

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYECHI · 18 TEVET 5761 · JAN. 13, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 12

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE DESCENT OF MAN

“...All Israel shall bless, saying ‘May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.’” (48:20)

Rebbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, one of the great sages of the previous generation, was once sitting in an airplane next to the head of the Histadrut, the Israeli Labor Federation. As Reb Yaakov was of advanced age, his children insisted that he travel in business class to minimize the rigors of the journey from America to Israel. The rest of his family traveled in Economy. As soon as the “fasten seat belt” sign went off, one of his grandchildren bounded forward and said, “Zeide, would you like a drink?” Not long afterwards, another grandchild appeared and said, “Zeide, are you comfortable? Would you like another pillow?” This grandchild was followed by another and yet another. This monotonous procession of doting grandchildren did not escape the notice of the head of the Histadrut. After the fifth grandchild made his exit, he turned to Reb Yaakov and said, “Forgive me, Rabbi, but may I ask you a question?” “Of course,” replied Reb Yaakov. Said the man: “I couldn’t help notice the tremendous respect your grandchildren give you. I’m lucky if I get a birthday card from my grandchildren. What’s your secret? Why is it that your children and grandchildren give you such respect?”

Reb Yaakov replied, “You see, we believe that we are descended from

people whose spiritual greatness is almost impossible for us to imagine: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe. My *rebbe* (Torah teacher) used to say, without false modesty and in total sincerity, that he didn’t come to the ankles of his *rebbe*, neither in Torah learning nor in purity of character. If you asked my *rebbe’s* *rebbe* about his *rebbe*, he would have said the same. If you extrapolate this backwards even a few generations, it becomes very difficult for us to have any idea of the greatness of the Vilna Gaon, who lived only 250 years ago, let alone of the Avot, the Patriarchs.

“Ever since that supernal moment when G-d spoke to our ancestors at Sinai, our spiritual journey has been ever downward. That’s why our children give us respect, because they see us as closer to Sinai than they. We are one generation closer to the giving of the Torah.

You, on the other hand, believe that you share common ancestry with the ape. So why should your children respect you? You are one generation closer to the ape than they are! They see themselves as a step up the ladder of the ‘ascent of man.’ In their view, it is you who should give them respect.”

“...All Israel shall bless, saying ‘May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.’”

On Friday nights throughout the Jewish world, the first thing that a father does upon returning from *shul* is to bless the children with the words of

this verse: “May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.”

Why, of all our towering spiritual giants, are Ephraim and Menashe singled out to be the paradigm of blessing? Why don’t we say May G-d make you like Avraham, or like Moshe?

The phrase “the generation gap” was coined by sociologists to denote the lack of mutual understanding between generations. But in Judaism, the generation gap is the discrepancy between the spiritual attainments of one generation and those of its predecessor, for the march of history, spiritually, has been inexorably downward.

The reason that we bless our children to be like Ephraim and Menashe can be found in Yaakov’s words to Yosef a few verses earlier — “Ephraim and Menashe will be to me as Reuven and Shimon.” (48:5)

Although Ephraim and Menashe were Yaakov’s grandchildren, they had not slipped down the rungs of the spiritual ladder; rather, they had managed to hang on to the spiritual level of the previous generation, of their uncles Reuven and Shimon.

When a father places his hand on the heads of his children on a Friday night, he blesses them that they should be able to raise themselves above the downward march of history, to maintain the spiritual level of the previous generation and escape the downward spiral of the generation gap.

Sources:

Rabbi Michael Schoen in *Prisms*, Rabbi C.Z. Senter

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of

Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

HAFTARA

MELACHIM I 2:1 - 12

OUT OF DATE?

We live in a world where yesterday's knowledge is out of date and last year's computer

is obsolete. What pearls of wisdom can we glean from the elderly?

