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Weekly Parsha VAYECHI Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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

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

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

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

This attitude remained constant throughout the long history of the Jewish people and of its various exiles, in Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Europe and today the entire world, outposts that have hosted and still host the Jewish people in our far-flung diaspora. The Jewish people were never in a hurry to leave any of these places and to return to the Land of Israel. This still seems to be the case in our time as well.

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

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

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

However we will deal with this baffling issue, there is no question that this represents a template for all later Jewish exiles and for Diaspora Jewry in all times and places. Apparently only tragedy moves the Jewish people...and throughout our history tragedies abound. Let us hope that somehow history does not repeat itself in our time as well.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Grandparents VAYECHI Rabbi Jonathan Sachs

Every Friday night we re-enact one of the most moving scenes in the book of Bereishit. Jacob, reunited with Joseph, is ill. Joseph comes to visit him, bring bringing with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob, with deep emotion, says:

"I never expected to see you again, and now God has shown me your children as well."

Gen. 48:11 He blesses Joseph. Then he places his hands on the heads of the two boys.

He blessed them that day and said, "[In the time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"

Gen. 48:20 So we do to this day, with these very words. Why this blessing above all others? One commentator (Yalkut Yehudah) says it is because Ephraim and Manasseh were the first two Jewish children born in exile. So Jewish parents bless their children asking God to help them keep their identity intact despite all the temptations and distractions of Diaspora life.

I heard however a most lovely explanation, based on the Zohar, from my revered predecessor Lord Jakobovits of blessed memory. He said that though there are many instances in Torah and Tanach in which parents bless their children, this is the only example of a grandparent blessing grandchildren.

Between parents and children, he said, there are often tensions. Parents worry about their children. Children sometimes rebel against their parents. The relationship is not always smooth.

Not so with grandchildren. There the relationship is one of love untroubled by tension or anxiety. When a grandparent blesses a grandchild they do so with a full heart. That is why this blessing by Jacob to his grandchildren became the model of blessing across the generations. Anyone who has had the privilege of having grandchildren will immediately understand the truth and depth of this explanation.

Grandparents bless their grandchildren and are blessed by them. This phenomenon is the subject of a fascinating

difference of opinion between the Babylonian Talmud and the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Babylonian Talmud says the following:

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, “Whoever teaches their grandchildren Torah is regarded as if they had received the Torah from Mount Sinai, as it is said, ‘Teach your children and your children’s children.’”

Deut. 4:10-11; Kiddushin 30a The Talmud Yerushalmi puts it differently. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi used to listen, every Friday, to his grandson reciting the weekly parsha. One week he entered the bathhouse, and after he had begun bathing he remembered that he had not yet heard the weekly parsha from his grandson. So he immediately got up to leave the bathhouse... They asked him why he was leaving in the middle of his bathing, since the Mishnah teaches that once you have begun bathing on a Friday afternoon, you should not interrupt the process. He replied, “Is this such a small thing in your eyes? For whoever hears the parsha from his grandchild is as if he heard it directly from Mount Sinai” (Yerushalmi Shabbat 1:2).

According to the Talmud Bavli, it is a great privilege is to teach your grandchildren Torah. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, the greatest privilege is to have your grandchildren teach Torah to you. This is one argument about which no grandparent will have the slightest difficulty saying that both are true.

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

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

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

With an exquisite sense of symmetry, just as we begin Shabbat with a grandparent’s blessing so we end it, in Maariv, with the words:

May you live to see your children’s children – peace be on Israel.

The Holy Ones and Their Families Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Anyone killed defending the nation and the Land is called holy * Thanks to them, life in this world continues and intensifies * A soldier killed by friendly fire is also considered holy to the same degree * Enlisting in the army is one of the most important and fundamental commandments in the Torah * The holy ones who sacrificed their lives, represent the highest level of loving God, and are in a world that is all good * The soldiers who sacrificed themselves to build Zion and Jerusalem, are themselves the consolation

When our holy soldiers are endangering their lives to defend the nation and the Land, with some dying in this effort, it is incumbent upon us to once again study and emphasize the supreme holiness of those killed sanctifying God’s name. Through this, we can understand the supreme greatness of all soldiers who endanger their lives to defend the nation and the Land.

On the Holiness of Soldiers Who Gave Their Lives Those killed defending the nation and Land merit the highest possible level in the World of Truth, because through their death sanctifying God’s name, they transcended their individual realm that every person dwells in, connected to the communal level of Israel’s holiness, bonded with God, and became sanctified in His holiness. Therefore, even though their lives were cut short in this world, they live fully in the eternal world of the World to Come, to the degree that “no person can one can stand in their enclosure” (Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 10b). Thanks to them, life in this world continues and intensifies, because from their lives in this world, they merited supreme sanctification, revealing the supreme point of holiness in this world.

A soldier killed by friendly fire or a training accident during war is considered equally holy, because that is the nature of an army and war. No army can function without such incidents, and without an army, there is no possibility of sustaining the Jewish people. Therefore, anyone killed in a war defending the nation and Land, is called kadosh (holy).

The Two Forms of Mesirut Nefesh that Sustain Israel Forever In the merit of their mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice), Israel’s existence is sustained. The basis for fulfilling commandments with mesirut nefesh is rooted in Akeidat Yitzchak (the ‘Binding of Isaac’), which revealed Israel’s segulah (uniqueness) – that through the willingness to sacrifice their lives, Israel is bonded to eternity.

There are two forms of mesirut nefesh in the Torah: The first form is the willingness to enlist in the army for the sake of the nation and the Land, when Israel fights for its

independence in its Land. The second form of mesirut nefesh is one of a bedi'avad (less than ideal) situation, during times of decrees and exile, when the wicked coerce Jews to transgress one of the three severe transgressions, or abandon their religion. That is, when we do not merit fulfilling mesirut nefesh through military service in the IDF, Jews are forced to sacrifice their lives for loyalty to the Jewish faith.

The Great Value of the Commandment to Enlist in the Military Some Torah students do not pay attention to the tremendous commandment fulfilled by soldiers. They mistakenly think that Torah is separate from Israeli nationalism, as if the Haredim uphold Torah values and commandments, while soldiers uphold national values not found in the Torah. However, the truth is that enlisting in the army is one of the most important and fundamental commandments of the Torah, encompassing two commandments upon which everything stands: saving the life of the nation, and settling the Land of Israel. More accurately, the categorization is as follows: some observe more of the private commandments; some observe more of the general commandments; and some are privileged to fulfill all the commandments of the Torah.

The great importance of serving in the army can be gleaned from the other name for Sefer Bamidbar ('Book of Numbers'), also called Sefer Ha-Pikudim ('Book of Counting'). Sefer Bamidbar tells the story of Israel's journey through the desert to prepare for conquering and settling the Land. Someone who does not understand the importance of serving in the army wrongly thinks that the census in Sefer Ha-Pikudim counted all of Israel. However, if such a person were to re-examine, he will find that the commandment was to count the army recruits over twenty years old. That is, to prepare all of Israel, each man by his own camp and each man by his division, in advance of conquering the Land. Based on this, we can understand the severity of the Sin of the Spies recounted in Sefer Bamidbar which caused the decree of death for all in the desert, delaying Israel's entry to the Land for forty years. Because in the Sin of the Spies, they transgressed against the most important commandment that generation was meant to fulfill. Thus, from then until the Holocaust, when we did not merit fulfilling the commandment to settle the Land, which includes establishing an army to defend the nation and Land, many more Jews died.

Through Mesirut Nefesh the Values of Eternity Are Fulfilled Within Us The holy ones in Israel and exile, who endangered their lives for sanctifying God's name and sustaining His nation, maintain Israel and its faith in the world, embodying Israel's ultimate self-sacrifice and holiness expressed in the 'Binding of Isaac'. Therefore, during the shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah, together with remembering the 'Binding of Isaac', all the holy martyrs

who sacrificed their lives sanctifying God's name, arise in our memory.

