



Parshat Vayechi

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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“Shoot From Hip and Ask Questions Later” – Is Not a Quality for a Jewish Leader

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Yissocher Frand

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.

The Angel Who Redeemed Him

Parshas [Vayechi](#)

Yaakov Invokes Heavenly Blessings for His Grandchildren From “The Angel Who Redeemed Him”

“And he blessed Yosef and said ‘the L-rd before whom my fathers walked, the L-rd who has taken care of me until this day, the Angel who redeems me from all evil, He shall bless the young lads...” [Bereishis 48:15-16]. This pasuk [verse] is familiar those who say it with our children at night before they go to bed. However, if we think about the pasuk, we will discover a basic difficulty.

Yaakov began giving this blessing to Yosef by referring to the L-rd (haElokim) with whom his forefathers traveled. We would expect that Yaakov would invoke the help of G-d in the blessing of the children. However, in the middle of the blessing, Yaakov suddenly switched and started talking about “the Angel”. Yaakov invoked the blessing of the Angel rather than the blessing of G-d. Wouldn't G-d's blessing be better than an Angel's blessing?

I saw a beautiful explanation in the *Limudei Nissan* (Rav Nissan Alpert). There was a very big difference between the relationship that G-d had with Avraham and Yitzchak and the relationship that He had with Yaakov. The first two generations of Patriarchs merited a relationship with G-d that was built upon open miracles. Avraham, even amongst his peers, was crowned: “a Prince of G-d are you in our midst” [Bereishis 23:6]. Everyone appreciated who he was. Likewise, Avimelech initiated a peace covenant with Yitzchak because he realized who Yitzchak was. They merited a treatment by G-d that was apparent to everyone.

Yaakov is the Patriarch who symbolizes the Jew in Exile. He existed and lived in exile and passed on to his children and his descendants the ability to survive in exile. The providence that Yaakov had was one in which G-d always saved him, but the salvation came in a way which was much more hidden than that experienced by Avraham and Yitzchak.

Look at Yaakov's life. He had troubles from Eisav. Then he had troubles with Lavan. Then he had troubles with Dena. Then he had troubles with Yosef. Then he had troubles with Shimon. Then he had troubles with Binyamin. Yaakov literally lived a life of troubles. But G-d was always there. In all of these instances, in the final analysis, goodness sprouted from what was perceived as evil.

The twenty years spent with Lavan were the twenty years in which Yaakov built the future Tribes. The incident with Yosef is what eventually sustained them in the years of famine. All of these things eventually had a silver lining – but as they were happening, they were all highly traumatic situations. It was certainly true that at all times G-d was “pulling the strings”, but it was not necessarily apparent that this was the case.

This typifies Jewish life in the Exile (Galus). In Galus, we live a life in which the Divine Face of G-d is Hidden (Hester Panim) from us. This means that G-d is there, calling the shots, but He is behind a cloud. It is often difficult to identify the “Hand of G-d” in that which transpires around us. It is difficult to perceive that what occurs to us is “for the best” rather than sometimes calamitous. This is our life in Exile.

Yaakov is about to bless his grandchildren, Menashe and Ephraim, who are the first Jews born into Exile. Their experience in the Egyptian Exile would foreshadow the Jewish experience in many future countries of exile. Yaakov wanted them to realize that the “Hand of G-d” would not always openly intervene on their behalf. At times, G-d’s presence would not be apparent to them at all. Therefore, precisely for this reason, Yaakov gave them the blessing of “the Angel who redeemed me from all evil...” In Galus, G-d does not deliver the salvation Himself in an open and apparent way as it was with the earlier patriarchs. Rather, “the Angel (Malach) who redeems” delivers the salvation. In Galus, G-d has his representatives (Malachim, literally Angels) who come to deliver salvation.

The entire blessing can be understood in this light. “The L-rd before whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked” – openly basking in His Salvation. “The G-d who shepherds me” – this is the same G-d who is like a shepherd to me. [The sheep do not

know that the wolf is lurking in the background, but it is the shepherd who is always there to make sure that nothing happens. This is the type of Providence that I merited to have in Exile.] And this same Providence – that G-d should watch out for you in Exile even in hidden and indirect ways – is my blessing to you: “The Angel who redeems me from all evil, he too should bless these young boys...” And if you can see this hand of G-d in all that occurs and you will remain upright and steadfast, then “... my name will be called upon you, as well as the names of my forefathers...” – eventually you will merit to have the open Providence of G-d which was experienced by Avraham and Yitzchak.

