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*TorahWeb.org*  
*Rabbi Mordechai Willig*  
*Forgiveness*

I

"Please forgive the sin of your brothers...now please forgive the sin of the servants of your father's G-d" (Bereishis 50:17). Yosef responds graciously, "Do not worry...Hashem intended it for good...I will sustain you... he consoled them, and spoke to their heart (50:19-21).

Rabbeinu Bachya (17) notes that the Torah does not say that Yosef forgave them; they died without his forgiveness, and their sin was not atoned. The punishment was exacted many years later, when the Romans killed the ten martyrs, as recounted during Musaf on Yom Kippur. As the piyut Eila Ezkera cites the Romans despot, "You must bear the sins of your ancestors". The second phrase in the passuk, "the sin of the servants of your father's G-d" is not a redundancy, but an allusion to the ten martyrs killed, in part as a punishment for the sale of Yosef by his ten brothers. Earlier (44:17), Rabbeinu Bachya names all ten, and cites the capital punishment of those who kidnap and sell the person they kidnapped (Shemos 21:16). He adds that the brothers themselves were also punished when their troubles in Egypt began immediately after Yosef's death.

The Gemara (Yoma 87a) states, "One who asks forgiveness should not ask more than three times", as the word "na", found three times in 50:17, is an expression of a request (Rashi). Rav Elyashiv (Toras Ha'adam L'Adam vol. 3 p. 27) proves from here that Yosef did not forgive them. If he had forgiven them, then the gemara would have no proof regarding how one should behave when not forgiven after three times. The brothers (and later the ten martyrs) were punished even though they asked for forgiveness three times, presumably because they, as tzadikim, were held to a higher standard (See Yevamos 121b, and Tzon Kodashim Menachos 29b).

Rabbeinu Bachya (38:1) asks: only nine brothers sold Yosef, as Reuven wished to return him to Yakov (37:22), so why were ten (as opposed to only nine) martyrs killed as a result of the sale? He answers that Yosef also sinned by causing the brothers' sin when he angered them and glorified himself over

them with his dreams. As such, the tenth martyr bore the sin of Yosef. Perhaps, alternatively, Yosef's sin that was borne by the tenth martyr was not forgiving the brothers for their sin against him.

II

Forgiving others is beneficial to the sinners who are forgiven, since it spares them from punishment. The formulation of forgiveness, recited by many nightly before Krias Shma Al Hamita, and annually in Tefila Zaka before Kol Nidrei, contains the phrase, "May no person be punished on my account." It seems from these two tefillos that forgiveness is effective even if the sinner does not confess and ask to be forgiven, and yet Rav attempted to have a sinner who sinned against him ask for forgiveness (Yoma 87a). Why did Rav not simply forgive him without encountering him? The answer may be that every interpersonal sin is also a sin against Hashem. One who was wronged can only forgive the interpersonal aspect, so that no person be punished on his account. However, in order to be completely forgiven for his sin against Hashem, the sinner must repent.

Repentance requires not only regret over the sin and resolution not to repeat it, but also confession (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 2:2). The confession must specify the sin and articulate regret and shame over it (1:1). Rav attempted to give the sinner the opportunity for complete teshuva so that he could be forgiven completely.

The Pele Yo'etz (Teshuva) proves from the story of Rav that even though sincere forgiveness granted by one who was pained by another achieves a lot, it is not enough. The sinner must do that which is incumbent upon him, i.e. appease the victim of his sin, even if he feels shame. Shame is part of confession, achieves forgiveness (Berachos 12b), and avoids much, much greater shame in the World to Come.

III

The Mishna Berura (606:3) cites three rulings of the Mateh Efraim (2) regarding asking forgiveness: 1) one who asks forgiveness must specify the sin 2) if he knows that the victim will be shamed, he should not specify it 3) asking forgiveness from an entire group, as opposed to individually from the person he sinned against, is insufficient.

Why must the sin be specified? At first glance, the victim must know what he is forgiving. But if so, how is he forgiven when he does not specify it in order to avoid shaming the victim? And why is specifying before an entire group insufficient? The need to specify must have a different reason. It is not indispensable as a function of the ability of the victim to forgive. Rather, in the words of the Pele Yoetz, it is incumbent on the sinner as part of his obligation to appease the victim. By specifying the sin, his confession is shameful. Shame is a function of forgiveness by Hashem, and applies to all sins, as the Rambam writes.

When specifying the sin shames the victim, it is prohibited, and therefore not incumbent on the sinner. Hence, he is forgiven by Hashem, as well as by the victim who sincerely forgives whatever the sin may be. By contrast, asking forgiveness from a group, even if the sin is specified, is not as embarrassing for the sinner as a one-on-one conversation with each person he sinned against, and is therefore insufficient.

If the sinner's victim died, the sinner must bring ten men to his grave and confess "I have sinned to Hashem and to this man" (606:2). The Mishna Berura (ibid 15, again citing Mateh Efraim (5)) requires that the sin be specified. Since a dead man cannot forgive, the sinner must be seeking forgiveness from Hashem. Still, it is incumbent upon him to specify the sin, so that the confession causes him to feel shame. Here, too, if specifying the sin will bring disgrace to the dead man's memory, it must be omitted (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 131:5). In such a situation, since it is not incumbent on the sinner to specify it, Hashem forgives him completely without it being specified.

If specifying will cause the victim pain, not shame, the sinner is likewise prohibited from doing so (Mo'adim U'zmanim 1:54, citing Rav Yisrael Salanter). The Chafetz Chaim's (4:12) requirement to reveal the lashon hara he said when asking forgiveness must refer to a case that will not cause the

victim pain (Dirshu fn. 10, citing Chut Shani (Yom Kippur) and Az Nidberu (7:66)). Otherwise, the Chafetz Chaim agrees that he may not specify the sin and cause the victim pain. Once again, since in such cases it is not incumbent upon him to specify the sin, he is forgiven completely. (See Minchas Asher (Vayikra pg. 269) who reaches this conclusion, seemingly against both Rav Yisrael Salatner and the Chafetz Chaim. In our analysis, they both agree with this conclusion).

IV

May one ask forgiveness more than the required three times? The Pri Chadash (606:1) cites a dispute on this matter, in which the Tur and Shulchan Aruch rule that one may, but the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 2:9) implies that one may not, rather he must leave the victim who refuses to forgive, and the one who does not forgive is now the sinner. The Pri Chadash agrees with the Rambam and adds that the sinner is forgiven if he attempts to appease the victim (Yoma 85b), even if the victim does not forgive him. (The Tur and Rabbeinu Bachya may disagree).

While this may make asking a fourth time unnecessary, why it is forbidden? Because having refused to forgive the sinner three times, there is a presumption (chazaka) that the victim will refuse again, and one may not cause him to sin. The Rambam's source (Bamidbar Raba 19:23) calls refusal to forgive sinful and cruel, a term cited by the Rama (606:1).

The Mishna Berura (8) adds that one who forgives another is forgiven by Hashem (Rosh Hashana 17a), and vice versa. Sha'ar Hatziyun (8) explains this as follows: in Shamayim they judge mida k'neged mida. As such, if one forgives a willful sin against him, Hashem forgives his willful sins as well. Thus, forgiving is beneficial not only to the sinner, but also to the victim who forgives, as he is thereby forgiven for his own sins.

Remarkably, recent studies have shown that letting go of grudges can protect against stress and the toll it takes on mental health (Time Magazine, Oct. 2, 2017, p. 31). Happiness results when one forgives others, and oneself, and makes a person physically healthier as well (p. 30). Thus forgiving benefits the one who forgave, both in this world and in the world to come.

