not let others dictate what is truly important and worthwhile.

Why are fish immune to the Evil Eye?

Fish are not concerned with envious eyes above the water. They live in their own world below the surface, a secluded realm that determines the direction of their lives. Like the fish, Joseph remained faithful to his inner convictions, despite the external pressures and influences of his roller-coaster life. A foreign land, a foreign culture, family estrangement, slavery and imprisonment, temptations - none of these succeeded in leading Joseph astray. Even when he needed to contend with the hardest test of all - the incredible success, wealth, and power of Egyptian viceroy - Joseph was steadfast in his beliefs and inner convictions. Joseph remained true to his own inner world, despite his active participation in a vastly different outer world. Just like a "fish in the land."

Arutz Sheva Jan 09, '06 / 9 Tevet 5766

For the Honor of Torah by Chanan Morrison

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook related the following story:

While living in Boisk, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and his family would occasionally take a late summer vacation at the Dobelns resort along the Baltic seashore. There, he used to meet Rabbi Zelig Reuven Bengis, and the two would spend time together in the hotel and its surrounding woods.

Near the Dobelns beach, a small structure was designated as a makeshift synagogue, where the bathers would gather for Mincha and Ma'ariv - the afternoon and evening prayers. One day, Rabbi Bengis had a yahrtzeit for one of his parents and he wanted to lead the prayers, as is customarily done. However, only nine men showed up, making them one short of a minyan (a religious quorum). One of the men, a go-getter by nature, went outside to find a tenth for the minyan.

As it happened, a rather domineering man of means also had a yahrtzeit that day, and he was arranging his own minyan outside. Not noticing how many men were outside, the 'go-getter' asked one of them to come inside and join Rabbi Bengis' minyan, where Rabbi Kook was also waiting.

Unfortunately, the outside group had numbered exactly ten, and now they were short a minyan. (When Rabbi Bengis retold the story, he explained that he had no idea that this Jew was the tenth man in the other minyan, otherwise he would never have allowed this to happen.) When the domineering man realized what had happened, he stormed into the room where Rabbi Bengis was praying and berated him with a barrage of curses and insults.

When Rabbi Kook saw the humiliation of this great Torah scholar, he immediately approached the assailant and gave him a resounding slap across the face. "In my presence," he said firmly, "no one degrades a Torah scholar!"

The wealthy man was so angered that he summoned Rabbi Kook to court. Indeed, the news of a rabbi slapping someone across the face made a shocking impression on everyone who heard about it.

When Rabbi Kook returned to Boisk, some of his devoted followers approached him and expressed concern over the fact that he might be taken to prison. In an effort to avoid this, they advised him to apologize to the man and beg forgiveness for slapping him. Rabbi Kook, however, refused to do so. He explained:

Concerning my own honor, I am permitted to forgive and forget. In fact, I am obligated to be humble and forbearing, as we say in our prayers, "Let my soul be like dust to everyone." However, if I apologize to this man, I am, in effect, condoning the affront to that great Torah scholar and consequently, the desecration of the Torah's honor.

Quite unexpectedly, the domineering man showed up at Rabbi Kook's door a short while later and begged forgiveness from the Rabbi! Thus, the whole incident came to an end... for the time being, at least.

The Gold Watch

Many years later, when Rabbi Kook was on a trip to the United States, a man came up to him and announced that he was the one whom the rabbi had slapped in Dobelns.

He then pulled out a golden watch from his pocket and said, "I give you this, O honored rav, in return for the slap that you gave me. You see, that whole incident brought me nothing but disgrace. I was so humiliated that I left town and came to America, where I became extremely wealthy. Thus, my good fortune is all thanks to you."

Rabbi Kook refused to accept the gift, but the wealthy man would not take 'no' for an answer. He kept on insisting until Rabbi Kook finally agreed to take the watch. Yet, Rabbi Kook still had misgivings. He felt

very uncomfortable about accepting this gift and benefiting, in some way, from the humiliation of a Torah scholar.

Some time later, there was a knock on the rabbi's door and in came an old man with a heartrending story. A close relative had fallen gravely ill, and the old man needed a large sum of money in order to transfer the patient from his home to a hospital.

Rabbi Kook searched his drawers, but found only small change. What did he do? He took his precious gold watch and said to the man: "Use this watch as a pledge and you will surely receive a sizeable loan in no time. Then, with God's help, I will try to raise enough money to redeem the watch from the money-lender."

The old man hurried off to a well-known financier, who was close to Rabbi Kook, and asked him for an urgent loan against the security of the golden watch. The wealthy financier looked at the watch and immediately recognized it as the rabbi's. Without delay, he gave his visitor a loan; and the next day, he returned the precious watch to Rabbi Kook.

[From An Angel Among Men by R. Simcha Raz, translated by R. Moshe Lichtman, pp. 76-78]

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Halacha Talk

by Rabbi Avraham Rosenthal The Four Amos of Tefilah

In a previous article we discussed how the ramifications of standing before the King during Tefilah affect the person who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei. In this article we will see how this concept also affects the people in the proximity of the one who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei. These halachos are divided into two categories: 1) The prohibition of sitting within the four amos of one who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei and 2) the prohibition of walking in front of him.

SITTING - THE SOURCE AND REASON

This prohibition is derived in the Gemara (Brachos 31B) from a pasuk in Shmuel (I 1:26). When Channah, the mother of Shmuel Hanavi, brings her son to the Mishkan for the first time in order to fulfill her vow to dedicate Shmuel to Hashem's service, she said to Eli Hakohen, "I am the woman who was standing with you (imcha) here praying to Hashem." The Rishonim offer two ways to understand the word "imcha" - "with you," in relation to this prohibition. According to Rashi, the pasuk means that because Channah was standing, Eli was also standing. Tosafos understands from the fact that "imcha" is written with a superfluous "hey," which has a numerical value of five, this implies that Eli did not sit within Channah's four amos, but rather in the fifth.

Two reasons are offered by the poskim for this prohibition. According to the Tur (102), the reason is because it appears that the one who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei is accepting upon himself ohl malchus shamayim, the yoke of Hashem's sovereignty, while the one who sits next to him, is not. Therefore it is considered inappropriate to sit next to one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. Another reason for this prohibition is because when a person recites Shemoneh Esrei, the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, is in front of him. Therefore the entire area is elevated and becomes "admas kodesh," - "holy ground," thus requiring proper decorum in order to give honor to the Shechinah. (Taz 102:3, Shulchan Aruch HaRav 102:1, Shibalei HaLeKet 25)

WHERE IS IT FORBIDDEN TO SIT?

It is forbidden to sit either in front of, at the sides of, or behind the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei.

In order to understand the definition of "in front of," one should picture himself standing in the middle of a circle with a radius of four amos.

Anything that falls within the forward half of the circle is included in “in front of.”

According to this opinion, the prohibition is limited to sitting within four amos of the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. (102:1)

However, the Mechaber quotes an additional opinion that holds that sitting directly in front of one who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei is more stringent and is forbidden “kemelo einav,” as far as the eye can see, or two hundred and sixty-six amos. (Shach Y.D. 244:8)

Sitting directly in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is stricter because it appears as if the person davening is bowing to the person sitting. The Mishnah Berurah (102:9) first quotes the Pri Chadash who says that the halachah follows the first opinion that a person may sit directly in front of the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei if he sits beyond four amos. The Mishnah Berurah then writes that the rest of the Achronim hold that one should be strict and not do so.

This stringency is limited to not sitting directly in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei kemelo einav. However, if the one sitting is off to the side, it is only forbidden within four amos. (Aruch HaShulchan 102:5)

WHAT IS FORBIDDEN?

