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Shabbat Vayechi

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News

Jews Have A Strong Tendency To Assimilation

The last statistics issued at the eve of the new year 2010, the Jewish leaders are more and more worried about the assimilation of Jews through mixed wedding.

There are today 13.3 millions of Jews in the world. they are shared in 100 different countries. However 41% of the world Jewish population are living in Israel and 40% are living in the United States of America. It has been found that 75% of the Russian Jews and 55% of American Jews are married to non-Jews.

Happy New Year 2010

Even though the Jewish people celebrate their new year in September (Rosh Hashana), the worldwide civil calendar is also reliable in Israel and among Jews all over the world. That's why I am happy to wish to everyone a happy new year 2010. The best wish and hope I have for each one of you is from G-d's Word: "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." (3 John 2).

Resolution For the New Year 2010

It is good at the start of a new year to take some resolutions and decisions that help us improving ourselves and our neighbors during the new year.

Rabbi Packouz suggests ten practical guidelines for positive speech inspired by Torah teaching.

1. Do not express damaging or derogatory information about someone that might cause him physical, psychological or financial harm, even if it is true and deserved.

2. Promote people's well being. When in doubt, don't speak out.

3. Humor is great, but make sure jokes aren't at someone else's expense.

4. Be kind to yourself. Speaking badly even about yourself is unethical.

5. Don't listen to gossip. If you can't change the direction of the conversation, it is advisable to leave.

6. If you inadvertently hear damaging information, you should believe that it is NOT true.

7. Always give others the benefit of the doubt and focus on the positive.

8. Words once spoken can't be erased. Think before you speak, especially if you are angry, hurt or jealous.

9. Use kind and supportive words with your children and spouse whenever possible. Harsh words can cause irreparable harm as can speaking derogatorily to others about the ones you love most.

10. It is not only permitted, but required, to warn a person about potential harm - for example, that a potential business partner has a repeated record of embezzlement.

Let's Remember in 2010

OUR SAGES IN PIRKEI AVOT (CHAPTERS OF OUR FATHERS) TELL US, "THE WORLD EXISTS UPON THREE THINGS; UPON THE TORAH, UPON PRAYER, AND UPON THE PERFORMANCE OF KIND DEEDS."

Overview

Ruben's Failure



Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

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 firstborn 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 G-d.

Yaakov passes away at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron. 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 G-d 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.

It was intended from the outset that Reuven would receive all of these gifts. What did he do to lose them?

The answer that we suggest is quite simply that he became angry. After Rachel's death, Yaakov moved his primary abode not to the tent of Leah (Reuven's mother) but to that of Bilhah. Reuven disturbed this new arrangement in response, angry at what he saw as an insult to his mother. Anger is a character trait which causes dissent and breaks connections. We see this, for example, when Moshe and Aharon became angry with the people, striking, instead of speaking, to the rock. The Ibn Ezra says of this incident that because of the arguments among the people and their dissent with Moshe and Aharon: "behold they factionalized". (Ibn Ezra, Bamidbar 20:8)

According to Jewish tradition, Reuven, as firstborn, should have received three precious gifts: a double portion of Yaakov's inheritance (*bechorah*), kingship (*malchut*), and priesthood (*kehunah*). In fact, Reuven receives none of these.

Anger and dissent cause disharmony and disunity. This is, of course, precisely the opposite of the aim of the gifts of Reuven. Thus, when Reuven displayed anger, the characteristic of disunity, he revealed himself to be an unsuitable recipient of the *Bechora* which was given to Yoseph (Ephraim and Manasse), *Malchut* which was given to Judah (David and his descendents), and *Kehunah* which was given to Levi (Aaron and his descendents).

Rabbi Zvi Belovski reminds us that Rabbi Moni bar Patish said, "Anyone who angers, even if it is determined that he should receive greatness from heaven, will be removed from his position. We learn this from Eliav, who became angry with David." (Pesachim 66b)

In fact, when Eliav, David's eldest brother, became angry, the possibility of him ever becoming king was taken from him and given to David. We thus see David, a man of peace and selfeffacement, as the ideal replacement for Reuven as king of Israel.