Life's True Existence is Sustained through the Martyrs By nature, human societies tend to sink into the routine of the present, and forget the great vision of redeeming the world. This leads to crises and disasters, because the soul always yearns for more. When positive outlets for this yearning are lacking, destructive outlets emerge, leading society to wickedness and destruction. A situation emerges where righteous people sticking to true values face severe and terrifying trials. When they withstand the trial and sacrifice their lives sanctifying God's name, they connect present life to eternal values, reminding Israel of the great vision. Thanks to this, the world continues and progresses towards redemption.

The Holy Ones Express Loving God to Completion The kedoshim (holy ones) express loving God at the highest level, as our Sages said: "'For love is as strong as death' – the love with which that persecuted (shmad) generation loved God, as it says: 'Because for Your sake we are killed all day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter' (Psalms 44:23)" (Song of Songs Rabbah 8:4).

Some Jews have not yet learned to call in God's name, but they are connected to the divine values manifested in truth, goodness, and Israeli nationalism. They may have heard negative things about observant Jews, but the Jewish/Israeli values they love and are willing to sacrifice their lives for, are divine values. Truly, they too sacrifice their lives out of loving God. As the Torah says: "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him, keep His commandments, heed His voice, worship Him and cleave to Him" (Deuteronomy 13:5). Our Sages asked: "Is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? But hasn't it already been stated: 'For the Lord your God is a devouring fire!' (ibid. 4:24)? Rather, the meaning is that one should follow His attributes: just as He clothes the naked... so shall you; just as the Holy One visited the sick... so shall you; just as He comforted mourners... so shall you; just as He buried the dead... so shall you" (Sotah 14a). Thus, one who cleaves to God's nation walks in God's ways, for God loves His nation, and watches over it always.

God Comforts Those Killed Sanctifying His Name Our Sages said that although the death of those killed sanctifying His name is terribly painful, God said they have not lost a thing, and their blood is more precious to Him than any offerings (Midrash Socher Tov Tehillim 16:4), because they are the foundation of the world's existence. They embody the absolute connection between the created, and the Source of Life.

Our Sages said that so greatly does their Kiddush Hashem sanctify God, that it is as if at the time of their death, the vengeance that God will exact upon the wicked killers, is already determined and occurring – as if they are already standing to be revived at Techiyat ha-Meytim

(Resurrection of the Dead) (Sifra, Acharei Mot 8:13). They further said that in the Upper Worlds, there is an appointed angel over all the Jews killed by non-Jews, who records their names on God's garments. They will remain recorded there until God avenges their blood, when Mashiah is revealed to comfort them. Angels of light and joy descend with Him to delight them, clothing them in garments of honor (Zohar vol. 1 39a, 41a).

Comfort for the Families of the Holy Ones The fallen soldiers are in a world that is all good, having already attained the highest level of sanctity of all of Israel, enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence, with all the righteous heroes. Even in this world, everyone recognizes their mighty heroism and wondrous personality. However, the greatest anguish is that of the soldiers' families, suffering, with a gaping void in their hearts. Who can restore their terrible loss? Therefore, the mitzvah to comfort them is so important.

The Comfort of Zion and Jerusalem We comfort all mourners with the prayer that God will comfort them together with the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. That is, the comfort stems from recognizing that all of life is for the sake of building Zion and Jerusalem. Therefore, any grief, even over a Jew who lived in exile yet maintained his identity, is a stage in the process of redemption towards building Zion and Jerusalem. If so, the soldiers who literally sacrificed themselves for building Zion and Jerusalem are themselves, the very comfort. For until death is finally consumed forever all people will eventually die, and we should console them, for their lives too were a stage on the way to building Zion and Jerusalem. Whereas those killed sanctifying God's name for the realization of Zion and Jerusalem, through their death sanctifying His name, there is already great comfort.

The comfort does not nullify the awful distress, but rather gives it meaning and direction for carrying on with life. From now on, the mourners will know that everything built here in the State of Israel, is built thanks to the power of their holy loved one. The children that will be born, the settlements that will continue thriving, the immigration that will persist, the Torah learning that will proliferate, the charitable and just deeds that will intensify, every flower that will bloom, and every joy that will emerge from each home – all in their merit. The moral Jewish society that we wish to establish here as the prophets' vision – belongs to them. Out of such remembrance we will be able to continue vigilantly in their path, the path of self-sacrifice for the Jewish people.

And if thanks to remembering one of the holy ones, we are stirred to add more good deeds, more Torah learning, more volunteering for settlement and immigration efforts, and perhaps even to marry and bear more children – it is fitting to share this with the bereaved families, so that they know

just how much their dear one beneficially impacted his acquaintances – thus, strengthening their comfort.

Parshat Vayechi: The Beginning of the End Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“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...” [Genesis 47:28, 29]

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

Yet according to Rashi, this very next verse, the opening of Vayechi, sends us in the exact opposite direction, a 180-degree turn for the worse, informing us that the Egyptian bondage was then beginning! Interestingly, Rashi's interpretation is not based on the words of the verse itself [Gen. 47:28], but rather on the almost hidden or interior meaning of the Torah embedded in the white space – or lack of white space – between the final verse of Vayigash and the opening verse of Vayechi. The portion of Vayechi opens without a parchment hint that a new chapter is beginning, or that a new story is being told. There are no paragraphs or indications of chapters in the text of the Torah scrolls. Rather, a white space – anywhere from a minimum of nine letters wide to the end of the entire line – is the Torah's way of indicating that a pause or separation of some kind exists between the previous verse and the following section.

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

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

But the truth is that the slavery does not come until a generation – and a biblical book – later, when we are told of the emergence of a new king over Egypt, ‘who did not

know Joseph' [Ex. 1:8]. In the meantime we are still in the book of Genesis; Joseph, with the keys to the treasury in his pocket, is the Grand Vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and his kinsmen are doing astonishingly well on the Egyptian Stock Exchange. So why does Rashi's commentary appear to be 'jumping the gun'?

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

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

Does this request sound like the words spoken by the Grand Vizier of Egypt? Does the number two figure at a Fortune 500 company, who undoubtedly confers with the president on a daily basis, need an appointment to see him, forced to go through the usual hierarchy of secretaries that junior staff have to go through? Why not a simple knock on the door on the part of Joseph? Why does the Torah even go to the trouble of reporting the process by which Joseph presents a petition – through intermediaries – to have his father buried? And Joseph doesn't even go through a secretary; he begs ('if I have found favor in your eyes') the 'house of Pharaoh', which generally refers to the household staff, the servants of Pharaoh. The Grand Vizier asks a maid or butler to whisper his need to bury his father in Pharaoh's ear. Is this the level to which a second-in-command must stoop in order to get time off for a parent's funeral? Seforno explains that in this particular instance, court etiquette prevented Joseph from making his request personally of Pharaoh because he was dressed in mourning clothes (and was presumably in need of a haircut and shave). However, Jewish law dictates that whatever one has to do in order to properly bury one's dead is permissible. Joseph certainly could have made himself presentable had his external appearance been the major problem. Maskil L'David maintains that a careful reading of the verse indicates a change in Joseph's status. His sudden loss of 'access' could well be a warning of new palace tremors which would eventually erupt into the enslavement of his descendants. Joseph had been demoted in position.

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

moment of truth for Joseph as well as for the readers of his story.

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

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

Joseph, too, understood that Pharaoh would be shocked at the request, a petition expressing the Hebrew rejection of the most powerful and civilized nation on earth. Indeed, it is such a difficult and sensitive matter that Joseph cannot face his patron Pharaoh directly with it. At that moment Joseph understands an even deeper truth: were he, his brothers, his children and grandchildren to make the choice to live as Egyptians and to die as Egyptians, the chances are that they would be totally accepted into the mainstream of the land and life in that country. However, were they to choose to live as Jews, with their own concepts of life and death, they would never be accepted and would probably be persecuted. It is this realization in the aftermath of Jacob's death which Rashi correctly sees as the beginning of the slavery of the Israelites. In Egypt, Joseph's kinsmen may have everything: Goshen Heights and Goshen Green, progeny and patrimony. But as long as they are determined to remain Jews, servitude and persecution are inevitable. They may rejoice in their preferred Egyptian status, where 'they took possession of it and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly,' but they cannot ever pause to enjoy this good fortune. The realization upon Jacob's death of the transient and illusory nature of their good fortune comes upon them inexorably and imperceptibly, as in the blink of an eye, as in a following sentence without a change of paragraph.

