

# Peninim on the Torah

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## Parashat Vayechi

*Please place your hand under my thigh, and do kindness and truth with me - please do not bury me in Egypt. (47:29)*

Yaakov Avinu insisted that his son, Yosef, promise that he will bury him in the Me'aras Ha'Machpeilah in Chevron. One would think that all a father has to do is ask, and the son will follow his wishes. Extracting a promise seems to be a bit excessive. This is especially true when the father is our Patriarch, Yaakov, and the son is none other than Yosef HaTzaddik. Yet, we find that when Yaakov was at death's door, making plans for his burial, these plans called for Yosef's promise -not simply his word - that he would not bury his father in Egypt. Yosef readily agreed. He gave his word, and then he made a promise. The entire incident seems perplexing. Did Yaakov suspect that Yosef, the righteous son, would violate his trust? Was his word insufficient that it had to be buttressed with a promise?

Further in the parsha, after Yaakov concluded his blessings to his sons, he reiterated his request that he be buried in Chevron. He did so after he had already spoken to and obtained a promise from Yosef. Why was Yaakov so anxious about his burial in Eretz Yisrael that he did not seem to trust his own sons?

In his anthology of Horav Yaakov Weinberg's discourses, "Forever His Students," Rabbi Boruch Leff cites the following explanation from the Rosh Yeshivah, zl. Our Patriarch was concerned with the inevitability of excuses. We make commitments; we make promises, but we find excuses - even valid ones- to prevent our carrying out our word. Surely, Yaakov knew that Yosef would never willingly renege on his word, but he was concerned about the possibility of a legitimate excuse, a bona fide reason for not fulfilling his commitment. Yaakov realized that Pharaoh would probably not be pleased with Yaakov's choice of burial plot. He was concerned that this might create an issue for Yosef. He might be the viceroy of Egypt, but he ruled by the whim of Pharaoh. If the king wanted to enshrine Yaakov, he might not allow his burial to occur outside of Egypt. Yaakov was not risking that eventuality. He certainly trusted Yosef. He did not trust the circumstances that might challenge his ability to carry out his word. Thus, he made Yosef swear to bury him in Chevron. Pharaoh would respect Yosef's oath. Indeed, this idea is supported by Pharaoh's statement to Yosef: "Go up and bury your father, since you swore to him." (ibid 50:6)

We now understand why Yaakov repeated his request to his other sons. If for some reason Yosef, as an administrator beholden to Pharaoh, could not fulfill his father's request, the responsibility would fall on his brothers. Somehow they must feel obligated to find a way to bury him in Chevron. It was imperative that he be buried with his ancestors. No excuse- however valid - would be acceptable.

Let us now take this lesson and apply it practically to our own lives. We all know that when we

really want to accomplish something, nothing stands in the way. We do what we want, overcoming the most complex and formidable obstacles in order to get what we want. It all depends on how motivated we are to reach that goal. We do not allow for excuses. Why should Yaakov?

Having said this, let us analyze some of our most prominent, time-honored excuses. How often do we use "too tired" as a reason for not learning, not davening properly, not performing acts of chesed, loving kindness? Another popular excuse is "no time." We are simply "too busy." Do we apply these lame rationalizations when it concerns something that we really want to do? Can we honestly say that our diminished Torah study, our lackluster davening, our indifference to the plight of others is due to a deficit in time, an inordinate amount of work, or over-fatigue? Perhaps we are lacking in attitude. Alternatively, perhaps our desire for spirituality is not as strong as it is for other, more exciting, endeavors.

Yaakov insisted that Yosef promise to carry out his request. If a promise is what it takes to guarantee commitment, then perhaps that is the approach one must take. We made a promise at Har Sinai - or have we forgotten about that one? We made that promise to Hashem. When we delve through the excuse factor in our lives, we might take into consideration the viability of our rationalization of our feeble attempts at total religious observance. If we are not satisfied with what we see, surely Hashem has very little about which to be pleased. We can correct the situation. All that is necessary is a lifestyle without excuses, or we can take the phrase, "I will try," out of our personal lexicon. To try means to attempt to do something - if nothing else comes up to prevent us from carrying out our commitment. To try means to allow for excuses. A Torah Jew, by his very definition, does not look for ways to justify his lack of action. He acts!

Many great individuals have achieved their distinction specifically because they have refused to rely on excuses. They acted and moved forward, and we are their beneficiaries. When I think of an individual whose indefatigable determination to help another Jew was the guiding light and motivating force behind his exemplary endeavors on behalf of Klal Yisrael, the personality of Reb Yitzchak "Irving" Bunim, zl, comes to mind. A man whose soul burned for the Jewish People, he left no stone unturned and no opportunity wasted in his quest to save Jews, educate Jews, and build Torah in this country and in Eretz Yisrael. He labored timelessly and endlessly for Jewish unity - especially in the face of the challenges and adversity created by external forces.

A parable which he would often use sums up the principle that drove him all of his life, and, likewise, could serve as a motivation for all of us. The great tzaddik, Horav Zushe, zl m'Anipole, was wont to say that there was only one question which he feared. "If on the Day of Judgment, when I stand before the Heavenly Tribunal, I am asked why I was not as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, I will reply that I had neither the mind, the emunah, faith, nor the opportunity. If I am asked why I was not as great as the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, I will ask in return, 'Who had such a mind as the Gaon?' After all, he memorized the entire Talmud forwards and backwards. But the one question I fear will be, 'Why were you not Zushe? Why did you not live up to your own capabilities and potential?' That is the question I cannot answer."

One thing is certain: giving excuses will certainly not help us achieve our potential.

*Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and my initial vigor...water-like impetuosity - You cannot be foremost. (49:3, 4)*

As expected, Yaakov Avinu began his blessings of the twelve sons who were the progenitors of

Klal Yisrael by focusing on his firstborn, Reuven. After criticizing him for errors of the past, he informed him that his impetuosity has taken its toll on his future. While we all know that Reuven had not really sinned, appearances play a critical role in characterizing one's actions. For all appearances, Reuven's behavior gave a negative impression. Chazal tell us that Reuven was to have received three gifts commensurate with his position as the firstborn son. As a result of his error, Hashem took them from him.

As the b'chor, he had the right to the privileges due to the firstborn. He was also supposed to receive the Kehunah, Priesthood, and Malchus, Monarchy. Yaakov's message to his son alludes to these privileges. The Maharal m'Prague explains that the firstborn has a unique relationship with the children that follow after him. As the first child, he is in some way the cause of the other children in the family, for without him as the first, there would be no other children in the family. This makes the b'chor a sort of middle man, an intermediary between the father and the other children. By being the first, thereby allowing for the existence of the other children, he enables the father to transmit all of his intellectual powers and abilities to the other children.

The Kehunah manifests a similar type of relational trait. As an expression of da'as, knowledge, noted in the pasuk in Malachi 2:7, Sifsei Kohen yishmeru daas, "For the lips of the Kohen will guard da'as, and they will seek Torah from his mouth, for he is an agent of the G-d of Hosts."

Daas functions as a medium for conjoining the intellect with the emotions, connecting the physical and spiritual components of man. Malchus is also an expression of conjunction, as the king unifies a nation consisting of diverse elements, individuals of varied backgrounds and proclivities. He gathers them all together under one banner of nationhood into one cohesive entity called a nation. Indeed the Navi Shmuel (1:9:17) refers to the king as "the one who will reign over My people." Rashi explains the word used by the Navi - yatzor - to reign, as actually meaning "to store up." Thus, Rashi explains that this refers to the king's ability to unify the people and prevent them from forming factions. The Shem MiShmuel notes that the common denominator between these three gifts is that each is an expression of an individual's ability to harmonize some aspect of human life. Malchus is the ability to connect entities in the physical world; Kehunah in the emotional world, and; bechorah in the intellectual world.

With this in mind, we can understand why Reuven simply could not keep these three gifts. The Shem MiShmuel feels that Reuven became angry. This anger caused him to act impulsively. It all happened when Rachel died, and Yaakov moved his primary domicile to Bilhah's tent, completely ignoring the tent of Leah, Reuven's mother. Reuven reacted in a manner unbecoming his lofty position in the tribal hierarchy. He disturbed this arrangement, responding to what he felt was a slight to his mother. He became angry and acted out of character.

Anger is a character trait that directly contradicts the unifying character of Reuven's Heavenly gifts. Anger causes dissension, creates rifts, and severs connections. Did not Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon strike the rock instead of speaking to it, all because they had become angry? Anger and dissent cause disharmony and disunity. When Reuven displayed a failing in his temper, he indicated that he was unsuitable to be the recipient of bechorah, malchus and kehunah, which are the antithesis of anger and its consequences. Anger breaks our link with Hashem, our connection to people and our own emotional balance.

Reuven lost the three gifts. Hashem instead gave them to three individuals, each one unique in his ability to harmonize and unify: The bechorah was given to Yosef; the Kehunah to Aharon HaKohen; and the malchus to David HaMelech. Each of these individuals exemplified the quality inherent in the

archetypical firstborn, monarch, Kohen. The Navi in Malachi (2:6) describes the consummate Kohen: "With peace and uprightness, he walked with me and turned many away from sin." Aharon was the ohaiv shalom v'rodef shalom, "lover of peace and pursuer of peace." The Ramban writes that Aharon never lost his temper. Never in his life did he become angry. This qualified him to assume the mantle of Kehunah.

Yosef was the quintessential tzaddik, the righteous man for whom the world exists. Having the power to sustain not only himself, but also his family, he served as the perfect conduit between the physical world and the Heavenly outpouring of goodness. His role in life was to serve as a conjunctive force, a nexus, between the higher and lower worlds and to prevent disharmony. He was a prime candidate to assume one of Reuven's lost gifts.

Last, it was David HaMelech who exemplified humility. His self-effacing character is noted from his attitude in Sefer Tehillim 22:7, "A worm and not a man, the derision of man and reviled by people." One who realizes how pitifully low he is in relation to the Almighty will never lose himself to anger. Anger is a reflection of an element of arrogance - something that David did not possess. Anger occurs when a person feels that things are not moving according to his plan. This means that he feels that he should be able to direct-- and possibly alter-- what will happen. He is upset that his will is not realized. This causes him to become frustrated and vexed, leading him to anger. When one realizes, however, how insignificant he is, and how limited his powers are, he will not have the audacity to expect to control events. Thus, when things go wrong - as they often do - he will not become angry, because, after all, he understands his place in the greater scheme of the universe.