Vayechi – Cause and Effect

Written by Rabbi Eliezer Chrysler

*“Yisachar chamor gorem (Yisachar is a bony ox)” 49:14.
Like a donkey, Yisachar bent his shoulder to bear the yoke of Torah.
Seeing as the word “gorem” is missing a ‘Vav’, the phrase can also be translated as ‘Yisachar was brought about by a donkey’. Le’ah, it will be remembered, had bought Rachel’s rights in Ya’akov that night for the duda’im (the jasmin) that her son Reuven had given her. Ya’akov, unaware of the transaction, was making his way to Rachel’s tent, and it was the braying of Ya’akov’s donkey that Le’ah heard, that prompted her to go out to meet him and bring him to her tent instead. That night, Yisachar was conceived. It can truly be said that both the cause and the effect of Yisachar were a donkey!*

The word ‘Tefillah’

Written by d fine

What does the word tefillah mean? In our sedra (48:11) we are given a major clue. Yaakov tells Yosef that in all these years ‘I have not seen your face’ –

and he uses the word ‘filalta,’ which has its roots in the word Tefillah. So what does filalta mean? The Netziv writes that it means when one makes a special effort to achieve something (a real hishtadlus). Thus, Yaakov was saying to Yosef that ‘in all these years that I thought you were dead, I did not even make a real attempt to see you (for I thought you were gone).’

This reveals to us a bit about what Tefillah means. One aspect of Tefillah is that a real attempt (hishtadlus) to ask things from HaShem. Indeed, if one praises HaShem but does not then ask something of Him then one can be considered to have sinned. Tefillah is a form of hishtadlus, as the Chazon Ish said. Apart from its innate ability to create a relationship of closeness to HaShem, Tefillah is a way of making a real effort to achieve something and ‘get what you want from HaShem.’ And nothing is too small for Him to provide – you just need to ask.

Pakod Yifkod

Written by H Jackson

At the end of VaYechi we read that the exile in Egypt will end when “Pakod Yifkod”, “God will surely redeem” (Bereishit 50:24). These would be the code words that would demonstrate to the leaders of the Israelites that the time for redemption had arrived. The Baal HaTurim asks what is so special about the phrase “Pakod Yifkod” and what is its correct translation? In the Torah reading for fast days, we encounter the same verb “Pokeid” (Shemot 34:7). Interestingly, this reference occurs after the sin of the golden calf when Moshe is appealing to God’s compassion and recites the 13 attributes of mercy. The standard translation of the phrase “Pokeid Avon Avot Al Banim V’Al Bnei Vanim ...” is that God “visits the sins of the ancestors on their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren and their great-great-grandchildren”. HaKetav VeHaKabbalah notes that to punish future generations based on the actions of their ancestors does not appear to belong in a passage about compassion? Additionally, is it morally fair to punish four generations for the sins of their predecessors?

The Baal HaTurim explains that the verb “Pakod” actually means “to be lacking”, as in the phrase “VeLo Nifkad Mimenu Ish”, “no-one was missing” (BeMidbar 31:49). So the code “Pakod Yifkod” means that “Pakod”, i.e. 190 (in Gimatriya 80+100+6+4) years* would be missing from the scheduled 400 years of exile in Egypt (Bereishit 15:13). Their exile would only last for 210 years, as Yaakov had hinted when he said “Redu Shamah” (Bereishit 42:2), since “Redu” has Gimatriya (200+4+6=) 210. Later, when God tells Moshe to notify the elders “Pakod Pakadeti” (Shemot 3:16), the intention is that 190 years have now been reduced from the exile.

Therefore “Pokeid Avon Avot Al Banim V’Al Bnei Vanim ...” means that God reduces the sins of the previous generations through the merits of their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. It is indeed merciful and benevolent for God to do this. We can now also understand why the Torah terms the Day of Atonement “Yom HaKippurim” in the plural, as opposed to the more logical “Yom Kippur” in the singular. On this day, two atonements can be achieved: atonement for the living and also for the benefit of the dead through their descendants’ merits. (I heard this Devar Torah from Norman Turner.)

* The text of the Torah writes the word “Pakod” without the Hebrew letter “Vav” but we may include it in the Gimatriya using the principle “Yeish Eim LeMikra”, i.e. we focus on the way the text is pronounced rather than the way it is spelled.

Humor

My friend was cranky from fasting all day for Yom Kippur yesterday.

I’m sure it will Passover.

My doctor told me intermittent fasting is good for weight loss.

I told him it doesn't work for me.

I haven't lost any weight even though I've been doing it multiple times a day.

've finally started intermittent fasting and been doing all my eating within a window.

Sad to say it's been the McDonald's drive thru window.

I asked a man in a turban why he wasn't fasting

He told me you don't have to fast for Ramadan if you are Sikh.