And so this portion is closed just as Egypt will soon be closed to their children. Such is the ultimate fate of the children of Israel in every exile.

Shabbat

Shalom

TORAH SHORTS: Weekly Biblical Thoughts by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Fragmentation of a Merchant's Mind (Vayechi) Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains. -Thomas Jefferson After a very long and tumultuous life, the patriarch Jacob is on his deathbed. He convenes his twelve sons and proceeds to give them his last words which include cryptic personalized prophecies and blessings. For his ninth son, Zevulun, Jacob declares the following:

"Zevulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea, and he shall be a shore for ships, and his flank shall be upon Zidon." Genesis 49:13

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619) states the maxim, based on this verse, that the Tribe of Zevulun was destined to become merchants, sailing to far-off destinations to make a living. Furthermore, he states the famous partnership that existed between the Tribe of Zevulun and the Tribe of Yissachar; the Tribe of Yissachar became a bastion of Torah scholars, dedicating themselves exclusively to full-time study, enabled only by the generous support of Zevulun.

However, according to the Kli Yakar, Jacob's prophecy contains a warning as well. The verse has Zevulun in three distinct places. Zevulun shall live in one place ('shore of the sea'), travel to a second place to conduct business ('shore for ships'), and his merchandise will be in a third place ('Zidon' – a commercial center of the ancient near east). The Kli Yakar explains that having one's mind on three (or more) geographic locations fragments the mind, reduces performance, and increases anxiety.

He thus claims that Yissachar has a better quality of life and peace of mind. Nonetheless, the reward of Zevulun is greater due to their support of their Torah-studying brothers, hence their being placed ahead of Yissachar in the blessings.

May those merchants amongst us enjoy greater peace of mind and less fragmentation, whether mental or geographical and may those blessed with the portion of Yissachar appreciate the sacrifice.

Shabbat Shalom, Ben-Tzion Dedication To British actor, Stephen Fry, on his important and courageous message of Jewish pride.

Office of the Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis Dvar Torah: Vayechi

You can live forever! Jacob never died. This extraordinary statement is recorded in the Gemara, (Mashechet Ta'anit).

There we are told how Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were exchanging words of Torah, and when they came to Jacob our Patriarch, Rabbi Yitzchak declared, "Ya'akov Avinu lo met" – "Jacob, our Patriarch never died".

Rav Nachman challenged him: "In the Torah we read how he was eulogised, he was embalmed, he was buried. So how can you say Jacob never died?" Rabbi Yitzchak replied: "I learn it from a scriptural source in the book of Jeremiah Chapter 30. There, the prophet tells us about the promise of Hashem, that the day will come when the children of Jacob will be reunited in the Holy Land at a time of redemption. Therefore, 'Ma zar'o ba'chayim af u'ba'chayim' – since his descendants are alive, he too is alive."

Since Jacob influenced so many people who internalised his values and passed them on through the generations, he is considered still to be alive. We often reflect on the immortality that our souls can attain, through life in Olam Habah – the world to come. But the Gemara wants to teach us that there is an additional form of immortality which we can attain here, in this world. In the Book of Bereishit, there are two parshiot which have in their titles the term 'life'. They are 'Chayei Sarah' and 'Vayechi'. 'Chayei Sarah' means 'the life of Sarah' but if you look at the content of the parasha, it is all about her death. And similarly, 'Vayechi', our parasha of this week, describes the death of Ya'akov, the death of Yosef – the death of that entire generation. But the message is very clear: because Sarah's values continued to be cherished and to be transmitted throughout the generations, the parasha is called 'Chayei Sarah' – Sarah is alive! Similarly, Ya'akov is very much alive even to this day! We speak about him and reflect upon his great teachings and therefore the parasha is called 'Vayechi' – because he lives on and on.

There is a double message for us here. First of all, we can guarantee that our forebears remain alive through us – through all the good deeds that we perform. And secondly, we can attain our own immortality by touching the hearts and moulding the minds of as many people as possible. If Jacob is still alive today, so too, we can be alive forever.

Shabbat Shalom.

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayechi Supply Side Diplomats

After Yaakov's passing the brothers were worried. After all, Yosef was the ruler of Egypt and their father Yaakov was now gone. And so the Torah tells us at the end of this week's portion, "Yosef's brothers perceived that their father was dead, and they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him.' So they instructed that Joseph be told, 'Your father gave orders before his death, saying: 'Thus shall you say to Joseph – 'O please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers and their sin for they

have done you evil; so now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants of your father's G-d."

The Torah continues by telling us that "Yoseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers themselves also went and flung themselves before him and said, "We are ready to be your slaves. But Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good – in order to accomplish — it is as clear as this day — which a vast people be kept alive. So now, fear not — I will sustain you and your young ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke to their heart." (See Genesis 50 15-21)

Yoseph seems very benevolent. He committed himself to sustain his brothers, despite their having sold him into a life of slavery. Yet, maybe they truly wanted some form of retribution. After all it is quite hard to bear the burden of guilt for the rest of your life, and if that is the case, perhaps Yoseph's benevolence may have defeated the purpose of their request. An old yarn that I heard as I was still unmarried has the wealthy father of the prospective bride interviewing her suitors before they got a chance to meet her.

Each one of the young men who discussed their anticipated financial plans was rebuffed.

One said that he would be going to medical school another was going to law school, and yet a third was waiting for an inheritance that would come any day. Each eager beau was barraged with a series of questions about the details of his future life and none had the proper answer.

Finally, a young Yeshiva fellow came to see the tycoon's daughter. After talking to the young man for twenty minutes, the man was beaming. He proudly introduced the prospective groom to his daughter with the highest recommendation. His wife and assistants were all astounded. What had this young man said that the others had not?

The man was still beaming when he repeated the conversation. "When I asked him where he plans to live when he first gets married he replied, 'G-d will provide!' When I asked him how he plans to feed a family if he is sitting and studying he looked at me and declared, 'G-d will provide!' When I asked when there are children, how does he plan to pay for their education and welfare, he beamed once again and exclaimed, 'G-d will provide!'" The man's entire household was baffled. "Why do those responses please you so much?"

The man smiled as he puffed out his chest, "He thinks I'm G-d!" It is said that Yoseph Dov HaLevi Soleveitchik of Brisk once remarked in wit that Yoseph was telling the brothers, "If you are afraid of retribution, I will provide you with the sweetest revenge. I will be your sole source of support and you will have to rely upon me for your sustenance." The Talmud in Beitzah 32 states, "R. Natan ben Abba also said in the name of Rav: If someone is

dependent on someone else's table, the world looks dark to him, for it says, "He wanders about for food-where is it?-he realizes that the day of darkness is ready, at hand" (Job 15:23). The Rabbis taught: One of three whose life is no life, is a person who is dependent on someone else for his meals."

And so, Yoseph was telling his brothers, perhaps I will not employ physical retribution but perhaps your greatest punishment will be that your livelihood will be dependent on the little brother you thought was only worthy of a place in a pit. In the Grace After Meals we beseech the Almighty, "Please don't have us rely upon the gifts of flesh and blood, but rather sustain us from Your hand." To live a life dependent upon others is no blessing. So according to this insight, Yoseph gave them something the brothers may really have asked for – the sweetest and most benevolent punishment they could have desired. Good Shabbos, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Dedicated in memory of Joseph Miller z"l HY"D by his children Mr and Mrs. Geoffrey Miller

Rabbi YY Jacobson

[What Does It Mean to Be a Leader?

