

VAYECHI



INSPIRATION

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CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי
(בראשית מח:ה)

Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon. (Bereishis 48:5)

Jacob is frequently called *zaken* (the old one) in the Torah and the Midrash, despite the fact that Abraham and Isaac lived longer. When Jacob refused to let Benjamin return to Egypt with his brothers, Judah said, Leave the *zaken* alone until the house runs short of bread [and Jacob will then be forced to change his mind] (Rashi on 43:2). Later, Joseph asks, Is your old father, *avichem hazaken*, whom you mentioned, well? Is he still alive? (43:27). In his explanation for the source of the prayer which follows the opening verse of Shema Yisrael, Baruch shem kevod malchuso le'olam va'ed, "Blessed be His glorious majesty forever and ever," Maimonides writes: The 'old one' exclaimed it, Pasach hazaken v'amar [after being reassured of the piety of his children]; therefore, it is a custom in Israel to recite the praise which the "old Israel" (Yisrael hazaken) said after

the opening verse of Shema Yisrael. (Hilchos Keriyas Shema 1:4) The appellation *zaken* is initially used without even mentioning his name, it being understood that the reference is to Jacob.

In Talmudic and Midrashic literature, Jacob is often called Yisrael Sava ("Old Israel"), and this term, too, is employed even in modern usage, to designate Jews who observe the old tradition. In what manner did Jacob distinguish himself that his name became the generic name for an entire people, and why is he in particular called the *zaken*?

Jacob was the first patriarch to establish direct communication with his grandchildren. He was the first to make a historic pronouncement, thereby laying the foundation for the dialogue of the generations. He literally conquered time and space when he said to Joseph, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt, until I came to you, to the land of Egypt they are mine. Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon (verse 5). They received portions

in the later division of the Holy Land, as did the sons of Israel (see Rashi). Though a second generation removed, and nurtured in an Egyptian environment, Jacob equated them with his own sons who had been reared close to him in the Holy Land.

Abraham and Isaac transmitted their spiritual heritage to their sons, but not to their grandsons. The latter received it from their fathers, but there was no direct communication between Abraham and Jacob or between Isaac and Reuben and Simeon. The influence of the grandfathers on their grandchildren was indirect. Jacob, however, related directly to his grandchildren; he did not need an intermediary or an interpreter; his was a direct dialogue. Jacob the *zaken* leapt over the gulf of generations and transmitted the great mesorah of Abraham directly to Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob was the first to impart special blessings to his grandchildren, May the angel who redeemed me from all harm bless the youths (verse 16). He blessed them even

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THE SECRET TO REDEMPTION



In Parsha Vayechi, we read about Yaakov's life coming to an end. He turns to his son Yosef, requesting to be buried in the land of Canaan. Agreeing, Yosef swears to fulfill his father's last wish. As Yaakov lays on his deathbed, he calls upon each of his sons to stand beside him, blessing them individually with specific and unique brachot. Again, this time in front of all of his sons, Yaakov asks to be buried within the land of Canaan, in Ma'arat HaMachpela.

In Bereishis 49:1, as Yaakov is talking to his sons, he says, "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will happen in the end of days." What does this mean? Rashi answers

explains that Yaakov wanted to inform his sons of the arrival of Mashiach; therefore, he told his sons to "assemble" because it is only possible for Mashiach to come when the Jewish people are united, without hate. In the beginning of the pasuk, it uses the word, "hei'asfu" (assemble), but in the following pasuk, it uses the word "hi'kavtzu" (gather). By using repetition throughout the pesukim it shows us Yaakov's desire to tell his sons the arrival of Mashiach, but according to Rashi, at that moment, the Shechinah departed from him and he was no longer able to tell his sons of the coming of Mashiach. Not being able to tell his sons when Mashiach is coming, Yaakov found

a way to tell them how to make Mashiach come: Unity. Yaakov calls out another time, "Hi'katzvu!" for his sons to gather. The gathering of Yaakov's sons, at that moment, represented the gathering and unity of the Jewish people.