Chazal teach us in the Talmud Pesachim 66b, concerning David HaMelech: "Anyone who angers, even if it is determined that he should receive distinction from Heaven, he will be removed from his position. We derive this from Eliav, who became angry with David."

This is a reference to Eliav, David's eldest brother, who became angry, and thereby lost the possibility of becoming king. Instead, Hashem gave the kingship to David. We derive from here the reason that David, a man who embodied peace and self-effacement, was selected as the ideal replacement for Reuven.

The lesson to be derived from here is very clear: Reuven had it all: Bechorah, Kehunah, and Malchus. He alone could have had what it later took Aharon, Yosef and David together to perform. This in itself indicates his awesome potential. One error, albeit trivial and certainly not intentional, however, cost him everything. He lost those incredible gifts because of the slight character flaw which he demonstrated. What should we say?

*Yehudah - You, your brothers shall acknowledge your hand...The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah. (49:8, 10)*

The blessings of Yaakov Avinu to his sons were eternal. Through his blessings he was establishing the future destiny and spiritual influence of each of his sons. He blessed Yehudah with monarchy: "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor a scholar from among his descendants." This pasuk describes Yehudah's destiny for the future of the Jewish People. It establishes his legacy, alluding to the qualities inherent in a monarch. What did Yehudah do to warrant this honor? Chazal tell us that it was Yehudah's ability to come forward to concede guilt in the incident with Tamar that earned him this privilege. The ability to denigrate one's self by confessing his error or indiscretion is an

indication of his true self-respect. An individual who is honorable does not allow his deficiencies to impugn his integrity. He is honest, accepting the consequences which result from his admission, but he remains a principled person who places self-respect above public opinion. This is the symbol of true honor, similar to the maxim of Chazal in Eiruvim 13b, "One who runs from honor, (will have) honor pursues him." There are people who pursue honor - and never really receive it. It is all a question of integrity, or, as the popular dictum concludes, "You cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

What seems odd is the fact that this entire honor originally was to be bestowed upon Reuven as the b'chor, firstborn. He was to be the Kohen, progenitor of the Priesthood; the rights of the firstborn were to be his; and he was to be the monarch. Hashem took these privileges from him because of his impulsivity. He acted on behalf of his mother, whom he felt that Yaakov Avinu had humiliated. He acted too quickly, without thinking, getting carried away as a result of his distress that Yaakov had passed over his mother. He lost it all due to his knee-jerk reaction. Did he deserve such a punishment? After all, he was acting on behalf of his mother. Should he have lost so much as a consequence of his over-zealous attitude in protecting his mother's honor?

Horav Tuvia Lisitzen, zl, delves into Reuven's behavior and discovers a self-serving motivation beneath Reuven's act in support of his mother's cause. Reuven acted on behalf of his mother. Perhaps this reflected a need to act on behalf of his own honor. Was it really for his mother, or was it for himself? He ran after the honor: One who runs after honor loses it, because it runs away from him. A king does not pursue honor, because if he has to ask for it, he does not deserve it. This is why Yehudah warranted the monarchy over Reuven. Likewise, Kehunah, the Priesthood, belongs where kedushah, holiness, reigns. Reuven's actions revealed an insufficiency in his kedushah, sufficient for Yaakov to eliminate him from the prospect of becoming the Kohen.

In other words, the Shevatim, Tribes, each one individually, and in his own inimitable manner, by his own action determined his destiny. They laid the foundation for his future position in life and leadership, both for his individual descendants and for the community in general. Yaakov responded to what he observed, to how his sons acted, to their perspective on life evidenced by their behavior under the circumstances that had confronted them.

*Dan shall pronounce judgment on his people, as one of the tribes of his people. (49:16)*

Dan was blessed with the middah, character trait, of truth and justice. Rashi adds that this blessing has special reference to Shimshon Hagibor, a descendant of Dan, who judged Klal Yisrael and meted out justice to the Philistines. The attributes of truth and justice are powerful middos, but, like all middos, they must be used properly. Indeed, as I recently heard from Horav Binyamin Eisenberg, Shlita, the reason middos are called just that is because the word middah also means measurement. Every middah manifests its own distinct measurement of which determines its near and far parameters. There is a time and place for every middah. For example, although we may frown upon anger under most circumstances, situations occur in which one must become angry. It is all according to the prescribed measure, the middah.

In the Talmud Pesachim 4A, Chazal relate that a certain individual insisted on going to court to settle every monetary dispute in which he was involved. He refused to compromise or negotiate any form of settlement. The settlement always had to be based on a black and white court decision. Chazal say that this man was clearly a descendant of Dan. Why? What is the connection between one who is

inflexible and the blessing of truth and justice, which Yaakov bestowed on Dan? How could a lofty blessing result in the mistrust and obstinacy manifest by this person?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, Shlita, explains that while every member of the Tribe of Dan was blessed with the precious legacy of an aptitude for justice, like any other attribute, it is susceptible to distortion. We need to exert extreme vigilance on every middah on a constant basis in order to maintain its pristine character, or else it might transform into something sinister and negative. The person to whom Chazal refers did not genuinely care about his inheritance of truth and justice. His passion for justice led him to make unreasonable demands, to refuse to compromise, to seek a way of extracting every last penny that might be owed to him. He went to court because, to him, "justice" was an obsession. He was not, however, seeking justice; he was pursuing money! Because he did not develop this middah, he distorted it, and, eventually, it catalyzed his ruin. He went beyond the prescribed measure. Yes, one can take truth and justice and pervert it, creating discord and dispute in his daily endeavor.

When Hashem blesses us, we should take the time to analyze the multifaceted qualities of this blessing. Anger is divisive, but, at times, it is not only appropriate, but it is actually necessary for Jewish survival. Although the outgoing and friendly person may create happiness and joy for others, he must perceive when it is more beneficial to keep quiet and say nothing. It is all within the middah. Truth and justice are powerful attributes to be embraced, but at times flexibility and compromise are primary, even if one must "look away" and give up on being "right." Middos are treasures that must be developed, diamonds in the rough that need to be polished in order to bring out their true brilliance. One who values Hashem's gift will demonstrate his appreciation in the care that he accords it.

*And he [Yaakov] said, "Gather yourselves together and I will tell you that which will befall you in the end of the days (49:1)*

Rashi tells us that Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal to his children the time of the Final Redemption, but the Divine Spirit suddenly left him. Why did Hashem remove His spirit from Yaakov? While it may be true that Hashem had no desire that the time of the Geulah Ho'Asidah, Final Redemption, be revealed, this is no reason to remove His spirit from him. He could have simply not disclosed this date to Yaakov. Why did He remove his prophetic powers?

The Radomsker Rebbe, zl, gives a profound explanation for Rashi's statement. He says that actually Hashem did not revoke Yaakov's powers at all. On the contrary, Yaakov saw only too clearly what the future would bring. He saw both from a physical and spiritual vantage the events that would precede Redemption; the terrible ordeals that his descendants would endure; the cataclysmic destruction that they would sustain, the near decimation of European Jewry, and its ensuing tragedies. This prophetic vision saddened him to such an extent that Yaakov lost an essential prerequisite for receiving Nevuah, Divine Prophecy. He lost the attribute of simchah, joy. Chazal tell us in the Talmud Shabbos 32b that the Shechinah, Divine Presence, rests on a person only amidst joy. The absence of simchah negates Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration.

The message is clear: We must learn to triumph over adversity, or we may lose what Divine Inspiration is still within us. In a way, we have an advantage over Yaakov Avinu. We experienced what he viewed prophetically. We survived, endured and continued on. We searched for strength, groped for

inspiration, found it, and kept going. We lost six million brethren, an entire Jewish culture and lifestyle, yeshivos, gedolei Yisrael and their Talmidim. Yet, we persevered and rebuilt. We had the advantage of learning from Yaakov our ancestor that, if we will permit adversity to crush us, we may lose whatever Divine Inspiration we possess, and without the Divine - the inspiration is worth very little.

Our strength lies in our obstinacy, in our refusal to capitulate and yield to those who would destroy us. It is this obstinacy that gives us the fortitude to maintain joy in our hearts and express it, even though it follows devastating losses. Yaakov Avinu taught us well.

*Water - like impetuosity - you cannot be foremost. (49:4)*

Yaakov Avinu addresses his bechor, firstborn, Reuven, as *kochi v'reishis oni*, "my strength and initial vigor," his hope, the one who should have been the leader of the brothers, but who lost it due to his impetuosity. He was the most precious gem in the family treasury, but he was not qualified for the leadership of the family. He was missing the ingredients which are requisite for a leader.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that the word *pachaz*, which has been translated as impetuous, is found in Sefer Shoftim 9:4, *Anashim reikim u'pochazim*, a reference to men who possess a shortcoming in their character. What was Reuven's character deficiency? Yaakov compares him to water. Hardly any other substance displays such a wide variety of qualities. Yet, water has no internal stability; hence, it could mean that Reuven was as unstable as water. Water always flows downward to the lowest level; this implies that Reuven strives after lowness. Water is a liquid, flowing rapidly forward, denoting impetuosity.

All of these are character deficiencies. Rav Hirsch however, focuses upon the instability of water and the parallel implication that Reuven was too unstable for a leadership role. To achieve preeminence, one must have strong inner resolution, a firmness that is stable. He can neither be moved by flattery, nor succumb to pressure. He stands tall, erect, stable, withstanding any and every assault on his leadership. Reuven did not have it. Thus, he was demoted from the position of leadership.

Yet, Chazal compare Torah to water. It has become the symbol of everything that is positive about Torah. If water is unstable and flows downward to the lowest point, why is it seen in a positive light? We may suggest that a lack of internal stability is a constructive feature in regard to Torah. It can fit into all situations and reach out to all people, regardless of their background and ability. It molds itself around the individual, as it encompasses every aspect of his life. It is able to flow downward to the lowest dregs of society and elevate them with its refreshing spiritual therapy. Yes, Torah conforms itself around a person, so that all of him is enveloped by it. Torah is structured, but its water-like capabilities give it the flexibility to structure itself around those who accept it.

*Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey. (49:14)*

It is interesting how Yaakov Avinu compares his sons to various animals. Yehudah, the strong son, the leader who would one day be the monarch, is compared to a lion. Naftali is compared to a hind, because of his exceptional speed. This goes on in regard to all of the brothers. Yaakov took a specific character trait, which the individual tribe exemplified, and compared that to an animal in which

the trait was also significant. What is difficult to grasp is Yissachar's comparison to a strong-boned donkey. This is the tribe that exemplified Torah study at its zenith. The donkey is among the lowliest in the animal world. What is the relationship between the two?