Reuben and Judah: A Psychological Profile

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Summary of essay: Each of us is called to lead, in one shape or another. We are leaders in our families, companies, and communities; some of us are given an opportunity to influence scores of people. What is leadership? What does it mean to be a leader? What should leaders demand of themselves?

A most fascinating journey through the lives of two individuals in Genesis demonstrates how the few vignettes shared about them hold the key to a rich portrait of two people who, through their downfalls and triumphs, teach us about our duties as leaders in a challenging world.

The Final Conversation

This week's Torah portion (Vayechi) tells the story of Jacob's final conversation with his children. In astonishing candidness, moving prose, and profound vision, Jacob speaks to each of his sons, heart-to-heart, just moments before he is about to pass on to the next world.

"Come and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel," Jacob begins the fateful encounter[1]. Then he addresses Reuben, his oldest son, with razor-sharp words:

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my power and the beginning of my might, foremost in rank and foremost in power. Water-like impetuosity -- you will not be preeminent, for you went up onto your father's bed; onto my couch and defiled it."

Reuben the firstborn, the rabbis explain[2], should have been entitled to the priesthood ("foremost in rank") and kingship ("foremost in power"). The Jewish priests and kings should have emerged from Reuben. But Reuben

forfeited these privileges and they went instead to his brothers Levi and Judah, respectively (Aaron's family of priests came from Levi; the Davidic dynasty of kings came from Judah). Reuben remained the firstborn, "my firstborn," with many of the privileges conferred by Jewish law on a firstborn[3], but he lost the priesthood and kingship.

Reuben's Error

What was Jacob referring to when he spoke of Reuben ascending on his bed? The midrashic tradition[4] offers two interpretations.

This first takes us back to a disturbing scene that transpired after Rachel's death, some 47 years earlier[5].

"So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is, Bethlehem. Over her tomb, Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder.

"While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went and lay with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it[6]."

Rashi[7], following Talmudic tradition[8], illuminates the backdrop behind this incident. When Rachel died, Jacob, who usually resided in her tent, moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, her handmaid. For Reuben, Leah's oldest son, this was an unbearable provocation and a slap in his sensitive mother's face. It was bad enough that Jacob preferred Rachel to her sister Leah, but intolerable that he should prefer a handmaid to his mother. He thus removed Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's.

Almost a jubilee later, in his final moments, Jacob reminds Reuben of this episode and attributes his firstborn's loss of potential greatness to it. "Water-like impetuosity," Jacob declares, "you will not be preeminent, for you went up onto your father's bed; onto my couch and defiled it."

Reuben's Mandrakes The midrash presents yet another meaning to Jacob's words, "For you went up onto your father's bed; onto my couch and defiled it." It takes us back to another dramatic incident that occurred around 10 years before the one just discussed.

"During wheat harvest," the Bible relates[9], "Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah (the commentators explain[10] that mandrakes were considered both an aphrodisiac and fertility drug). Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.' But she said to her, 'wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?' Rachel said, 'Therefore, he shall lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.'" Indeed, Jacob spent the night with Leah instead of Rachel. Reuben, in other words, was the indirect cause for the relocation of his father's bed for one night.

The Sensitivity of a Child

What is fascinating about both of these tales is that they sketch a portrait of a remarkably sensitive and noble child.

Reuben's heart goes out to his mother's plight. As the firstborn son of Leah, he seems to carry alone the burden of his mother's relative lack of appeal in Jacob's eyes. In fact, his very name, Reuben, meaning, "see, a son," was bestowed upon him by his mother, "because G-d has discerned my humiliation, for now, my husband will love me [11]".

In the earlier episode, Reuben, as a young lad out in the field, is thinking of his mother's anguish and hoping that, with the aid of the mandrakes, Leah will be able to win Jacob's complete affection. In the latter episode following Rachel's death, Reuben can't bear the pain caused to his mother by Jacob's placing his bed in Bilhah's tent.

It is, indeed, true that in both of these instances, Reuben's hastiness and impetuosity had negative consequences. In the incident with the mandrakes, had he waited until Rachel left Leah's tent, his gift to Leah might have prevented the bitter row that erupted between the two sisters, the only feud between them recorded in the Bible, and would have not created confusion in Jacob's sleeping arrangements. In the second instance, too, had Reuben broached the issue directly with his father or with Bilhah, instead of taking the matter into his own hands and moving his father's bed, the issue may have been resolved in a more dignified manner.

Still, it is clear that the motivation -- in contrast to the end result -- of both of these actions was pure and reflected profound moral concern. Why did he deserve to forfeit the priesthood and royalty?

Judah the King

Our dilemma becomes more disturbing upon considering who, of the 11 other sons of Jacob, received the gift of royalty in lieu of Reuben. It was the fourth son, Judah.

Here are Jacob's final words to Judah[12]:

"A lion cub is Judah; from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself. He [Judah] crouches, lies down like a lion, like an awesome lion, who will dare rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah...Nations will submit to him until the final tranquility comes."

The message is clear. Just as the lion is the "king of the jungle[13]," Judah is destined to be the king of the civilized world. Indeed, Judah became the ancestor of Israel's greatest king, David. Since David, royalty among the Jewish people belonged to Judah's tribe[14]. The messiah himself, we are told, will be a descendent of Judah[15]. Even our very name, "Jews" or, in Hebrew Yehudim, or in Yiddish, Yidden, is derived from the name Judah, or Yehudah. It was Judah who conferred his identity on the people[16].

Why Judah? Jacob presents the reason in eight words: "From the prey, my son, you elevated yourself." Judah was potentially a man of prey, a lion, a devourer; yet he succeeded in elevating himself from this terrible characteristic. Judah transformed himself. Why did Jacob

view Judah as a potential man of prey? Rashi, quoting the midrashic tradition, focuses our attention on two rather unforgettable incidents about Judah that transpired nearly four decades earlier[17].

The Joseph Drama

The first, of course, is the moment when Joseph, on the instruction of his father, pays a visit to his brothers, who are shepherding Jacob's flock in the city of Shechem (Nablus).

The brothers, who despised Joseph deeply, see him approaching from afar. They realize that with no one to see them, they can kill Joseph and concoct a tale that will be impossible to refute. Only Reuben protests. The biblical text states[18]: "Reuben heard and saved him [Joseph] from their hands. He said, 'Let's not take his life'. Reuben said to them: 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him' -- intending to rescue Joseph from his brothers and bring him back to his father."

It is interesting to note that the Torah rarely described people's inner drives. In this instance, however, the Torah makes an exception, revealing to us Reuben's true motivations: He wished to save Joseph.

As the story continues, the brothers agree to Reuben's suggestion. They throw Joseph into an empty well and they sit down to eat a meal. In the midst of the meal, they see an Arab caravan traveling to Egypt. Here, for the first time, we encounter Judah's voice[19]:

"Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? Let's sell him to the Arabs and not harm him with our own hands. After all -- he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.'" The brothers' consent. Joseph is sold and brought to Egypt as a slave, where, 13 years later, he will rise to become the viceroy of Egypt.

Reuben's Fasting

Reuben was not present during the sale. "When Reuben returned to the cistern," the Torah relates[20], "and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone! And I, where can I go?'" The brothers dipped Joseph's tunic in blood, and presented the tunic to Jacob, who exclaimed: "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph has surely been torn to bits!"

Where was Reuben during the sale of Joseph? The text is obscure, but it does offer a glimpse: The brothers sold Joseph while in the midst of a meal. The Torah, perhaps, shared with us this irrelevant detail in order to hint to us the reason for Reuben's absence. Reuben left the scene because he could not eat with his brothers. Why?

Rashi, again quoting the midrashic tradition, says[21] that Reuben had been dressing himself in sackcloth and fasting ever since he rearranged his father's beds after Rachel's death. Although the incident with the bed occurred nine years earlier, Reuben was still seeking ways to repent.

Therefore, he did not join his brothers in their meal and was not present during Joseph's sale.