The sale of Yosef is the paradigmatic sin bein adam l'chaveiro (See Meshech Chochma to Vayikra 16:30). Interpersonal sins caused the churban Bayis Sheini (Yoma 9b) and the murder of millions by the Romans, including the ten martyrs. The proper balance of truth and peace, and the avoidance of sin'as chinam, are critical conditions needed to reverse the tide of history and rebuild the Bais Hamikdash (See Radak to Zecharia 8:19).

Each member of Klal Yisroel can hasten the geula by avoiding interpersonal sins, by asking forgiveness from those he wronged, and by forgiving those who have wronged him. We must all learn the lessons taught by Rabbeinu Bachya, the Gemara, the Rambam and the Mishna Berura. We must seek forgiveness, despite the shame of specifying our misdeed, unless specifying will cause the victim shame or pain. We must grant forgiveness, realizing that we may have caused the sinner to wrong us. Moreover, if we do not forgive, we are termed cruel and sinful. Finally, forgiving benefits both the sinner and the victim, in this world and the world to come. May we thereby witness the ultimate geula quickly.

Today, Asara b'Teves, may be the anniversary of mechiras Yosef (D'rashos Bais Yishaya, p. 242). The Chasam Sofer, quoting earlier sources, writes that each year, on Asara b'Teves, the Heavenly Court decides whether the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt during the coming year. By improving our interpersonal behavior, seeking forgiveness, and granting it, we can do our share to make this year the year of redemption. When we balance truth and peace properly, Asara b'Teves, and other fasts, will be days of joy and celebration (Zecharia 8:19).

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## **Rav Yissocher Frand – Parshas Vayechi**

### *Humility Protects Against the Evil Eye*

When Yaakov gave his Bracha to Ephraim and Manashe he said, “May the Angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they reproduce abundantly like fish within the land.” [Bereshis 48:16] The expression “v’yidgo l’rov” [may they reproduce abundantly like fish] is a strange expression. Rashi explains: “And may they reproduce like these fish that proliferate and become numerous and the evil eye has no effect on them.”

Why are fish not affected by the evil eye (Ayin haRah)? The Gemara says in Tractate Brochos [20a; 55b]: “Just as fish are covered by the sea (i.e. – they are ‘out of sight’) and the Evil Eye cannot rule over them, so too the Evil Eye will not be able to rule over Yosef’s descendants. Yosef and his descendants have the bracha of “alei ayin” [Bereshis 49:22] – they are above the eye and not affected by Ayin HaRah.

There is another fascinating aspect as to why fish are not subject to the Evil Eye. It is based on a Chizkuni, which is further elaborated upon by a sefer called the Pa’aneach Razah. These two sources point out that Adam never gave names to the fish “because they are hidden from the eyes of man.” The Torah mentions that the Almighty brought all the animals to Adam and he gave them names. The Torah mentions names of various animals – both the Kosher and non-Kosher animals – in various contexts in the Torah. We even know the names of various reptiles and insects. However, names of species of fish are not mentioned anywhere in the Torah.

There are many different kinds of fish. There are thousands of species of fish in the world. If someone does not believe me, they can go down to the National Aquarium here in Baltimore and see the unique fish and their names. Nonetheless, the Torah does not specify fish names! This is a strange thing.

That is why fish are not subject to Ayin HaRah. It is because they are anonymous. Ayin HaRah only affects people and things that stand out. This is what the Chizkuni and the Pa’aneach Razah are alluding to. The reason that the fish in the sea are not subject to Ayin HaRah is not only that they are under water and hidden. More than that – from the time of Creation they have been anonymous. They are not glaring. Such a situation protects from the Evil Eye.

If we extrapolate this idea to human beings, does it mean that because we all have names, we are all doomed to Ayin HaRah? That is not the case. Rashi writes [Sanhedrin 19b D.H. Tokfo shel Yosef]: “Anavah – davar she’ayn lo shem, she’adam oseh lefi tumo” [Modesty – something which has no name, a person acts simply]. This means if a person has the ability to stay out of the public eye and not stick himself into everyone’s face – then even within the context of being a human being who does have a name – he can still achieve a certain amount of anonymity and meld in with the rest of the society. This is a “segulah” for avoiding the Evil Eye. Anonymity does not necessarily mean that a person is nameless, but if a person is humble, he too has protection.

The Chidah states this explicitly. The Chidah believes that a person with humility can escape the Evil Eye. Someone who is humble does not prance around and try to attract attention to himself. It is specifically such attention-grabbing actions that attract the Evil Eye. The Chidah points out that the Hebrew word Anavah (ayin nun vov hay) has the same numeric value as Ayin (ayin yud nun) plus one, indicating that Anavah (modesty) transcends the (Evil) “Ayin” (Eye). The Gematria of Ayin is 120; that of Anavah is 121. Thus, the Chidah says that one with Anivus “is above” the (Evil) Eye! This is the same message the Chizkuni and the Pa’aneach Razah are teaching us – fish are hidden and anonymous and therefore they are not subject to the Ayin HaRah.

*Shimon and Levi: Then and Now*

When Yaakov blesses each of his sons, he does not articulate some of the “Brachos” in the traditional way of giving a Bracha to someone, but in fact, he formulates them in terms of a critique of the particular son. For certain tribes, Yaakov points out their foibles and mistakes. Two of those sons were Shimon and Levi. Yaakov Avinu did not forget what they did to Shechem, and the anguish they caused him because of that incident. Yaakov says – because of this – “I will divide them up amongst Jacob and I will scatter them within Israel.” [Bereshis 49:7]

Rashi interprets: “There are a preponderance of poor people – scribes and teachers of young children amongst the Tribe of Shimon – in order that they be spread out – and the Tribe of Levi – he caused them to travel around for their food by going to the threshing floors to obtain Terumos and tithes.” Levi did not have any farmland of their own and they were dependent on others for their income. Shimon, likewise, took the role of the scribes and the teachers of children.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky wonders: It appears that Yaakov wanted to punish these two tribes for the rash actions of their founders. So what type of “curse” does he give them? “I am going to make you teachers.” They will need to go from city to city. They teach in one city for a few years and then for whatever reason, the people do not like them, and they need to travel to another city. These are the teachers of our young children. They are entrusted with the most precious commodity that we have – our children. Also, the scribes are from Shimon. If a scribe writes a wrong letter yud (i.e. – even the smallest letter of the alphabet) a pair of tephillin will be pasul [invalid]. Someone can go a whole lifetime without fulfilling the mitzvah of tephillin if he received a pair of tephillin written by a careless scribe for his Bar Mitzvah. What does it mean, Rav Kamenetsky asks, that Yaakov Avinu “curses” these sons – by giving them the most critical jobs in the Jewish nation?

Rav Yaakov answers, that this is clearly not the correct understanding of the message Yaakov is giving to Simon and Levi. The correct interpretation is as follows: It takes a special type of person to be a sofer and it takes a special type of person to be a Rebbe. The person needs to be in the job for the Sake of Heaven and he needs to put away his personal considerations. Doing something l’Shem Shamayim requires self-sacrifice and dedication (Mesiras Nefesh). This level of dedication requires zealotry [kana-us].

Shimon and Levi exhibited kana-us. They were zealots. They took up the righteousness of the cause of their sister who was violated. The other brothers may have been bothered about Dinah’s situation, but they did not do anything about it. Shimon and Levi were incensed that this should happen to their sister! They were willing to be moser nefesh. It was not a cakewalk to go into the city of Shechem and rescue their sister. This took a special breed of people.

Rav Yaakov says, that is why they became the teachers of young children. It is because they are zealots, and to be melamdei tinokos requires the special kana-us that Shimon and Levi exhibited.