This taught me an important lesson about unity. We can learn for ourselves that when the Jewish people are unified with their fellow Jews, Mashiach will come much sooner. Another lesson we could learn from this pasuk is the message "v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho - Love your fellow neighbor as you love yourself." Looking closely at the wording of the pasuk, it uses the Hebrew

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FIVELIGHTS

5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

1

What's more powerful – an arrow or a sword?

Targum Onkelus translates the words “arrow” and “sword” (Genesis 48:22) to be referring to prayer. What does prayer have to do with arrows and swords?

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, the Meshech Chochmah, explains that a sword is lethal no matter who is holding it. **An arrow, however, is only deadly when it is in the hands of a skilled marksman.**

So, too, there are two types of prayer. When we pray alone with our voice, the efficacy of our prayers is like an arrow – they are only as strong as our focus and effort. But prayer as part of a community – using the text of the siddur – is like a sword. No matter who wields those words of prayer, these words of prayer are always powerful.

2

Nechama Leibowitz tells us that when God told Yaakov not to be afraid (Bereishis 46:3), it wasn't exile and bondage that Yaakov feared; **Yaakov feared success and wealth.** Such prosperity comes with the possibility of distracting people from their true missions in life.

Sure enough, Bereishis 47:27 tells us that the Jews acquired wealth and thrived in Egypt. For this reason, when Yaakov blessed Yosef, he did not use the same formula that God had used when blessing Yaakov. God said: *“Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations will come from you, and kings will come out of your loins. The land that I gave Avraham and Yitzchak, I will give to you and to your descendants...”* (Bereishis 35:11-12)

Whereas Yaakov said: *“...I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of nations. I will give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.”* (Bereishis 48:4)

Yaakov omitted the reference to kings, lest Yosef mistakenly think that this referred to his position in Egypt, which was ultimately unimportant. On the other hand, Yaakov emphasized the significance of Eretz Yisroel as an everlasting inheritance in order to remind his family that the success they achieved in Egypt was fleeting and not actually their purpose.

3

When Yaakov fell ill, his son Yosef came to visit him. The Torah tells us that when Yaakov received his visitor, he sat up “on the bed” (על המיטה) (Bereishis 48:2).

The Talmud tells us that when one visits a sick person, he alleviates one-sixtieth of the patient's pain (Nedarim 39b). The gematria of המיטה (the bed) is 59. Therefore, our verse can be understood that Yaakov sat up “because of 59.” In other words, **Yosef's visit alone was enough to make Yaakov feel better** and let him gather the strength to sit up.

We see from here an allusion to the greatness of the mitzvah of bikkur cholim.

4

When Yaakov blessed his grandsons, he crossed his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim, the younger son. The Torah tells us that when Yosef saw this, it was “evil in his sight” (i.e., it greatly upset him). He said, “Not so, my father – this is the firstborn,” to which Yaakov replied, “I know, my son. I know” (Bereishis 48:17-19).

The Meam Loez explains this incident as follows.

There were those who still suspected Yosef's guilt in the incident with Potifar's wife. When Yaakov favored Ephraim over Menashe, it upset Yosef because he was afraid that perhaps his father believed such rumors and was spurning his firstborn out of concern that the boy might really be the product of an adulterous relationship. When Yosef objected, **he stressed Menashe's legitimacy.** Yaakov assured him, “I know, my son,” i.e., I know that you are my son, who overcame temptation when you conjured a vision of my face in your mind. “I know” that Menashe is your rightful firstborn.

We see that Yaakov giving precedence to Ephraim was because of Ephraim's own inherent potential for greatness and **not because of any defect in Menashe**, who was also blessed. When something good happens to one person, it is not meant as a reflection on anybody else.

5

In the first two verses of Parshas Vayechi, the Torah tells us that “Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt” and that “the time drew near for Yisroel to die” (Bereishis 47:28-29). Why does the Torah switch names, and why does “Yaakov” live but “Yisroel” die?

Yaakov – the name given to our forefather upon his birth – comes from the word עקב meaning the heel of the foot, something that is trod upon. This name refers to the **physical aspect** of our ancestor's existence. It was Yaakov – the physical being – that needed to descend to Egypt because of a famine.