Not only is it forbidden to sit within four amos of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei, but leaning on an object might also be forbidden. The poskim discuss two methods of leaning: heavy and light. If a person leans heavily on an object, e.g., a shtender, so that if someone would unexpectedly pull it away the person leaning would fall, it is considered as if he is sitting, and it is prohibited. If however, the person leans lightly and he would not fall, then in extenuating situations this type of leaning is permitted within four amos of the one davening. (M.B. 102:1)

WHEN IS IT FORBIDDEN?

The prohibition of sitting within the four amos applies to the four amos of one who is reciting any part of Shemoneh Esrei. This is true even if he has finished reciting the Shemoneh Esrei proper and is only saying the supplications of “Elokai netzor.” The prohibition is in effect until he takes the three steps back. (M.B. 3)

WHEN IS IT PERMITTED TO SIT?

As we discussed, there are two reasons why it is forbidden to sit within the four amos of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei: a) It appears as if the one sitting does not want to accept upon himself the yoke of Hashem’s sovereignty and b) the area is considered to be holy ground, thereby requiring proper decorum in order to honor Hashem. There are several situations where these reasons are not applicable and therefore it is permitted to sit even within four amos of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei.

1) Someone who is obviously weak (i.e., his weakness is apparent to all who see him) and cannot remain standing the entire time that his neighbor recites Shemoneh Esrei is permitted to sit within the four amos. This is true only if he cannot easily move to a place outside of the four amos. The reason for this leniency is since he is obviously weak, his sitting does not imply that he does not wish to accept Hashem’s sovereignty nor does it show disrespect to Hashem’s honor. (M.B. 10-11) There is an opinion that this leniency also applies to the entire congregation on Yom Kippur afternoon, since everyone is obviously weak from the standing and fasting. (Beis Baruch on Chaye Adam 26:9)

The Mishnah Berurah (10) writes that this leniency definitely applies to sitting on the side of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. However, he quotes a stringent opinion that sitting in front is forbidden even for one who is weak, because it appears as if the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is bowing to him.

2) If the one sitting is reciting any part of the Tefilah, even the mishnayot of “Eizehu Mekoman” and Pirkei Avos, which one might not consider as part of the Tefilah since they appear to be Torah learning, he may sit within the four amos. Since he himself is davening it does not appear as if he is not accepting Malchus Shamayim, and while he davens he is giving honor to Hashem.

There is a disagreement whether responding to the chazzan during the repetition of Shemoneh Esrei is sufficient to allow one to sit within the four amos. According to the Kaf HaChaim (9), since he is obligated to respond, it is as if he himself is davening, and he may sit even within the four amos. However, according to the Mishnah Berurah (124:20), he may not do so. This is because the very nature of the repetition of Shemoneh Esrei requires one to stand.

3) According to some opinions, if one is learning Torah it is permissible to sit within four amos of someone reciting Shemoneh Esrei. This is true as long as it is noticeable that one is learning and not just “thinking in learning.” Since this is not agreed upon by all the poskim, the Mishnah Berurah writes that learning while sitting behind the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is totally permissible. But to learn while sitting on the side or in front is only permissible in extenuating circumstances.

An example of a difficult situation is where a person is weak, although not obviously so. As we discussed earlier, someone who is obviously weak is permitted to sit within the four amos even without learning or davening (according to most opinions). In a situation where he is not obviously weak, he may sit on the side or in front within the four amos when it is obvious that he is learning. (Chaye Adam 26:1)

4) It is also permitted to sit, even in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei, if a fixed object that is four tefachim wide and ten tefachim high intervenes between the two. This is because such an object creates a separate domain, and each person is considered to be in a different place. Therefore neither of the reasons for the prohibition applies. It does not appear that he is not accepting Hashem’s sovereignty, or that he is slighting Hashem’s honor by sitting, because technically speaking, he is somewhere else. (M.B. 2)

WHAT IF I WAS THERE FIRST?

Until now we discussed the prohibition of sitting down within the four amos of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. If a person is already sitting and someone else comes and starts Shemoneh Esrei within his four amos, does he have to stand up?

According to the letter of law, since the person who is sitting was there first, the one who wishes to recite Shemoneh Esrei is obligated to distance himself, and the one sitting does not have to stand up, even if the other person davens within four amos. However, according to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (18:20), this is only true if the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei stands in front of or at the side of the one sitting. But, if he stands behind the one sitting, the latter should stand up. This is based on the second opinion quoted in the Mechaber that sitting directly in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is forbidden because it appears as if the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is bowing to him.

Also, the Rema and Mishnah Berurah write that “midas chassidus,” proper conduct, dictates that even where the one sitting was there first, in all situations he should stand up in order to remove a stumbling block from before his fellow who acted inappropriately. (102:3)

In general, this leniency is only applicable in a private house. However, in a shul that is designated for Tefilah, the Mishnah Berurah writes that one should be stringent and not sit within the four amos, even if he was there first. But, if one is learning Torah and certainly if there is a Torah lecture in progress, and a minyan forms, one does not have to stand up even according to “midas chassidus.” (M.B. 13)

WALKING PAST - THE SOURCE AND REASON

Now we will discuss the second law: the prohibition of walking past a person reciting Shemoneh Esrei.

The source of this halachah is a Gemara in Brachos (27A): “Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: It is forbidden to walk opposite people who are praying.” The Mishnah Berurah (15) quotes two reasons for this: 1) Walking in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei disturbs his concentration. He adds that according to this reason, it is also forbidden to walk in front of one reciting Krias Shema. 2) Since one who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei is standing before the Shechinah, it is forbidden to walk

in front of him as this intervenes between him and the Shechinah. This indicates a lack of respect to the Shechinah. Perhaps this can be understood if we consider how we would view a person who walks in between two people having a conversation. Doing so shows a lack of *derech erez*. This is certainly true with the Shechinah.

According to the latter reason, even if there is no possibility of disturbing the concentration of the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei, e.g., his eyes are closed, it is still forbidden to walk in front of him. (Biyur Halacha 102, s.v., *asur*) And according to the former reason, even if the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei is standing behind a partition and therefore in a different domain, so there is no issue of walking between him and the Shechinah, it is still forbidden to walk past as long as the partition does not block his view. (M.B. 2)

WALKING: PERMITTED OR FORBIDDEN

In order to properly understand this halachah, we must again envision the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei as standing in the middle of a circle, whose radius is four amos. The area in which everyone agrees that it is forbidden to pass is the area of four amos directly in front. The Zohar is stricter and forbids walking in front even beyond the four amos.

In the entire area behind him where he cannot see, even though most *poskim* permit walking, the Zohar says that it is forbidden. Therefore, preferably, one should not walk there. However, if someone is going to daven or do a mitzvah, he should rely on the majority opinion that permits walking behind the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. (Ben Ish Chai, Yisro 7, Kaf HaChaim 102:25, 27)

Regarding the area by his side where he can see, aside from the view of the Zohar that forbids walking within the four amos, there is a disagreement between the Magen Avraham and the Eliyahu Rabbah. The Magen Avraham is strict and writes that it is forbidden to walk in any area within the four amos where the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei can see, even though it is not directly in front of him. According to this opinion it is certainly forbidden to stop directly in front of the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei within his four amos.

On the other hand, according to the Eliyahu Rabbah, it is only forbidden to walk directly in front of the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei within the four amos. On his sides, even where he can see, one is permitted to walk even within the four amos. According to this opinion it is permitted to stop in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei, even within the four amos. The Mishnah Berurah (18), after quoting both opinions, writes that perhaps one can be lenient and follow the view of the Eliyahu Rabbah in a difficult situation.