Yaakov on his deathbed gathers his sons to bless them. These blessings are peppered with rebuke, and turn out to be Yaakov's game plan for each of their individual lives. In the *haftara*, the ailing King David gives his final commands to Shlomo, his son and heir. "Guard the Torah," David tells him, "walk in its paths, do not deviate from the law of Moshe and then you will know wisdom." David has one message for

Shlomo. He does not tell him where to invest his riches, nor how to win friends or wars. Rather, he tells him that there is nothing above or beyond the Torah. This is the wisdom of the aged *tzaddik*.

In making a decision, our first thought is often "What's in it for me." The Torah commands us to seek the advice of our "elders," meaning a sage, a *tzaddik*. Only one who has liberated himself from a self-centered attitude can direct us along the true path.

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"His smaller brother will be greater than him...." (Bereishet 48:19)

Ephraim was chosen above his older brother Menashe because of his greater humility. Thus, the verse emphasizes that he was the "smaller," i.e., the more humble, brother.

• Based on *Kli Yakar*

לע"נ
 מרת לאה בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ז"ל
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DRINK

The central act in the process of proving through Divine intervention the guilt or innocence of a *sotah* (suspected adulteress) is her drinking the special potion known as the “cursed waters.”

The Torah three times (*Bamidbar* 5:24, 26, 27) directs that she must be given this potion to drink, and the simple understanding is that she drinks it from a cup. The Sage Rava poses an interesting question: What if she drinks it by way of a *siv* — is this considered a normal way of drinking or not?

Rashi explains *siv* as a drinking straw formed from the bark of a palm tree. The Aruch, however, writes that the *siv* bark served as a sort of sponge to absorb the potion which was subsequently sucked out of the *siv* by the *sotah*.

It may be that the Aruch departs from Rashi’s approach because the next question posed by Rava is whether drinking through a *shfoferet* qualifies as normal drinking. The literal translation of this word is “tube”, so defining *siv* as a straw would make the two questions identical. A solution to this problem facing Rashi is provided by Tosefot Shantz who defines the *shfoferet* mentioned in Rava’s second question as only being similar to a straw, but really a sieve through which the potion flows into the *sotah*’s mouth.

According to either explanation of *siv*, the question is raised by Tosefot as to why we do not resolve Rava’s question on the basis of what he himself says (*Mesechta Pesachim* 155b), that if one wraps a *siv* around *matzah* on Pesach Eve and thus swallows it he has not fulfilled the mitzvah of eating *matzah*. Just as *siv* around *matzah* is not considered normal eating, so should drinking through *siv* not be considered normal drinking.

Tosefot quickly dismisses the comparison by pointing out that in the case of *matzah*, the *siv* bark forms a barrier between the *matzah* and the food pipe and is therefore not considered normal eating. This is not the case with the potion which enters the food pipe unobstructed but through an unconventional channel.

• *Sotah* 18a

CANDLE, DAWN AND CROSSROAD

“For the mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light.” (*Mishlei* 6:23) This is comparable, says the *gemara*, to the situation of a man walking along a lonely road in total darkness. He is afraid of the thorns which may cut him, the sword-like growths which may stab him and the pits into which he is likely to fall. In addition he is in fear of the wild beasts and bandits which lurk in the darkness and he is not certain that he is walking in the right direction.

He comes upon a torch to light his way and is now able to avoid thorns, sword-like growths and pits. But he is still

in fear of beasts and bandits and uncertain of his direction. When the light of dawn appears he is safe from the beasts and bandits who slink back to their lairs but he is still uncertain of where he is heading. Only when he reaches a familiar crossroads is he finally free from all the dangers which have threatened him.

Maharsha explains this parable in the following fashion:

Life in this world is compared to a journey through darkness. Man is composed of body and soul. The body performs the *mitzvot*, while the soul, which encompasses man’s intelligence, is occupied with the intellectual activity of Torah study. In man’s physical existence there are three major obstacles to security and perfection. Thorns symbolize man’s struggle against hunger as we find in the penalty of human labor meted out to Adam. “Thorn and thistle will it [the earth] sprout for you” (*Bereishet* 3:18). The sword-like growth represents the sword of the enemy and the pits symbolize the sudden death of sickness and accident. Performing *mitzvot* with our physical powers is similar to the torch and the merit of these physical actions achieves for us physical security.