We now appreciate just what Reuven could have been. He had the potential to be Aharon HaKohen, Yosef HaTsadik, and David HaMelech in one mighty person. But one error, albeit slight, ended this possibility forever. He could not maintain control of these three great gifts given the slight character fault which he had demonstrated. Thus they were taken from him and given to others.

What Make a True King?

The Torah states that in giving Judah (Yehuda) his blessing, Jacob said: “Yehuda is a lion’s whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up” (Genesis 49:4). Rashi, the great commentator, tells us that Yehuda elevated himself by two actions: 1. he stopped his brothers from killing Joseph, and 2. he publicly embarrassed himself to save the life of his former daughter-in-law, Tamar. Why is it important for us to know how Yehuda behaved in a praiseworthy manner?

Yehuda is the progenitor of the tribe from which came the future kings of Israel. It was precisely because of these exhibitions of character that Yehuda merited this honor and responsibility. In Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, the question is asked, “Who is the mighty person?” and answered, “He who rules over his own desires.” Such a person is worthy to rule over others because he will rule over them with the same righteousness as he rules over himself.

In saving Joseph, he ruled over himself not to be influenced by the other brothers who wanted to kill Joseph. In saving Tamar, he did not let personal pride stand in the way of doing the right thing. The ability to rule over one’s own passions makes any person a true king.

Even Israel: Av and Ben in Israel

Rabbi Ari Kahn says that when it is Yosef’s turn to receive his father’s blessing Yaakov says: “Yosef is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; from there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. (Bereishit 49:22-24)

Yosef is referred to as *Even Israel* which is literally translated as the “stone of Israel.” Onkelos understands the word *even* (stone) as an amalgam of *av* (father) and *ben* (son). Yosef is not only a son, he is also a father. While this is far from remarkable—many people in the history of the world have been both fathers and sons—Yaakov’s comments do much to identify this unique quality Yosef possessed. Yosef was a son and a father; he had the status of one of the twelve tribes, yet he also had the status of one of the patriarchs. He is an *av* and a *ben*. This

is the reason Yosef’s death, and none of the other brothers’, is recorded in Genesis together with the other patriarchs; his status was elevated to that of his father Yaakov, his grandfather Yitzchak and his great-grandfather Avraham. Nonetheless, he is also mentioned in Exodus with the other brothers; he is also a son of Yaakov, a member of the collective known as the Children of Israel.

Great Spiritual Leaders

It is clear that Jacob’s blessing is to be understood as being much more than spiritual support for the attainment of certain spiritual levels by his various descendants. His blessings actually constitute a conclusive delineation of roles and powers among the tribes. These blessings resemble a legally binding constitution for the Jewish nation, much more than what we commonly think of as blessings. Nachmanides relates the tragic history of the Hasmonean royal dynasty of the Second Temple period to illustrate the entitlement aspect of Jacob’s blessings.

The Hasmoneans were a clan of priests—members of the tribe of Levi, not Judah—who led the Jewish rebellion against the Syrian Greeks that is commemorated by the Chanuka Holiday. They managed to drive the Greek armies of Antiochus out of Israel against great odds, to purify the Temple, and to reestablish the Jewish monarchy, an institution that had ended with the destruction of the first Temple more than three hundred years earlier. As the Hasmoneans were clearly the de facto leaders of the Jewish people, both physically and morally, they were unanimously acclaimed as monarchs by a grateful and admiring populace.

According to Nachmanides, the acceptance of the monarchy was the cause of the Hasmoneans’ downfall. In the space of a few generations the entire clan was wiped out, leaving no trace or remnant. Their sin: the violation of Jacob’s blessings. Had they over-ruled the popular will and insisted on the appointment of a monarch from the line of David—that is, from the tribe of Judah—they would surely have prospered for many generations.

People of such great spiritual merit, possessed of such heroic self-sacrifice and great moral stature, capable of inspiring such a powerful spiritual revival in Jewish hearts would certainly have enjoyed the protection of God’s Grace under ordinary circumstances.

THE SMELL OF MASHIACH

Yaakov said in the Blessing to Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the law-giver from his descendants, until the Mashiach comes...” (Genesis 49:10). After the passing of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch in 1772, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok led a group of chassidim to settle in the Holy Land.