Rav Yaakov elaborates, “Let us see what happened to Shimon and Levi. What did they each do with their zealotry?” Levi refined his zealotry. Levi used his kana-us properly and in the right vein. When it came time – after the sin of the Golden Calf – when Moshe called out “Who will follow Hashem? Come to me!” It was only the Tribe of Levi that all stepped forward. They answered the call. Over the years, they perfected their patriarch’s perhaps unbridled kana-us. Rav Yaakov even suggests that they perfected it because they spent the time in Egypt learning Torah. Shevet Levi was exempt from the enslavement. So what did they do? They learned Torah. When a person occupies himself with Torah and becomes a Ben Torah, that refines, directs, and channels kana-us properly. At the critical moment after the Sin of the Calf, they knew what to do. Therefore, at the end of the Torah, when Moshe gives the Tribes his blessings, he comments to Levi: “They teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel...” [Devarim 33:10] That is Levy.

Shimon, on the other hand, never got it right. From the time he first exhibited kana-us it was a kana-us at the opposite end of the spectrum. When

the Tribe of Shimon challenged the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu during the incident involving Zimri and Cozbi, when he publicly had relations with a Midianite princess, it was also a brazen act. His zealotry was never refined, it was never channeled.

At the end of his discussion, Rav Yaakov writes the following: Zealotry which is not directed and tempered by halachic principles is not able to succeed and ultimately will wipe out the zealous person from the world. Only great Torah personalities in each and every generation have the proper intuition to recognize when one must act with zealotry and protest, and when one must be silent. Only Gedolei Yisrael are endowed with the uncanny ability to decide when it is right to stand up and when it is right sometimes to be quiet. The yardstick for this determination is given over only to those who also have been given the key to Torah understanding.

Kana-us is a dangerous thing and the only way it can be used is through direction of Gedolei Torah. People who employ kana-us unguided by appropriate Torah intuition trigger results that never end well.

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**The Future of the Past (Vayechi 5779)**

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

The scene that brings the book of Genesis to a close is intensely significant. Joseph’s brothers were terrified that, after the death of their father Jacob, Joseph would take revenge against them for selling him into slavery. Years before, he had told them that he forgave them: “Now, do not worry or feel guilty because you sold me. Look: God has sent me ahead of you to save lives” (Gen. 45:5). Evidently, though, they only half-believed him.

Their fear was based on the fact that, as is clear from the earlier story of Esau, sons were not allowed to take revenge against their brothers in the lifetime of their father. Esau had said, “The days of mourning for my father will be here soon. I will then be able to kill my brother Jacob” (Gen. 27:41). That is what the brothers now feared: that Joseph had not really forgiven them but was simply waiting until Jacob died.

That is why, after Jacob’s death, the brothers sent word to Joseph saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father” (Gen. 50:16).

So Joseph had to tell them again that he forgave them:

“Don’t be afraid,” said Joseph. “Am I in place of God? You intended to harm me but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Gen. 50:19–20)

The episode is moving in itself, but it also resolves one of the central questions of the book of Genesis – sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. Can brothers live peaceably with one another? This question is fundamental to the biblical drama of redemption, for 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 slavery to freedom. These words of Joseph, though, tell us something more. I have previously argued that the entire drama Joseph put the brothers through when they came to buy food in Egypt – accusing them of being spies, and so on – was to test whether they had done teshuvah. Did they realise the wrong they had done in selling Joseph and had they really changed as a result? At the height of the drama, as soon as Judah said he would stay as a slave so that his brother

Benjamin could go free, Joseph revealed his true identity to them and forgave them. Judah, who had proposed selling Joseph as a slave, had completely changed. He had done teshuvah. He was now a different person. Yet something more is revealed in this last conversation between Joseph and his brothers. It concerns the most paradoxical of all rabbinic statements about teshuvah. It was said by one of the great baalei teshuvah, penitents, of the Talmud: the third-century sage known as Reish Lakish. Originally a highway robber, he was persuaded by Rabbi Yochanan to give up his lawless ways and join him in the house of study. Reish Lakish repented and became Rabbi Yochanan's disciple and colleague (and also his brother-in-law: he married Yochanan's sister).

Perhaps speaking from his own experience, he said: Great is repentance, because through it deliberate sins are accounted as though they were merits, as it is said, "When the wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (Ezekiel 33:19).[1] This statement is almost unintelligible. How can we change the past? How can deliberate sins be transformed into their opposite – into merits, good deeds? The quotation from Ezekiel does not prove the point. If anything, it does the opposite. The prophet is speaking about a person who, having undergone teshuvah, now does good instead of evil – and it is because of his good deeds, not his earlier evil ones, that "he shall live." The verse says that good deeds can overcome a previous history of wrongdoing. It does not say that they can turn bad into good, deliberate sins into merits.

Reish Lakish's statement is intelligible only in the light of Joseph's words to his brothers after the death of their father: "You intended to harm me but God intended it for good." The brothers had committed a deliberate sin by selling Joseph into slavery. They had then done teshuvah. The result, says Joseph, is that – through divine providence ("God intended it") – their action is now reckoned "for good."

Not only is this the source of Reish Lakish's principle; 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 they are what we sought to achieve. The good consequences are not: they are mere unintended outcomes.

Thus, in the case of Joseph, many positive things happened once he had been brought to Egypt. Eventually 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 the brothers not done as they did. The reason is that the brothers neither foresaw nor intended this set of outcomes. They meant to sell Joseph as a slave, and that is what they did.

However, once the brothers 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. Paraphrasing Shakespeare's Mark Antony, the good they did would live after them; the bad was interred with the past (Julius Caesar, act III, scene 2.). That is how, through repentance, deliberate sins can be accounted as merits, or as Joseph put it: "You intended to harm me, but God 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. Surely time is asymmetrical. We can change the future but not the past. We can choose what is yet to be, but, in the words of the sages, "What has been, has been,"[2] and we cannot alter it.

We now see, through Joseph's and Reish Lakish's words, a revolutionary idea. There are two concepts of the past. The first is what happened. That is something we cannot change. The second is the significance, the meaning, of what happened. That is something we can change.

The great truth about the role of time in our lives is that we live life forwards, but we understand it only looking back. Consider an autobiography. Reading the story of a life, we see how a deprived childhood led to the woman of iron ambition, or how the early loss of a parent drove

the man who spent his later years pursuing fame in search of the love he had lost.

It might have been otherwise. The deprived childhood or the loss of a parent might have led to a life dominated by a sense of defeat and inadequacy. What we become depends on our choices, and we are often 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. If life is like a narrative, then later events change the significance of earlier ones. That is what the story of Joseph and his brothers is telling us, according to Reish Lakish.

Joseph was saying to his brothers: by your repentance, you have written a new chapter in the story of which you are a part. The harm you intended to do me ultimately led to 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 you have transformed yourself through teshuvah, you have transformed the story of your life as well. By your change of heart you have earned the right to be included in a narrative whose ultimate outcome was benign. We cannot change the past, but we can change the story people tell about the past. But that only happens when we ourselves change.

We can only change the world if we can change ourselves. That is why the book of Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and his brothers. It tells on an individual level the story that the book of Exodus tells on a national level. Israel is charged with the task of transforming the moral vision of mankind, but it can only do so if individual Jews, of whom the forerunners were Jacob's children, are capable of changing themselves.

Teshuvah is the ultimate assertion of freedom. 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.

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**Weekly Parsha VAYECHI**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The era of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people ends with this week's Torah reading. There are times when the passing of a generation happens without even notice. But there are other times when even a casual observer of the world scene realizes that the old era has ended and that a new one is about to begin. The passing of Jacob and his children, in the entire generation of the 70 souls that descended into Egypt, was noticed by both their descendants and by the Egyptian government and people as well. The benevolence extended to Jacob and his family – albeit because of Joseph and his act of saving Egypt from starvation – was to end. The Torah does not expand on this attitude change except to remark the ancient anti-Semitic canard, that there are too many Jews and that they are too influential and not loyal. This excuse would be used to enslave the Jewish people and persecute them.