A Tale of Two Personas

Now, we come to understand Jacob's final words to Judah: "From the prey, my son, you elevated yourself." Rashi explains, that when Jacob stated, upon discovering Joseph's blood-drenched tunic decades earlier, "A savage beast devoured him [Joseph]," Jacob was hinting to Judah that on his deathbed he would compare him to a lion." Jacob suspected that Joseph fell prey to Judah's hands. When Jacob learned the truth, that instead of letting Joseph die in the well Judah actually persuaded his brothers to sell him into slavery, Jacob, in appreciation, conferred upon Judah the crown of royalty, assuming the position taken from Reuben.

This is a deeply disturbing comment. Reuben is the only older brother of Joseph who attempts to save him and return him to his father. The Torah, as mentioned above, is unusually clear about Reuben's virtuous intentions. "His plan," states the Torah, "was to rescue Joseph from his brothers and bring him back to his father." Judah, in stark contrast, merely substitutes Joseph's death from starvation with a life sentence of slavery. Judah does not even consider liberating Joseph!

The powerful moral contrast between Reuben and Judah is even more striking when we reflect on the wording employed by Judah to persuade his brothers to sell Joseph. "Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? Let's sell him to the Arabs and not harm him with our own hands. After all -- he is our brother, our own flesh and blood."

""This, let's face it, is a speech of apparent monstrous callousness. There is no word about the evil of murder, merely pragmatic calculation ("what will we gain"). At the very moment he calls Joseph "our own flesh and blood" he is proposing selling him as a slave!

The moral paradox embodied by Jacob in his final moments, as he moves the gift of kingship from Reuben to Judah, is nothing less than astonishing. In the very episode for which Judah is rewarded with the gift of royalty (because he "elevated himself from prey"), Reuben stands head and shoulders above Judah in his nobility, compassion, and sensitivity. Yet it is Reuben who loses the crown to Judah!

The Tamar Drama

As we recall, in addition to the Joseph drama, the midrash and Rashi[17] present a second meaning in Jacob's final words to Judah, "From the prey, my son, you elevated yourself." According to this interpretation, Jacob was alluding to the event that took place between Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar.

Tamar, we recall[22], had married Judah's two elder sons, both of whom had died, leaving her a childless widow. Judah, fearing that his third son would share their fate,

withheld him from her, thus leaving her unable to remarry and have children, since the levirate laws of marriage at the time held that when a husband died and left a childless widow, she was bound in marriage to either her brother-in-law or her father-in-law[23].

Once she understands her situation, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute. Judah encounters her and they are intimate with each other. She becomes pregnant. Judah, unaware of the disguise, concludes that she must have had a forbidden relationship and orders her to be put to death by burning. At this point, Tamar, who, while disguised, had taken Judah's seal, cord, and staff as a pledge, sends them to Judah with a message: "The father of my child is the man to whom these belong." Judah now understands the whole story. Not only has he placed Tamar in an impossible situation of living widowhood, and not only is he the father of her child, but he also realizes that she has behaved with extraordinary discretion in revealing the truth without shaming him. (It is from this act of Tamar's that we derive the rule[24] that "one should rather throw oneself into a fiery furnace than shame someone else in public.")

Judah admits he was wrong. "She is right!" he exclaims. "It is from me [that she has become pregnant]." Tamar's life, of course, is spared. She soon gives birth to twins, Peretz and Zerach, the former becoming the ancestor of King David.

This, then, explains the meaning behind Jacob's words, "From the prey, my son, you elevated yourself." Judah was a "man of prey" who sentenced Tamar to death. Yet at the last moment, he confessed his guilt and rescued Tamar and her fetuses from death. Because of this, he was conferred with the power of kingship.

One Moment Vs. Nine Years

This interpretation, too, is disturbing. Both Reuben and Judah commit serious wrongdoings. Reuben intervenes in his father's intimacy; Judah sentences an innocent pregnant woman to death. Both confess their guilt and take full responsibility for their wrong actions. But in this instance again, it is Reuben who surpasses Judah on two counts.

Firstly, Judah almost caused three innocent lives to die, while Reuben merely relocated intimate furniture. Secondly, Judah admitted his guilt and that was it. Reuben, on the other hand, for at least nine years after his sin, was fasting every day in repentance!

We encounter here what appears as cruel cynicism at its finest. The act for which Judah receives the endowment of royalty -- his readiness to confront his wrongdoing and acknowledge his guilt -- is performed by his brother Reuben with far more depth and diligence. Yet it is Reuben who loses his potential greatness to Judah.

Furthermore, if Reuben has been fasting and repenting all this time for his mistake in tampering with his father's bed, why did this not suffice in having the royalty restored to his bosom?

Jacob's Response

There is one more vignette in Genesis which allows us a glimpse into the above riddle. Genesis chapters 42-43 finds Joseph, now the Prime Minister of Egypt, treating his brothers (who have come to buy grain in Egypt) very harshly. He accuses them of espionage, imprisons one of his brothers (the Rabbis identify him as Shimon), and stipulates his release with the other nine brothers bringing his youngest brother Benjamin down to Egypt. When Jacob hears of this condition, he is terribly distressed. He has lost two sons, Joseph and Shimon, and now he might lose Benjamin. Jacob refuses to let them take Benjamin, the last surviving child of his beloved wife Rachel.

It is here where Reuben steps in. "And Reuben spoke to his father, saying, 'You may put my two sons to death if I don't bring him (Benjamin) to you. Put him into my hand[s] and I will return him to you.'"

But Jacob refuses. "My son shall not go down with you, because his brother is dead, and he alone is left, and if misfortune befalls him on the way you are going, you will bring down my gray head in sorrow to the grave."

Yet the famine lingered and the starvation persisted. It is Judah who steps up to the plate. He tells his father these words: "Send the lad with me, and we will get up and go, and we will live and not die, both we and you and also our young children. I will guarantee him; from my hand, you can demand him. If I do not bring him to you and stand him up before you, I will have sinned against you forever." Jacob relents. He sends Benjamin with the brothers. It is during this visit that Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, and the first Jewish family is reunited. Jacob relocates to Egypt and meets his son Joseph after a 22-year separation.

Here we wonder yet once again, why did Jacob refuse Reuben's promise and embrace Judah's pledge? They both promised to return Benjamin to Jacob. Reuben, we have discovered, seemed to be far more virtuous than Judah. Yet Jacob would respond only to Judah. The unfairness seems to repeat itself. The sincere Reuben who is ready to sacrifice both of his children is repelled.

Reuben's Profile

Upon deeper reflection, it is precisely in this entire complex tale that we may encounter Judaism's perspective on the function and meaning of the crown of royalty and the art of leadership.

Reuben, throughout Genesis, displays moral dignity, sensitivity, and gracefulness that surpass Judah. Reuben, obviously, is a person who works on himself. He challenges his instincts, habits, and emotions. He seems to possess a frail ego. We do not notice a tinge of pompousness or arrogance in this person. He is always thinking about somebody else. When he is in the field, his thoughts are with his mother and her plight. When Rachel dies, his thoughts, again, are with his mother. When Joseph

is kidnapped, his heart is with his younger brother and father. Finally, for nine years he fasts and dons sackcloth in order to cleanse his ego, his sins, his faults.

Yet, Reuben's greatness is also his flaw.

If we examine every single episode recorded about Reuben we discover an astonishing commonality: In each of them, his noble intentions come across in delightful splendor; his sensitivity to injustice is nothing short of remarkable; his willingness to work on himself and his faults is legendary. Yet in all of them, the other person -- the outsider, the victim -- never ends up actually benefitting from Reuben's kind intentions.

Leah, instead of enjoying her mandrakes, ends up in a bitter row with her sister. In the story with Jacob's bed, instead of creating a more affectionate ambiance between Jacob and Leah, Reuben ends up offending his father deeply and not helping his mother's situation in the slightest. In the Joseph story, Reuben's actions have Joseph placed in an empty well, where he can easily die from starvation or venomous serpents.