Yisroel – the name given to the patriarch by God – is related to the word שרר which means dominion, something that is elevated. This name reflects our forefather's **spiritual accomplishments.** When our ancestor was ready to divest himself of the physical that is Yaakov, it was the spiritual that is Yisroel that moved on to eternal reward in the next plane of existence.

While we may not all have two names, each of us is composed of a physical self and a spiritual self. Like our forefather, we may have to feed our physical Yaakov but **we should never let that be at the expense of our spiritual Yisroel.**

SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

RAMBAN 47:28	We are still continuing Yaakov's journey to Egypt.
KLI YAKAR 48:4	Only Yosef is called a "kahal."
RAMBAN 48:6	How do we split up Israel?
RAMBAN 48:7	The reason why Rachel is not buried with the rest of our forefathers and mothers.
RABBEINU BACHAYE 49:2	The two gatherings before redemption.
OHR HACHAIM 49:3	Seriously, you need to see this inside. Too many crucial points to even list.
RAMBAN 49:10	Kingship is for Yehudah, we're talking to you Chashmonaim!
KLI YAKAR 49:18	Judges must be fearless.
RAMBAN 49:33	The righteous never die.
RABBEINU BACHAYE 50:17	Did Yosef ever really forgive his brothers?

In this week's parsha, Yaakov is on his deathbed and tells his children: "Gather around, and I will tell you what will happen at the End of Days" (Genesis 49:1). However, this information is never disclosed! Instead, yaakov blesses each one of his sons, and no further mention is made of the prophetic vision he promised to reveal.

According to Rashi, the Divine Presence left Jacob as he was about to tell his sons what would happen at the End of Days. Since Yaakov was unable to prophesy without Divine assistance, he blessed his children instead. But why would the Divine Presence depart from Yaakov precisely at this time? Rabbi Naftali of Rupshitz suggests that once Yaakov looked into the future, he saw all the pain that the Jewish people would have to endure until the end of time, and this saddened him so much that the Divine Presence left him. The Talmud teaches (Shabbat 30b) that sadness prevents a person from being able to receive prophesy. Therefore, once Yaakov was overwhelmed with sorrow for the Jewish people, he no longer had clarity about future events.

This teaches us a powerful lesson about what it means to feel the pain of others.

The following story is from "Between the Lines," a series in mysticism by Rabbi Aba Wagensberg:

A story is told about Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He once visited an ill person who was very worried about whether he would receive a place in the World to Come. Upon hearing the man's concern, Rav Levi Yitzchak called over some of his students to act as witnesses, whereupon he drew up a document transferring his own portion in the Next World to the ill man. His students signed the document, and a few moments later, the man died.

The students were shocked by their rabbi's behavior, and they asked him why he had acted in such a manner. Rav Levi Yitzchak replied, "To make a Jew who is suffering feel calm and at ease, even for one moment, is worth more than the entire World to Come."

(It seems possible that the reward Rav Levi Yitzchak received for this great act of compassion far outweighed the reward that he signed over to the dying man!)



CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV CONTINUED FROM FRONT

before he assembled his own sons for their blessings. He embraced them between his knees, and he placed his hands upon their heads, symbolically signifying that there was a direct transmission from Jacob to Ephraim and Manasseh. There was no generation gap in the house of Jacob. The halachic ruling (Yevamos 62b) that b'nai banim harei hem k'vanim (grandchildren have the same status as children) is derived from Jacob's declaration about Ephraim and Manasseh.

How appropriate, therefore, that our people be called Israel or Jacob, for it was he who created the community which ensures Jewish continuity. What preceded him were patriarchal families, but Jacob laid the foundation for a people. Though the covenant was made initially with Abraham, it was not until Jacob that the secret of perpetuating the mesorah was discovered.

(Reflections, 2:18-19)

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CONVERSATIONS WITH RABBI JASON STRAUSS



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WHAT PERSON IN TANAKH DO YOU MOST IDENTIFY WITH?