In history, sometimes things move slowly from one generation to the next whereas at other times they move rapidly and uncomfortably. By ending the book of Bereishith with the death of Jacob and Joseph, the Torah prepares us for the next book which will show the Jewish people in a completely different state of being. It is most interesting that the Torah calls this story of the end of the era by the word that indicates life. Life is always seen as a new beginning and no matter what the changing circumstances may be, Jacob and his descendants will continue to live.

Jacob has his wish fulfilled and is buried with his ancestors in the land of Israel. However, when it came time to bury Joseph, it is obvious that the Pharaoh and the Egyptian people will not allow him, even in death, to leave their borders. But Joseph has a strategy that he knows will outlive the

decrees and policies of any of the pharaohs of Egypt. He has his descendants take a solemn oath that they will take his body from the sealed casket of the Nile River and return him to the home of the Jewish people, the land of Israel.

Joseph is confident that this oath and the memory of it within the psyche of the Jewish people will be enough so that even centuries later they will see to it that his body is removed from Egyptian exile and reburied in the land of his fathers, the land of Jewish eternity. After generations of slavery, idolatry and forgetfulness, the Jewish people will be redeemed. When that happens, they will recall the ancient oaths that they took, that they would take Joseph out with them and bring him to the land of Israel. This is a paradigm, an example for all Jewish history and life. Even after centuries of exile, after moments of terrible forgetfulness and confusion, somehow the Jewish people remembered where their true home was, where they would achieve great and mighty accomplishments against all odds. That is why this holy book describes life itself.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

**Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)**

**By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, so the whole age of Jacob was one hundred and forty-seven years. And the days of Jacob drew near to die...” (Gen. 47:28, 29)

The final verse of the last portion of Vayigash summarizes the astonishing achievement of the Israelites in Egypt: ‘And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the country of Goshen and they took possession of it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly’ [Gen. 47:27]. Could anything be a clearer testament to the resilience of Jacob’s descendants who, in a relatively short period of time, managed to grow rich in real estate, to be fruitful and to multiply?

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

There are no paragraphs or indications of chapters in the text of the Torah scrolls. Rather, a white space – anywhere from a minimum of nine letters wide to the end of the entire line – is the Torah’s way of indicating that a pause or separation of some kind exists between the previous verse and the following section.

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

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

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

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

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

Does this request sound like the words spoken by the Grand Vizier of Egypt?

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

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

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

Ordinarily a person wants to be buried in his own homeland where his body will become part of the earth to which he feels most deeply connected.

Indeed, in the ancient world the most critical right of citizenship was the right of burial. The wise Jacob understands that Pharaoh expected Joseph to completely identify with Egypt, to bring up generations of faithful and committed Egyptians after all that his adopted country has given to him. But this was impossible for Jacob – and the patriarch hoped that it would also be impossible for his children and grandchildren as well. They were in Egypt but not of Egypt. They might contribute to Egyptian society and economy, but they could never become Egyptians. Jacob understood that his burial in Canaan would be the greatest test of Joseph’s career, and would define the character of his descendants forever. Hence he makes his beloved son solemnly swear not to bury him in Egypt. Hence our Midrash understands that Hebrew servitude in Egypt begins at this very juncture, when Joseph understands that the Hebrews would always be stranger-slaves in Egypt. Indeed, Egypt is a story of every Jewish Diaspora in history.

Shabbat Shalom

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5757-vayechi/>

**Drasha Parshas**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

**Hope in a Box**

“And Yoseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years and they put him in a coffin in Egypt.” (Genesis 50:26) Thus ends the Book of Genesis. With those words the entire congregation rises in unison and shouts, “Chazak! Chazak! V’nischazek!” Be strong! Be strong! And may we all be strengthened!

It is troubling. First, Sefer Bereishis (Genesis) ends in a state of limbo. Yoseph is not even buried; he lies dormant in a box through the entire ensuing exile. He asks his children to remember him and eventually bury his bones with them upon their exodus. Why does he not seek immediate burial in Canaan like his father Yaakov?

Second, the entire juxtaposition seems inappropriate. After we end Sefer Bereishis and declare that “Yoseph was put in a box in Egypt,” we all shout almost as in a cheer, “Be Strong and be strengthened.” Are those somber words a proper lead-in to the shouts of Chazak?

Would it not have been more fitting to end the book of Genesis with the passing of Jacob, his burial in Israel, and the reconciliation of Yoseph and his brothers? That would have been a morally uplifting ending and would have left the congregation with a sense of closure.

Yet, it seems that there is a definitive purpose in ending Genesis with Yoseph’s state of limbo. What is it?

Alexander the Great (356-322 B.C.E.), king of Macedonia, and ruler of most of the civilized world, died at a young age. Before he embarked on his conquest of Asia, he inquired into the welfare and stability of his loyal followers, lest their dependents fall destitute during the long battle. After assessing their needs he disbursed nearly all his royal resources amongst his faithful. His friend General Perdicas was surprised.

“What have you reserved for yourself?” he asked the mighty ruler.

“Hope,” answered the king. “There is always hope.”

“In that case,” replied his followers, “we who share in your labor shall share in your hope.”

With that they refused the wealth that Alexander allotted them.

Perhaps there is great meaning behind the Torah’s abrupt conclusion leaving a congregation to ponder as they hear the words “and he was put in a box in Egypt” juxtaposed with shouts of rejuvenation.

Yoseph’s quest was to leave this world with more than memories. He wanted to declare to his survivors that he, too, would not find his final rest during their tenure of suffering. Yoseph, the first of the sons of Yaakov to die in a foreign land, understood that with his passing, the long exile would slowly emerge. The children of Jacob would slowly and painfully transform from saviors to visitors, and then from visitors to strangers. Finally they would be considered by their hosts as intruders worthy of enslavement. But Yoseph also knew that one day the exile would end and that his people would once again be free. By remaining in a box, Yoseph concurrently declared his message of hope and solidarity to the multitudes that simultaneously awaited his final burial and their redemption. Silently, in an unburied box, he waited with them as the echoes of his pact rang in their memories. “When G-d will indeed remember you, then you must bring my bones up with you.”

It is a message for all generations. It is a message for all times. When we see the bones of Yoseph, unburied and in a box — “we must not see a box of bones — see the hope that lies therein.” We see the hope and faith that the patriarch declared to his children. “Do not bury me now, as you surely will be remembered one day. My hope is your hope.”

And as the congregation finishes the Bereishis on that unfinished note, they stand up and shout in unison, “Chazak! Chazak! V’nischazek!” Be strong! Be strong! May we all be strengthened!” For one day we will all be free.

Good Shabbos ©1996 Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**FaxHomily - Imrei Binyamin - Parsha Vayechi**

**Rabbi Binyamin Kamenetzky's Thoughts on Parshas Vayechi**

**Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky**

*A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,*

*transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky*

*Sponsored in memory of*

*הרב חנינה געציל בן משה זצ"ל*

*The Menahel of Yeshiva of South Shore. With love and wisdom, he taught, nurtured, and guided hundreds of talmidim in Yeshiva of South Shore.*

**Collective Individualism**

Dear Readers, because of the request to continue in the path of Faxhomily, I will attempt to incorporate a meaningful story with the divrei Torah of my grandfather.

Yaakov Avinu, sensing that his end was near, gathered his children at his bedside and blessed them. He blessed every one of his twelve children with a specific bracha, unique to his personality and inner strengths.