One day, a somewhat deluded individual climbed the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and sounded a shofar. Soon the rumor spread that Mashiach had arrived, setting off a great commotion in the street. Rabbi Mendel went to his window and sniffed the air. “No,” he said, “unfortunately, the redeemer has not yet arrived. On that day, ‘the world shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea’ and ‘all flesh will perceive’ the reality of the Creator. I do not sense the Divine truth that will permeate the world in the era of Moshiach.” Said the renowned mashpia, Rabbi Grunem Estherman: “Why did Rabbi Mendel need to go to the window to smell for the presence of Mashiach? Because the all-pervading truth of G-d was already a tangible reality within the walls of Rabbi Mendel’s room.”

OUR DIAMONDS

Rabbi Chayim ben Atar, in his famous commentary Ohr Hachayim asks: Why is it that people lived much longer at the beginning of creation (Adam - 930 years; Mesushelach 969; Noah 950 years etc.) and much less later?

He explains the decline in longevity with the following parable: A king who had many diamond mines gave the rough unpolished stones to craftsmen to bring out their great potential beauty. He promised that whoever would fulfill his duty and quota of polished stones would be rewarded generously.

He gave each worker many stones. One he gave 300,000 stones to work on. Another he gave 350,000 stones etc. He allotted one day for each stone. Each craftsman was to bring his stones back when he was completely finished. When the time came and the king checked their work, he was greatly disappointed.

Not only didn't they bring the stones to their great-

est potential, but they even gave back many of them in worse shape than they were originally. The king was very upset. He punished the workers. He commanded the next generation of workers that they should be careful not to make the same mistake as their parents.

However, the king also realized that he would have to make it easier for the children to accomplish their task and not to overburden them with his expectations. So instead of giving them 300,000 stones, he gave them only one tenth (30,000 or 40,000) etc. The king thought to himself, “Once the children realize that they don't have as much work as their parents and that they will have to give an accounting and show their work sooner, they will be much more aware of the time when they have to return the diamonds and do a better job.”

The same says the Ohr Hachayim is with man's life. Our life, talents and spiritual gifts within each of us are the G-dly diamonds which we must polish and illuminate. This is accomplished through the observance of G-d's commandments. Our life, talents and spiritual gifts comprised of many qualities. Each day of one's life has been allocated to polish and refine one of these facets/qualities. In the beginning of creation, G-d gave mankind great capacities with many facets/qualities which required a lot of time to do the work, for which G-d allotted many years. However, mankind didn't fulfill their mission. Instead, because G-d gave him hundreds and hundreds of years in which to accomplish the job man ignored the fact that he would one day have to give an accounting to The Creator.

As a result, G-d decided that the work was too great and the time allotted to perform it too long. G-d then made the job smaller and shortened the time span, thus giving greater encouragement to fulfill one's mission in this world and earn reward in the World-to-Come.

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Haftara

1Kings 2: 1 - 12

PARASHA: Yaakov is dying and give his last instructions to Yosef and other sons: [Yaakov] blessed Joseph, and said, “The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth.” (Gen. 48:15-16)

HAFTARAH: The Jewish tradition has made a parallel between Yaakov dying and King David dying and giving instruction to Solomon his son: “When David’s time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. Then the LORD will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: ‘If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.’ “Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from your brother Absalom. ... I swore to him by the LORD, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.” Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David.

Besorat Yeshua

Mark 13:32-14:9

PARASHA: Yaakov is dying, as everyone of us he did not know the exact time of his death but he knew that the day will come soon. “Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them.” (Genesis 48:10).

BESORAH: Yeshua announced his coming back, but he precise that he does not know the exact day and nobody will know it “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” (Mark 13:32-33)

In the parasha Yaakov, just before dying gave some prophecy about the future of God’s people through his sons, Yeshua does the same, he will dye very soon, and give some prophecy for the future of his people: “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

In the parasha Yosef demonstrated kindness to his brothers even after the death of his father, there is a woman in the text of the Besorah who demonstrated kindness to Yeshua before he dyes, her name was Myriam, living in Bethany a small village near Yerushalaim. “While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ... But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