BE CAREFUL BACKING UP

We have seen that it is forbidden to walk in the four amos of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. This is especially true in the area in front where he can see. Therefore, if one finishes Shemoneh Esrei, and the person behind him has not yet finished, it is forbidden to take three steps back, if by doing so he will enter the four amos of the one behind him. This is true even if the one behind started later. (Sh.A. 102:5, M.B. 20)

According to the opinion of the Eliyahu Rabbah, if the person behind is not directly behind him, one may take three steps back. If the person is directly behind him, one can take three steps back at an angle provided he does not enter the four amos directly in front of the person behind him. (M.B. 19, Sefer Arba Amos shel Tefilah, part II, 5:1, in the name of the Chazon Ish)

At the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei, even though the custom is to take three steps back before starting, if the person behind already started, one should not take the three steps. One should not even take the steps at an angle for this purpose. If there is room, one should just take three steps forward. (Ishei Yisrael 29:8, footnote 43)

WHEN IS IT PERMITTED TO WALK IN FRONT?

There are several situations when it is permitted to walk directly in front of someone reciting Shemoneh Esrei.

1) If one has to do a mitzvah for a group of people. For example: One is needed to complete a minyan or he needs to bring the Sefer Torah to the bimah. It is also permitted in order to give a public Torah lecture, or a cohen who needs to say *bircas cohanim* (Arba Amos shel Tefilah, part II, 6a:6-7, 6b)

However, for mitzvos of an individual, such as to daven with a minyan or to go to learn Torah, one is not allowed to walk directly in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. Rather, if necessary, he may walk in the area where the one reciting Shemoneh Esrei can see, but only on the sides. (ibid. 6a:3)

2) If one has an urgent need to use the bathroom, he may walk directly in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. (ibid. 3:1)

TWO MORE POINTS

We have seen the importance that Chazal placed on not disturbing the concentration of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. Therefore, it is obvious that to talk in shul, especially in earshot of someone who is davening and thereby disturbing his Tefilah is included in this prohibition. The Shelah HaKadosh indicates that while the congregation is reciting either the first *pasuk* of Shema or Shemoneh Esrei, it is forbidden to enter the shul altogether, perhaps he might disturb someone's concentration. (Arba Amos shel Tefilah, sec. II, 1:10)

Although the emphasis of this article has been the responsibilities of the congregation towards the individual who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei so that they do not disturb his concentration, there is another point here as well. The individual also has responsibilities towards the congregation. He should not recite Shemoneh Esrei in a place where people will walk in front of him. Aside from the fact that this will cause his concentration to be disturbed, he is causing others to transgress the prohibition of walking in front of one reciting Shemoneh Esrei. A person that could daven somewhere else, but nevertheless does so in a place where people will walk in front of him is called a sinner. (ibid. 12)

HASHEM ALSO STANDS

The Gemara Brachos (6A) asks: "From where do we know that when ten people daven, the Shechinah - the Divine Presence - is with them?" The Gemara answers: "As it is written (Tehillim 82:1), 'The L-rd stands in the congregation of G-d.'"

Rashi explains that the word "eidah," or "congregation" that appears in this *pasuk* refers to ten people just as we find with the spies that Moshe sent to Eretz Yisroel. Ten of the twelve spies returned with a negative report and Hashem referred to them as (Bamidbar 14), "this wicked eidah - congregation."

The Medrash Vayikra Rabbah (35:3) writes: "Said Rabbi Elazar: It is common practice that when a mortal king makes a decree, if he wishes to keep it, he does so, and if he chooses not to, then others will keep it. But The Holy One does not act this way. When He makes a decree, He is the first one to keep it, as it written, 'before an old person you shall rise and you shall honor a sage... I am Hashem.' I am the One who did this mitzvah of standing before an old man originally."

The commentators on the Medrash explain that this is referring to when Hashem came to visit Avraham after his *bris milah*. Avraham sat and Hashem stood.

With this introduction we can understand a comment of the Maharsha on the Gemara in Brachos. The Maharsha explains that the reason Hashem stands with those who daven is because it is forbidden to sit within their four amos.

It is possible that the Maharsha is referring to the Medrash. Not only does Hashem keep His mitzvos, He also abides by the instructions of Chazal. (Sefer Arba Amos shel shel Tefilah - Hakdamah)

YatedUSA

Halacha Discussion

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

She'ailos U'teshuvos

Question: If after reciting Pesukei d'zimrah one realized that he forgot to say Boruch she'omar, may he still recite Yishtabach?

Discussion: Yes, he may. While l'chatchilah one may not recite Pesukei d'zimrah without first reciting the blessing of Boruch she'omar¹ — a blessing which is similar to a berachah rishonah over food — b'diavad, if Boruch she'omar was omitted, one still recites Yishtabach afterwards, just like a person who forgot to recite a berachah rishonah over food still recites a berachah achronah after he finishes eating.²

Question: What is the halachic definition of tefilah b'tzibur?

Discussion: Tefilah b'tzibur means that ten adult men are davening Shemoneh Esrei together.³ L'chatchilah, the ten men should begin davening Shemoneh Esrei at the exact same moment,⁴ but b'diavad, even if all ten men did not begin the Shemoneh Esrei at the same time, it is still considered tefilah b'tzibur.⁵

Some poskim hold that if ten men are present but only six of them are davening Shemoneh Esrei, it is still considered tefilah b'tzibur.⁶ Many other poskim, however, disagree.⁷

Some poskim hold that one who davens his own Shemoneh Esrei along with the sheliach tzibur's chazaras ha-shatz also fulfills the obligation of tefilah b'tzibur.⁸ Most poskim, however, disagree.⁹

Question: If one came late to shul for Shacharis, can he still manage to daven tefilah b'tzibur?

Discussion: It depends on how late he came. Shulchan Aruch rules that it is more important to daven tefilah b'tzibur than to recite the entire Pesukei d'zimrah. Therefore, one who came late should skip as much of Pesukei d'zimrah as necessary — except for Boruch she'omar, Ashrei [Nishmas on Shabbos] and Yishtabach — in order to be able to begin davening Shemoneh Esrei with the rest of the congregation.¹⁰ If one came so late that even if he would skip Pesukei d'zimrah he would still be unable to begin Shemoneh Esrei with the tzibur, he should still skip Pesukei d'zimrah as long as he will be able to a) begin Shemoneh Esrei while there are still ten (at least) people davening;¹¹ and b) complete his entire Shemoneh Esrei before the sheliach tzibur begins to recite Kedushah during chazaras ha-shatz.¹² If, however, he estimates that he does not have enough time to complete his Shemoneh Esrei before Kedushah will be recited, he should not daven Shemoneh Esrei with the tzibur. Instead, he should wait and daven Shemoneh Esrei along with sheliach tzibur's recitation of chazaras ha-shatz.¹³ [Whether or not it is permitted to skip Pesukei d'zimrah in order to be able to daven Shemoneh Esrei along with the chazaras ha-shatz will depend on the previously-mentioned dispute among the poskim as to whether or not reciting Shemoneh Esrei along with chazaras ha-shatz is considered tefilah b'tzibur.]

Question: Should a woman who comes late to shul for Shacharis skip parts of Pesukei d'zimrah in order to be able to daven Shemoneh Esrei with the tzibur of men?

Discussion: Contemporary poskim are divided on this point: Some hold that since women are not considered as part of a tzibur in any way, even if they daven at the same time that the tzibur does, their tefilah is not considered tefilah b'tzibur. They should not, therefore, skip any part of Pesukei d'zimrah — which, according to many poskim, they are obligated to recite¹⁴ — in order to daven with the tzibur.¹⁵ Other poskim, however, disagree. In their opinion, a woman who davens Shemoneh Esrei while the tzibur is davening is considered as if she davened tefilah b'tzibur, and she is permitted, therefore, to skip parts of Pesukei d'zimrah in order to be part of the tefilah b'tzibur.¹⁶

Question: In order for the obligation of zimun to be in force, how many people have to be eating?