When Yaakov is finished blessing his children, the passuk tells us, "Ish asher kibirchaso berach osam" "Each man according to his blessing, he blessed them." (49:38). The wording of the passuk is troubling. The passuk begins in the singular, "Each man according to his blessing," and ends in the plural, "He blessed them." Shouldn't the passuk end with a singular expression also, "He blessed him"?

The Menahel of Yeshiva of South Shore, Rav Chanina Herzberg zt"l, who passed away this week, was a master educator, who sought out the individual talent and strengths in every single child under his tutelage.

There was once a boy in the yeshiva who was a fair student, until he started acting out of line. While he was in the upper elementary grades, his mode of dress and behavior started to shift slightly towards the rebellious side. He grew his hair longer, and wore clothing which were less refined than the other boys. As time passed, his behavior was bordering on disrespectful, and his rabbeim were beginning to label him as a troubled teen.

One day, he came to yeshiva with his top two buttons of his shirt open, wearing a golden chain on his neck. This was simply too much for his rebbe, who after commenting to the talmid how he is dressed inappropriately for yeshiva, went to Rabbi Herzberg and pressured him to suspend the boy from yeshiva. Rabbi Herzberg, in his keen understanding of youth, and with his loving and accepting philosophy which he absorbed from his rebbe, Rav Shlomo Freifeld zt"l, asked the rebbe, "Did you ever watch this boy daven?" The rebbe, surprised by the question, responded in the negative. "Watch how he davens." Rabbi Herzberg responded. "Watch how he stands and davens shemoneh esrei - eyes closed, with deep concentration. Then come back and tell me if you still want him sent away from the yeshiva."

Indeed, Rabbi Herzberg's prescient patience and vision paid off, as this boy is a fine young man Torah, who spent many years in Kollel and now has a respectable position in the community. His davening is still paradigm. My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l explains the above quandary: Yaakov Avinu understood that every shevet is unique. He wanted everyone to be unique. The greatest blessing to all of them collectively is that each shevet received a focused blessing according to their strength. Thus, "Each man according to his blessing (individually), he blessed them (collectively)."

Good Shabbos!

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayechi**  
**For the week ending 22 December 2018 / 14 Tevet 5779**  
**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**  
**Insights**

**With the Help of Heaven**

**“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)**

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is a global campaign promoting various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets what the campaign describes as “[Israel’s] obligations under international law”, defined as withdrawal from the occupied territories, removal of the separation barrier in the West Bank, full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and promotion of the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Voices against the BDS movement claim that it judges the State of Israel with standards different from those used to judge other political situations. For example, Charles Krauthammer wrote: “Israel is the world’s only Jewish state. To apply to the state of the Jews a double standard that you apply to none other, to judge one people in a way you judge no other, to single out that one people for condemnation and isolation — is to engage in a gross act of discrimination.” Retired Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz compares the way BDS proponents “single-out” Israel for its human rights violations with the way Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell defended his decision to impose anti-Jewish quotas in the beginning of the 20th century. When asked why there should be a quota on Jews, Lowell replied, “Jews cheat.” When reminded that Christians cheat too, Lowell responded, “You’re changing the subject. We are talking about Jews now.”

In this week’s Torah portion the quintessential exile of the Jewish People into Egypt reaches its conclusion with Yaakov and all his family firmly domiciled in the Land of Goshen. In spite of all of Yosef’s public service to Egypt, rescuing the country from the ravages of a world-wide famine and skillfully navigating Egypt to a position of unrivalled prominence and power, we learn in the very first sentences of the book of Exodus that “a new king arose of Egypt, who did not know Yosef.” (1:8) Here is the archetypal source of the amnesia shown by host nations to their Jewish citizens: They welcome our skills and industriousness and then turn around and say, “Yeah, but what have you done for us lately?”

What causes this amnesia?

210 years later, when Moshe leads the Jewish People out of Egypt, they were immersed in idol worship. Clearly this did not happen overnight. In fact, from the moment the Jewish People entered Egypt, the effect of the spiritual impurity of that land started its work. Slowly but very surely it took its toll, and the Jewish people started to forget Who it is that helps and guards them. When we write a letter or an essay or even a list or a drawing, we put an abbreviation of three letters either in Hebrew or English in the top right-hand corner of the paper. We write BS”D, meaning B’sayatta d’Shamaya, which is the Aramaic for “with the help of Heaven”. We declare that everything that we can write, think or create comes only with the help of Heaven.

When a Jew forgets from where his help comes, BS”D will turn into BD”S.

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**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**  
**No Two Snowflakes Are Alike**

When I’m not in Israel, live on the eastern seaboard of the United States, which tends to have significant snowfall during the winter. Most people find snowfall a nuisance. But for me, a snowfall is a chance to reflect on one of the Almighty’s greatest wonders, the little snowflake.

The snowflake, held under a magnifying glass, is an exquisitely intricate and beautiful creation. Furthermore, every snowflake is unique. No two snowflakes are alike.

The uniqueness of each snowflake is but one example of an amazing fact, which is true of the entire natural world. No two blades of grass are identical, no two leaves are exactly the same, and every individual member of every animal species is unique in some way.

This is true of human beings as well. None of us has the same fingerprint, and no matter how closely one of us might resemble another, we are different from the other in some respect.

The Talmud recognizes this when it comments that “just as no two faces are alike, so too, no two personalities are alike”. We are different from each other physically, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually, and in every other way.

Any person who has parented several children knows that each child is different from the get-go. Mothers tell me that even while still pregnant with their children, they were aware of the potential differences that unfolded later in life.

Woe to the teacher who treats all of his students alike. The so-called cookie cutter method of education is doomed to failure. Each of us has different learning styles and differing intellectual strengths and weaknesses. The secret of successful pedagogy lies in the recognition of individual differences, and in the ability of the teacher to be flexible enough to adapt his or her lessons to each individual and his or her learning needs.

In this week’s Torah portion, Vayechi, we find that our patriarch Jacob was well aware of this secret.

Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph, and later proceeds to bless each one of his sons, the twelve tribes. Reading these blessings, we cannot help but notice how each one is fundamentally different and seems tailor-made to the character traits and emotional makeup of each tribe.

Jacob blesses one son with power and dominion; another with agricultural wealth. One is compared to a lion, one to a wolf, and yet another to a serpent.

Jacob knows his children and knows how diverse and heterogeneous his family is. He knows how to bless them with the particular resources that they will need as they march forward, with varying talents and dispositions, into their historical roles.

The Bible underscores this when it summarizes the entire episode of the blessings with the following words:

“All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a blessing appropriate to him.” (Genesis 49:28) To each a different blessing, to each his own parting word.

The fact that each of us is uniquely gifted is a basic component of the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, who passed away more than 70 years ago, but whose written legacy keeps him very much alive.

Rav Kook insists that the very purpose of education is to help each person discover his or her own individuality, to learn what he or she can do best. Self-discovery, for Rav Kook, is the essence of the educational endeavor. Rav Kook, besides being an educator, was also a mystic. From his mystical perspective, he views the world as being a unified whole, to which every individual is necessary, because each individual contributes something utterly unique to the cosmos.

Each snowflake is different from the other because the beauty of each snowflake is equally essential to nature’s beauty.

Each human being is unique because the contribution of every one of us is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of humanity's ultimate mission. Like Jacob's children, we all are uniquely blessed. Appreciating our uniqueness as that of every one of our fellow men is an essential component of Jewish spirituality.