The astonishing pattern continues: Reuben's fasting and repenting for nine years is what actually causes him to be absent while his brothers sell Joseph into Egyptian slavery. While Joseph lay helpless in a well, Reuben went off to pray, meditate and repent. Had he remained, he might have actually rescued Joseph before he was sold.

In promising to return Benjamin to Jacob, Reuben talks first about how forfeiting on his pledge will affect him and only afterward about the necessary action itself. "And Reuben spoke to his father, saying, 'You may put my two sons to death if I don't bring him (Benjamin) to you. Put him into my hand[s] and I will return him to you.'" What is more, Reuben gives a condition that is purely fanciful. What would Jacob gain by killing Reuben's two sons if Benjamin were not to return? After all, they are his own grandchildren!

The Contrast

At last, a pattern emerges. Reuben is consumed with his personal daily battle for moral truth and spiritual transcendence. Reuben is a great man, but he is not a leader. He is a spiritual giant, but he is not a Rebbe, a king, or a shepherd to his people. Reuben ought to remain the firstborn son, with all the status involved, since he might be morally superior to his brothers. But he has not proven worthy of becoming a genuine leader.

Now, let us draw the contrast to Judah's profile.

In both episodes -- the sale of Joseph and the relationship with Tamar -- Judah does not display the dignity or sincerity of his brother Reuben. Judah's actions leave him wanting, but they produce concrete and tangible benefits to the victims in need of help. As a result of Judah's words to his brothers, Joseph is not allowed to die in the well and is left to live as a slave. As a consequence of Judah's confession, Tamar and her fetuses are saved from death.

Judah does not reside in the richness of his own inner space; he is present in the flames of the outsider. Reuben's intentions were greater, but Judah made a real impact on people's lives.

Finally, let us note the words Judah employs to persuade his father Jacob that he can send Benjamin with him. "I will guarantee him; from my hand, you can demand him. If I do not bring him to you and stand him up before you, I will have sinned against you forever." Unlike Reuben, he begins by articulating definitely the necessary action and does it in unwavering terms. "I will guarantee him." Unlike Reuben, he does not make a completely impractical condition that Jacob may kill his sons; rather he states, "I will have sinned against you forever." These are words of a born leader.

Of course, Judah must learn from his errors and grow to become a deeper and finer human being, which he does. Years later, when Joseph's younger brother Benjamin is about to be taken as a slave, Judah offers himself instead. "And now if I come to your servant, my father, and the lad [Benjamin] is not with us, and his soul is so bound up with his soul, when he will see that the lad is gone, he will die. And your servants will have brought down the hoariness of your servant our father in sorrow to the grave. Because your servant [Judah] took responsibility for the lad [Benjamin] from my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him to you, then I will have sinned to my father, for all time.' Now, please let your servant [Judah] remain in the place of the lad as a servant to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers..."

Twenty-two years earlier, the same Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother [Joseph] and cover his blood? Let's sell him to the Arabs and not harm him with our own hands." Now, when Joseph's younger brother Benjamin is about to be taken as a slave, Judah offers himself instead. A metamorphosis has occurred. Judah is a changed man.

Reuben too learns from his errors, making amends, and discovering greater horizons of truth. But at the end of the equation, Reuben is a great, moral spirit; Judah is a king. The difference? Reuben sees his spiritual work as the epicenter of his universe; Judah knows that the bottom line of life is not who you are, but how your decisions and behavior affect the fate of other people. For Reuben, even at his highest moments, the zenith of life consists of man's confrontation with his own tension and darkness. Judah, in contrast, even at his lowest moments, knows that life in its ultimate expression is about touching and embracing the pulse of the other.

And that is what it means to be a leader.

(This essay is based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, presented on Shabbas Parshas Vayechi 5730, December 27, 1969 [25]).

[1] Genesis chapter 49. [2] Rashi to Genesis 49:3-4. [3] Midrash Tanchumah (Buber edition) Vayeizei 13; Agadas Bereishis section 48. Cf. Rashi to Genesis 35:23; 29:32. This does not contradict Chronicles 1 5:1, see Rashi ibid. and Likkutei Sichos vol. 15 p. 444 and references noted there. Other sources are of the opinion that Reuben also forfeited his firstborn status, see Midrash Rabah Bereishis 98:4; 99:6; Tanchumah Vayeichi 9; Targum Eikelus, Targum Yonason and Targum Yonoson Ben Uziel to Genesis 49:3-4; Agads Bereishis section 82. [4] Midrash Rabah Bereishis 98:4. [5] Rachel died when Jacob was approximately 100 years old (see Seder Hadoros year 2008 for the exact calculations). At this point, Jacob was 147 years of age. [6] Genesis 35:19-22. [7] Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, or Rashi, was the outstanding Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages. He was born in Troyes, France, and lived from 1040 to 1105, surviving the massacres of the First Crusade through Europe. His impact on Jewish scholarship and learning remains singularly unique. 11th-century French Jewish sage, is considered the greatest biblical commentator. [8] Talmud Shabbas 55b. [9] Genesis 30: 14-16. [10] See The Living Torah (by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan) in footnote to Genesis 30:14 for a detailed commentary and references on the subject. [11] Genesis 29:32. [12] Genesis 49: 9-10. [13] Talmud Chagigah 13b. [14] See Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:1; Hilchos Melchaim 1:7-8. Cf. Ramban's fascinating commentary to Genesis ibid. [15] Rambam Hilchos Melachim 11:4. [16] See Midrash Rabah Bereishis 98:6. [17] Rashi to Genesis ibid. from Midrash Rabah Bereishis 98:7. [18] Genesis 37:21-22. [19] Ibid. 26:27. [20] Ibid. 29-33. [21] Ibid. 29, from Midrash Rabah ibid. 84:19. [22] Genesis chapter 38. [23] See Ramban to Genesis ibid. 38:8. [24] Talmud Sotah 10b; quoted in Rashi to Genesis 38: 25. [25] Published in Sichos Kodesh 5730 vol. 1 pp. 322-332; Likkutei Sichos vol. 15 pp. 439-446. A number of the ideas and rendition of biblical narratives presented in this essay were culled from Covenant and Conversation, Vayigash 5763 and Vayeishev 5764, by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (www.chiefrabbi.com).

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yitzchak ben Alter Lieb. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

The Powers of Eisav Shimon and Levi are brothers; their weapons are stolen tools (49:5).

A puzzling statement appears in Parshas Vayeitzei, in the Torah's account of the births of the shevatim: After the birth of Yehuda, the possuk states about Leah, "stopped giving birth." This is unusual, for the Torah makes no such statement regarding the other wives of Yaakov. Ostensibly, it is self-evident when the Torah finishes listing the offspring of each wife that they had no further children after that. Moreover, this statement is not even accurate as

Leah later had three more children: Yissachar, Zevulun, and Dinah. Why, then, do these words appear in the possuk?

There is an interesting pattern in the brachos of the first four children of Leah: Each of them is associated in some way with a characteristic of Eisav. Yaakov praises Yehuda for being a powerful warrior, telling him, "Your hands are at the nape of your enemies' neck," even though the ability to fight is a characteristic of Eisav. The Torah states that "the hands are the hands of Eisav," which the Gemara interprets as a reference to warfare; Chazal teach us that anyone who achieves victory in war has some connection to Eisav's powers of combat. Thus, although Yehuda is praised for his might, that seems to be a quality that should be associated with Eisav's offspring, rather than the progeny of Yaakov.

Shimon and Levi, too, are associated with Eisav, for Yaakov states that their "weapons are stolen tools;" as Rashi explains, this means that their acts of violence were appropriate for Eisav, rather than for the family of Yaakov. Likewise, Reuven is criticized for his anger and impetuosity, which the Torah also associates with Eisav; in Parshas Toldos, Rivka instructs Yaakov to leave home until Eisav's fury abates. In fact, Chazal state that Reuven's name itself alludes to the contrast between him and Eisav; the name is derived from the words, "see the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law." It would not be possible to contrast Reuven with Eisav unless there was some basis for comparing them; there is no logic in pointing out a contrast between two people who have no similarities or connection to each other whatsoever. Thus, there must be some link between Reuven and Eisav in order for this statement to be logical.