But man is also threatened in regard to his spiritual security. The evil inclination in man is like the beast within while the evil influence of bad company is like the bandit outside. These spiritual dangers can only be countered by the spiritual-intellectual force of Torah study which is like the light of day.

What do the crossroads, which bring final security, represent? A number of definitions are offered by the Sages. Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak states that this means a Torah scholar with fear of sin. Rashi explains that if one has achieved the self-discipline of fearing sin after achieving Torah knowledge, he is safe from all dangers, for Torah educates him in regard to his responsibilities and what is right and wrong while self discipline restrains him from following his passions. This is called finally knowing that one is heading in the right direction.

• *Sotah* 21a

The Ohr Somayach
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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week's Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*?” Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey?”
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the *Ma'arat Hamachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

Avi Elfenbein <art118@lawrence.csn.net> wrote:
In Parashat Vayechi, Yaakov gives a blessing to his sons. Why does he not give a blessing to his daughter, Dina? I look forward to an answer. Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Avi Elfenbein,

Good question. In truth, there's no proof that he *didn't* bless Dina: The Torah doesn't record everything Yaakov ever did or said. If he did bless her, the Torah may not have considered it necessary to include as she was not a founder of one of the tribes. Yaakov's blessings to his sons are not just individual blessings, but blessings to them and to the tribe that is to emerge from them. The Torah records this so that we will know the character and strength of each tribe.

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

A DAY AT THE RACES

From: Debra Korenstein in Jerusalem
<bubsies@geocities.com>

Dear Rabbi,

I have always wondered how from Adam and Eve came all the different races and colors of the world?

Dear Debra Korenstein,

Great Question! The Talmud itself deals with this. In reality, the modern concept of adaptation to the environment is rooted in the Talmud written 1800 years before Darwin was born!

The Sages teach us that in order to help different people survive in their respective climates and conditions, G-d gave them physical characteristic traits adapted specifically for their environment. For example, the Talmud states that G-d gave people who live in swampy regions large feet to help them contend with the soft footing. And to those who live in eastern desert climates G-d gave special eyelids to help them contend with the sand which kicks up.

In the same line of reason, we can clearly postulate that G-d adjusted the melanin in the epidermis of people who live in different longitudes to contend with the varied exposure to the angles of the sun's rays. Or, simply put, G-d did it.

This is clearly the way G-d created the whole world. Many times in Tanach we see that G-d created everything in kindness, with the innate ability to survive and contend with its environment. Not only does G-d give all life its capability to survive, but he created the inanimate world with many different manifestations of nature to protect and enhance life.

For example, King David in Psalms says that G-d gives "snow like wool." What kind of comparison is this? Snow

is cold and wool is used to warm and protect? Yet, careful observation gives us the answer: Snow acts like an insulation to protect the ground and its vegetation from the extreme cold of winter. The more to the poles we traverse the more snow there is, further insulating the ground underneath. Many animals even have the innate understanding to burrow themselves in the snow during extreme temperatures.

In his inspired wisdom, King David perceived this concept of ground insulation marvelously. Differences among people, too, can be seen as helpful adaptations from a benevolent Creator.

WHO IS A JEW?

From: Evelyn Goldberg Rotz in Coconut Creek, FL
<evrotz@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,

Can you tell me the origin of the word "Jew"?

Dear Evelyn Goldberg Rotz,

The word Jew is rooted in the name "Judah". Judah was one of Jacob's 12 sons and he was the father of one of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

About 26 centuries ago, ten of the Tribes of Israel disappeared into exile. Only the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and the Levites remained. Since Judah was the preeminent tribe, the land was known as "Eretz Yehuda," or Judea, and the remaining Israelites were called "Yehudim," Jews.