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**  
**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayechi**

פרשת ויחי תשל"ט  
ועשיית עמדי חסד ואמת

#### **And do kindness and truth with me. (47:29)**

*Rashi* explains that the kindness performed towards the dead is the kindness of truth, altruistic kindness. Every act of lovingkindness carries with it the possibility of reciprocity or of some form of recompense. When one performs kindness for the deceased he has no hope for any return. This is pure altruism, ie, truth. *Rashi* seems to be describing the acts of *chesed* as consisting of two levels: plain *chesed*; and *chesed* infused with *emes*. Yaakov *Avinu* was asking Yosef to commit to an act of kindness which reflected truth, an extraordinary act of kindness, unlike any other: kindness characterized by truth. This implies that the *chesed* act remains static, unchanged, which is probably true from the position of the beneficiary. Kindness is kindness. From the perspective of the benefactor, the one carrying out the act of kindness, however, *chesed* which has the added component of *emes*, is a *chesed* of a different genre. It is not the same act of *chesed* as "plain" *chesed*. How can we understand this?

When Yosef *HaTzaddik* saw that his end was near, he asked his brothers to see to it that his remains would be removed from Egypt for burial in *Eretz Yisrael*. He followed in the path of his father, who had previously made the same request of his sons. A difference existed, however, with regard to the nature of their requests: Yaakov asked his sons to execute the deed, while Yosef requested this of his brothers. He did not address his sons. Indeed, at the time of *geulas Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian redemption, when the Jews departed from the land that had been their surrogate home for 210 years, it was Moshe *Rabbeinu*, a descendant of Levi, who removed Yosef's bones from Egypt. Why did Yosef ask his brothers – not his own sons – to take his bones out of Egypt? Furthermore, why was Moshe, the leader of the nation (who probably had other things to do), selected to carry out the promise to Yosef?

*Horav Levi Dicker, zl*, explains that an additional component is intrinsic *chesed*, kindness, of which we are unaware. Complete kindness is kindness that has come full-circle, with the receiver reciprocating kindness to the benefactor. Yosef had done so much for his brothers, from finding them a place to live, to sustaining them in Egypt. He had forgiven them for selling him into slavery. He had done everything to alleviate their feelings of melancholy concerning what they did and their fear over what he might do in revenge. Nonetheless, despite all of this, Yosef's expression of kindness to his brothers remained incomplete.

What is the definition of complete kindness? *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, explains that complete kindness is the process by which the beneficiary is able to reciprocate the kindness to his benefactor. The *Zohar HaKadosh* writes that by performing *mitzvos*, we complete Hashem's kindness to us. He is benevolent; we "pay back" via the agency of *mitzvah* performance. When a person acts kindly to another person, but does not allow the beneficiary to do anything in return, his act of kindness is deficient; it is lacking, because the beneficiary is pained by his inability to reciprocate. He feels that he is in debt until that time in which he is given the opportunity to repay that kindness with a kindness of his own. Hashem certainly does not need anything from us. Nonetheless, in His infinite kindness, He grants us the opportunity to reciprocate, thereby "relieving" us of our obligation to Him.

Yosef also wanted to avail his brothers the opportunity to return the favor, but since he was the viceroy of Egypt, they could do very little for him. Yosef obviously could not personally negotiate taking his own bones out of Egypt. Thus, he asked his brothers to do for him what he would be unable to do for himself. Thus, he was setting the scene for his act of *chesed* to achieve completion. This is why he did not ask his sons. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, too, was in a unique position. As *Klal Yisrael's* leader, he was the people's surrogate; in this manner, he was uniquely suited to act on behalf of the entire Jewish nation. He had the ability to grant all of the *Shevatim* the closure they required, thus completing Yosef's acts of kindness.

Returning now to our original questions: Are there two forms of *chesed*? And what is the meaning of *chesed v'emes*? As we explained, in order for *chesed* to be complete it must go full circle, allowing for the beneficiary to reciprocate. Anything less deprives

the benefactor of the complete *mitzvah*. When one performs *chesed* for the dead, reciprocity is impossible. In such an act of *chesed v'emes*, the benefactor must come to terms with the notion that he is performing *chesed* that is supported by truth. He can expect nothing in return – not even a thank you. This is absolute *chesed*.

*Chesed Shel Emes* is an area shrouded in obscurity. The *misaskim*, volunteers, who engage in their holy work of preparing the deceased for burial, are involved in an endeavor that can best be described as otherworldly. Dealing with the deceased requires reverence, being aware that the body is the physical container which houses the *neshamah*, soul, the spiritual life force of the human being as the soul's earthly repository; the body maintains a degree of holiness and must be treated accordingly. Anyone who is involved in the holy work of *Chevra Kaddisha*, sacred burial society, attests to the verity that the members are engaged in an esoterically holy endeavor.

Stories concerning *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, provide glimpses into another world which members of the *chevra* occasionally witness. To the first-time reader, these stories might represent a stretch of the imagination, but having had the privilege to be a member of the *chevra* for the past forty years, I can state unequivocally that these stories may be taken at face value. Since I am limited by the parameter of space, I will pick one sample of the many incidents that have taken place.

A tragic accident occurred in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. A car lost control and was driven wildly onto the sidewalk, knocking down two people at a nearby bus stop and a woman who happened to be standing in front of a store window. The woman was a religious Jewess, a Russian immigrant. She died instantly.

One of the area *rabbanim* contacted *Chesed Shel Emes*, an organization in Brooklyn consisting of hundreds of volunteers, who address all *tzarchei ha'meis*, the needs involving the deceased – literally from illness to beyond. They are devoted 24/7 to this *chesed* which they perform with *emes*. *Chesed Shel Emes* immediately dispatched a volunteer to the medical examiner's office to ensure that no autopsy would be performed, that the *nifteres*, deceased, be treated with *kavod ha'meis*, full and proper respect, and that the body be released in a timely manner. Several volunteers went to the scene of the accident to collect all human remains that were required to be buried.

*Chesed Shel Emes* maintains its own *chelka*, section, of the Jewish cemetery in Long Island. It is used for those who have no designated burial site, most frequently due to a lack of funds. Following the burial, the *misaskim* noticed that the grave right next to the new grave had the same last name as the present *nifteres*. After a little research, they discovered that this other grave belonged to none other than the present *nifteres'* grandmother, who had been brought to *Kever Yisrael*, Jewish burial, by *Chesed Shel Emes* several years earlier. Unquestionably, Hashem had manipulated the events, so that these two *neshamos*, *ha'nehavim v'ha'neimim b'chayehem u'bmosam lo nifradu*, "the beloved in life were not separated in death."

ראובן בכורי אתה... פחו כמים אל תותר

**Reuven, you are my firstborn... water-like impetuosity – you cannot be foremost. (49:3,4)**

The *Midrash (Yalkut Shemoni Mishlei 15, remez 953)* teaches, "Because Reuven, Shimon and Levi accepted the rebuke of their father, Yaakov *Avinu*, they merited to have their lineage enumerated together with that of Moshe and Aharon" (*Shemos* 6:14). The first three sons of Yaakov achieved an enviable pinnacle of spiritual merit by accepting their father's rebuke. The fact that Hashem rewarded them indicates that accepting rebuke is a challenging feat, a battle which they won, and one that apparently from which others not as strong as they might not have successfully emerged.

There is no question that no one looks forward (but should) to being rebuked, to being told that he has done something wrong, but is it this acceptance worthy of reward? *Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl*, vividly presents the scenario that must have taken place as the *Shevatim*, Tribes/brothers, stood around their father's deathbed. Certainly, the Torah giants (as they looked lovingly at Yaakov *Avinu*) thought about the Torah that he had taught them, his love and devotion to them, his infusing them with the *middos tovos*, refined character traits, in order to bring them to the point where they became the *Shivtei Kah*. They certainly wanted to continue learning, to derive more and greater Torah lessons. As he was about to depart this world, his final words would be based upon his observations of them, constructive words of criticism that would make them even better leaders. Is there any question concerning their attitude at this unique time? Would there be any possibility of resentment on their part that would somehow impede their acceptance of rebuke? Yet, *Chazal* imply that Reuven, Shimon and Levi had to overcome the challenge of listening to Yaakov's critique. Why?