Discussion: Three men who ate a meal together are Rabbinically¹⁷ required to recite Birkas ha-Mazon together.¹⁸ One of them recites the zimun and the first blessing of Birkas ha-Mazon aloud, so that the others can hear him clearly. For this reason, when there is a big crowd, a man with a powerful voice should be chosen for the honor.¹⁹ If two people sit down to a meal which includes bread, and a third person wants to join them, they should ask him to eat bread along with them so that they can recite zimun. If he refuses to eat bread, then even if he eats a k'zayis' worth of any food (approx. 1 fl. oz.), zimun is recited.²⁰ If the third person drank a revi'is (approx. 3 fl. oz.) of wine or any natural fruit juice, zimun may definitely be said.²¹ Many poskim rule that coffee or tea is also sufficient to require zimun.²² Some poskim allow even soda or lemonade,²³ while others do not.²⁴ If the third person drank water only, no zimun is said.²⁵

A minimum of seven people can get together for a meal including bread, and join with three other men who did not eat bread in order to recite the name of Hashem [Elokeinu] when reciting zimun, provided that the three men ate or drank something, as stated above.²⁶

Question: Is a woman obligated in the mitzvah of zimun?

Discussion: If a woman ate a meal together with at least three other men, she is obligated to join²⁷ in zimun together with them.²⁸ She may not leave the table until zimun takes place, and if for some reason she must leave temporarily, the men must wait for her to return to the table in order to proceed with the zimun.²⁹

In the event that three or more women ate together with three or more men and the women are not ready to bench together with the men, they are allowed to form their own zimun when they are ready to bench.³⁰ If, however, they participated in a meal with ten or more men, then they may not bench for themselves and must join the men for zimun.³¹

Question: If three or more women join together for a meal, are they obligated in zimun?

Discussion: Three or more women who ate a meal together may be mezamen for themselves if they wish, but they are under no obligation to do so.³² For undetermined reasons, this optional zimun is not widely practiced today among the Ashkenazim.³³ Ten or more women who joined together for a meal may be mezamen for themselves if they wish, but they are not permitted to recite the word "Elokeinu" during the zimun.³⁴ In all other cases, such as two women and a man, or two men and a woman eating together [or nine men and a woman eating together who would like to be mezamen with Elokeinu], it is forbidden to be mezamen.

(Footnotes)

1 O.C. 53:2.

2 Beur Halachah 53:2 s.v. amar.

3 Mishnah Berurah 90:28, quoting Chayei Adam 19:1.

4 Mishnah Berurah 66:35.

5 See Igros Moshe O.C. 3:4 and Halichos Shelomo 8:7.

6 See Eimek Berachah, Tefilah 6, Chelkas Yaakov 2:138 and Minchas Yitzchak 3:10 and 9:6-7.

7 Harav Y.Z. m Soloveitchik, quoted in Teshuvos V'hanhagos 1:104; Orchos Rabbeinu 1:160; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:28-30; Halichos Shelomo 1:5-8. [All poskim agree that it is permitted to recite Kaddish or chazaras ha-shatz for only six mispallelim, as long as ten men are present; Mishnah Berurah 69:8.]

8 Eishel Avraham O.C. 52; Chasam Sofer (Igros Sofrim 14).

9 Peri Megadim (Eishel) 52:1 and 109:4; Shalmas Chayim 91, Igros Moshe O.C. 3:9.

10 See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 52:1 who lists the various parts of Pesukei d'zimrah in order of "importance." Certain parts of Pesukei d'zimrah take priority over others when time constraints prevent one from reciting all of Pesukei d'zimrah.

11 Halichos Shelomo 8:7 and Devar Halachah 8.

12 See Mishnah Berurah 109:2 and Beur Halachah s.v. ha-nichnas.

13 Mishnah Berurah 109:14; Aruch ha-Shulchan 109:11-12.

14 See Mishnah Berurah 70:1 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 4. See also Aruch ha-Shulchan 47:25.
 15 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Avnei Yashfei, Tefilah, 16 note 13 and Halichos Shelomo 1:5, Devar Halachah 4); Harav M. Shternbuch (Rigshei Lev, pg. 156)
 16 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv and Harav S. Wosner (Avnei Yashfei, Tefilah, 16 note 12); Harav C.P. Scheinberg (Rigshei Lev, pg. 154); Harav M. Halberstam (Rigshei Lev, pg. 155)
 17 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 197:16; 199:19, according to most Rishonim. See, however, Chazon Ish O.C. 31:1, who maintains that zimun is min ha-Torah.
 18 O.C. 192:1.
 19 Mishnah Berurah
 19 3:17. A microphone should not be used.
 20 O.C. 197:3 and Mishnah Berurah 22.
 21 O.C. 197:2 and Mishnah Berurah
 20. B'dieved 1.6 fl. oz. is sufficient; Beur Halachah, s.v. sheyeish. See Chazon Ish 30:11.
 22 Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:183; Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 130.
 23 Aruch ha-Shulchan 197:5.
 24 Harav Y.Y. Fisher (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, ibid.).
 25 Ruling of the Mishnah Berurah 197:12. Shulchan Aruch Harav and Chayei Adam rule that zimun may be said over water.
 26 O.C. 197:2.
 27 She may not, however, lead the zimun; Beur Halachah 199:7 s.v. veyotzos.
 28 O.C. 199:7.
 29 Igros Moshe O.C. 5:9-10.
 30 Mishnah Berurah 199:18 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 9.
 31 Shulchan Aruch ha Rav 199:6.
 32 O.C. 199:7. Even if one or two men ate together with the three or more women, the women are allowed to be mezamen, with the zimun in this case being led by one of the women; Halichos Beisah 12:7, quoting Harav S.Z. Auerbach.
 33 Beur Halachah 199:7 s.v. nashim; Aruch ha-Shulchan 199:2. Among the Sefaradim, however, three or more women who join together for a meal are mezamen for themselves; V'zos ha-Berachah, pg. 132, quoting Harav M. Elyahu. See also Ben Ish Chai, Korach 13.
 34 O.C. 199:6.

The Weekly Halacha Overview, by Rabbi Josh Flug.

The Mitzvah of Netilat Yadayim

The Gemara, Chullin 106a, provides two reasons for the mitzvah of netilat yadayim. First, it is a rabbinic decree due to a concern for those who handle terumah. As Rashi, ad loc., s.v. Netilat Yadayim L'Chullin, explains, one who touches terumah without first washing his hands can ritually defile the terumah. Therefore, the rabbis instituted that one should wash one's hands before eating in order that those who handle terumah will be accustomed to washing their hands. Second, it is a special mitzvah instituted by the rabbis. One can ask: if there is a rabbinic decree that one must wash one's hands out of a concern for those who handle terumah, what is added by this second reason that there is a special mitzvah instituted by the rabbis?
 R. Chaim Soloveitchik, Chiddushei HaGrach Al HaShas no. 143, explains that there are two aspects to netilat yadayim. First, there is a rabbinic prohibition to eat (bread) without first washing one's hands. This is based on the concern for those who handle terumah. Additionally, there is mitzvah to wash one's hands in preparation for a meal regardless of whether or not they are ritually impure. This second aspect is comparable to the mitzvah of kiddush yadayim v'raglayim, the mitzvah of washing one's hands and feet performed by the kohanim prior to their service in the Beit HaMikdash. The mitzvah of kiddush yadayim v'raglayim is not contingent on ritual purity but rather a distinct activity that must be performed in preparation for service in the Beit HaMikdash. This article will explore the role of these two aspects of netilat yadayim in some of the relevant laws of netilat yadayim.