This can be explained as follows: Leah was created as the bas zug, the intended spouse, of Eisav. As the Torah hints, and as Chazal explain, Leah wept bitterly over her fate to the point that her eyes became disfigured, as she prayed fervently to be spared from a marriage to Eisav. Ultimately, her prayers were accepted and she became Yaakov's wife, but this did not change her fundamental character traits. As Eisav's intended soulmate, she certainly possessed attributes that made her a fitting match for him, and once she married Yaakov, those characteristics were bequeathed to his children instead.

Thus, Leah's first four children had certain character traits that would have been appropriate for the children of Eisav. In a certain sense, they were actually Eisav's offspring. This explains Reuven's rage, Shimon and Levi's use of violence, and Yehuda's strength as a warrior. Unlike Eisav, though, Leah's children made the proper choices in life, and they remained part of the Jewish people. When the Torah states that Leah "stopped giving birth," it means that she stopped bearing children who harbored Eisav-like

traits; all of the children who were born subsequently were not considered like Eisav in any way.

In truth, Yaakov's vision was for Eisav to be a part of Klal Yisroel as well; it was only the negative choices he made that prevented him from becoming part of the nation. But Eisav's unique attributes and strengths were also important for the Jewish people. Therefore, those characteristics had to be integrated into Klal Yisroel in another way; through Leah's first four children. Indeed, Chazal state that Dovid Hamelech was "ruddy," the same term used to describe Eisav, for in a sense, Dovid was just like Eisav. The difference between them,

according to Chazal, was that Dovid was "with beautiful eyes;" this refers to the fact that he subjugated himself to the Sanhedrin, who were termed the "eyes of the congregation." Eisav, on the other hand, did as he pleased; he did not accept the authority of any Torah sages, which rendered him unfit to be part of Klal Yisroel. However, Klal Yisroel still needed Eisav's strengths, which is why they became part of the contribution made by the four oldest sons of Yaakov Avinu.

King or Servant? His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk (49:12). This is part of the blessing that Yaakov gives to his son Yehuda, scion of the royal lineage of the Jewish people. Clearly, wine has always been associated with royalty. But what does the color white and milk have to do with the future kings of the Jewish people? The Gemara (Kesuvas 111a) has a fascinating interpretation of this verse; "Better is the one who shows the white of his teeth (i.e. in a smile) to his friend, than the one who gives him milk to drink." In other words, "white toothed from milk" can be interpreted as "to be white toothed with a smile is better than to give milk."

This is because one who provides milk to the poor provides a physical gift that sustains the person for a little while. But the one who smiles at or comforts the forlorn with encouraging words gives that person an everlasting feeling of self-worth. This lifts his spirits and sustains the recipient a lot more than any physical gift, which is merely a temporary respite.

This concept is also found in the animal kingdom. The Gemara (Kiddushin 82b) describes what kind of professions certain animals would assume if they had to enter the workforce; the lion would be a porter and a fox would be a merchant, etc. While it is easily understandable how the cleverness of a fox would make him a successful merchant, why would a lion, king of all the animals, choose the lowly job of a porter?

The answer lies in the Torah's view of leadership. Real leadership is about empowering others to actualize their potential. In other words, leadership isn't about the majesty of the position. True leaders take the resources at their disposal to help move others forward. Sometimes, perhaps even often, it means carrying the "baggage" of others so

that they can get to where they need to go. Leaders realize that their role is to move the overall mission forward and take responsibility for its execution. A lion becomes a porter because his real desire has nothing to do with his own self-aggrandizement, rather his role is solely to help others. This is the message that Yaakov wanted to instill in the future kings of the Jewish people. They will have the wine of royalty, but it must be used with the "white teeth" to empower others.

Empowerment of Marriage Parsha Breaks are short Divrei Torah (generally 5-7 minutes long) given by the Rosh HaYeshiva between Mincha and Ma'ariv at one of the Yeshiva's daily minyanim. These links can easily be downloaded on your smartphone.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
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VAYECHI "Yosef's brothers perceived that their father was dead..." (Ber. 50:15) It's amazing how much we need approval I recently got a new car. It's all-electric, all 'whistles and bells,' and does absolutely everything thing for you. It turns the headlights on when it's dark, tells you when you need air in the tires and even warm itself up for you before you get in on a cold day. The only thing it doesn't do is make you a cup of coffee, but I'm sure they're working on that. One of the features that was new to me is that, if you have the electric key in your pocket, your mere approach to the car releases the lock on the door and all the light flash. The other day, I was crossing the road to take out the trash and I came within a few feet of the car. The lights flashed; the door locks opened with a welcoming clunk, and the side mirrors flipped out like a pair of ears of an old canine friend. I had this unmistakable feeling, absurd as it was, that the car was smiling at me, and gave me a fleeting moment of happiness. I caught myself and thought, "Wow! If being recognized by an inanimate object can bring a smile to my face, how much more does the recognition of a human being lift our spirits?" "Yosef's brothers perceived that their father was dead..." With Yaakov's death, the brothers sensed that Yosef's attitude to them had changed. He no longer invited them to dine with him as he had done during their father's lifetime. They thought his latent resentment was now surfacing, but they were wrong. The Marahal explains that with the death of Yaakov, Yosef knew that the persecution of the Jews could start at any time. An invitation to the palace could be construed as the Jews seeking power and influence. So, to minimize this latent antisemitism, Yosef stopped inviting them. Yosef knew that his actions might be misinterpreted by the brothers, but to be a leader of the Jewish People means knowing when to override the natural sensitivity that a brother has toward his siblings for the

Office of the Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Parshat: Vayechi 8 January 2020

You can live forever! Jacob never died. This extraordinary statement is recorded in the Gemara, (Mashechet Ta'anit). There we are told how Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were exchanging words of Torah, and when they came to Jacob our Patriarch, Rabbi Yitzchak declared, "Ya'akov Avinu lo met" – "Jacob, our Patriarch never died". Rav Nachman challenged him: "In the Torah we read how he was eulogised, he was embalmed, he was buried. So how can you say Jacob never died?" Rabbi Yitzchak replied: "I learn it from a scriptural source in the book of Jeremiah Chapter 30. There, the prophet tells us about the promise of Hashem, that the day will come when the children of Jacob will be reunited in the Holy Land at a time of redemption. Therefore, 'Ma zar'o ba'chayim af u'ba'chayim' – since his descendants are alive, he too is alive." Since Jacob influenced so many people who internalised his values and passed them on through the generations, he is considered still to be alive. We often reflect on the immortality that our souls can attain, through life in Olam Habah – the world to come. But the Gemara wants to teach us that there is an additional form of immortality which we can attain here, in this world. In the Book of Bereishit, there are two parshiot which have in their titles the term 'life'. They are 'Chayei Sarah' and 'Vayechi'. 'Chayei Sarah' means 'the life of Sarah' but if you look at the content of the parasha, it is all about her death. And similarly, 'Vayechi', our parasha of this week, describes the death of Ya'akov, the death of Yosef – the death of that entire generation. But the message is very clear: because Sarah's values continued to be cherished and to be transmitted throughout the generations, the parasha is called 'Chayei Sarah' – Sarah is alive! Similarly, Ya'akov is very much alive even to this day! We speak about him and reflect upon his great teachings and therefore the parasha is called 'Vayechi' – because he lives on and on. There is a double message for us here. First of all, we can guarantee that our forebears remain alive through us – through all the good deeds that we perform. And secondly, we can attain our own immortality by touching the hearts and moulding the minds of as many people as possible. If Jacob is still alive today, so too, we can be alive forever. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rav Frand - Parshas Vayechi "Shoot From Hip and Ask Questions Later" – Is Not a Quality for a Jewish Leader On his deathbed, Yaakov gives brachos to his children. He begins with his firstborn son and tells him: "Reuven, you are my firstborn... Yeser s'ais v'yeser az