Apparently (explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*), accepting criticism properly is a difficult task – even for such spiritual giants. Despite their unparalleled love for Yaakov and the reciprocal love which they were certain he had for them, and despite the awe and reverence in which they viewed him, they would still maintain a tinge – a small vestige – of resistance to his *mussar*, words of rebuke. This resistance would have impeded their acceptance of the final message of Yaakov *Avinu*. To their credit, explain *Chazal*,

they triumphed over the hurdle, overcame their resistance, by accepting his rebuke wholeheartedly. For this, they were justly rewarded.

What is the key to accepting criticism? The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites the *Midrash Socher Tov (Tehillim 53)*, which relates that David *Hamelech* had difficulty accepting rebuke from Avigayil. She contended that it was wrong to spill Naval's blood. She concluded, "Do not say 'I am the king,' so that no one may rebuke me. *Hocheach atah atzmecha*, Rebuke yourself!" From the fact that she summed up her rebuke with these closing words, we may glean that she suspected in her heart that David would not accept her rebuke. As king, he could come up with a number of excuses to permit his actions – even if it involved shedding blood. The mere fact that she felt compelled to say what she did teaches us that even *kedoshei elyon*, the spiritually high, the sanctified leaders, find it difficult to accept rebuke. What should we say?

Nonetheless, we derive a powerful lesson and guide for accepting rebuke from Avigayil's rebuke. "Rebuke yourself!" When we hear rebuke from someone, be it a friend or otherwise, it is good to introspect and think cogently, asking oneself: Is it possible that what he says is true? Could I be guilty of this infraction? Between "myself and the lamppost" is an ideal venue for self-scrutinization and soul-searching. Are we prepared to admit to ourselves what we shy away from conceding to others?

What is the usual reaction to rebuke? "Who are you to criticize me?" "What makes you so perfect?" When we are criticized, the reaction will invariably be to call to mind our critic's flaws. This is our way of defraying the pressure from us. All of the while, we lose out on the benefits of rebuke. The finest writers are those who seek out good editors. They do not fear critique. On the contrary, it improves their work.

Furthermore, we all know that *ohav es ha'tochachos*, love criticism, is one of the forty-eight paths to wisdom. Sadly, most people view criticism as a personal attack, which triggers all sorts of defense mechanisms. Indeed, the smaller the individual or the greater his guilt, the louder and less subtle are his defenses. Anyone who wants to achieve true distinction will appreciate and actually love criticism, because having his errors pointed out to him prevents him from repeating them.

*Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, explains that one of the reasons that we have difficulty accepting criticism is that it comes at times when we are not emotionally prepared. We are caught off guard. On the other hand, if one is a person who invites criticism, who does not hide from it, but actually welcomes constructive criticism, he is in a position to deal with it calmly, sensibly and seriously. Indeed, such a person does not wait for a crisis to erupt before he seeks advice. He wants to preempt and prevent a crisis.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* points out that people think that the word criticism is painful and negative. They feel that a critique means that they are "no good." Absolutely not. Criticism means "you are good, but I believe that you can be even better." Veritably, it is painful to discover our mistakes, but going through life repeating them is even more painful.

*Rav Weinberg* underscores the value of giving others (our friends and those about whom we really care) criticism. Someone who is suffering spiritually or emotionally is in as dire need of help as one who is suffering physically. We resist giving criticism because we want to be loved, and we think that people will resent us for criticizing them. The greater our love for someone, the greater should be our feelings of obligation to help by pointing out his error. If we were to see someone driving the wrong way on a highway, we would surely scream, "Stop!" Why do we allow our friends to drive the wrong way in life?

*Rav Weinberg* advises to "criticize wisely." If the critique will create animosity and discord, apply common sense and say nothing. It is better not to speak than create disharmony. Always ask yourself, "How would I react if I were on the receiving end? How would I want to be told of my problem?" For every one criticism, couch it with ten portions of love. Reassuring the person that you are on their side, that you really care and that everything you say emanates from a heart filled with love and care – goes a long way in restoring the person's confidence and mitigating whatever ill feelings he might develop in response.

Last, the most effective rebuke is demonstrating – through action and deed – how one should act. Children who do not appreciate the beauty and value of honesty probably come from homes in which parents do not place a premium upon their own sense of integrity to one another. Otherwise, the truth would be obvious to everyone. There would be no conflicts or discord at home. *Moshe Rabbeinu* was able to instruct *Klal Yisrael* because he represented the perfect person, one whose character was exemplary and whose Torah scholarship and *mitzvah* observance were exemplary.

The Hebrew word for rebuke is *tochachah*, a derivative of the word *hocheach*, which means to show or to prove. The *mochiach*, one who rebukes, must himself be a paragon of good. He must show that he is not personally deficient in whatever area he is rebuking the person about. Second, he must prove to the person whom he is rebuking that he has a problem. He cannot simply tell him; he must show and prove to him that a problem exists.

In conclusion, I add the words of Shlomo *Hamelech*, *Hochach l'chacham v'yeehavecha*, "Reprove a wise man – and he will love you" (*Mishlei 9:8*). Rebuke a person who possesses wisdom and common sense. Such a person will appreciate your concern and thank you for it. One who is deficient in the areas of wisdom and common sense will be suspicious of your motives and never forgive you. It is best to stay away and bite your tongue.

קברו אתי אל אבתי אל המערה אשר בשדה עפרון... שמה קברו את אברהם ואת שרה אשתו שמה קברו את יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו ושמה קברתי את לאה  
**Bury me among my fathers, in the cave that is in the field of Ephron... there they buried Avraham and his wife, Sarah; there they buried Yitzchak and his wife Rivkah; and there I buried Leah. (49:29,31)**

The *Meoras HaMachpeilah* (as explained by *Rashi*, *Ibid 23:9*) was called *machpeilah*, which means double. *Chazal* gave it this name either because it contained upper and lower chambers or due to the fact that *zuggos*, couples, that were buried there. It was the burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, couples united in life and death. Thus, *Yaakov Avinu* concluded his request to be buried there next to his "wife," Leah. If *Yaakov's* only reason for burial in the cave was to be buried next to his wife, he could have been buried next to Rachel *Imeinu* on the road to Bais Lechem. After all, she was the one whom he had originally preferred to marry. If he cared so much for her in life, he must have similarly cared for her in death. Why did he not insist on being buried next to Rachel? As a result of Rachel's indiscretion concerning the *tzaddik's* (*Yaakov's*) bed, Heaven decreed that she could not be buried near *Yaakov*. The Patriarch himself had no problem being buried next to her. He did not feel that his honor had been impugned. He had forgiven Rachel.

*Horav Bentzion Firer, zl*, explains that *Yaakov* decided in favor of being buried near Leah because he wanted to be close to his father and grandfather. He wanted burial in the family plot. The fact that Leah, his wife, was buried there was a factor in favor of *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. On the other hand, once we acknowledge why Rachel was buried on the road to Bais Lechem, we wonder why this exact same reason did not apply to him. *Chazal* say that Rachel was buried on the road so that she would serve as a source of comfort, to console the exiles who were being driven out by *Nevuzaraden*. Rachel would rise from her grave and pray that they be able to return to their home one day. If Rachel did this, why did *Yaakov* not want to do the same? Let crying for the Jewish People about to be driven from their homeland become a family affair. Imagine the effect if both *Yaakov* and Rachel would have risen from their graves to petition on behalf of the Jewish People. We might say that *Yaakov*, like *Avraham Avinu* and *Yitzchak Avinu*, did not advocate on behalf of the Jews. When Hashem said to them, "Your children have sinned!" they replied, "Let them be punished for Your Name." This is true only insofar that when *Yaakov* heard Hashem's accusation, he was only supporting Hashem's claim, "*Banecha chatu*." Although he explained that Hashem had instructed him to bury Rachel on the road so that she would be an advocate for her children, he should have countered, "I will also weep for them."