Speaking to a group of vacationing yeshivah students, Horav Tzvi Markowitz, Shlita, said the following: At one time, both the horse and the donkey served man as beasts of burden. Indeed, in every village one would notice how the horse and donkey would leave in the early morning on their way to the fields. When they returned at the end of the day, their masters gave them the opportunity to rest. There was, however, an apparent difference in the manner in which they rested. In order for the horse to rest, it was necessary for its owner to remove its load, unbuckle its saddlebags and remove whatever ropes were tying it in place. The horse would gallop and jump around, as its constraints were removed.

The donkey was different. It rested with its load still tied to its back and its saddlebags still in place, while whatever constraints it had remained fastened. The donkey needed only a quiet place where it could stand undisturbed, while the horse had to "let loose."

The vacation time, the days off, are what determine the essence of a ben Torah, one who serves Hashem unequivocally. If vacation means loosening of one's structure and morals, such that his spiritual commitments are relaxed, this is the vacation of a horse. If, however, he maintains his responsibilities, continues with structured observances of davening with a minyan, studying Torah and acting no different than if he would be in the bais hamedrash, he rests like the donkey. Yissachar, the tribe that was devoted to Torah study, reflected their commitment even during periods of rest, because they were acutely aware that there is no rest from Torah.

Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, applies this idea to the entire year. Every time, everywhere, under all situations, Torah reigns paramount. There are those who act in the most proper and correct fashion when they are inside the walls of the bais hamedrash. Yet, they have a desire to have a "good time" outside the protective walls of the sanctuary. A good time, regrettably, consists of dropping some of the restrictions that one feels are intrinsic to the yeshivah. What he fails to realize is that the yoke is not relegated only to the four walls of the yeshivah. It applies everywhere.

The question that is posed by many young people is simple: Is it possible to live under the "duress" of Taryag mitzvos, all the time, without any time off for a little fun? Indeed, there are those who feel that we should "go easy" on young people: give them some space and breathing room; let them "hang their hair down," and other such statements which apply to contemporary culture. Rav Beifus explains that it is specifically one's meticulous observance and total commitment to Torah and mitzvos that creates inner peace and harmony. It is the only way that one senses a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Why? Because success, satisfaction, achievement are directly connected to the neshamah, soul. The soul receives satisfaction only if the individual dedicates himself to total observance.

This statement is profound. We are being told that inner peace, success and satisfaction are the 'foci' of the soul, which is the primary component in the amalgam of body and soul known to us as man. We may see the body, but his essence is his neshamah. All too often, we get carried away providing for our bodies and think nothing of our neshamos which cry out for equal time. Indeed, our primary goal in life should be to satisfy our neshamah. It is the neshamah's satisfaction that determines our satisfaction. It is the neshamah's success that determines our success. To provide the body and ignore the neshamah is tantamount to pouring liquid into a bottomless glass. It is a total waste.

Rav Beifus relates a powerful story which emphasizes the significance of the neshamah. There is a ger tzedek, righteous convert, living in Yerushalayim, a scholar of note, who recently related what

it was that motivated him to convert to Judaism: "It was after World War II, and I was living in Holland. I felt a tremendous sense of guilt after realizing the terrible things that my countrymen had wrought against the Jews. I wanted to do something as a form of contrition to atone for what my people had done to your people. I left Holland and came to Israel to do whatever I could, to somehow, somehow, pay for the sins of the gentiles. I was able to get a position in a home for children that were severely challenged both physically and mentally. I felt a deep sense of satisfaction in working with these children."

"I was dumbstruck by the mother of a little boy who came every day, early in the morning, traveling for one and one half hours each way by bus to spend the day with her son. The child was perhaps three years old, severely mentally retarded and physically unable to move his body. He could not hear or speak. He just lay there staring at the ceiling."

"Yet, his mother came every day and performed the same ritual. She would walk in and say, Boker Tov! 'Good Morning, my child.' She would pat his head and give him a kiss. Then she placed his yarmulke on his head and a small Tallis Katan on his body. Then, with tears streaming down her face, she would recite Krias Shema and Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, which all mothers recite with their pre-school children. Only this child heard nothing and understood nothing. She would continue telling him about the parsha of the week and stories about the Jewish People. Incredible!"

"This went on every day! I could not understand what she was doing. She appeared to me to be insane! She must have had a breakdown to do this daily for a child that had no clue concerning what she was saying. I finally gathered up enough courage to approach her and ask, "Giveret, ma'am, why are you doing this? Who are you talking to? Do you not realize that your child neither hears nor comprehends what you are saying to him?"

"She looked at me with piercing eyes and said, 'True, his physical body does not comprehend, but I am not talking to his body. I speak to his soul - and his soul understands and derives great satisfaction from the Tzitzis and the Krias Shema and from every pasuk of Torah that I recite to him.'

"When I heard these words," continued the ger, "I decided that a religion that develops a relationship between a person and the spiritual dimension of a child that does not function in any physical manner - I wanted to know more about it. So began my quest to join the Jewish people."

What a powerful message, one that opens up vistas of perspective on people. There is an element in a person that we often ignore - the neshamah. The soul within each of us is alive and well and not impaired in any way. Perhaps this is why so many have returned to Yiddishkeit after years of assimilation: Their trapped neshamah is crying out, reaching out to be saved from extinction. Perhaps this is why some educators are better able to reach difficult students more so than others - they focus on the students' neshamah. Perhaps this is why some parents are more successful in raising their children more so than others: They never forget the neshamah component of their child. The "neshamah factor" plays a crucial role in every person's life. Every individual should remember this, knowing full-well that any negative action he takes will have an adverse effect on his neshamah. While an individual may not care about his body, he has no right to harm his neshamah.

*Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?" And Yosef said to his father, "They are my sons whom G-d has given me here" (48:8,9)*

The Commentators question Yaakov Avinu's inability to recognize his own grandsons. He had been living in Egypt for seventeen years. Surely, he knew who his grandsons were. Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains that as Yaakov was about to bless his grandsons, the Divine Spirit departed from him because Yaakov foresaw that evil kings would descend from Menashe and Ephraim: Yoravam and Achav from Ephraim, and Yehu and his sons from Menashe. Shocked, he asked Yosef, "Who are these?" In other words, where did these sons, who are apparently not deserving of a blessing, come from? Yosef reassured him that Menashe and Ephraim were both the products of a marriage founded and maintained in holiness and purity. Despite the fact that, unlike Yaakov's other sons, they were to be the ancestors of certain wicked descendants, they were still worthy of blessing.

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, extends this idea a bit further. There is a great difference between Yaakov's sons and his grandsons, Menashe and Ephraim. The Shivtei Kah, holy Tribes, lived their entire lives in a matzav, situation, of running from evil, constantly vigilant to maintain their spiritual status-quo. They were born in the home of their grandfather, the evil Lavan, the swindler. They quickly learned that the place in which they lived, Lavan's home, was replete with idols and other such forms of spiritual pollution. They had to be on guard as long as they were in his presence. Afterwards, they confronted Eisav, who wanted to accompany Yaakov. Their "running" continued, as they distanced themselves from this new source of contamination. The incident with Dinah and the Shechemites followed on the heels of Eisav. When they went down to Egypt, once again they sought a place that was unpopulated, far away, where there could be alone. Always running, closing the door, separating themselves from their environment - that was the lifestyle of Yaakov's sons. It was good for them. It strengthened their resolve and raised their level of conviction. In the merit of their guardedness, they would be able to withstand the various trials and tribulations to which they would be subjected over time.

What about Menashe and Ephraim? Their upbringing was entirely different. They were never taught to run, because they did not have to do so. They lacked nothing. They were born in Egypt, a country known for its moral and spiritual depravity. Yet, it did not touch them, because their father was the king. They must have been in a good place; otherwise, why would their father be the country's Viceroy? Being raised with a silver spoon in the hierarchy of Egyptian society will do that to you. They never felt they needed to distance themselves, to run away, because they never had reason to believe that they were in the presence of evil. Perhaps, this is why their descendants ended up the way they did. When a family feels that Egypt is "it," it is no wonder that in the future a Yoravam ben Nevat will emerge. When Yaakov imagined his future descendants, he thought along the lines explained above. Thus, he turned to Yosef and asked, "Mi eilah," "Who are these that are not suitable for blessing?" Yosef responded to his father saying, "Logically, you might be correct. Despite the fact, however, that my children were raised in the palace amid wealth and security, we, their parents, have taught them that it is all a gift from the Almighty. They have been inculcated with the exact same chinuch, education, I received from you." When Yaakov heard this, he agreed to bless Yosef's sons.

Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zl, posits that Yaakov's sons were acutely aware of the fact that Yosef's children, having been raised in the moral filth of Egypt, would need an extra blessing. They neither saw the beauty nor experienced the holiness and purity that permeated Yaakov's home. This is suggested by the fact that no one seemed concerned when Yaakov singled out Yosef's sons for blessing, something he had not done for any of his other grandchildren.

With this in mind, we understand why Yaakov mentioned Ephraim's name before that of Menashe. Ephraim needed the blessing more. Menashe was born first. At that time Yosef still remembered his father's home. It still exercised a strong effect on him. Indeed, the name Menashe

implies, "It made me forget." In other words, when Menashe was born, the memories of home, although bittersweet, were still present. When Ephraim was born, however, Yosef viewed himself to be more of a citizen of Egypt. He was already moving in the circles of power. Indeed, as Rav Yaakov notes, the average Egyptian name was usually comprised of the letters, Pei, Reish, Ayin, which were the letters of Pharaoh's name. Ephraim's name was comprised of these same letters, indicating a greater affinity to Egyptian society and its way of life. Perhaps this is why Ephraim studied with Yaakov, more than Menashe, since Menashe knew the Hebrew language, while Ephraim might not have been as fluent. In essence, since Menashe and Ephraim were born and raised in Egypt, they needed extra spiritual care. Everyone acknowledged this perspective.