It's not easy to say that you identify with a character in Tanakh, as they all lived such different and exciting lives. You don't make it into Tanakh without facing some very difficult circumstances. There is one character who had a tremendous impact on my life, however, through the influence of a more contemporary Jewish hero. The last chapter of Rabbi Soloveitchik's classic book *The Lonely Man of Faith* uses the analogy of Elisha to challenge the modern man of faith. Elisha was a successful cattle rancher and a wealthy slave master, focused on worldly pursuits. Suddenly, Elijah, a man of G-d, appears and places before him the opportunity to drop everything to fight corruption and idolatry as a prophet and servant of G-d. Elisha doesn't hesitate to follow Elijah on this mission; he slaughters his cattle, feeds and frees his slaves,

and says farewell to his parents. Rabbi Soloveitchik asks, "Is modern man of faith entitled to a more privileged position and a less exacting and sacrificial role?" This question propelled me towards an interest in Jewish education and communal work.

WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A RABBI AND A JEWISH EDUCATOR?

There are a number of people who deserve much credit for inspiring or encouraging me to choose my profession but I will mention three people. My high school principal is a man of integrity and generosity that I have rarely found in my life. He tries hard to know and understand not only his own students but every student in the school. He opens his home to the whole school multiple times a year. He barely sleeps so he can balance being a parent, a teacher, and a leader all at once. I realized in senior year that I wanted to be like him one day. Second, my grandfather, for whom I am named, Grandpa Yoash, was a student of the famous Lumza and Grodna Yeshivas and a teacher for his entire career. Upon realizing

the extent of his Torah knowledge during my year in Israel, I became committed to studying for rabbinical ordination. Finally, I should mention while I was a student at Columbia University, I was very active in the Orthodox community, giving shiurim and serving as gabbai. The Hillel rabbi, from whom I learned a lot of Torah, told me that he felt I had something to contribute to Jewish communal work. I really took that to heart and it helped motivate me to search for community rabbi positions.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK?

My all-time favorite book is actually *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok. As a kid, about the same age as my students, I found myself relating to Reuven, one of the main characters, in many ways as a modern Jew who loves to learn Torah but who wants to integrate his learning within a modern moral and political context. I would recommend it as required reading for every Orthodox Jewish high school (or even middle school) as a way to bring up our community's biggest issues..

THE SECRET TO REDEMPTION CONTINUED FROM FRONT

word for neighbor (*Li'rayacha*) rather than the hebrew word for friend (*chaver*).

If we look at the root of the word *Li'rayacha*, the root letters are *reish* and *ayin*. These two letters happen to be the same letters for the roots of the hebrew words, *Ra* (evil), *Ro'eh* (shepherd), and *Teruah* (the sounding of the shofar). The shofar *Reish-Ayin* represents something that was once whole, then was broken, and aspires to be put back together.

Think about the word *Ra* (evil). What is evil? If G-d is entirely good, how can there be evil? The answer is simply that G-d created good in the world, but people have taken that good and shattered it, creating evil. Some say that when Adam was created, his soul was made up of every Jewish person's

soul. Adam had been the first person in the world to shatter that which was good and make it bad. G-d gave Adam all that was good, but he took that and went against G-d's commandment; making it bad. Since Adam shattered the good, he also shattered his soul creating individual souls for each of us.

Now look at the word *Ro'eh*, shepherd. What is the job of a shepherd? A shepherd's main job is to gather all the sheep who wish to wander off. He brings all the sheep together, who are scattered. On Rosh Hashana one of the sounds of the shofar is called a *Teruah*. A *Teruah* comes after and before a *Tekiah*. A *Tekiah* is a whole sound, whereas a *Teruah* is a broken sound. All these things represent

something whole, that becomes broken, and then comes back together. The Jewish people were broken and we need to be reunited once more. Once we come together and are unified, and we love our friends like we love ourselves, that is when *Mashiach* will come.

As members of Am Yisrael, we must take this idea to heart. We should not go out of our way to hate others, or speak *lashon hara*. We must be kind to one another, love our friends like we love ourselves, and always be unified as a nation so we can (IY"Y) bring the final redemption sooner!

Sharoni Borenstein is a member of NCSY's National Teen Board.

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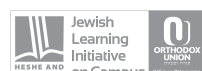
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