One Who Has No Water

The Gemara, Pesachim 46a, states that if one is in a situation where there is no water within four mil (seventy-two minutes of travel) he is exempt from netilat yadayim. Aruch, Erech Gabal, notes that although one is technically exempt from netilat yadayim, one should wrap the food in a cloth so as not to touch the food directly. R. Chaim explains that when there is no water readily available, the mitzvah aspect of netilat yadayim is waived. Nevertheless, there is still a concern for those who handle terumah. By wrapping the food in a cloth, the concern for those who handle terumah is no longer applicable because ritual impurity is not transferred unless there is direct contact between one's hand and the food. [The leniency of wrapping the food in a cloth does not apply in an ordinary situation (Mishna Berurah 163:2). This is because the mitzvah aspect of netilat yadayim demands that one wash one hands even if there is no concern for ritual impurity. See however, Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 6:18.]
 The Beracha Recited Upon Immersing One's Hands

The Gemara, Chullin 107a, states that one may eat bread after immersing one's hands in a mikvah. This concept is known as tevilat yadayim. There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to what beracha should be recited when performing tevilat yadayim. Mordechai, Berachot 202, states that one should recite "Al tevilat yadayim." However, Rashba, Chullin, 107a, contends that one can only recite "Al netilat yadayim" because the beracha was originally instituted for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of netilat yadayim and not tevilat yadayim.

R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik (in Hagadah Shel Pesach MiBeit Levi pg 193) explains that the basis of this dispute is contingent upon which aspect of netilat yadayim is primary. If one assumes that the primary aspect of netilat yadayim is the removal of ritual impurity, the action taken to remove the ritual impurity defines the event. If one immerses his hands, the event is defined as "tevilat yadayim," and the beracha would reflect that. However, if the primary aspect of netilat yadayim is the mitzvah of washing one's hands in preparation for the meal, the mitzvah is already pre-defined as the mitzvah of netilat yadayim. One who immerses his hands is fulfilling the same mitzvah but in a different manner. Therefore, the beracha of "Al netilat yadayim" is recited.

A Situation of Doubt

The Mishna Yadayim 2:4, states that one may be lenient in matters of doubt regarding netilat yadayim. The two cases that the Mishna applies this to are cases where the doubt involves a question of whether the water was valid for netilat yadayim or whether enough water was used for netilat yadayim. Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 6:15, adds that if there is a doubt whether one washed his hands or not one may be lenient based on this principle.

One can question Rambam's leniency. Ostensibly, the principle that one may be lenient in matters of doubt concerning netilat yadayim is part of a larger principle that one may be lenient in matters of doubt regarding laws that are rabbinic in nature (safek d'rabanan l'kula). However, Shach, Yoreh De'ah 110, Klalei Sfek Sfeika no. 20, proves from the Gemara, Eiruvim 35b, that the principle of safek d'rabanan l'kula is not effective in overturning a previously established status quo. In a situation where one is in doubt whether he washed his hands, there is a previously established status quo that his hands are impure and require netilat yadayim. If so, why does Rambam allow the doubt to overturn the established ritual impurity on his hands?

There are two possible answers to this question. First, Rambam, Hilchot She'ar Avot HaTumah 8:8, in listing the various rabbinic enactments regarding the purity of terumah, does not include netilat yadayim for (chullin) bread on this list. R. Chaim deduces from this omission that Rambam's opinion is that there is only one aspect to netilat yadayim - the mitzvah aspect. Accordingly, one can suggest that the reason why one may be lenient in a situation where one is in doubt if he washed his hands is because there is no established status quo that is overturned. The only existing established status quo is the ritual impurity of the hands, and according to Rambam, ritual impurity is insignificant to the mitzvah of netilat yadayim.

Second, it is possible that the principle that one may be lenient in matters of doubt regarding netilat yadayim is more expansive than the principle of safek d'rabanan l'kula. The principle that one may be lenient in matters of doubt regarding netilat yadayim allows one to overturn a previously established status quo. The expansive nature of this principle is implicit in the comments of R. Yisrael Isserlin, Terumat HaDeshen 1:261.

If one assumes that the basis for Rambam's leniency is his omission of the ritual impurity aspect of netilat yadayim, it is arguable that since other Rishonim subscribe to the ritual impurity aspect of netilat yadayim, one cannot accept Rambam's leniency (see P'ri Megadim, Introduction to Hilchot Netilat Yadayim, s.v. Ul'fi). However, if the basis for Rambam's leniency is the expansive nature of the principle that one may be lenient in matters of doubt regarding netilat yadayim, it is possible that Rambam's leniency is universally accepted. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 160:11, rules in accordance with the opinion of Rambam, indicating that the leniency is more universally accepted. He adds (based on Ra'avad, ad loc.) that if it is possible to cover all bases by performing netilat yadayim a second time, one should do so.

Washing Hands for Another Purpose

R. Yosef Karo, Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 158, understands that the opinion of Tosafot, Pesachim 115b, s.v. Asuchi, is that if one washes netilat yadayim for the purpose of eating a davar shetibulu b'mashkeh (an item dipped in liquid) and then he wants to eat bread, he must perform another netilat yadayim. The reason is because the first netilat yadayim is not performed with intent to sanctify one's hands, but rather just to remove the ritual impurity. R. Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik explains that if intent is integral to netilat yadayim, it is insufficient to perform netilat yadayim with intent to cover only one of the aspects of netilat yadayim. Therefore, the netilat yadayim of davar shetibulu b'mashkeh - which only has significance in the realm of ritual impurity - is insufficient to serve as netilat yadayim for bread which requires a formal preparation for the meal in addition to the removal of ritual impurity. [Rama, Orach Chaim 158:7, questions whether intent is necessary for netilat yadayim. Accordingly, netilat yadayim for davar shetibulu b'mashkeh will cover netilat yadayim for bread. Rama recommends accepting the stringencies of both possibilities and in such a situation one should wash again without reciting a beracha.]

**Ashrecho Vetov Loch! A Good and Fortunate Life
by HaRav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, shlita**

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Deah V'Dibur ::11 Teves 5766 - January 11, 2006

Mordecai Plaut, director

Yaakov Ovinu spent the last seventeen years of his life in Egypt. At the end, before he passed from this world, he blessed his sons. Yissochor's blessing was, "Yissochor is a strong-boned donkey. He rests between the borders; he saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant. Still, he bent his shoulder to the burden and became an indentured servant" (Bereishis 49:14-15).

Rashi explains why Yaakov Ovinu chose the donkey as the ideal portrayal of his blessing to Yissochor; that Yissochor should be like "a donkey with sturdy bones to bear the yoke of Torah, just as a strong donkey hauls a heavy load." That is, Yissochor was blessed with a personality that could assume the yoke of Torah.

Rashi further explains that Yissochor was blessed to be, "Like a donkey that travels day and night, and does not have a night's sleep in a dwelling." Whether it is day or night, the donkey catches some sleep whenever the opportunity presents itself.

In order to show the wonderful results of this brochoh, Rashi cites the posuk in Divrei HaYomim I (12:32), "The descendants of Yissochor have wisdom to understand the seasons, thus knowing what Klal Yisroel should do." This means that Yissochor's descendants became the heads of the highest courts, reaching the peak of influence in Klal Yisroel.

Yissochor's offspring happily shouldered the responsibility of formulating the yearly calendar. Consequently, Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave them the wisdom that enabled them to correctly establish the months and seasons. All Klal Yisroel benefited from their Torah wisdom, which was an outcome of Yissochor's persistence and stamina in toiling happily in Torah. Because Yissochor was blessed with the ability to easily bear a constant burden of Torah, he was able to achieve accuracy and excellence in rendering halachic decisions.

Yaakov Ovinu's blessing was designed to show Yissochor exactly what qualities he should utilize to realize his full potential. The Zohar, however, quotes the question of Rabbi Elozor: "Why should Yissochor be called a donkey? If it is because he is engrossed in Torah, let him be called a horse, a lion or a leopard. Why a donkey?" A horse is faster than a donkey, a lion is more powerful and a leopard is bolder.

Of all the comparisons that could have been made, Yaakov Ovinu picked the donkey as best reflecting those qualities that gave rise to Yissochor's success in Torah. What virtue does a donkey possess that outweighs all of these seemingly more important characteristics of other animals?