*So they instructed Yosef, O' Please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers... and Yosef wept when they spoke to him... Thus, he comforted them and spoke to their heart. (50:16,17,21)*

He calmed them and he soothed them, but we do not find that Yosef actually forgave his brothers for selling him. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, suggests that even if Yosef had been able to forgive his brothers for what they had done to him, which he did wholeheartedly, he could not overlook the ensuing chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name. There is only one kaparah, atonement, for chillul Hashem; To do the opposite, to be mekadash shem Shomayim, sanctify the Heavenly Name. This was fulfilled through the tragic deaths of the Asarah Harugei Malchus, Ten Martyrs, the great Torah giants whose lives were martyred in the most cruel and heinous manner. Indeed, Chazal - cited by the Rikanti - say that the neshamos, souls, of Yosef's ten brothers entered the bodies of the great rabbis. Thus, the brothers were absolved through these tragic deaths, as a result of their unparalleled mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice.

This is a powerful and demanding statement. Regrettably, one might act unethically in areas of commerce, whether it involves another Jew or in the context of his relationship with the outside world. So, he might get away with it - temporarily. He might even find a legal loophole to legitimize his action. What is he going to do when his lack of ethicality is discovered and publicized over the media? How is he going to respond to the chillul Hashem which is the direct result of his "legitimate" activities? Is he going to quote heterim, dispensations, from Chazal, which - in his mind - justifies his iniquity? Even if he were to find support in halachah, does that support negate the chillul Hashem that he has created?

The Shivtei Kah, holy Tribes, determined that Yosef was a rodef, pursuer. With a clear, collective conscience the brothers decided that he should be killed, or at least sold as a slave. What should we say? This penetrating moral dilemma is addressed to those who act inappropriately, and at those who support individuals who perpetrate evil under the cloak of innocence and even virtue.

*Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good. (50:20)*

Years of ambiguity and question had come to an end when Yosef and his brothers finally confronted each other. The truth was revealed: it was all part of a Divine plan. The dreams foretold it. Yosef sensed it. Time proved that Hashem had desired a plan for Klal Yisrael to go down to Egypt to begin the Egyptian exile. Life is filled with such occurrences, episodes that "seem" isolated, but in

reality are intrinsically connected to a Divine plan. Some people are perceptive, sensing that they are part of a greater plan. Others at least look back and realize how Hashem's plan has unfolded. Yet others are regrettably plagued with myopia, even in hindsight. They refuse to see the apparent Hand of Hashem throughout the course of events. There are thousands of recorded episodes that demonstrate this idea. I recently came across a story of Divine Providence that was particularly moving.

The story is about Jerry, a young Jewish American idealist, who left this country and went to Eretz Yisrael. After a brief stint in the U.S. army, shocked by the not so subtle forms of anti-semitism that he had encountered so soon after World War II, he felt it would be best if he went to Eretz Yisrael and try his luck there. Together with other adventurers, he came to a land filled with immigrants and survivors, all trying to make a new life for themselves. He worked on a kibbutz together with many other foreigners, all volunteers. It was there that he met Yehudah, a Holocaust survivor. They were quite different; Jerry was a happy-go-lucky, talkative American while Yehudah, was a close-mouthed, morose European. Realizing that Yehudah must be concealing a lot of emotional baggage, Jerry avoided the subject of the Holocaust.

One hot summer day, they were both working under the blazing sun, when Jerry noticed the numbers tattooed on Yehudah's forearm. When the numbers registered in his mind, he could not help but emit an audible gasp.

"What is the matter, Jerry?" Yehudah asked. "I am sorry, Yehudah. I could not help but notice the numbers on your arm." "Surely, you have seen such numbers on other survivors before?" Yehudah curtly rejoined. "True, I did. It is just that it is odd that the last four digits 7-4-1-6 are the same numbers as the last four digits of my social security number." "Such a meaningless coincidence, and you're excited!" scoffed Yehudah, as he continued with his work. The ice was broken, and Jerry could no longer contain himself. He asked, "Listen, Yehudah, I want to be your friend. I care very deeply about you and your past. Perhaps you would like to talk about it.?"

Finally, Yehudah responded, "Maybe you are right. Maybe I should not keep everything bottled up inside me. Perhaps we have an obligation to serve as witnesses to the German atrocities and tell the world." The two sat down, and Yehudah began to tell his story. It was a familiar story, one of tragedy and survival. An hour later, Yehudah concluded, "We stood in line at selection - my brothers, my sisters, my parents and I - and we were branded with these numbers, all in numerical order. I was next to the last, followed by my brother. Afterward, we were split up, and I never saw any of them again. I was the only one of my family to survive the war." Jerry remained silent as he listened to Yehudah recount the sad story of his life. He now understood why so many of the survivors were loathe to tell their story. It hurt too much.

Years went by, and Jerry left the kibbutz and began to work as a tour guide for wealthy Americans who chose to be chaperoned around Eretz Yisrael in a comfortable limousine. For the most part, it was a soft, well-paying job. Every so often he might get a difficult customer, but he could learn to live with it. One day, he picked up a new client whose attitude was downright insufferable. He was obnoxious, rude and domineering. He always had to be in control. He shouted orders at Jerry as if he was some lowly slave. Jerry made a superhuman effort to remain polite. Finally, as Jerry's patience was about to burst, the man suddenly shouted, "Pull over to the side of the road" "What?!" Jerry asked, confused, "What is wrong? What did I do?"

"I said to pull to the side of the road," the man practically screamed. Stunned, Jerry followed orders and pulled over. He turned around to face his abusive client. Before he could speak, the man looked him in the eyes and said, "I know you don't like me very much." Jerry did not respond. After all,

what should he say? It was obvious that he was not the kind of person who was used to being a punching bag for someone's idiosyncrasies. He continued his silence as the passenger began to speak.

"I know that at times my behavior can be obnoxious and offensive. Truthfully, I am surprised at what has happened to me. I'm sorry. It is just that I cannot control my emotions. I am all alone in the world, after having suffered so much. There are nights that I shake and cry myself to sleep." After making this opening statement, the man broke down and began to weep uncontrollably. "You think I am nothing more than an arrogant, pompous wealthy American businessman. You think I have no regard for anyone's feelings but my own. It is not true. I have suffered. I am a Holocaust survivor." As he made this pronouncement, he slowly rolled up his sleeve to reveal his numbers: 7-4-1-7.

The last four digits of Jerry's social security number were 7-4-1-6. Suddenly, the memory of a conversation held many years earlier came to mind. He recalled Yehudah relating the last time his family was together by the infamous selekstia: "We were branded in numerical order...I was next to the last."

Jerry's reverie was broken by the tortured sobs coming from the back of the limousine. "I lost my entire family in the Holocaust. I may have money but I have no family. I have no one in the world," he cried.

Hearing this, Jerry turned around and looked at the American and said, "My friend, you are wrong. You are not alone in the world. Come with me, and I will show you that number 7-4-1-6 is very much alive. I happen to know where he can be found."

So many stories demonstrate Hashem's Hashgachah, Divine Providence. Regrettably, for some of us they remain exactly that - nice stories. We should strive to perceive Hashem's Providence over every aspect of our daily lives. We will then have a greater appreciation of the "stories."

*Shimon and Levi are brothers.....Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter.....Accursed is their rage for it is intense....I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Yisrael.  
(49:5,6,7)*

Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, notes that Shimon and Levi exhibited a distinctive character trait that under normal circumstances would have constituted a basis for granting them a dominant role over Klal Yisrael: They were "achim," brothers. They had elevated the value of communal brotherhood to an extremely high level. Completely free of egoism, each one of them was touched by any wrong done to even the least important member of the family circle. To hurt a member of the family was to injure each one of them personally. In response, their collective rage, although perfectly justified, was unharnessed. They killed men whose indifference to Shechem's violation of Dinah betokened their silent support of his dastardly act. Had they confined their rage to the culprit, perhaps Yaakov Avinu might not have been as critical of them.

Rage cannot catalyze a blessing. The natural consequence of their impulsivity was a curse. Unbridled anger is a character trait that renders a person unfit for leadership. Horav Hirsch notes the significance of Yaakov Avinu's words to the emerging nation. At the laying of the cornerstone of the Jewish nation it was of profound importance to emphasize that every violation of the laws of morality and justice, even those performed in the best interests of the community, produces a curse. Cunning,

guile and brute force, which in private life never go unpunished, result in accolades and civic honors in the public sector. The laws of morality exist only for private life. In politics and diplomacy, the only code of ethics that is recognized is the one that supports the party or the state. The original testament for the Jewish nation presented here placed a curse on all trickery and violence, even if they are allegedly executed on behalf of the public interest. We are, thereby, taught that the end does not justify the means, regardless whether or not the beneficiary is an individual or the entire community.

Yaakov says, "I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Yisrael." "Achalkem," I will separate/divide them up, not with the intention of breaking up a whole, but rather to portion out something valuable. "Afitzeim," I will disperse/scatter them, is to divide something up into the smallest possible pieces so that nothing remains intact of the original whole. The name "Yaakov" is a reference to Klal Yisrael in galus, exile, where they are depressed and persecuted. "Yisrael," on the other hand, is the name which implies strength, power and victory. Accordingly, the danger to the general well-being of our People as a result of Shimon and Levi's excessive impetuosity and irascible disposition, presents itself only at a time when Klal Yisrael is flourishing. It is manifest when the nation consists of a powerful body of people who can easily be influenced by two close-knit tribes filled with feelings of strength and power, coupled with unity and brotherhood. In a flourishing state of Yisrael, Shimon and Levi must be separated. This actually happened.

Shevet Levi was to be entirely dependent upon its brethren for sustenance. When the land was apportioned, they received no province at all. Shevet Shimon's portion was in an enclave, blocked in entirely and greatly dependent upon its more powerful neighbor, Yehudah. Thus, when Klal Yisrael was in a flourishing state, Shimon and Levi's political influence was totally impeded. During our times of persecution, when we are subject to the trials and tribulations of the galus experience, there is a clear and present danger that the people's feeling of inconsequence and sense of oppression will destroy their spiritual energy. It is under these circumstances that the phrase, "v'achalkem b'Yaakov," "I will separate them within Yaakov," is of critical import. The greatest benefit to the broken, downtrodden Jew of Europe, the depressed Jew scattered and persecuted throughout the world, was the fact that the tribes of Shimon and Levi were "scattered" along with them. Their presence helped to elevate the feelings of self-esteem within the Jew, the sense of belonging to a proud nation. It reinforced their pride in their religion and the satisfaction of maintaining their conviction in the face of extreme challenge. The fiery passion of Shimon and Levi kept alive the energy and courage, the fire and noble Jewish pride, the enduring Jewish spirit, which outlived the loss of the Jewish state. Indeed, as Chazal teach us, the most important contingent of Jewish teachers, scholars and scribes descended from Shimon and Levi. They imbued the children who, as they grew into adulthood, carried forth the zeal and passion to function as a proud and committed Jew. Yaakov Avinu's critique was actually a profound blessing in disguise. Is that not often the case?

*Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter! With their congregation do not unite, O' my honor! For in their rage they killed a man and in their wish they hamstrung an ox. (49:6)*

Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that "b'sodam", in their design, is a reference to the incident of Zimri. The tribe of Shimon, following their leader, Zimri, gathered together conspiratorially to Cosbi, the Midyanite princess, before Moshe. Zimri asked, "Is it forbidden to take a non-Jewess as a wife or not? If it is forbidden, who permitted Yisro's daughter to you?" Yaakov did not want his name involved in this matter. Consequently, when the Torah records Zimri's lineage, Yaakov's name is not mentioned.

The word "b'kehalam," with their congregation, is a reference to Korach, a member of the Tribe of Levi, who congregated the entire assembly against Moshe and Aharon.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains Chazal according to the Talmud in Kiddushin 52b where it is stated, "Happy is he who sees his parents in a superior craft/trade, and woe to him who sees his parents in a mean/defective craft." He interprets Chazal's term "craft/trade" as referring to mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds. When one is himself involved in the performance of mitzvos, is kind to his fellow man, goes out of his way to help whomever he can, it is appropriate to call to mind the good deeds of his ancestors. After all, he is following in their footsteps, so that the merit of his forebears assists him in continuing on in the path of the righteous, of Torah and mitzvah observance. The converse is true when one is involved in an evil craft of sin and mitzvah neglect. For him, it is best that he does not recall his ancestors' righteous deeds -- for two reasons. First, his actions bring disgrace upon them. He has deviated from the path which they have charted for him. Second, the mere fact that he has descended from virtuous and pious Jews is a greater liability. He is held in greater contempt for veering from the spiritual path which his ancestors laid out for him. Yaakov Avinu, therefore, prayed that his name not be mentioned in relation to his evil grandchildren. Why magnify their sin more than necessary? Emphasizing their origins would only condemn them even more.

In recalling their sin, Yaakov said "For in their rage they killed a man," and "in their wish they hamstrung an ox." Chazal say their act of rage refers to executing the people of Shechem for their involvement in, and subsequent indifference to, the violation of their sister Dinah. Yosef is referred to as an ox. Chazal criticize them for their part in the sale of Yosef. Horav Shapiro asserts that Yaakov was rebuking them for their hypocritical behavior. He addresses their anger. Even if we were to say that one could justify their actions, violating an innocent girl is a heinous crime, which deserves a punishment commensurate with the crime. Such evil should be expunged from the community, along with its perpetrator. Shimon and Levi did not attack the people of Shechem out of a sense of righteousness, to punish them for their crime, to rid the world of this virulent strain of evil. They acted in anger! They did not deliberate; they did not have kavanah l'shem mitzvah, religious intent to perform the mitzvah of removing the evil from our midst. No, they acted in anger. Their action was basically negative. Had they thought out their response, there might have been some room to justify it. Their impulsivity rendered their behavior nothing more than revenge motivated by anger and vindictiveness.

Conversely, in regard to their selling of Yosef, had they acted out of anger, there might be some way to vindicate their deed. No, they acted deliberately, with premeditation, impervious to Yosef's entreaties. They knew what they were doing. They did not act out of impulse. They convened a beis-din, court of law, to determine Yosef's guilt. He was found guilty and deserving of punishment. There was no room for compassion. This was their error. They acted capriciously when they should have been prudent. They were circumspect when a "little anger" would have been appropriate.

*Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good: in order to accomplish-it is as clear as this day-that a vast people be kept alive. (50:20)*

Yosef was assuaging his brothers' guilt, saying that Hashem "caused" him to be brought to Egypt in order to set in motion the vehicle for ultimately saving them. They were simply pawns in Hashem's Divine plan. The commentators question the meaning and purpose of the words, "It is clear

as this day." What is the reference to "this day"? The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, in his sefer Be'er Moshe, posits that the "kayom ha'zeh," "this day," is a reference to another instance in which the phrase "this day" is used: In Parashas Veyeshev, when recalling the incident of Yosef Ha'tzaddik and the promiscuous wife of Potiphar, the Torah says, "Then there was an opportune (this) day when he (Yosef) entered the house to do his work" (39:10). This pasuk serves as the preface, leading up to the incident in which Potiphar's wife did everything possible to seduce Yosef. Her blandishments and ensuing threats fell on deaf ears. Yosef could not be persuaded to sin. He maintained his purity, triumphing over the overwhelming challenge presented by this iniquitous woman.

The Ozrover explains that Yosef's ability to restrain himself, to overcome the natural desires this woman was attempting to arouse, was a merit, which foreshadowed future events for Klal Yisrael in Egypt. Yaakov's descendants were to be slaves in a country in which wanton immorality was an inherent part of the culture. Egypt was the most depraved country. To be able to overcome the challenges of such an environment, Klal Yisrael needed special zechusim, merits. They were bequeathed these merits through Yosef Hatzaddik. His strength of character and fortitude in the face of overwhelming challenge on "that day" formed the basis for Klal Yisrael's ability to withstand temptation during their tenure in Egypt. This is the meaning of "kayom ha'zeh", Yosef was inferring to his brothers that he was "sent" by Hashem to Egypt to save "this day," a reference to the "day" that Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. His ability to withstand the challenge to his purity on that day saved "a vast nation," namely Klal Yisrael's spiritual/moral purity. Because of him they did not become victims of the moral decadence of Egypt.

*He (Yosef) comforted them and spoke to their heart. (50:21)*

Yosef comforted his brothers. It seems that he had forgiven them for selling him as a slave. In a similar statement, Yosef said to his brothers, "Do not be distressed and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was as a provider that Hashem sent me here ahead of you." (Bereishis 45:5) Once again, it seems apparent that Yosef was not angry with his brothers. Indeed, he asserted that the sale was a G-d-send. Hashem placed him in Egypt, so that he would be in a position to help his family. Both of these pesukim apparently imply Yosef's forgiveness. He did not, however, forgive them. The Torah does not relate explicit forgiveness from Yosef. Was explicit forgiveness necessary? One would think that Yosef's remarks concerning the mechirah, sale, would be sufficient proof that he had forgiven his brothers.

The Midrash, as cited by Rabeinu Bachya, teaches us that Klal Yisrael suffered the terrible tragedy of the Asarah Harugei Malchus, Ten Martyrs, who were murdered by the Roman emperor as a result of the sin of mechiras Yosef, the sale of Yosef. Is this possible? Did not Yosef forgive his brothers for their part in the sale? Why should ten great Torah leaders, the greatest of the generation, die as penance for that sin?

Rabeinu Bachya explains that while it seems that Yosef forgave them -- and he probably did forgive them -- he never explicitly and openly articulated this forgiveness. It is only implied by his statements. That is not sufficient. The forgiveness must be explicit! This is why the tragedy of the Ten Martyrs occurred many centuries later.

What a powerful lesson for us! How often do we apologize to someone we hurt? We even ask for forgiveness, only to receive the following response, "It's okay;" "It's no problem," "Don't worry

about it," which we accept as sufficient. We see here that unless the person we hurt explicitly says, "I forgive you," we are still held liable. To forgive a hurt is not a simple thing to do; to articulate this forgiveness is more difficult, but without this explicit forgiveness, the absolution is not genuine.

*Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?" (48:8)*

Rashi explains that when Yaakov Avinu turned to bless Yosef's sons the Shechinah departed from him because Yaakov saw through Ruach Ha'Kodesh, Divine Inspiration, that wicked kings would descend from them: Yoravam and Achav from Ephraim, and Yeihu and his sons from Menashe. This perception shocked Yaakov to the point that he asked Yosef, "Who are these?" He meant: From where did these sons, who are apparently unworthy for blessing, come? Yosef assured his father that while his sons would have descendants that would be evil, they themselves were virtuous, pure and worthy of his blessing.

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, zl, notes a profound lesson to be derived herein. Yehoshua and Gideon also descended from Yosef's sons. Both of these men were Torah leaders for whom Hashem had wrought miracles. Yet, Yaakov did not observe these individuals through his prophetic vision. They were obscured by the overwhelming evil of Yoravam and Achav. The forces of evil are so overpowering that they manifest the ability to conceal the positive effects of good. Imagine, Yehoshua was the successor to Moshe Rabbeinu as leader of the Jewish People. He was a man who challenged the meraglim, spies, and exposed their lies about Eretz Yisrael. He was a tzaddik for whom Hashem stopped the sun. Yet, the evil of Yoravam, who also descended from Ephraim, albeit much later, was able to overshadow this image of good. What an incredible lesson for us all! For those of us who have thought the good that we do compensates for the bad, we have just learned otherwise.

*But Yisrael extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger and his left hand on Menashe's head...and Yosef said to his father, "Not so, Father, for this is the firstborn...But his father refused, saying, "I know, my son, I know."(48:14, 18, 19)*

The last pasuk, "I know, my son; I know," seems to be redundant. Yaakov could just as well have said, "I know." Why does he add "my son" and reiterate "I know"? Horav Yosef Siegel, zl, explains that when Yaakov heard the words, "Not so, Father," emanating from Yosef, he was slightly taken aback. It sounded like Yosef was reproving his father for his error. Halachically, this is wrong. A son may never challenge or correct his father. Even if the father is transgressing the Torah, the son is only supposed to "call attention" to the fact that the father's action is not consistent with the Torah! One is never, however, permitted to critique a parent.

Yaakov sensed this slight infringement upon his kavod, respect due from his son, and responded in turn, "I know, my son; I know," meaning: "I hear from your comment that you, like many of today's youth, think you know more and understand better than your elders. This is not true. You are mistaken. First of all, "I know, my son," - whatever you know, I also know. I am fully aware of who is the firstborn and who is not. Furthermore, "I know" - there are things of which you are not aware of that I have in my mind. Therefore, you have no reason to think that my behavior regarding the blessings is not well thought out."

Yaakov told Yosef two things: First, I know what you know. Second, I know things that even you do not know. Yaakov was aware that although Menashe preceded Ephraim in birth, he would supercede him in spiritual success. Regrettably, the attitude that many of us manifest towards our elders has not changed considerably.

*By you shall Yisrael be blessed saying, "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Menashe."  
(48:20)*

We must endeavor to understand the uniqueness of Ephraim and Menashe, which causes them to be considered the paradigm for blessing. While it is true that they remained virtuous and G-d fearing in the land of Egypt, are we to ignore Reuven, Shimon, Levi, etc.? I recently heard the following exposition: Klal Yisrael has been subjected to pain and suffering at the hands of our "host" nations. Indeed, many have said that the only way to avoid affliction is to acculturate, to assimilate our Torah way of life and become like "them." Suppose, one were to react to these people saying, "Repent! Raise your children according to the derech ha'Torah, Torah way of life; let them be like Yaakov's sons, Reuven, Shimon, or Levi. The likely response would be, "How can you expect us to raise such "frum," religious, children in contemporary society? We have to be out in the community. Ghettozation is a thing of the past. If we have to live with the gentiles, we have no recourse but to follow in their ways."

We cannot ignore this rationalization. Yaakov raised his sons in a utopian, spiritual environment. They were never exposed to the harmful effects of the "street." They were never compelled to live among people who were morally degenerate and spiritually deficient. How can we expect these people to raise a "Reuven" or "Shimon"?

It is specifically for this reason that Yaakov Avinu chose Ephraim and Menashe as his paradigms for blessing. They were two young men, raised in Egyptian society and culture. They probably dressed and spoke in contemporary style. Nevertheless, they were Bnei Torah, virtuous, pious and totally committed to the way of life of their grandfather. They demonstrated that one could be observant even in Egypt! Klal Yisrael can maintain a Torah lifestyle and adhere to mitzvah observance "b'mlo muvan ha'milah," "to the full meaning of the word." We observe this from Yosef's sons who virtually stood on the same spiritual plateau as Yaakov's sons. Ephraim and Menashe have given hope to parents throughout the millennia who have been challenged to raise children in the filth of galus, exile.

How did Yosef do it? How was he able to raise such G-d-fearing sons amidst the moral depravation that permeated Egypt? We suggest there is only one way: Yosef lived in Egypt; Egypt did not live within Yosef! While he was compelled to leave his home to "work" in the halls of Egyptian society, his home was rendered impervious to the street. Yosef's home was replete with the same kedushah and taharah, holiness and purity, that imbued Yaakov's home. The "old world" values and ideals that had been infused in him in his childhood were a critical factor in the manner in which he raised his children. The medium that was the vehicle for carrying Egyptian filth into the homes did not enter his home. Egypt ended at his doorway. We should realize that the blessing of "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe" could only take effect if we raise our children like Yosef did.

*Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good: in order to accomplish...that a vast people be kept alive. (50:20)*

Yosef attempted to calm his brothers' fears concerning his attitude towards them. We must endeavor to understand why Yosef feels he must allay his brothers' concerns so many times. He had reiterated a number of times in this parsha that he was not angry at them, that it had not really been their own initiative, but rather Hashem's Will, that he come down to Egypt; they were His agents. Why should they think that Yaakov's death might catalyze a resurgence of Yosef's anger? Furthermore, when Yosef spoke of the past to his brothers in an attempt to ease their fears, why did he add, "Although you intended me harm?" Is this statement supposed to produce a calming effect? If anything, Yosef inferred that he knew that they really had wished him harm. He was apparently opening up old wounds. Why?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cites Targum Yonasan who has a completely different approach to understanding Yosef's dialogue with his brothers. In an attempt to assuage his brothers concerns, Yosef asked them, "Why do you think that I harbor enmity towards you? Is it because I am not sitting at the head of the table, eating together with you, as when our father was alive? My brothers, it is not because of you that I have changed my place. I sat there only out of respect for our father. Now that he is gone, I do not feel comfortable sitting "up front." You should know that G-d intended it for good, so that a vast people be kept alive. If I am to help others then I cannot accept kavod, honor, for myself." In order for an individual to serve as a conduit, as a vehicle for transmitting chesed, kindness, to others, he cannot be obsessed with his own personal glory!

Incredible! Yosef told his brothers that he had a goal in life; he had a G-d-given mission: to sustain a world. In order to accomplish this objective, he had to forget about his own glory. Personal kavod and chesed to others do not mix well together. To paraphrase Horav Schwadron: If one wants to help others, he should not seek glory for himself. Leave the mizrach vont, eastern wall (an inference to the place where people of stature usually sit in the synagogue). If you are to help Klal Yisrael, then you must not dwell upon your own glory.

*Yosef died at the age of one hundred and ten years. (50:26)*

So ends Sefer Bereishis. With the death of Yosef, the book devoted to creation, to the beginning of the world, the Avos, Patriarchs, and the various stages of the early families' development, comes to a close. Interestingly, in the beginning of Sefer Shemos, pasuk 6, the Torah repeats the fact that Yosef died. Why? He died once; why record it twice? Also, when Yosef brought his sons to Yaakov for his blessing, the Torah says, "Va'yevarech es Yosef," "He blessed Yosef." What was Yaakov's blessing to Yosef? The only blessing about which we read is the one Yaakov gave to Yosef's sons. Rabbi Yossi says that the word "es" denotes something extra, indicating that Yosef was also blessed together with his sons. What was this blessing?

Horav Mordechai Miller, Shlita, cites Chazal who say that when Yaakov blessed the shevatim, tribes, he also blessed Yosef. This blessing, however, was different in that Yosef was not included among the shevatim. There were two separate units: the shevatim and Yosef. Sefas Emes explains this in the following manner: When a father blesses his sons with the blessing, "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe," he refers to Yaakov's statement, "Ephraim and Menashe will be like Reuven and Shimon to me." In other words, the father hopes his son will grow up to be like the shevatim. Why,

then, does he emphasize Ephraim and Menashe? Why does he not simply say, "May you be like the shevatim"? Sefas Emes explains that Ephraim and Menashe were of a different generation than the shevatim. Yaakov's blessing elevated their status to the "shevet" level. They, too, were now included among Bnei Yaakov, the sons of Yaakov. When a father blesses his son with the hope that he will become like Ephraim and Menashe, he is referring to the unique ability granted to them, the capacity to connect with the previous generation of Yaakov, to become part and parcel with the "Shivtei Koh." This is the hope of all Jewish parents for their sons.

Yosef's sons became shevatim. Hence, Yosef, their father, became an Av, Patriarch. Yosef achieved patriarchal status as a result of his sons' blessing. Thus, the blessing to Ephraim and Menashe also served as a blessing for Yosef - one that elevated him to a greater spiritual plateau. Yosef merited two designations: As Yaakov's son he was one of the "Shivtei Koh;" and as Ephraim and Menashe's father, he achieved the status of an "Av."

We now understand Yosef's blessing and the significance of his sons' blessing. We turn to explore why the Torah records Yosef's passing twice. In his preface to Sefer Shemos, the Ramban distinguishes between Sefer Bereishis, and Sefer Shemos. Sefer Bereishis is the Book of Creation, the book that addresses chidush haolam, the formation of the world and the creation of everything in it, such as the Avos, Patriarchs, founding fathers of our People. Sefer Shemos, on the other hand, addresses the future, the progeny of the Avos, including their trials, challenges and achievements. Sefer Bereishis is the book of the Avos, while Sefer Shemos is the book of the shevatim. Yosef's death is thus mentioned twice, since he functioned in two roles: that of shevet and that of Av. His "av-like" attributes earned him a position in closing Sefer Bereishis. His death is repeated in Sefer Shemos together with the deaths of his brothers. Their deaths marked the commencement of the Egyptian exile.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, addressed the individual persona and achievement of each of the Patriarchs. Avraham Avinu was the first "ger," convert to Judaism. He is, thus, called the "Av hamon goyim," Father of Nations, as he was the one that initiated his own entry into Judaism. Yitzchak Avinu was the first Jew to be born into kedushas, holiness, of Yisrael. He was the first to be circumcised at the age of eight days old. Yaakov Avinu is characterized as "mitaso sheleimim;" his bed was perfect, meaning his children were all devout and committed to their father's religion. How was the first Jew to set the rigid parameters of Judaism? One who is born into the fold can never leave. To paraphrase Horav Hutner: Avraham is "der ershter gevorener," first to become. Yitzchak is "der ershter geboirener," first to be born; Yaakov is "der ershter farfaliner," first to be compelled with no way out.

Yosef completes the equation. Chazal tell us that Yaakov is compared to a fire and Yosef to a flame. Together, they have the ability to triumph over Eisav. Yosef is viewed as the hashlamah, completion, of Yaakov Avinu. Horav Hutner explains that while Yaakov symbolizes the concept of "once a Jew, always a Jew," the acute danger of extreme assimilation through intermarriage is to be noted. We turn to Yosef to stem the tide of assimilation, to ward off the attack against kedushas Yisrael. The Torah says that when Potifar's wife attempted to seduce Yosef, he ran out of the house. Chazal have thus described Yosef as one who runs away from sin. He imbued Bnei Yisrael with this quality: the ability to resist temptation, to overcome the challenges to our strong morality. As a flame carries the force of the fire beyond, so, too, does Yosef represent the ability to infuse the generations that have descended from Yaakov with the holiness and morality of Yisrael. He spreads the kedushah. He is, therefore, considered Patriarchal in nature and accomplishment.

Klal Yisrael did not assimilate in Egypt. They maintained their morality, language, Jewish names, and distinct manner of dress in accordance with the laws of tznius, modesty. This all stemmed

from Yosef, who infused Klal Yisrael with the strength and virtue of morality. Yosef reaches out across the generations, inculcating the patriarchal values and ideals into their descendants. Let us hope that the flame, which represents the morality of our People, will never be extinguished.

*But as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me on the road...and I buried her there on the road to Efratas, which is Bais Lechem. (48:7)*

On what basis did Yaakov expect Yosef to bury him in the Meoras Ha'Machpeilah, when Yaakov did not do so for Yosef's mother, Rachel? Sensing Yosef's possible quandary, Yaakov Avinu responded with the reason that he purposely buried Rachel by the roadside. When the Jewish people were to be led to captivity after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash, they would receive solace from Rachel's grave. When they passed along the road to Bais Lechem, anguished, persecuted, depressed and exhausted, Rachel's soul would come to her grave to supplicate the Almighty on their behalf. Rachel's cries for her children have been the motif of her resting place. Indeed, to this very day, the broken-hearted Jew comes to Kever Rachel to pour out his heart. The question that confronts us is, if the souls of the dead are aware of their children's pain, what difference does it make where their graves are located? Rachel would certainly have prayed for Klal Yisrael regardless of where she had been buried.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, remarks that a mother grieves for her child's pain when the child continues to be "hers." When children build upon the spiritual heritage infused in them by their parents, when they hold dear the values that their parents cherished, they merit recognition. Children who distance themselves from their heritage, who seem to have a difficult time relating to and "recognizing" their parents, will be undistinguishable to their parents.

Regrettably, the grave has been the place that children return to visit and -- at times -- shed a tear about the present and the past. They visit their mother and they remember: They remember her devotion; her meticulous observance; her sense of commitment; her love for the way of life for which so many have lived and died. This memory may invoke a feeling of remorse; it brings to mind their mother's last wish- that her children maintain themselves in the derech Hashem, path of the Almighty. Indeed, the grave physically marks the connection. It sustains the relationship between parent and child.

In Yaakov Avinu's attempt to arouse Rachel's maternal feelings towards her descendants, he buried her in a place that would be accessible to them when they needed her most. Her grave on the road to exile would inspire their prayers. Through their supplications, they would bond with their mother who would -- in turn -- pray for their survival.

*He blessed Yosef and he said,..."O G-d who shepherds me from my inception until this day." (48:15)*

Targum Unkeles understands "ha'roeh osi," "Who shepherds me", as "Who sustains me." Interestingly, Yaakov Avinu finds no other time suitable to offer his gratitude to the Almighty for sustaining him and providing for his basic material needs. He refers to the G-d before whom his ancestors walked, whose angel redeemed him from all evil, and adds - "Who has sustained me." Why did Yaakov find it necessary to supplement his praise of Hashem with the more "basic and simple"

praise of sustenance?

Horav Gershon Leibman, Shlita, Rosh Hayeshiva of Bais Yosef in France, extends this question. We thank Hashem for our daily bread when we recite Birkas Hamazon. Other than that, we do not offer gratitude for mazon or parnassah, sustenance and our daily livelihood, during our daily tefillos. Even on Rosh Hashanah, at a time when we turn to Hashem to sustain us during the coming year, our prayers revolve around Hashem's kedushah, sanctity, His eminence, our awe of Him; we ask that He dignify us before the nations of the world and that the righteous experience joy and happiness. Yet, we do not ask for sustenance or for any material blessings. Why then did Yaakov find this moment to be appropriate for thanking Hashem for sustaining him? Horav Simchah Zissel, zl, M'Kelm, was wont to say, "Baruch Hashem, I have sufficient food for today." In fact, food is something about which people with class rarely talk. Yet, Yaakov Avinu makes a point to mention it. Why?

The answer is simple, according to Horav Leibman. We think that we are above dwelling upon the concept of food and everyday mundane necessities. We are "flying in the Heavens," attempting to develop our spiritual level, to attain a closer "relationship" with the Almighty. All the while, we ignore the basics - the source of everything. We perceive only that which is immediately in front of us. The infant sees and relies on his mother for his sustenance. As the child matures, his father takes over the "position" of provider. When he becomes an adult, he relies upon himself. He sees that which is before him - he never perceives the real source of his sustenance - Hashem.

Too many partitions separate us from Hashem - or so we think. Horav Yisrael Yaakov Lubshenski, zl, would always wonder: Why it is that when something goes wrong, we never complain directly to Hashem? We never get "angry" at Him. Instead, we criticize our friends or associates, anyone upon whom we can place blame? Never do we focus on the real source of our problem - Hashem. The reason has been mentioned before. We do not focus on the source; we do not look for the true origin, only for the immediate reason which is before us. We do not search in the distance for Hashem, because regrettably we do not acknowledge His presence in our midst at all times.

For Yaakov Avinu there is no mechitzah, partition, between him and the Creator. Nothing stands between him and his understanding of Hashem's Providence throughout every aspect of his life - not even what may seem to be "natural" cause and effect. His parnassah, livelihood, is derived directly from Hashem through Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence. It is no different than one who receives a check in the mail from his parents: Will he for one moment consider that this check is a gift from the mailman? No! The mailman is only an agent carrying out his "mission." Yaakov Avinu clearly recognized the source of his sustenance. Therefore, he was able to offer gratitude in turn. It would also serve us well to look beyond the "mailman" and reflect upon the origin of the "check."

*May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak. (48:16)*

Why does Yaakov mention his own name before he mentions his father and grandfather? Why does he not demonstrate the mitzvah of Kibud Av, honoring one's father? Horav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita, suggests a practical reason for this omission: Yaakov was saying that his grandsons should be a source of such nachas that not only should I be pleased, but even my forefathers will be filled with nachas. Kol Yehudah suggests that Yaakov was referring to the attributes represented by each of the Patriarchs. Avraham Avinu devoted himself to the middah of chesed. He reached out with kindness to

an entire world. He was the epitome of altruism. Yitzchak Avinu symbolized the concept of avodah, service to Hashem, through prayer and devotion. Yaakov Avinu was the symbol of Torah. Together, the Avos represent Torah, avodah and gemilus chasadim, which are the three attributes which support and maintain the world.

We now understand why Yaakov placed his name prior to that of his father and grandfather. He blessed his grandsons that they should merit to grow in Torah. It should be their prime focus and direct their lives. Afterwards, once they would have become suffused with Torah, he mentioned "v'sheim avosai," and the names of my forefathers. They could then focus on avodah and gemilus chasadim. One will attain the attributes of avodah and chesed from Torah; from the chesed and avodah, one does not necessarily achieve involvement in Torah.

Along similar lines, this writer once heard the following from his rebbe, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl regarding the Mishnah in Peah 1:1, in which the Torah enumerates those mitzvos which illustrate that a person eats his fruit in this world, but the principle endures till Olam Habah: Honoring one's parents; acts of loving kindness; attendance at the synagogue; opening one's home to wayfarers; visiting the sick; marrying off a young woman; attending to the needs of the deceased; prayer; establishing harmony among people and husband and wife. Those are the social mitzvos that engender incredible reward. The Mishnah closes with the statement, "V'talmud Torah k'neged kulam," "And the study of Torah is opposite /greater than all of them." This Mishnah seems to imply that while social mitzvos are certainly important, they do not replace Torah study. Study retains primacy over all other mitzvos. The text, however, does not support this interpretation. The words "k'neged kulam" should be translated as "opposite them." Instead we are translating it as "goes above them."

Horav Katz explained that the Mishnah teaches us an important lesson. Every endeavor which a Jew takes upon himself to perform, regardless of its purpose, must be "stood up" opposite the Torah and reviewed: Does it meet the Torah's halachic criteria of right and wrong? While these mitzvos are noble and virtuous, they must follow the standards and guidelines set forth by the Torah -- or they can be transformed into a negative endeavor. Establishing a shul is truly a wonderful undertaking, but one must address the appropriateness of the time and place of this mitzvah. Performing an act of altruism does not grant one license to do as he pleases. Everything we do must be addressed by the Torah or the act loses its credibility.

*All these are the twelve tribes of Yisrael...He blessed them each according to his special blessing.  
(49:28)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu gave each of his sons his individual blessing, uniquely cognuous with his individual nature and personality. He then gave a collective blessing to all of them together. Horav Eli Munk, zl, explains that the Jewish nation is founded on the principle of unity in plurality. Each tribe is called upon to perform its particular function, based upon its specific character trait. Hence, each tribe constitutes a unit by itself. Why, then, did Yaakov bless them collectively afterwards?

Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, derives a significant lesson from this pasuk. It is important for everyone to utilize his individual abilities and attributes for the betterment of the klal, wider community. The blessing of individual talents carries with it a requirement that the person contribute these assets to the tzibur, congregation. Furthermore, when each person acts in the collective interest, in

harmony with others, everyone becomes enriched. Thus, each tribe gained by the others' involvement. Each tribe merged its attributes with the traits of the other tribes. Yaakov Avinu sought this symbiotic unity when he blessed all of his sons together.

*And Yosef went up to bury his father. (50:7)*

Yaakov suffered during the majority of his life from various afflictions: Eisav; Lavan; problems with his children; the premature death of Rachel. One would think that in death he would finally be able to repose in peace. In the Talmud Sotah 13a, Chazal tell us otherwise. When the funeral procession accompanying Yaakov's coffin arrived at his final resting place at Meoras Ha'Machpelah, Eisav confronted the mourners, contesting the title to Yaakov's plot. The tribes argued that Eisav had sold it to Yaakov. A debate ensued in which each side claimed right to this holy site. When Eisav asked for Yaakov's deed, certifying his purchase of the burial plot, the tribes decided to send Naftali back to Egypt to retrieve the deed. In the meantime, they would wait. Chusim ben Dan, who was deaf, was present during this dialogue and inquired regarding the cause of the delay. When he was told what was occurring, he exclaimed, "My grandfather will be compelled to lie in degradation until the deed is brought!" He immediately arose and killed Eisav. Why was it that Chushim was the only one who was so reactive? Was he more concerned about Yaakov's honor than Yaakov's own sons, who seemed to be negotiating with Eisav?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, suggests that the Talmud implies the answer when it refers to Chushim's deafness. The brothers had slowly been drawn into a discussion with Eisav. While the debate continued back and forth they thought they were besting Eisav. Although this might have been true, during this time period Yaakov's body lay in shame. They did not realize what they were doing. Human nature causes one to adapt slowly to a given situation. The brothers' dispute with Eisav dulled their sensitivity to their father's shame. Chushim, who was not a part of the debate because of his impairment, was consumed with anger when he was told what was occurring. His senses were not dulled. He reacted in an expectable manner.

Horav Shmuelevitz goes on to explain that human beings are endowed with the gift of "histaglus", adaptability. We adapt to the conditions in which we are placed. We have seen people who had been exposed to the unspeakable horrors of the concentration camps, who experienced the most cruel and heinous torture, survive to rebuild their lives. As circumstances worsened, they found the ability to adapt to the situation, the courage and fortitude to go on. Indeed, one who has undergone a tragedy or has survived a horrifying incident will certainly be changed by the experience. The power to continue, to go on and start over again, is due to adaptability. This wonderful gift can, at times, be less beneficial. Like every attribute endowed to us by the Almighty, it all depends upon how we use it.