*Rav Firer* explains that, indeed, *Yaakov's* burial in *kever avosav*, the "family" plot, was to encourage his descendants to return to the Holy Land. For Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* after their exile, two criteria had to be satisfied. First, the return must conform with Hashem's Will; He must want them back in *Eretz Yisrael*. Second, *Klal Yisrael* must want to return. The first condition, to have Hashem agree that they return, was resolved via Rachel's tears. Her outpouring of emotions penetrated the Heavenly Gates and catalyzed a positive Heavenly response to end the exile and allow the Jewish People to return to the Land. The second condition that required *Klal Yisrael* to desire to return would be facilitated by *Yaakov Avinu* via his burial in *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. When the people would ruminate over return, versus remaining in Bavel or other countries of exile, the first query would be, "Is it our home?" If they were to return it was critical for them to feel that *Eretz Yisrael* was their homeland. Secure in the knowledge that therein lay their ancestors, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs who established their nation and from whom they (the exiles) descend, the people will have second thoughts about remaining in Bavel. No decision is easy. Was *Yaakov* to be buried next to Rachel or Leah? The answer was dependent upon what was ultimately (in the Patriarch's mind) the best catalyst for Jewish return to the land. What would engender their greatest longing for "home"?

*Rav Firer* observes that apparently Rachel's pleas achieved full realization, as Hashem granted reprieve to the Jewish People, ending their exile so that return to the Land was possible. The second criteria, which required the people to have a desire to return, was not as operative, since many Jews opted to remain in Bavel. Nonetheless, *Yaakov's* plan was not only focused on the Jews who were banished during the *Churban Bais Hamikdash*, but for all future generations, to the exiles driven out of the land by Titus and others. His plea continues to reverberate: "Come home to the Land where your forefathers are buried."

לעילוי נשמת

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### Parshas Vayechi - In a Single Moment

By BJLife/Reb Dovid Fink

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Parshas Vayechi represents the culmination of creation, the end of Sefer Breishis. The world and its teva are in place, Avraham Avieniu forms his Bris with Hashem, thus beginning the Jewish people and Avraham's children lead to the birth and forming of the Shivtei Yisroel – the 12 Shevatim. Indeed, much of the Parsha centers around Yaakov's brachos to his sons. Perhaps most fitting, within the brachos we find a telling piece of musar, one as applicable today as it was then, some three thousand years ago.

While much commentary has been devoted to the contents of each Bracha, perhaps the most stunning is the "blessing" given to Shimon and Levy. The "bracha" given to Shimon and Levy is unique in many respects. First, they are the only brothers whose "blessing" is a combined one – that is to say neither has their own special pasuk or pesukim. They are almost addressed as a single unit. Second, the "bracha" is rather disheartening and chilling. Their wrath is overtly cursed by Yaakov and they are plainly called to task for their improper behavior in killing Shechem. Finally, Yaakov delivers the remedy for their conduct and declares that they must be split up in Eretz Yisroel so as not to egg each other on in the future.

It is no wonder that Yaakov addressed Shimon and Levy together. Until this point they appeared to always act in unison, with one mind, one heart and unity of purpose. Shimon and Levy attacked and massacred Shechem with apparently little or no involvement from their other brothers. (Vayishlach 34:25) Rashi, in our parsha (49:5) further explains that it was Shimon and Levy who wanted to kill Yoseph before Reuven intervened with the suggestion to throw him into the pit and Yehuda ultimately encouraged selling him to the Yishmaelim. Yaakov saw them as a combined force and therefore knew they must be split up to break their damaging influence on each other. Indeed, the harshest criticism is reserved not for Shimon and Levy personally, but rather

for their wrath and misuse of weaponry. The Musar however comes from the course of history that would take shape

after this most humbling dressing down by Yaakov. Shimon and Levy, brothers in every way could not have taken more divergent paths from this point onward. Shimon and Levy, the extremists, prone to act on their impulses, were never heard from as a unit again. Shimon, for the most part, continues in many ways on a destructive course while Levy quickly becomes the standard bearer for Torah and Klal Yisroel. Levy is spared the shibud Mitzrayim. While Bnei Yisroel is enslaved, Levy lives outside of the slavery learning Torah. Moshe, Ahron and Miriam are born to Levy's daughter Yocheved and grandson Amram. Moshe becomes Klal Yisroel's greatest Navi and teacher, Ahron is granted the Kehuna for himself and his descendants and Miriam Haneveya is Zocheh to have Malchus Bais Dovid as her direct descendant. Levy is further granted special status as the Kohanim were to perform the Avodah in the Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash with the Levyim assisting them and singing shira. Levy's path after Yaakov's brachais impressive indeed.

The path of shevet Shimon is much more clouded. Shimon's next prominent appearance is with his son, Zimri. At the end of parshas Balak, Zimri openly champions for Bnei Yisroel to intermarry with Midyan. Zimri goes so far as to mock Moshe Rabbeinu by pointing out that Moshe is married to a Midyanite woman while "denying" them to the rest of B'nei Yisroel. Zimri then takes his loathsomeness to a new level by openly taking Kuzbi, a Midyanite woman, for all to see. Indeed, in Zos Habracha, shevet Shimon is the only shevet not to receive a bracha from Moshe Rabbeinu prior to his death. Rashi explains that it was on account of Zimri that this was so. Not only is Shevet Shimon conspicuous for its overt misconduct but also stands alone as the only shevet who never had a Shofet or Melech come from it. The Yalkut Shimoni at the beginning of parshas Shoftim states specifically that no leader could ever come from Shimon on account of Zimri.

Shimon and Levy, the closest of brothers united against all, now stand at opposite sides of the spectrum. Levy, the undisputed leader of Klal Yisroel, Shimon destined to forever be denied any leadership position within Klal Yisroel. How did this happen and what can we learn from it?

The Maaseh of Zimri is indeed pivotal in its illustration of how this occurred. Shimon took the Musar of Yaakov Aveinu and rejected it. He felt that he could not deny what he innately was - a radical - unwilling to control his anger and impulses. Levy, on the other

hand, took Yaakov's Musar and fundamentally changed who he was and how he lived. When Zimri the son of Shimon takes Kuzbi, who is it that kills him and won't stand by for such a desecration? Pinchas, Ahron's grandson of shevet Levy. The separation is complete; the unity which formerly existed between these brothers is now a great divide. In order to grasp the implications of this lesson we must take a step back and gain some perspective on who Shimon and Levy were at the time Yaakov delivered his bracha. These two brothers were well over 60 years old at the time. They had fought wars, raised families and recognized their special status as members of the Shivtei Yisroel. They were both quite set in their ways, even certain in the correctness of them. Yet one of them, Levy was determined and able, after hearing the Musar of Yaakov, to fundamentally change who he was and how he lived. Levy, still retained his Kanoyis, as illustrated by his descendant Pinchas, but he learned to only act on it L'sheim Shamayim. Shimon chose to reject Yaakov's musar and let his baser instincts take him wherever they led. That lesson was passed down to Zimri and ultimately through his shevet ledorei doros. This is why Shimon was forever denied leadership. One who cannot see the error in their ways cannot lead. A more profound and powerful musar is difficult to find. Simply put, one is never too old nor is it ever too late to change one's ways. Any one of us can recognize a failing, even one intrinsic to our personality, and resolve to change it in an instant. Our ability and openness to do so can completely change the course of our lives, the lives of our families and that of those who come after us.

May Hashem grant us the insight to recognize our shortcomings, the strength to correct them and the willingness to do so.