One of the earliest appearances of the word "Jew" is in the Book of Esther, in which the hero is referred to as "Mordechai Hayehudi," Mordechai "the Judean" or "the Jew." (*Book of Esther 10:3*)

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

LIGHTS FROM ODESSA

OHR.EDU has received many inquiries regarding the possibility of adopting a child from the Ohr Somayach Children's Home in Odessa. There is no doubt in our minds that the best interest of the children would be to get them out of the Ukraine and adopted into good homes.

We face serious bureaucratic difficulties in this regard, however. In order to found our orphanage, we had to apply for a government license, not an easy thing to obtain in the Ukraine. Until we founded the Ohr Somayach Children's Home, no private orphanage existed, the only orphanages being State institutions. With great difficulty we obtained the license, and have over the years gained an excellent reputation, but we are under constant surveillance by the authorities. The moment we arrange for a child to be adopted out-

side the Ukraine, we would immediately be accused of "selling" children; They would rescind our license and close the orphanage. We don't think this is worth the risk.

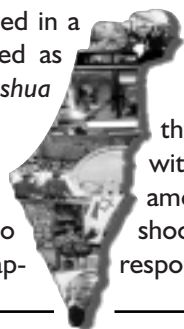
Once the children turn sixteen, the situation is different, and we bring them as quickly as possible to Israel where we have a special high school especially for them.

So, while we are sorry we can't arrange for adoption, but should anyone be interesting in becoming a child's guardian or wish to support a child, we would be very interested. The total cost of the upkeep of a child is \$5000 per year. This or any part of it would be greatly appreciated. For more information, please contact Rabbi Yaakov Bradpiece at child@ohr.edu or call 972-2-581-0315. In the US, please call 1-800-431-2272. Thank you.

THE ALMOST VOLCANO

When Yehoshua passed away he was buried in a part of Har Ephraim which is described as being “north of the volcano”. (Yehoshua 24:30)

This puzzling description is explained by the Talmud (*Mesechta Shabbat 105b*): Insufficient eulogies were made about this great leader who brought his people to *Eretz Israel*, and Divine disap-



proval of this behavior was expressed in the mountain threatening to erupt as a volcano.

Another explanation for the volcanic threat, says the Midrash, was that Jews became so preoccupied with their settling of the land which they had divided amongst the tribes that they had to be Divinely shocked into an awareness of their primary Torah responsibilities.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Sometimes we need to judge ourselves favorably, like in this story called...

PANCAKES

Six year old Brandon decided one Sunday morning to fix his parents pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard, and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor. He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor which by now had a few tracks left by his kitten. Brandon was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be something very good for his Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad. He didn't know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or on the stove, (and he didn't know how the stove worked)!

Suddenly he saw his kitten licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor.

Frantically he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and sticky. And just then he saw dad standing at the door.

Big tears welled up in Brandon's eyes. All he'd wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him. Then, walking through the mess, he picked up his crying son, and hugged him.

That's how G-d deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess sometimes. Our marriage gets all sticky, or we insult a friend, or we can't stand our job, or our health goes sour. Sometimes we just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do.

That's when G-d picks us up and loves us and forgives us. But just because we might mess up, we can't stop trying to "make pancakes." Sooner or later we'll get it right, and then we'll be glad we tried...

• Submitted by an Ohrnet reader

YIDDLE RIDDLE

I am eating, and if I were to finish eating at this point, I would be required to say two *brachot acharonot* (after-blessings). I now take a nibble of another food. Now I only need to say one *bracha acharona*! What have I eaten?

• Riddle submitted by Saul Behr in Johannesburg, South Africa <saalb@unihold.co.za>

Answer next week...

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 47:28 Egypt and Rome
- 47:31 Necessity for the Oath
- 48:1 The Division of Eretz Yisrael
- 48:7 Rachel's Tomb
- 48:15 (first part) Yosef's other children
- 49:10 (first part) Kings of Israel
- 49:17 Shimshon

- 49:31 Burial in the *Ma'arat Hamachpela*
- 49:33 The Death of Yaakov

SFORNO

- 47:31 Yosef's Oath
- 48:18 The Laying of Hands
- 49:7 The Humility of Dispersion
- 49:11 Signs of *Mashiach*