The Zohar answers: "The donkey bears his burden without kicking back at his master as would other animals. He has no arrogance, and he is not concerned that he has no proper place to sleep. Similarly, Yissochor, who is engrossed in Torah, takes upon himself the yoke of Torah and does not rebel against Hashem. He is not filled with pride . . . He rests between the borders [of the fields], as it is said [similar to the Mishnah in the sixth perek of Ovos], 'Sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and in Torah you shall toil.' "

In other words, Yaakov Ovinu's blessing to Yissochor was that Yissochor should be devoted to Torah without ever complaining about the hardships involved. He should be content, happy with whatever comes his way. The minimum will suffice, and everything does not have to be "just so" for him to be satisfied with life. When he needs to rest, he should be pleased with whatever place is available, and he should gladly accept whatever he has, in all circumstances. This attitude goes a long way in making a ben Torah.

The Zohar also explains what Yaakov meant by his blessing, "He saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant." Rest refers to the Written Torah, and land refers to the Oral Torah. All good that Yissochor

found in life came solely from Torah, and we see it was not just good but pleasant. According to the Zohar, shouldering the burden of Torah requires unceasing dedication to the study of Torah day and night.

"Roughing it" and sustained efforts in Torah go hand in hand. Diligence combined with lack of concern about physical comforts produces the perfect expertise in Torah that leads to truthful and accurate halachic decisions. This was the essence of Yaakov Ovinu's blessing to Yissochor, and it became, in turn, the legacy of Yissochor's tribe.

The gemora (Pesochim 49a) gives us a clue as to why self-restraint and diligence are so essential for excellence in Torah with the following advice, "A person should always sell all he has to marry a daughter of a Torah scholar." The gemora is apparently telling us that under all circumstances, no matter what the cost, a person should sell all he owns to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar. Even if it would cost a million dollars or more, this is what he should do.

It is not usually expected of a person to give up all his wealth. Obviously, there must be a very special reason why Chazal place such importance upon marrying a daughter of a Torah scholar. The gemora therefore explains the reason, "so that if he dies or is exiled, he can be assured that his children will become Torah scholars." With the father gone, the entire task of raising the children will fall on the mother.

A daughter of a Torah scholar, having grown up in a Torah home, understands the crucial importance of Torah and is therefore well equipped for this task. Hence, even in the absence of her husband, her home will continue to be imbued with love for Torah and to be illuminated by the light of Torah.

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The Rambam in Hilchos Talmud Torah (3:13) writes, "Though there is a commandment to learn during the day and during the night, a person does not learn most of his wisdom except at night. Therefore, one who wishes to merit the Crown of Torah should be careful not to waste even one of his nights with sleeping, eating, drinking, conversation and other such things. . . "

With this statement, the Rambam is teaching us that though sleeping, eating, drinking and the other necessities for good health are important, nonetheless the precious time we are given in this life should not be needlessly wasted. Therefore, the Rambam urges us to spend our time at night, "only in learning Torah and dialogues of wisdom."

Learning Torah is a privilege, and those of us who learn it properly are like kings. The king's crown is far more than a fancy hat. It represents the king's majesty and power. The crown indicates the honor and respect that the king commands. A king, by definition, lacks nothing; the entire kingdom is his personal domain, and it serves him. Only royalty wear a crown, the symbol of their unique status.

By virtue of the Torah he learns, a ben Torah is also royal. He, too, has a crown — the crown of Torah. But unlike a king, who is born to the throne and so by birthright merits the crown, a ben Torah must earn his Crown of Torah.

A ben Torah, like a king, can rule over a vast empire if only he learns to slowly but surely replace his natural desire to satisfy physical needs and pleasures with a greater desire for Torah. Eventually, all material concerns will pale in comparison to the gratification he gets from his efforts in Torah. As a result, natural desires for food and rest will, on their own, subside. All this is true, providing a strong, steady and honest effort is made to cling to Torah.

The Zohar concludes with the same message as the mishna in the sixth perek of Ovos, "This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt and drink water in measure, sleep on the ground and live a life of deprivation, and in Torah you shall toil. If you do this, you are fortunate and it is good for you — ashrecho vetov loch — you are fortunate in this world, and it is good for you in the next."

We can understand how it will be good in the next world, but how do we understand that one who leads this apparently austere life is considered fortunate in this world?

On our own, we would not be so bold as to suggest that sleeping on the floor is a good and fortunate life. However, Chazal are teaching us that such a lifestyle will lead, as the Rambam wrote, to the Crown of Torah. A Torah scholar's home is filled with the light of Torah.

Therefore, Chazal wisely advise spending all one's wealth to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar, a woman who all her life has been privileged to experience and behold the brilliance of the crown of Torah. Such a woman has seen how her father's nights are filled with limud haTorah and how none of them are wasted on trivial pursuits.

Such dedication to Torah brings many results. Honest and consistent efforts to understand Torah give us fresh new insights into the true meaning of its words. We develop a heightened sensitivity to the subtle nuances between one expression and another. These new insights and discoveries are what spawn growth in Torah. We come to a greater and deeper appreciation of Hashem and His Torah. Hence, through Torah, our love for Hashem grows constantly.

It is impossible to think about trading all this in for some tasty food, which really amounts to just a moment or two of pleasure. The daughter of a Torah scholar sees all this with her own eyes. It is true that her father has a bed in the house, but she knows that if he did not have a bed on which to sleep, the floor would suffice just as well.

Similarly, the donkey finds his sleep, "between the borders" of the fields. He finds time for a little break on the way from one town to the next. He bears his load without complaint. This is not true for the ox. The ox is more powerful than the donkey, but its nature is entirely different.

The gemora cites a case about a violent ox that attacks only on Shabbos (Bava Kama 37a). The whole week goes by without incident. Only during Shabbos does the ox go wild. Rashi explains that this happens since on Shabbos the ox is free from work. Therefore, the ox has an opportunity to become arrogant and aggressive. During the six working days of the week, the ox feels the pressure of its burdens and this keeps it in check. On Shabbos though, when the ox finds freedom from its weekday burdens, it rebels.

In contrast, the donkey, with his submissive nature, is well suited for his work. A donkey does not find life difficult or bothersome because of its burdens. Thus, when Shabbos comes and there is no work for him to do, even though the routine becomes easier the donkey will not behave differently from before. The donkey was never bothered by the burden in the first place, so when the burden is removed, there is no urge of defiance needing to express itself, because by nature the donkey is not rebellious. If, while the donkey is working he humbly finds rest during

work, then on Shabbos, so much more will he be content to rest peacefully.

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The Vilna Gaon, in the sefer Even Shleimoh (2:9), is quoted as saying, "It is not possible to serve Hashem except after the elimination of worldly pleasure and desires . . . And it is impossible to experience the sweetness of Torah except through afflictions and detachment from physical pleasures." True, this appears to be a very difficult goal to reach. Yet, as long as a person is driven by the urges of his desires, he will inevitably be turned away from truly fulfilling the will of his Creator.

In addition, unless one sacrifices for Torah, he will not be able to comprehend the beauty of arriving at a true resolution of a Torah issue. Finally, after much effort, everything fits into place; all doubts and questions are dispelled. Developing the desire and the expertise takes many years and is not easy, but in the end, it can be done. Then, once achieved, no pleasure in the world surpasses it.

The Tanna Devei Eliyohu Rabba (26:20), Tosafos in the gemora Kesuvos (104a) and Mesillas Yeshorim (chap. 13) all teach us the same message: "Before a person prays that Torah enter his body, he should pray that delicacies do not enter his body."

We are clearly being taught an important lesson: not to let the necessity of our eating and drinking influence our goal of accepting the yoke of Torah. As indicated by these words, prayer is the way to achieve this, for prayer opens many doors to our spiritual success. Though it may seem difficult and perhaps impossible to sacrifice our pleasures in this world, nonetheless, if we try Hashem will help us, for it is His will that we do so.

In our morning prayers, before reciting the Shema, we ask Hashem, "Light up our eyes with your Torah." When the light of Torah enters our lives we view the world from a true perspective. The Torah guides us, and we become truly fortunate — fortunate not to squander our lives in wasteful, unthinking and aimless pursuit of physical gratification. Yaakov Ovinu, with great wisdom and foresight, gave his son Yissochor a blessing that he would be able to wear a crown, the Crown of Torah. As a king never feels his crown to be a burden, he never tires of wearing his crown. Just as a king views his crown as his glory, his pride and his joy — so, too, does a ben Torah wear the crown of Torah.

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From crshulman@aol.com
I'm adding 2 more divrei torah.

From: "Adam Pincus" <harhamor@bezeqint.net>

Date: Thu, 12 Jan 2006 22:39:13

To: <CRShulman@aol.com>

Subject: Rav Tau on Parashat SHMOT

"A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey"

**Adapted from "The Faith of our Time" vol.6
by Rabbi Tzvi Israel Tau**

Yeshivat Har Hamor, Jerusalem

Plentiful natural resources enjoyed by a nation can have very different moral and spiritual ramifications, depending on its character.

For an ordinary nation, the overflowing blessing of nature can turn into a curse. Their material needs satisfied without much effort, the people tend to become lazy. To entertain themselves during their considerable free time, they develop a decadent culture of wasteful recreational activities. Instead of industriously harnessing their natural wealth to contribute to the advancement of humanity, they squander it in self-indulgence.

In the case of Israel, material wellbeing and prosperity are necessary to accomplishing our spiritual mission. Every culture and country in the Jewish Diaspora that has permitted it has been the beneficiary of the success of the Jewish people in expressing their genius for business, science, art, philosophy, etc.; yet, engraved upon the psyche of Israel is an awareness that the main goal of life is not merely amassing material wealth, and that the holy, eternal side of life is infinitely more important and central.

Our realization of the primacy of our spiritual mission does not necessitate afflicting the body. On the contrary, our lofty conception of holiness demands the normal, healthy flourishing of the material forces of life, out of recognition that they are all meant to participate in the service of G-d. Indeed, the manifestation of holiness within Israel is not complete until it encompasses all facets and faculties of the life of the individual and the state, not leaving a slice of life that is not illuminated by its light.

The value of bodily health and comfort goes beyond serving as a platform for the appearance of holiness; the cheerfulness of a robust material life is a necessary condition to rising to the heights of worshipping G-d out of love and reverence of His glory. Partaking in life's pleasures, not as a corrupting addiction, but with the conscious intention of refining and cheering the spirit, broadens and strengthens the service of G-d itself. This is the meaning of the Talmudic proverb that "honey and other kinds of sweets accustom one's tongue to studying Torah."

G-d promised our forefathers "a good and spacious land ... flowing with milk and honey." This is not a crude, profane promise, but one that signifies Israel's internal values, those that make it suited for the broadening of life. This blessing is in essence a statement about the character of the nation destined to dwell on such a land. Natural wealth will enable the Jewish people to achieve the prosperity and refinement necessary to realize their destiny as "a light unto the gentiles."

To our discredit, the generations that followed Moses did not withstand the test of the land's bounty. Instead of marching on our unique Divine path to having an elevating influence on humanity, we succumbed to the lure of pagan culture that infected the ancient world. "Once I brought them to the land which I swore to their fathers, *flowing with milk and honey*; they ate, got satiated and fat and turned to other gods, and served them, and despised Me, and broken My covenant." The land's abundance, far from serving its original purpose, propelled our descent into the crass materialism and idolatry that led to our downfall.

This unfortunate chapter in our history was a passing illness. It does not disprove Israel's elevated status and potential for greatness. Even at times of external disgrace, unperceived by the outside observer's eye, hidden under heaps of foreign influence, the Divine flame burning at the depths of the nation's soul remains undimmed. The misdeeds of our forefathers have been expunged, purified in the furnace of misfortune that befell us in the exile. The time is at hand for the internal character of Israel to awaken from its lengthy slumber and realize the glorious destiny latent in the blessing of "a good and spacious land ... flowing with milk and honey."

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago 5764]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Vayeichi

15

It is the scene that brings the Book of Bereishith to a close.

Years before, Joseph had forgiven his brothers for selling him into slavery ("Now, do not worry or feel guilty because you sold me. Look: G-d has sent me ahead of you to save lives"). Evidently, though, they only half believed him. Could he really forgive an act of abandonment that had altered the whole course of his life? Their feelings of guilt had not gone away, and came back to haunt them when Jacob died.

It seems clear from the earlier story of Esau that sons were not allowed to take revenge in the lifetime of their father. Esau says, "The days of mourning for my father will be here soon. I will then be able to kill my brother Jacob". That is the possibility the brothers contemplate in the case of Joseph. They fear that he may want to take revenge but has waited until the death of Jacob. They are anxious that his words of forgiveness in the past may not have been sincere. He may simply have been biding his time, waiting for the appropriate moment (as later happened in the case of Amnon and Absalom).

After Jacob's death, the brothers come to Joseph and say, "Before he died, your father gave us final instructions. He said, 'This is what you must say to Joseph: Forgive the spiteful deed and the sin your brothers committed when they did evil to you'".

The sages realised that this was not true. Had it been true, there would be some reference to it in the narrative. This therefore became one of the texts from which the sages derived the rule, "It is permitted to tell a lie for the sake of peace." Yet Joseph takes their words seriously – not because he believes them, but because the very fact that they said it means that they are still feeling anxious and guilty. His response is majestic in its generosity:

"Don't be afraid," said Joseph, "Am I in place of G-d? You intended to harm me but G-d intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

The significance of this speech in the context of Bereishith as a whole is simple and profound. A continuing theme of the book is sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. The outcome of these conflicts charts a progression. The first culminates in fratricide, the second in separation, the third in relative goodwill (Esau and Jacob eventually meet, embrace and go their separate ways). Joseph, however, lifts the drama to new heights. He forgives. He heals where the brothers harmed. He answers hate with love.

This outcome is essential to the biblical drama of redemption. If brothers cannot live together, how can nations? And if nations cannot live together, how can the human world survive? Only now, with the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers, can the story move on to the birth of Israel as a nation, passing from the crucible of slavery to the constitution of freedom as a people under the sovereignty of G-d.

Yet there is something more, and different, at stake in Joseph's remark, and it is this I wish to explore. It concerns the most paradoxical of all rabbinic statements about teshuvah.

One of the most colourful characters of the Talmud was the third century sage known as Resh Lakish. Resh Lakish was originally a highway robber and gladiator. Tradition reports that he once saw the great scholar Rabbi Jochanan bathing in the Jordan and complimented him on his appearance (Rabbi Jochanan was famed for his handsome appearance). Rabbi Jochanan, in turn, was impressed by Resh Lakish's obvious strength. "Your strength," he said, "should be devoted to Torah." "Your beauty," replied Resh Lakish, "should be devoted to women." "I have a sister," said Rabbi Jochanan, "who is even more beautiful than I am. If you repent, I will make sure that she becomes your wife." Resh Lakish repented and became Rabbi Jochanan's disciple and colleague.

The Talmud reports that, despite relinquishing his earlier life, he occasionally used his physical strength to good ends. On one occasion he rescued a rabbinic colleague, Rav Imi, who was being held captive by a group of kidnappers. Another time, he went into a town where Rabbi Jochanan had been robbed and brought back his stolen possessions. But he is best known as one of the most famous of baalei teshuvah, penitents, of the talmudic era. Perhaps speaking from his own experience, he coined several aphorisms about teshuvah, two of which are reported in the tractate of Yoma (86b):

Resh Lakish said: Great is repentance, because through it deliberate sins are accounted as unintentional, as it is said (Hosea 14: 2), "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity." "Iniquity" means a deliberate sin, yet the prophet calls it "stumbling" [i.e. unintentional]. Resh Lakish also said: Great is repentance, because through it deliberate sins are accounted as though they were merits, as it is said (Ezekiel 33: 19), "When the wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live thereby."

The first of these statements makes sense. When we acknowledge our wrongs, we signal that we regret having done them. We retrospectively dissociate ourselves from them. The acts remain, but the intent does not. To that extent we turn them from deliberate sins to acts that we now wish we had not done. The second statement, by contrast, is virtually unintelligible. By signalling our remorse, we at best declare that (now, on reflection) we did not mean to do what we did. We cancel the intention. What we cannot do is cancel the deed. It has been done. It is part of the past. It cannot be changed. How then can deliberate sins be turned into merits, in other words, into good deeds?

Nor does Resh Lakish's quotation from Ezekiel prove his point. If anything, it proves the opposite. The prophet is speaking about a person who, having undergone repentance, now does good instead of evil – and it is because of his good deeds, not his earlier evil ones, that “he shall live.” What the verse shows is that good deeds can overcome a previous history of wrongdoing, not that they can turn wrong into right, bad into good, deliberate sins into merits.

I have hinted in the previous Covenant and Conversation, however, that the source of many of the Talmud's principles of teshuvah are not derived from the prooftexts cited by the Talmud itself, but from the story of Joseph and his brothers – the key biblical narrative of teshuvah. The reason the sages did not cite this as their source is twofold: first, the Joseph story is narrative, not law; second, it precedes the covenant at Mount Sinai, and therefore only serves as a valid precedent if some confirmation can be found in the post-Mosaic literature.

I believe the same is true for Resh Lakish's statement about sins and merits. Its source is precisely the words Joseph speaks to his brothers in the last chapter of Bereishith: “You intended to harm me but G-d intended it for good.” This is exactly what Resh Lakish argued. The brothers committed a deliberate sin by selling Joseph into slavery. But they (or at least Judah, the instigator of the decision to sell Joseph) had done teshuvah. The result was that – through Divine providence -- it was now reckoned “for good.” Not only is this the source of Resh Lakish's principle, but it also enables us to understand what it means.

Any act we perform has multiple consequences, some good, some bad. When we intend evil, the bad consequences are attributed to us because that is what we sought to achieve. The good consequences are not: they are mere by-products, happenstance, unintended outcomes.

Thus, in the case of Joseph, many things happened once he had been brought to Egypt. He became master of Potiphar's household, a prison administrator, an interpreter of dreams. Later he became second-in-command of Egypt, overseer of its economy, and the man who saved the country from ruin during the years of famine. None of these consequences could be attributed to his brothers, even though they would not have happened had they not done as they did. The reason is that they neither foresaw nor intended this set of outcomes. They meant to sell him as a slave, and that is what they did.

However, once they had undergone complete repentance, their original intent was cancelled out. It was now possible to see the good, as well as the bad, consequences of their act – and to attribute the former to them, since the meaning of their act is no longer defined by what they originally intended but by what part they played in a providential drama whose outcome was only now fully apparent in retrospect. To paraphrase Shakespeare's Mark Anthony, the good they did would live after them; the bad was interred with the past. That is how, through repentance, deliberate sins are accounted as merits, or as Joseph put it: “You intended to harm me, but G-d intended it for good.” This is a hugely significant idea, for it means that by a change of heart we can redeem the past.

This still sounds paradoxical. We tend to take for granted the idea of the asymmetry of time. The future is open, but the past is closed. Before us lie a series of paths: which we take depends upon our choice. Behind us lies the history of our previous decisions, none of which we can undo. We cannot go back in time. That is a logical impossibility. We can affect what is yet to be; but, in the words of the sages, “What has been, has been,” 7 and we cannot alter it. With or without repentance, the past is surely immutable. All of this is true, but it is not the whole truth. The revolutionary idea behind Joseph's and Resh Lakish's words is that there are two concepts of the past. The first is what happened. The second is the significance, the meaning, of what happened.

In ancient Israel a new concept of time was born. This did more than change the history of the West; in a sense, it created it. Until Tenakh [the Hebrew Bible], time was generally conceived as a series of eternal recurrences, endlessly repeating a pattern that belonged to the immutable structure of the universe. The seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter – and the lifecycle – birth, growth, decline and death – were a reiterated sequence in which nothing fundamentally changed. This is variously called cyclical, or cosmological, or mythic time. There is a powerful example of it in Tenakh itself, in the book of Ecclesiastes:

generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises . . . All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again . . . What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

This is a deeply conservative philosophy. It justifies the status quo. Inequalities are seen as written into the structure of the universe. All attempts to change society are destined to fail. People are what they are, and the world is what it is always been. At best this view leads to resignation, at worst to despair. There is no ultimate meaning in history. As the author of Ecclesiastes says:

Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

The Jewish understanding of time was utterly revolutionary. For the first time people began to understand that G-d had created the universe in freedom, and by making man in His image, He endowed him too with freedom. If so, he might be

different tomorrow from what he was today, and if he could change himself, he could begin to change the world. Time was an arena of change. With this, the concept of history (as opposed to myth) was born.

Many great thinkers have written on this theme, including the historian Arnold Momigliano and the anthropologist Mircea Eliade. Here is how the British historian J. H. Plumb puts it in his book, *The Death of the Past*:

The concept that within the history of mankind itself a process was at work which would mould his future, and lead man to situations totally different from his past, seems to have found its first expression among the Jews . . . With the Jews, the past became . . . an intimate part of destiny and an interpretation of the future . . . The uniqueness of this concept lay in the idea of development. The past was no longer static, a mere store of information, example and events, but dynamic, an unfolding story... This sense of narrative and of unfolding purpose bit deeply into European consciousness.

And what applies to nations, applies also to individuals.

We live life forwards, but we understand it backwards. The simplest example of this is an autobiography. Reading the story of a life, we see how a deprived childhood led to the woman of iron ambition, or the early loss of a parent shaped the man who spent his later years pursuing fame in search of the love he had lost. There is an air of inevitability about such stories, but it is an illusion. The deprived childhood or the loss of a parent might equally have led to a sense of defeat and inadequacy. What we become depends on our choices, and we are (almost) always free to choose this way or that. But what we become shapes the story of our life, and only in hindsight, looking back, do we see the past in context, as part of a tale whose end we now know. In life considered as a narrative, later events change the significance of earlier ones. It was the gift of Judaism to the world to discover time as a narrative.

That was what Resh Lakish knew from his own experience. He had been a highway robber. He might have stayed one. Instead he became a baal teshuvah, and the very characteristics he had acquired in his earlier life – physical strength and courage – he later used to virtuous ends. He knew he could not have done so had he had a different past, a life of study and peace. His sins became merits because in retrospect they were an essential part of the good he eventually did. What had happened (the past as past) did not change, but its significance (the past as part of a narrative of transformation) did.

That too was the profound philosophical-spiritual truth Joseph conveyed to his brothers. By your repentance – he intimated to them – you have changed the story of which you are a part. The harm you intended to do ultimately brought about good. So long as you stayed the people prepared to sell a brother into slavery, none of that good could be attributed to you, but now (through teshuvah) you are different and so too is the story of your life. By your change of heart you have earned the right to be included in a narrative whose ultimate outcome was benign.

We now see the profound overarching structure of the book of Bereishith. It begins with G-d creating the universe in freedom. It ends with the family of Jacob on the brink of creating a new social universe of freedom which begins in slavery but ends in the giving and receiving of the Torah, Israel's “constitution of liberty.” Israel is charged with the task of changing the moral vision of mankind, but it can only do so if individual Jews (of whom the forerunners are Jacob's children) are capable of changing themselves – that ultimate assertion of freedom we call teshuvah. Time then becomes an arena of change in which the future redeems the past and a new concept is born – the idea we call hope.