(greater by raising and greater by might)." (Bereshis 49:3). What do the words "yeser s'ais v'yeser oz" mean? Rashi interprets, "You were potentially fit to be greater than your brothers by having the kehunah, as indicated by the word s'ais which is related to the expression "nesias kapayim" ("lifting of the palms," which takes place during Birkas Kohanim). Rashi also interprets the expression "v'yeser oz" as implying that Reuven should have also had the leadership role in Klal Yisrael – malchus (monarchy). Rashi infers this from the similar expression "v'yiten oz l'malko" (Shmuel I 2:10). What caused Reuven to lose this greatness, for which he had been destined? Yaakov continues his blessing to Reuven in the next pasuk: "Pachaz k'mayim al tosar olisa mishkivay ovicha" (Haste like water – do not take more, because you mounted your father's bed...) (Bereshis 49:4). Rashi interprets "Pachaz k'mayim" – your impetuosity, which caused you to react impulsively when you felt your mother was slighted (in the incident in which Reuven shifted Yaakov's bed from the tent of Rochel's handmaiden to the tent of his mother, Leah, following the death of Rochel). The impulsiveness you demonstrated on that occasion disqualified you from being the king. Rashi says the expression "pachaz k'mayim" connotes fast flowing water that is in an apparent hurry to get to its destination. "You are like a quick flowing stream – too quick, too trigger-happy. Therefore, you are ineligible to receive all these extra benefits (kehuna and malchus), which you were destined to receive." On the other hand, by the bracha of Yehuda – who does receive the monarchy – the pasuk says: "A lion cub is Yehudah; from prey my son, you ascended (m'teref b'nee alisa)" What does that mean? Rashi interprets: You, Yehuda, were part of the conspiracy to kill Yosef. You were the one who came up with the supposed story that Yosef was killed by a wild animal. You were part of all that. But what happened, Yehuda? You changed your mind. You withdrew and you said "What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? (Bereshis 37:26) You argued, let's not kill him, but rather throw him into a pit. We can sell him to the Yishmaelim. According to Rashi, Yaakov further noted that this is not the only time Yehuda changed his mind and regretted an earlier statement. He also initially issued a decree that Tamar should be executed (when he suspected her of being unfaithful and having illicit relations outside her family). But upon seeing her evidence to the contrary, he said "She is more righteous than I." (Bereshis 38:26) What is Rashi teaching? Rabbi Buxban from Florida wanted to explain these Rashis as follows: There is one quality that disqualifies a person from being a king or a leader in Klal Yisrael – the quality of impetuosity and impulsiveness. Knee-jerk reactions are unacceptable for a Jewish leader. A leader needs to be able to think things through, and rethink things if necessary. Before carrying out a decision, a king

must ask himself “Is this the right way to go?” Reuven did not rethink his steps. He was offended. He stood up for his mother’s honor – all well and good. But he didn’t say “Hey, wait a minute! Let me think this thing through. What am I doing to my father? I am insulting him.” Because of that quality, Reuven could not be the melech. Yehudah, on the other hand, also made mistakes. His initial reaction was “Let’s kill Yosef. Let’s kill Tamar.” But then he thought about the matter and said “mah betza” (What is to be gained by this)? He changed his mind and retracted his position. He said, “Maybe I was not right.” That is an attribute needed to be a melech Yisrael. “Shoot from the hip and ask questions later” is not the quality we want in a Jewish leader. And if a person cannot say the words “I was wrong. I made a mistake” he cannot be the melech. Reuven ultimately did teshuva. In fact, the Medrash (Bereshis Rabbah 98) says that when Yaakov Avinu explains that Reuven did teshuva, he expresses it as follows: “You have made yourself a mikvah of water and have purified yourself within it.” Those who know a little about the laws of tahara (ritual purification) know that there are two kinds of bodies of water that can provide tahara to a person. The first is called a “mikvah” which is an accumulation of rainwater. It must be completely still water, so still that if there is any leakage, it is not a mikvah anymore. It is called zochalim (flowing waters), which invalidate a mikvah. The other type of medium of purification is a “ma’ayan,” which is a fast-flowing stream. If a person immerses in the Mississippi River, he has achieved the highest form of tahara. A “ma’ayan” even purifies a Zav (a form of impurity which cannot achieve tahara by immersion in a standard “mikvah”). Yaakov emphasizes that the way Reuven repented was by immersion in a mikvah. As opposed to “pachaz k’mayim...” (as impetuous as a fast-flowing stream), which was the quality of Reuven that previously caused him to offend his father. Now he immersed in a stationary mikvah. The choice of that mode of tahara is symbolic. Reuven said to himself, “No. Don’t rush. Sometimes we need still waters, like the waters of a mikvah, rather than the fast-flowing waters of a ma’ayan.”

How the Doctor from Minnesota Won His Friday Night Bet With the Yerushalmi Yid

There is a custom throughout the Jewish world to bless our children on Friday nights. (Some people do this every Friday, and some people do it specifically on Erev Yom Kippur.) We bless our sons with the famous blessing (from this week’s parsha) “May Elokim make you like Ephraim and Menashe.” (Bereshis 48:20) and we bless our daughters with the blessing “May Elokim make you like Sora, Rivka, Rochel, and Leah.” Over the years, we have said numerous peshatim on the meaning of the bracha “May Elokim make you like Ephraim and Menashe.” Tonight, I would like to say over the following story which I heard recently: There was a medical conference in Yerushalayim that brought together

experts from all over the world on the topic of epilepsy. A doctor from Minnesota, who was a world-renowned expert in this field, came to the conference. He met there a Yerushalmi looking Jew who was participating in these meetings. This was not the type of person who looked like a doctor (although today it is not always easy to tell). The doctor asked him, “Nu, is your medical expertise in the field of epilepsy?” The Yerushalmi said, “No. I am not a doctor at all, but I have a child who has epilepsy. Many times, I have travelled all over the world to conferences on this condition to hear what is new in the field. I want to know if there are any new medications or new treatments. Now there is an epilepsy conference in Yerushalayim, so certainly I came.” The Yerushalmi then invited the doctor, the epilepsy expert, to his home for Shabbos dinner the Friday night after the conference concluded. The doctor accepted the invitation. As the guest entered the house, the host told him (in private), “I have five daughters. One of them has epilepsy. I bet you won’t be able to tell which of the five has epilepsy. Her epilepsy is for the most part under control, and my daughter is perfectly normal. She is not self-conscious about her condition. I bet you won’t be able to tell which daughter has epilepsy.” The doctor responded, “Listen, I am a world class expert in epilepsy. I will be able to tell which daughter it is.” The host asked, “Would you like to bet on that?” The doctor said he did! (I don’t know what exactly they bet, but that is not important to the story.) Throughout the entire meal, everything was fine. There were no outward manifestations of her illness at all. After the meal, the host (privately) asked the doctor, “So tell me: Which is the one that has epilepsy?” The doctor said (not in front of the daughters) “It is that one!” The host was astonished. He said “You are right! How did you possibly figure that out? She behaves exactly the same as all of her sisters! How did you know?” The doctor explained: “Do you know how I knew? It was because when you benched your daughters before the meal, I saw that your heart rate increased when you benched her.” When we sit at our Shabbos tables Friday night and we bench our children, in our minds we think “What do I want from this child? What do I want this child to be? What do I want this child to become?” As much as this father knew his daughter’s illness was under control, still, her condition affected his heart strings. It affected his heart rate. That is how the doctor knew. The moment when we bless our children Friday night is really special. We have a unique ability to connect with each child, and then give each a bracha asking that they become like Ephraim and Menashe or like Sora, Rivka, Rochel and Leah. This is a most emotional moment. Perhaps the outer manifestations of these emotions are not visible to the average person. Perhaps this is not even something we are ourselves aware of — but these subconscious expressions of bracha come from the deepest place in our heart. *Transcribed by David*

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה