

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE VAYHI

Haftarah: Melachim I 2:1-12
DECEMBER 26, 2015 14 TEBET 5776

DEDICATIONS: In Memory of Rosa Bat Victoria – Rose Gindi August

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

We have a sponsorship opportunity We have a beautiful set of Rambam Mishneh Torah with English translation coming in to our library We would like someone to dedicate All 18 volumes \$550 Please let us know

**Minha & Arbit 4:15PM - Candle Lighting 4:15PM
Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday evenings**

**Shabbat
Class with Rav Aharon 8:30AM – Latest Shema 8:52AM
Shahrit 9:00 AM,
Torah not before 10:00 and Musaf not before 10:30AM
Rabbi David is away this Shabbat - Chazot is 11:55**

Thank You to The Waldman Family who will be sponsoring the kiddush this week in honor of Ari making a Siyum on completing the tractate of Megilah – a tremendous accomplishment

**Please be generous and donate a Kiddush
As we pray Mincha after Kiddush during the winter, we need a sponsor every week**

**Kiddush Message from Rebbetzin Ida
With the exception of two Shabbats this winter, we have no Kiddush dedications until the spring and during the winter as we pray Mincha after Kiddush, we must have a lunch.
Please take a moment and select a week and reserve a kiddush**

**Mincha Follows Kiddush – Amida after 12:19 PM
Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!**

**Children's program at Sephardic at 3:00PM –
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 4:00 - Any changes will be advised in Synagogue**

Seudah Shelishi at Home Shabbat Ends at 5:15 Return for Arbit at 5:30 PM

**We are happy to announce the return of movie night!
Last week was a success
Special Thank You to Jack and Patti Azizo for sponsoring the pizza.
To be on the volunteer list or to sponsor a movie night
Please email Hindy - HmizNY@Gmail.com**

**SUNDAY MORNING Shaharit at 8AM
DAILY MINYAN Monday, Thursday 6:55,
Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM**

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!
 212-289-2100 – Mincha/Arbit –Give us 18
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!**

Editors Notes

Shema Yisrael Learning to Hear !

As the book of Genesis comes to an end, Jacob, the last of the forefathers dies. He is mourned in Egypt and then Pharaoh gives Joseph permission to honor Jacob's wish to be buried in Israel, in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron. A huge funeral procession consisting of all the elders of Egypt as well as Jacob's family accompanied the body. Then after returning to Egypt, the brothers fearing that now, after Jacob had passed away, Joseph will take out his revenge for selling him, approach him.

"Your father left these instructions before he died: 'this is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

It is very clear that this was a lie. Had Jacob wanted Joseph to hear these words, he would have told Joseph himself. The brothers who fear for their lives tell this little white lie. Perhaps that is why Joseph weeps. After supporting them and caring for them these last seventeen years, he weeps because his brothers still thought him capable of revenge.

Their conscience remains guilty so many years later perhaps because they were so ashamed that for twenty years they were sure that they were right. From the moment of the sale through the moment of Joseph's revelation, they were certain that Joseph was the guilty party and they were justified in getting rid of him. Then for the seventeen years that followed they must have wallowed in the confusion and the guilt that Joseph's revelation brought to light.

Rabbi Joey Haber has a great tape posted last week on LearnTorah.com titled, "You're fooling yourself". He explains that people make dumb mistakes. We often go out of our way to convince ourselves of our own expertise. We are self-biased and too often close ourselves up from hearing criticism or even constructive advice. We surround ourselves with friends who will nod their heads in agreement to what we say. The Ben Ish Chai explains that as people, we

are either buying or selling. Most of us are selling. We talk, we explain, we convince and others take it in.

We are meant to be buyers. We are meant to learn. Perhaps Joseph hinted this to his brothers when he told them to tell Pharaoh that they were Anshei Mikneh which literally translates as men of sheep, but koneh means to buy. Maybe he was hinting that in a world of sellers and buyers, they should try being buyers, try to hear the other guy, try to be a bit less sure of themselves.

Rabbi Haber gives many examples, but he closes with an incredible story which I really wanted to tell over. I asked around and someone confirmed the same true story although some of the minor details vary.

There was a Jewish boy named Greg who grew up in Middle America. His father may have had some experience as a Jew but ran away from it and together with his wife raised their son in as secular an environment as possible. They weren't even three day Jews. Oh perhaps they lit a menorah when they decorated their tree and they shared a box of matzah on Passover, but that was about it.

They wanted to raise their son with every advantage and with the best education. And when it was time for him to go off to university they knew that a certain men's Catholic College was the best place for him. The problem was this school was really for Catholics. They convinced their son to say nothing about being Jewish and he was accepted subject to a final interview with the dean, Father Michael.

Greg and his parents arrived at the school and Greg went in to speak with Father Michael. In the middle of the interview, Father Michael stopped and asked Greg, "I realize you're not Catholic, are you Jewish?"

Greg can't lie and tells the priest that he is Jewish. Father Michael calls in the parents and wants to make sure that they are all aware that the school requires every student to take two hours of religious study each day. The parents have no problem with this, but Father Michael says that he can't in good conscience allow it. He suggests that Greg who knows nothing about Judaism learn about Judaism with him each morning from 7 to 9AM.

The parents assume the dean will never have the time to follow through, But class starts on day one in August and although Greg finds learning the Hebrew alphabet and words a bit boring at first when they get into the holidays and begin studying the chumash

with Rashi, it gets exciting. They continue looking at Jewish philosophy, beliefs, prophets, mishna and even Talmud.

Greg comes home for winter vacation. His parents offer to take him to dinner, but he declines saying he is tired. They also see him only eating vegetables and mumbling when he eats. Friday night comes and they have a reservation at their favorite steak joint, but Greg says he has to read and they go without him. They are confused. Is he on drugs? What's going on? Suddenly the father stops and says, "Oh my gosh, we've got to get home".

They open the front door and they see their son sitting at the tables with two candles lit and a glass of wine.

"You're religious"? questions the father.

"Dad, I'm just exploring with Father Michael".

Greg returns to school and continues learning with Father Michael. As the summer approaches, Father Michael suggests that Greg try spending the summer in Israel at Aish HaTorah. Greg agrees and as the last day of school comes, Greg sits with the priest who has been his teacher.

"Without being disrespectful Father, I must ask you something. How do you know all this about Judaism? Are you Jewish, Father Michael"?

Father Michael explained that he was not. But the question still remained. Father Michael continued that when he was studying for the priesthood, he went to Israel to visit the holy sites. In addition to the Christian sites, he came to see the wall. He put on the paper kippah and approached the stones and contemplated their history when a stranger tapped him on the shoulder.

"Are you American? He asked. "Would you like to learn more about Judaism?"

Father Michael continued, "the man took me to Rabbi Noah Weinberg and I was so interested I stayed a year. I loved it. And because I have a natural gift in learning and because I had such desire, I learned a great deal. Perhaps more in that year than most Jews learn in a lifetime

I thought about converting. And then my father called and told me it was time to come home and get back to my studies for the priesthood. So I agreed. I went to see Rabbi Weinberg and admitted truth. He went crazy. He yelled at me. He berated me for being a liar. And he told me that he would never forgive me.

"I begged him, pleaded with him, tried to explain to him.

"And then he told me that one day when I become a priest I'll undoubtedly come in contact with Jews on the wrong path. He told me to set them straight and he'll forgive you. That was ten years ago and then you came in for an interview and I realized that this was my chance at forgiveness. So I taught you what he taught me."

Greg went on to study at Aish. He became a well-known observant psychologist raising religious kids who his parents love. And I'm sure Father Michael achieved the forgiveness he sought.

If we are willing to open up our ears and listen, we can sometimes hear from outsiders that which sets us right and gives us clarity. So many people; so many of us make foolish decisions because we don't want to open up to possibilities. We don't want to listen.

This was mistake of brothers of Yosef; a mistake that weighed on them for seventeen years after they understood and perhaps for the rest of their lives. This is mistake most of us make all the time. There is a lesson to us to try to be different, to try to open up and to try to hear, As we read this week, Shema Yisrael, Hear O Israel.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

BARUCH DAYAN HAEMET

Rabbi Eliyahu Shamoula, co-founder and director of the Shehebar Sephardic Center, provided the directional outlook for the organization. He was the organizational genius behind the scenes.

Under his guidance, the SSC matured from a small Sephardic yeshiva with 10 students into a global outreach program. His valuable abilities lead the SSC successfully.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1949, Rabbi Shamoula spent the first 12 years of his life there before emigrating to the United States with his family. After receiving a degree in civil technology from Staten Island College in 1971, Eliyahu Shamoula realized his dream and went to Israel where he studied at the famous Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Jerusalem for five years.

After receiving rabbinical ordination in 1977, Rabbi Shamoula worked in the beginners program for American youth at the Aish Hatorah Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Subsequently, Rabbi Shamoula worked

at a company in Tel Aviv that constructed the Ovda and Ramon airbases in the Negev.

But Jewish education was in his blood and in 1980, together with Rabbi Sam Kassin, Rabbi Shamoula opened the SSC yeshiva in the Old City. The yeshiva has grown in number, reach and purpose into the present day Shehebar Sephardic Center.

Rabbi Shamoula was interned in the Sephardi section of the cemetery at Har HaMenuhot.

A friend who is a friend of Gershon Pincus sent us this

A Security Concern Due to Divided Loyalties' A dentist wants to serve America's military. But having a mother in Israel can be disqualifying.
BRET STEPHENS Dec. 16, 2015

When Gershon Pincus turned 60, he decided he wanted to give something back to his country. The Brooklyn-born father of four had maintained a successful private dental practice in New York City for 35 years. As he would later attest in an affidavit, "I can think of no better way to experience the sunset of my career than by using my professional skills as a dentist to assist those who have chosen to serve in the United States military."

So Dr. Pincus turned to the USAJobs website, found an opening for part-time work at an off-base Naval clinic in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and applied. By the summer of 2014 he was making a weekly commute of some 400 miles to the clinic from his home in the Far Rockaway neighborhood of Queens. It was routine dentistry at lower pay than he had earned in private practice. But it was the opportunity he had sought to serve.

That October, Dr. Pincus underwent a routine interview to obtain a security clearance for civilian employees. As part of the interview, he made note of his familial connections in Israel. Two of his siblings had moved there in the 1980s, though neither worked for the Israeli government. His elderly mother, now suffering from dementia, had also moved there late in life, so her daughter could help take care of her. And one of Dr. Pincus's children, Avi, had served briefly in the Israeli army before tragically succumbing to a drug overdose at an early age.

As for Dr. Pincus's own connections to Israel, they amounted to three visits in the past decade, including one for his father's funeral. He has no personal friends in Israel, no financial interests or holdings there, and no desire to ever hold an Israeli passport. He calls his mother on a weekly basis, and for a while handled her monthly rent and utilities bills. That's it. The security investigation concluded: "There is nothing in subject's background or character that

would make him vulnerable to blackmail, extortion, coercion or duress."

But that wouldn't be the end of the matter. This March, Dr. Pincus was subjected to an unusual second interview, this time from a contract investigator sent by the Office of Personnel Management. All but one of the questions, sent from OPM headquarters, concerned his potential connections to Israel.

In September, Dr. Pincus's security clearance was denied, meaning he would not be able to continue doing his dental work. The "Statement of Reasons" provided by the OPM explained why.

"You have weekly telephone contact with your mother and brother in Israel. You added your mother, sister and brother may have contact with neighbors in Israel. Foreign contacts and interests may be a security concern due to divided loyalties or foreign financial interests, may be manipulated or induced to help a foreign person, group, organization or government in a way that is not in U.S. interests, or is vulnerable to pressure or coercion by foreign interests."

In the lexicon of anti-Jewish slurs, "divided loyalties" has such a notorious history that it's surprising to see it make its way into a formal government document. Avi Schick, a partner with the Dentons law firm, says that when he first heard that a Naval employee could lose his job just for having relatives in Israel, he was so skeptical that he promised to take the case pro bono if the facts turned out to be true. "And here we are," he tells me. My own calls to the OPM and the Pentagon were not returned.

The larger question is how common such security-clearance denials are. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals maintains a public database of what are known as "Industrial Security Clearance Decisions" dating back to 1996, involving thousands of civilian cases in all. Each of these involves an appeal from an application that was initially denied, and it is reasonable to assume that many rejected candidates never bother with an appeal.

Since the Obama administration came to office, there have been a total of 58 cases in which Israeli ties were a significant factor in the decision. Of these, 36 applicants—an astonishing 62% of the total—lost their appeals and had their clearance applications denied. For comparison, there has been just one case of a French citizen losing an appeal and being denied a clearance, and zero involving British citizens.

It's true that a statistical analysis alone is not sufficient evidence of systemic prejudice. Then again, as Mr. Schick notes, the process of disqualifying Dr. Pincus "was driven by headquarters personnel" at the OPM, not some rogue agent in the field. It's also worth adding that the slenderness of the evidence by

which Dr. Pincus is being denied his clearance (and thus his job) suggests the level of scrutiny to which any applicant with the slightest Israeli connection is subjected. In one 2014 case, briefly described in the database, a candidate was refused clearance because a sister-in-law serves in the Israeli military. Mr. Schick has now petitioned Navy Secretary Ray Mabus to review Dr. Pincus's case. As that review takes place, the most pro-Israel administration in history—as President Obama and his advisers like to brag—might ask why it treats Americans with honest and honorable ties to Israel as potential enemies of state.

Mr. Stephens writes the Journal's "Global View" column. Write bstephens@wsj.com.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Yaacov blesses his children before his death

- 1- Yaacov, feeling his days are near an end, asks Yosef to bury him in Eretz Israel
- 2- Yaacov blesses Efrayim and Menashe - hamalach ha'goel oti...
- 3- Yaacov blesses Efrayim and Menashe - yesimcha elokim ke'efraim oomenashe...
- 4- Yaacov blesses / rebukes Reuben, Shimon and Levi. Yaacov blesses Yehuda w/ kingship, Zebulun w/ business success, Yisachar w/ Torah, and Dan w/ strength in battle.
- 5- Yaacov blesses Gad w/ victory in war, Asher with good land, Naftali w/ quickness and Yosef w/ grace
- 6- Yaacov blesses Binyamin w/ strength in battle and the beit ha'mikdash in his land. Yaacov dies. Benei Israel goes to bury Yaacov in Kenaan
- 7- Yosef tells his brothers that Hashem will redeem them. Yosef dies

THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN "He moved his hands with intelligence." (Beresheet 48:14)

This week's parashah tells us that when Ya'akob Abinu was giving blessings to Ephraim and Menasheh, "sikel et Yadav, he maneuvered his hands." Ya'akob crossed his hands so that his right hand ended up on Ephraim, who was on his left side, and his left hand ended up on Menasheh, who was on his right side. The fact that Ya'akob switched his hands teaches a critically important lesson about our relationships. The right side of a person represents his strengths, his wonderful qualities. The left side of a person represents his weaknesses, the areas in which he needs to improve.

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro explains, that when we face a person and stretch our arms without switching them, we are placing our right arm (the stronger arm) on the other person's left side. This indicates that we are accentuating his "left" side,

reminding him of his faults and deficiencies. When we point our left arm (the weak arm) at his right side, we are symbolically neglecting to acknowledge his attributes.

Ya'akob Abinu is teaching us, "switch your hands." When you face a person, let your right arm extend to his right side, emphasizing his fine traits. Give him a meaningful compliment. Remind him of how much he means to you and what an integral role he plays in your life. Your left, weaker arm, will extend to his left side, indicating that although everyone has deficiencies, you will not accentuate his, or remind him of his shortcomings.

In order to be successful in our interpersonal relationships, we must follow this formula of focusing on the positive rather than on the negative. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"May Hashem make you like Efraim and Menasheh" (Beresheet 48:20)

Ya'akob told Yosef that all the Jewish people will bless their children with these words, "May you be like Efraim and Menasheh." Among the many reasons given as to why Jews should always bless their children to be like these two sons of Yosef and not other great personalities, is that Menasheh, the older brother, did not show any jealousy when he saw his younger brother being blessed with the right hand. Usually the concept of sibling rivalry would have caused the older to resent the younger one, but when Ya'akob saw that there was no ill feeling between the two brothers, he told Yosef, this is the example we should have when blessing our own children. It may be suggested that this came about not only because of Menasheh's superb character, but also because Yosef put so much love into them that each one felt special in their father's eyes. Hence, there was no room for jealousy.

We, as parents, must try our best to show as much love and affection as possible to each child so that their self-esteem and self-confidence will be as strong as it can be. This will bring out the best character traits in them and leave no room for jealousy or resentment. A tall order? No! This is included in the blessing of Ya'akob that we will be able to bless our children and raise them in such a way to be like Efraim and Menasheh. It's up to us to try our best; the rest we pray to Hashem for success. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Efrayim and Menashe

We read in Parashat Vayehi the well-known story of the Beracha which Yaakob bestowed upon Efrayim and Menashe, Yosef's two sons. When Yosef brought his sons before Yaakob to receive his

blessing, he positioned Menashe, the older brother, to Yaakob's right, and Efrayim, the younger brother, to the left. Yosef naturally anticipated that Yaakob would want to place his right hand – representing primacy – on the head of the older brother, and the left hand, which is viewed as subordinate to the right, on the head of the younger brother. Yaakob, however, switched his hands, placing his right hand on the younger brother, Efrayim. He explained to Yosef that Efrayim would exceed his older brother in stature, and therefore deserved to have the right hand placed on his head.

A number of commentators raised the question of why Yaakob did not simply ask his grandsons to change positions. Rather than inconveniencing himself by crossing his hands, he could have simply instructed Efrayim to stand to his right and Menashe to his left. Why did he decide to switch his hands?

The Noam Elimelech (Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, 1717-1786) suggested that Yaakob wanted to spare Menashe embarrassment. The brothers stood before Yaakob with their heads lowered, and thus would not know which hand rested on which head. By crossing his hands, Yaakob ensured to place his hands in the correct fashion without Menashe realizing that he was given the left hand despite his being the older brother. If Yaakob had asked the brothers to reposition, Menashe would have understood that he is being relegated to secondary status, and would have thus suffered embarrassment.

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1993) suggested a different explanation. Yosef represented an exceptional combination of spiritual greatness and worldliness. He was an outstanding scholar and Saddik, but at the same time, he was the consummate statesman. As second-in-command to Pharaoh, who ruled over the largest empire on earth at the time, Yosef sat in meetings with rulers and dignitaries and helped manage a large nation. He was both spiritual and worldly, a holy man and a man of the world.

This combination rarely exists in a single individual, and, indeed, in Yosef's offspring, these two qualities were separated. Efrayim was the Torah scholar, and the Midrash relates that during the seventeen years Yaakob spent in Egypt, he studied Torah all day with Efrayim. Menashe, by contrast, served as his father's assistant in managing the country's affairs. He was deeply involved in the government and in economic and geopolitical affairs. Efrayim was the Torah scholar, and Menashe was the government official.

Efrayim and Menashe thus represent the two kinds of leadership that are needed in Am Yisrael: religious leadership, and lay leadership. Our nation's primary leaders are the Rabbis, the scholars of Torah, but the Rabbis cannot do their jobs without a devoted and skilled team of lay communal leaders, people to support, organize and manage the community's affairs. Both "Efrayim" and "Menashe" are critical and indispensable figures to the success of the Jewish people.

This, Rav Schwab explained, is why Yaakob decided to keep Menashe to his right, even though he placed his right hand on Efrayim's head. He did not want to give the impression that Menashe, the lay leadership, is not significant. The point he wanted to convey is that Efrayim – Torah scholarship and Torah authority – must always be the primary component, as symbolized by the placement of his right hand on Efrayim. But even though Torah is of course the most critical and central aspect of Jewish life, the aspect of "Menashe," the lay leadership, also bears great importance. The lay leaders must work under the guidance and authority of the Torah scholars; Menashe is, in this sense, secondary to Efrayim. But both groups of leaders are essential to the Jewish people's mission of living as God's nation on earth.

In the Yoreh De'a section of the Shulhan Aruch (246:1), Maran rules that each and every Jew bears an obligation to study Torah each day and night. He then adds, however, that if a person cannot study Torah, either because he does not know enough to even begin learning, or because of his schedule, he should support Torah scholars, and thereby fulfill his obligation with respect to Torah learning. This person will then receive reward as a result of the Torah learning which he facilitated.

This Halacha underscores the fact that all members of our nation, regardless of their background or skills, have a crucial role to play in the process of Torah. We need both Menashe and Efrayim – people who study Torah, and people who support Torah and work on behalf of Torah institutions. Together, they form the backbone of the Jewish people and help ensure our nation's physical and spiritual survival.

VICTOR BIBI - SOD HAPARASHA THE SPIRITUAL SIGN

R. Hayyim Vital (Shaar Hamisvot) explains that the soul of man is not clothed directly by the body. Rather there exists an interface which clothes the soul. It is known as a צלם Selem. Based on the Zohar (Vayehi), R. Hayyim explains that thirty days prior to the passing of an individual, two of the three aspects

of one's Selem זל, namely the Sel זל which relates to the surrounding lights departs from his head in the secret of the verse (Shir Hashirim 2:17) "Until the day blows past and the Selalim have fled". According to R. Bahye, Shelomo HaMelekh meant here to advise that when a person's "day" (his lifetime on earth) approaches its end, this is signaled by his Sel זל leaving him first.

YAAKOV REQUESTS THE CONCRETE SIGN OF PHYSICAL SICKNESS TO NOTIFY ONE THAT HIS DEATH IS APPROACHING

A narrative in the Talmud (BM 87) informs us that Yaakov was the first to request and be granted that man be given a concrete sign that his death was approaching. It is apparent from this source that this sign take the form of a weakening of the body or a sickness that would precede death. The proof verse is one sighted from our parasha, "And he told Yosef, Behold! Your father is ill." Why should sickness or the weakening of the body alone serve exclusively as the sign that one's time to pass from this world is at hand? Couldn't Hashem have provided Yaakov with the more concrete spiritual sign of his near demise?

In fact, in an earlier verse, prior to the one relating to Yaakov's sickness, it had already been communicated to him that his demise was at hand. The verse reads "The days of Yaakov had been gathered together in advance of the death of Israel". Similar expressions are used prior to the onset of death of Moshe (31:14) "The days are gathering in advance of your death." As well as by David (Melakhim I 2:1) "The days of David gathered prior to his death." R. Bahye sights Tanhuma that this verse indicates that a spiritual sign had been given to Yaakov that his death was at hand even prior to the onset of his illness. The verse reflects what we read in Divre Hayamim I 29:15 "Our days on earth are as a Sel זל or shadow". A similar thought is found in Tehillim 144:4 "Man is like a breath; his days like that of a passing Sel זל or shadow." Namely Yaakov had been granted the ability to see that his Sel זל had been removed from himself which served as a concrete spiritual sign his death was imminent.

YISHAQ APPARENTLY HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN ANY OF THESE TWO SIGNS THAT HIS DEATH WAS IMMINENT

It is quite possible that Yaakov requested at least the concrete physical sign of sickness prior to death in

response to the apparent false alarm that occurred with his father Yishaq at the age of 123. What was almost 57 years before his demise, Yishak says to Esav (27:2) "I am old and I have no idea when I will die." Evidently his having no idea of the day he was destined to die is what prompted him to dispense the blessing at that time. As Yishak was one of the righteous of the world, wouldn't Hashem grant him this ability to know his day of death? The answer lies in what the Torah states "His eyes had weakened to a state where he had been unable to see." To see what? The Midrashim suggest a number of reasons for Yishak's blindness. I would like to suggest he was also blinded from witnessing certain phenomenon that occur to one prior to his death. This spiritual blindness prompted him to preempt a sudden death and dispense "the blessing" at that time to his son. What should have been reserved as a blessing from Yishak adjacent to his demise; evidently was possibly given prematurely.

A PREFERENCE TO TRANSFER BLESSINGS ADJACENT TO ONE'S DEPARTURE FROM THE WORLD

Yishak appears to admit that the time to dispense the blessing would ideally occur close to death. He preempts his blessing with the fact that he is not privy to any concrete physical or spiritual signs that his death is approaching. Hence, rather than delay and miss an opportunity to bless his son altogether he decides not to take any chances and wait. This also appears to have been the method used by Abraham to dispense blessings to his children adjacent to his death (25:5-8). We see a definite preference by Yaakov in our parasha and later Moshe in Sefer Devarim to only transfer blessings adjacent to their departing this world. Anything earlier would be considered premature and can result in negative consequences. The additional potency of the blessings at this time might be associated with the זל Sel that leaves the confines of the righteous one's body to advance a more potent blessing. This is hinted at by Yishak who says (27:4) "In order for my soul to bless you before I die". Evidently during the time that is adjacent to one's death, the soul in the form of the Sel זל is freed from the confines of the body to advance a more potent blessing.

IF YAAKOV WAS ENDOWED WITH THE ABILITY TO SEE THIS SPIRITUAL SIGN, WHY REQUEST THE PHYSICAL SIGN OF SICKNESS?

The Ohr HaHayyim writes that though the Zohar records that R. Shimon Bar Yohai observed the phenomena of the lose of the Sel צל from his colleague R. Yishak; this knowledge is often withheld from ordinary people. Though many are aware of this as they become more in tune with spiritual matters, it is not universal gift. In addition, we even see this ability might even had alluded Yishak; albeit for reasons other than his spiritual propensity. R. Moshe Alshikh based on the same section of the Zohar in Vayehi adds that often even the righteous are only dimly aware of this phenomenon.

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND DESCENDANTS WERE ENDOWED WITH VISION TO PERCEIVE THE SPIRITUAL SIGNS

An interpretation of the biblical account of the twelve spies in Sefer Bemidbar bears out this concept. The spies, each one representing a tribe of Yisrael, return from their mission with a report indicating the might and strength of the inhabitants of Cana'an. However, it was only Yehoshua, a descendant of Yosef and Calev a descendant of Yehuda, who were able to see that which eluded their colleagues; the Selem צלם that nourished the physical bodies of the land's inhabitants had darkened. Yehoshua and Calev knew that the ensuing result would be the imminent death of the inhabitant's physical bodies! As it says (14:9) "Their Selem צלם has departed from them." This is what King David was referring to when he wrote (39:7) "Man exists by virtue of his צלם Selem.

ON THE NIGHT OF HOSHANA RABBAH - ALL ARE GRANTED THIS VISION

According to the meditations of R. HaAri; it is during the first half of the night of Hoshana Rabbah that we prepare a seal (hotem) for Hashem's Malkhut or Kingdom we established during the preceding Holidays. At Halakhic midnight there is the life or death judgement related to this seal. After Hasot one is granted a technique to see if the spiritual sign of life remains attached or if one's death is approaching. At that time he can see his etheric Sel צל via the light of the moon. If one has, סוד מולטו been sealed for death the Sel צל would appear removed from his head. Ramban (14:9) writes "It is a well-known fact that there will be no Sel צל over the head of a person who is destined to die that year on the night of the seal.

OPPORTUNITY TO BRING BACK ONE'S SELEM AFTER IT DEPARTS

In Sefer Reqanti (Shelah) a story is related whereby a certain man went out on the night of Hoshana Rabbah as was the custom to look via the light of the moon and found the Sel צל missing from his head. He thereby began to fervently pray and committed himself to Teshuva. He later went out and noticed that the Sel צל had indeed returned to its place.

CONCLUSION

Yaakov evidently did not personally need the physical sign of sickness as he was endowed with the spiritual sensitivity to know his death was approaching via the removal of his Selem. He prayed for this as not all of his descendants are granted this ability. From the incident of the מילגרם - the spies; it appears as if at least the righteous of the families of kings (Yosef and Yehuda) inherit this visual acumen. This might not be true for members of the other tribes. However, all of Israel has been granted this opportunity during the night of Hoshana Rabbah - the night we establish and seal the kingdom of Hashem. Even if most of us do not make use of this technique, we are all at least aware of this fact of judgement regarding the Sel צל; and as the noted penitent we do spend that night and next morning pouring out our prayers beseeching Hashem that our Sel צל not depart before it's time.

Rabbi Wein ON BEING CURRENTLY RELEVANT

The "hot-button" topics in our ever-changing society rarely have much staying power. They seem somehow to fizzle out of their own accord, having made a lot of noise, spawning countless op-ed pontifications but rarely leading to substantive change or benefit in our lives and societies. The main issue facing world Jewry is its shrinking population due to the ravages of assimilation and intermarriage, declining birth rates and the failure of the non-Orthodox in the Diaspora to hold on in any meaningful manner to their youth. Yet a cursory glance at Jewish media and current discussion would leave one to believe that the greatest issue that we must contend with today is where the Women of the Wall should be allowed to light their Chanuka menorah.

There is no doubt in my mind that decades from now this currently important issue will have little resonance in the Jewish world. Sixty years ago, when

I first began my rabbinic career, the issue of mixed pews in the synagogue was dominant. It no longer is. Mixed pews has not in any way increased synagogue attendance nor contributed in any way to family stability in the Jewish world.

The slogan then was “the family that prays together (meaning side by side during the services) stays together” has been proven by time to be just another irrelevant slogan. There are far more regular worshippers in synagogues that maintain separate seating than in those that have mixed pews.

The damage done sixty years ago in this matter is pretty much beyond current repair. But the issue itself is today completely irrelevant to the future of Judaism and the Jewish people.

The issue of countering assimilation should be paramount to the Jewish communities in the world. Accepting intermarriage carte blanche only worsens the problem. And the problem is exacerbated since the wolf is guarding the henhouse, with many of the heads of the Jewish organizations, who should be fighting assimilation and intermarriage, assimilated and even intermarried.

Reform should be in the forefront of this battle and instead it is one of the chief enablers, with dire results. We can all be compassionate towards individuals and couples but it is difficult to reconcile that misplaced compassion with the willful destruction of the Jewish future.

More Jews perhaps have been lost to assimilation over the past seventy years than were destroyed in World War II. There will be no museums built or memorials erected to commemorate these losses. The tyranny of overriding political correctness has made this most relevant issue irrelevant, since it is not nice to talk about it for fear of offending others.

The keepers of the faith, mainly but not exclusively Orthodox, are always fair game for discussion and criticism. But nary a word is ever heard or written about what the true cause of assimilation is and who in the Jewish world are its main abettors. Somehow many feel that this is not relevant to the discussion of the problem, while others feel that it is not really a problem at all.

The security and welfare of the State of Israel would seem to be one of the most important and relevant topics in the Jewish world. But again there are many who for various reasons do not deem it to be so. It is not the number one political issue in the eyes of American Jewry and even amongst many who live

here in Israel. It appears that other issues – such as perceived unlimited personal liberties – take precedence.

Having struggled so long and bitterly to achieve our state and its independence it is unthinkable to me that there are those in the Jewish world who advocate giving it up in favor of all sorts of pie in the sky imaginary scenarios of a better world. To me, all other issues pale into irrelevance in comparison with the security and safety of the State of Israel and of its inhabitants.

This has nothing to do with the imperfections that exist in the government, policies and citizenry of the state. It is just elementary that the existence of the state and its security and stability is the prime issue that faces the Jewish world today.

Why this is not understood and not even a matter of discussion is puzzling to me, to say the least. In the long run of history many of the current issues, personal faults and countless organizations will have proved themselves to be irrelevant to the Jewish future.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

Jacob was on his death-bed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died. But the text begins with a strange semi-repetition: “Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.” (Gen. 49:1-2) This seems to be saying the same thing twice, with one difference. In the first sentence, there is a reference to “what will happen to you in the days to come” (literally, “at the end of days”). This is missing from the second sentence. Rashi, following the Talmud,[1] says that “Jacob wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine presence was removed from him.” He tried to foresee the future but found he could not.

This is no minor detail. It is a fundamental feature of Jewish spirituality. We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We make the future by our choices. The script has not yet been written. The future is radically open.

This was a major difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. The Greeks believed in fate, moira, even blind fate, ananke. When the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would have a son who would kill him, he took every precaution to make sure it did not happen. When the child was born, Laius nailed

him by his feet to a rock and left him to die. A passing shepherd found and saved him, and he was eventually raised by the king and queen of Corinth. Because his feet were permanently misshapen, he came to be known as Oedipus (the “swollen-footed”).

The rest of the story is well known. Everything the oracle foresaw happened, and every act designed to avoid it actually helped bring it about. Once the oracle has been spoken and fate has been sealed, all attempts to avoid it are in vain. This cluster of ideas lies at the heart of one of the great Greek contributions to civilization: tragedy.

Astonishingly, given the many centuries of Jewish suffering, biblical Hebrew has no word for tragedy. The word *ason* means “a mishap, a disaster, a calamity” but not tragedy in the classic sense. A tragedy is a drama with a sad outcome involving a hero destined to experience downfall or destruction through a character-flaw or a conflict with an overpowering force, such as fate. Judaism has no word for this, because we do not believe in fate as something blind, inevitable and inexorable. We are free. We can choose. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily said: “We must be free: we have no choice!”

Rarely is this more powerfully asserted than in the *Unetaneh tokef* prayer we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even after we have said that “On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed ... who will live and who will die”, we still go on to say, “But teshuvah, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree.” There is no sentence against which we cannot appeal, no verdict we cannot mitigate by showing that we have repented and changed. There is a classic example of this in Tanakh.

“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people: This is what the Lord, God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.’” (2 Kings 20:1-5; Isaiah 38:1-5)

The prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah he would not recover, but he did. He lived for another fifteen years. God heard his prayer and granted him stay of

execution. From this the Talmud infers, “Even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, you should not desist from prayer.”[2] We pray for a good fate but we do not reconcile ourselves to fatalism.

Hence there is a fundamental difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. A prophet delivers not a prediction but a warning. He or she does not simply say, “This will happen”, but rather, “This will happen unless you change.” The prophet speaks to human freedom, not to the inevitability of fate.

I was once present at a gathering where Bernard Lewis, the great scholar of Islam, was asked to predict the outcome of a certain American foreign policy intervention. He gave a magnificent reply. “I am a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is passé.” This was a profoundly Jewish answer.

In the twenty-first century we know much at a macro and micro-level. We look up and see a universe of a hundred billion galaxies each of a hundred billion stars. We look down and see a human body containing a hundred trillion cells, each with a double copy of the human genome, 3.1 billion letters long, enough if transcribed to fill a library of 5,000 books. But there remains one thing we do not know and will never know: What tomorrow will bring. The past, said L. P. Hartley, is a foreign country. But the future is an undiscovered one. That is why predictions so often fail.

That is the essential difference between nature and human nature. The ancient Mesopotamians could make accurate predictions about the movement of planets, yet even today, despite brain-scans and neuroscience, we are still not able to predict what people will do. Often, they take us by surprise.

The reason is that we are free. We choose, we make mistakes, we learn, we change, we grow. The failure at school becomes the winner of a Nobel Prize. The leader who disappointed, suddenly shows courage and wisdom in a crisis. The driven businessman has an intimation of mortality and decides to devote the rest of his life to helping the poor. Some of the most successful people I ever met were written off by their teachers at school and told they would never amount to anything. We constantly defy predictions. This is something science has not yet explained and perhaps never will. Some believe freedom is an illusion. But it isn't. It's what makes us human.

We are free because we are not merely objects. We

are subjects. We respond not just to physical events but to the way we perceive those events. We have minds, not just brains. We have thoughts, not just sensations. We react but we can also choose not to react. There is something about us that is irreducible to material, physical causes and effects.

The way our ancestors spoke about this remains true and profound. We are free because God is free and He made us in His image. That is what is meant by the three words God told Moses at the burning bush when he asked God for His name. God replied, Ehyeh asher Ehyeh. This is often translated as "I am what I am," but what it really means is, "I will be who and how I choose to be." I am the God of freedom. I cannot be predicted. Note that God says this at the start of Moses' mission to lead a people from slavery to freedom. He wanted the Israelites to become living testimony to the power of freedom.

Do not believe that the future is written. It isn't. There is no fate we cannot change, no prediction we cannot defy. We are not predestined to fail; neither are we pre-ordained to succeed. We do not predict the future, because we make the future: by our choices, our willpower, our persistence and our determination to survive.

The proof is the Jewish people itself. The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is engraved on the Merneptah stele, inscribed around 1225 BCE by Pharaoh Merneptah IV, Ramses II's successor. It reads: "Israel is laid waste, her seed is no more." It was, in short, an obituary. The Jewish people have been written off many times by their enemies, but they remain, after almost four millennia, still young and strong.

That is why, when Jacob wanted to tell his children what would happen to them in the future, the Divine spirit was taken away from him. Our children continue to surprise us, as we continue to surprise others. Made in the image of God, we are free. Sustained by the blessings of God, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

[1] Rashi to Gen. 49:1; Pesachim 56a; Bereishit Rabbah 99:5.
[2] Berakhot 10a.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "And Israel said unto Joseph: I had not thought to see thy face" (48:11)

The word "Pillalty" means "To Think" (Rashi 48:11).

We can now appreciate the true significance of "L'hitpallel", which is usually understood as "To Pray".

"L'hitpallel is a reflexive verb which literally means: to cause oneself to Think. Thinking is the key factor in praying. Thinking about Hashem!

The first thing that the Rabbis want us to think about is to state the fact that I could not even praise Hashem if He did not give my lips the ability to do so. So we ask Hashem for this ability in order to proceed with the Amidah.

"Baruch Atah" means "To You our knees are bent." We bend our knees to Hashem because we owe Him everything. When you owe something to someone and you can't pay him, what do you do? You bend over to him. "Atah" - our knees are bent to You, Hashem. "All the Blessings & Kindnesses I receive are on my back weighing me down. I am Humbled in Gratitude to You alone and to no one else".

The next thing to Think about is that we have been given the privilege to address the King of the Universe as "You" ("Atah") throughout the Amidah, instead of "Your Majesty" (the third person which is a sign of respect). Think! You have been given the status of Children of the King ("Banim atem L'Hashem Elokechem"). And you are speaking to your Father who loves you and has unlimited power/kindliness to do everything you ask Him for.

In order to get maximum benefit from our Prayers try the following strategy. Before we reach the "Modim" (Gratitude) prayer, prepare your mind with a different Thought each day and thank Hashem with joy for what He is giving you. Such as: sight, ability to walk, parents, money, sanity ... When we bow in this prayer, Think and Thank Hashem.

The Tefillot were composed for the purpose of elevating our minds. Now we are Thinking and demonstrating to ourselves Emunah which is filling us with happiness and confidence and bitachon/trust. When we Think in this manner three times daily and we teach our families to practice this as well, then we will be connected to the Source of life, blessings and successful living in this world and forever.
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