*And I, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died unto me in the land of Canaan on the road when there was still a stretch of land to come to Efras, and I buried her there on the road. (48:7)*

Yaakov seems to be justifying himself for not burying Rachel in the Me'oras Ha'machpeilah. After all, Yaakov is imploring Yosef to make sure that he is interred in the burial place of the Patriarchs, even though his beloved wife, Rachel, Yosef's mother, was not buried there! If that was the intended

meaning, however, then Yaakov's "speech" would have been placed earlier in the parsha, where Yaakov asks Yosef to bury him in the Me'oras Ha'machpeilah. In this context his statement is apparently connected to the decision to grant each of Yosef's sons a special position as an individual tribe among the shevatim.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that during this entire conversation the Torah refers to him as Yaakov -- not Yisrael. This is the case until the point when Yaakov confers "shevet" status upon Menashe and Efraim and blesses them. "Vayischazak Yisrael," Yaakov pulled himself together only when Yosef approached him. Yaakov's response indicates Yosef's importance. Specifically, it underscores how Yosef's significance would ultimately affect the national future of Klal Yisrael. As Yaakov looked at his two grandsons, he viewed them as Yisrael - attributing special meaning to that moment.

Horav Hirsch contends that Yaakov's decision to make Yosef's descendants into a double tribe was the result of his overwhelming love for Yosef. Unrelated to national considerations, it was purely a personal decision. In these last days of his life, Yaakov's thoughts reverted back to Rachel, his intended wife, whom he cherished with great affection, who had been tragically taken away from him the earliest. Her memory was especially prominent in his mind. Indeed, it was more than likely that her fate would cast her in the distant background in the future memorials of the nation. He feared she would be forgotten. In the future, when Yaakov's descendants would go to pray at the graves of their ancestors, they would visit the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, but Rachel Imeinu, the Matriarch who was Yosef's mother and Yaakov's beloved, would be missing. Yosef's mother, even in death, did not receive her rightful place. Only two tribes would memorialize her as their mother.

Yaakov feared that Rachel would be forgotten, so he decided to make Yosef - Rachel's firstborn - the firstborn of the tribes, by forming two tribes from the descendants of Yosef's two sons. He granted them a "double portion" as is the due of the firstborn. Yaakov clearly was demonstrating his undying affection for Rachel. He gave her in death what she never had experienced in life.

*And Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?" And Yosef said to his father, "They are my sons whom Hashem has given me here." He said, "Bring them to me if you please, and I will bless them." (48:8,9)*

The Midrash explains that Yaakov obviously knew the identity of Yosef's sons. He was in Egypt for seventeen years. He certainly had the opportunity to interact with them during this time. Also, Yaakov studied Torah with Efraim. Chazal explain that when Yaakov was about to bless Yosef's children, the Shechinah departed from him. He foresaw that evil kings would descend from them: Yaravam and Achav from Efraim; Yehu and his sons from Menashe. This vision shocked Yaakov so that he asked Yosef, "Who are these?" meaning, from where did these sons, who are apparently unworthy of blessing, come? Yosef assured his father that they were begotten from a union which was holy and kosher according to the demands of halachah and were consequently worthy of blessing.

We may question the words of the Midrash. If Efraim and Menashe are not worthy of blessing based on their own merit since their descendants would be evil, how would the kashrus/halachic acceptability of their parents' union change this reality? They are either worthy or they are not! Also, why did Efraim and Menashe become the standard for blessing with which every parent blesses his sons, "May Hashem make you like Efraim and Menashe?" What was so unique about these two sons in

contrast to the other tribes?

Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, describes a major difference between Efraim and Menashe and the other tribes. The shevatim were all born in exile when their father worked for Lavan. When they finally left Lavan's home, it was not in a dignified manner--they were forced to flee from him. While they were yet on the road prior to settling in Eretz Yisrael, the tragedy that befell Dinah occurred. This preceded the tragedy of mechiras Yosef, which left their father a broken man, bereft of his favorite child. One may submit that even after they settled in Egypt under Yosef's protection, they were still "unsettled" as they were fully cognizant that they were responsible for creating tragedy in Yosef's life. Thus, we may suggest that the sons of Yaakov were filled with anxiety. They never could call themselves "free men" in the sense that they were never released from the cloud of fear which loomed over them.

Conversely, Yosef's sons were born to him when he was already the viceroy over Egypt. Eminently successful and powerful, Yosef was able to provide a lifestyle of royalty, dignity, and freedom for his sons. His sons were revered. While Efraim and Menashe knew their roots, the ambiguities and anxieties that plagued their grandfather did not really affect them. They were raised as free men with incredible self-confidence. They were aware that, as Yaakov's grandsons, they were the scions of the Patriarchs, replete with kedushah and taharah, holiness and purity. They were also the sons of Yosef, the powerful leader of Egypt, the man to whose word the entire world listened. Indeed, Yosef's sons had the characteristics necessary to become great leaders.

Something happened, however. Yaakov saw disaster in the future. He saw how Efraim and Menashe's resolution and spiritedness backfired many generations later through the evil which their descendants perpetrated. The qualities that were so desirable for national leadership and blessing actually became a catalyst of downfall. The self-confidence turned into gross chutzpah; the courage was transformed into audacity and shamelessness. Yaakov questioned Yosef, "Who are these?" He saw the roots of evil in Efraim and Menashe. How could this be? Yosef responded, "They are my sons which Hashem has given me here." They were born in Egypt, so that our people would have leadership that was not raised amidst anxiety, depression, and exile. They were born into and raised throughout their lives in the comfort of freedom and autonomy--not beholden to anyone. Their self-determination was a valuable asset for Klal Yisrael. Yehoshua, the leader who took Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, was a descendant of Efraim. One who is free, one who is filled with self-confidence and resolve, can serve Hashem without fear or anxiety. Yes, there is a possibility that self-determination can lead to disaster. Without it, however, Klal Yisrael's leadership would have been limited. The two must serve together, Efraim and Menashe, each enhancing the other's qualities. Efraim represents the spirit while Menashe symbolizes material pursuit. Together, they create an unparalleled leadership. Only when Menashe acquiesces to Efraim is there no fear of the consequences of material endeavor. On the contrary, this relationship sublimates the material, engendering it with sanctity. This is the blessing that we give our children: "May they be like Efraim and Menashe." Efraim's devotion to the spirit permeates and imbues Menashe's material enterprise.

*Water like impetuosity--you cannot be foremost, because you mounted your father's bed; then you desecrated Him Who ascended my couch. (49:4)*

Reuven's impetuosity cost him his right to national leadership. We may wonder if Reuven's action was really that inappropriate. After all, he was demonstrating overwhelming respect to his

mother. Indeed, the Torah lists Reuven together with the rest of his brothers. This causes Chazal to comment that Reuven was as righteous as they. He did not sin. He erred and was deserving of a formal reprimand. Why, however, should he have lost the bechorah?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, makes a compelling statement. Reuven was certainly demonstrating concern for his mother's feelings, fulfilling the mitzvah of kibud eim, honoring his mother. What about his father? Is he permitted to neglect honoring his father in order to respect his mother? Yaakov was implying to Reuven that his impetuosity caused him not to think of all the ramifications of his actions. His impulsiveness caused him to lose sight of his father's needs. Consequently, commensurate with his level and position, his potential for leadership was viewed as deficient. Therefore, he lost the birthright.

Horav Epstein cites a similar instance in the Talmud 31b which recounts how Eili the Kohen Gadol sent a Kohen to slaughter a bullock. When Shmuel, who later became the leader of Klal Yisrael, saw that they were looking for a Kohen, he said to them, "Why do you go looking for a Kohen to perform the shechitah? The shechitah may be performed by a zar, layman!" They immediately brought him to Eili, who asked him, "How do you know this?" Shmuel responded with a valid proof from the Torah. Eili replied, "You have spoken well, but you are guilty of rendering a decision in the presence of your rebbe. Whoever gives a decision in the presence of his teacher is liable for the death penalty." Thereupon, Shmuel's mother, Channah, came and cried and begged forgiveness. Shmuel was spared, but not until Eili expressed strong criticism regarding his impulsive behavior.

When we think about it, we should question: What did Shmuel do that was so irresponsible? All he did was state a halachah! In fact, as the Maharsha posits, Shmuel was only two years old at the time. Rather than focusing on his brilliance, he was chastised for speaking "out of turn." One would think that rather than be criticized, Shmuel should have been praised for his scholarly application of the laws. In truth, Shmuel was criticized not for what he said, but rather for the manner in which he communicated. It appeared to the innocent bystander that Shmuel was insolent, rendering a decision in the presence of his rebbe.

We infer from here the enormous responsibility one has whenever he undertakes a given activity, regardless of its positive nature. It is quite conceivable that while our intentions are correct, and the focus of our activity is commendable, there might still be a tinge of impropriety that we have neglected to consider. That one little error can devastate the most glorious plans.

*Shimon and Levi are brothers. (49:5)*

In the context of the pasuk, the word "achim," which is usually translated as "brothers," is interpreted as "comrades." Shimon and Levi are paired together as comrades in arms, who conspired together to commit a violent act against the people of Shechem. From the fact that Yaakov calls them "achim," we may infer that he viewed them as equals, neither one having any distinction over the other. Interestingly, this equality did not last very long. In the end, they went different ways. Levi went to the extreme right, serving as the symbol of Torah. Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, the leaders who shepherded Am Yisrael during its formative years, are descendants of Levi. Shimon's descendants had a derogatory reputation. Zimri, who openly defied Moshe and cohabited with a pagan princess, initiated the rebellion that was the cause of the deaths of twenty-four thousand Jews. It was Pinchas, a descendant of Levi, who had the zealous response which quelled the ensuing plague.

The tribe of Shimon was small in number, because many of them perished as a result of their sins. Shevet Levi's numbers were also small, but that was due to their constant exposure to the sanctity of the Aron Hakodesh. Neither received an official portion in Eretz Yisrael. The reason for the individual exclusion of each, however, was different. Levi did not inherit a portion because Hashem is considered to be his portion. He is to be totally dedicated to the sacred, not involving himself in the mundane. Shimon, on the other hand, did not receive land as a punishment for his transgression.

Where did they differ? How did two brothers, seemingly equal in nature and temperament, uniform in their attitude and observance, separate and go in different directions? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, suggests that while Yaakov apparently rebuked both brothers equally, Levi applied himself, corrected his error and adjusted his attitude considerably. He devoted himself whole-heartedly to the study and dissemination of Torah. The two brothers started out the same way. One, however, listened and accepted the mussar - reproach - that he received, to a greater degree. Levi listened to the point that his descendant, zealous for the honor of Hashem, killed the prince of the tribe of Shimon as he was committing a repugnant act. It is not one's sin that destroys an individual as much as his unwillingness to correct and mend his ways. One's character is reflected most deeply in his sincere teshuvah.