

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYHI

DECEMBER 29, 2012

16 TEBET 5773

DEDICATIONS: To Moses and Mariyah – Thanks!

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## Editors Notes

YES, I know its very late and those in Europe, Israel and points East will not get the newsletter before Shabbat – I am sorry! But still give it a read when you open it after Shabbat!

This week's portion is certainly one of the most puzzling ones. I am sure as you read through Vayehi you too are left with many questions, from the title of the portion to the first Rashi and the puzzles continue. Here Jacob is about to die and he calls his sons in for their final blessing. Reuben comes first and bam – sounds more like a curse than a blessing, Then Shimon and Levi and bam bam, they are weapons of violence! What's going on? And the questions continue. Following the burial of Jacob, Joseph's brothers come to him and tell him that their father left him a message which it seems he didn't. The verses tell us that they are afraid that now that Jacob is dead, Joseph will "nurse" hatred against them.

Gentlemen, what happened to forgiveness? Didn't Reuben do penance for the past 40 years over his act of moving Jacob's bed by fasting and wearing sack cloth? Didn't Shimon go through enough while imprisoned in Egypt that his father would forgive him regarding Shechem? And didn't Joseph tell his brothers when he revealed himself that all that was done was part of G-d's plan and he bore them no grudge?

And it seems that the guilt of the brothers extends well beyond their own physical lives. A part of their souls enters the ten spies who search out the land, give a bad report and die. A part of their souls is atoned for by the ten martyrs - Aseret Harugei Malchut – the ten rabbis living during the era of the Mishnah who were martyred by the Romans.

Something is missing. What is it? I heard this morning based on an explanation of the Arizal that there was something lacking.

People can feel bad about what they have done. They can mourn. They can be ashamed and accept the embarrassment that comes with it. They can fast and they can wear sack cloth. But something remains missing in the entire story of Joseph and what's absent is the lesson.

I remember as a boy hearing the words again and again on Yom Kippur – Modeh VeOzev Yerucham – One who admits and leaves his sin is forgiven. In this case, we never see an admission of guilt and we never see an apology. Does Reuben come to his father and say he is sorry for moving the bed? Do the brothers come to Jacob and apologize for lying to him and letting him suffer for 22 years? Do they ever apologize to Joseph? Do Shimon and Levi apologize for putting Jacob and the family in danger after killing the people of Shechem? And even Joseph bears some guilt. Does he ever apologize for starting the whole mess with his tattle tales?

When we were little kids our parents taught us that when we mess up we say, "I am sorry". And they reminded us that we can't just say the words without meaning them. In this entire story we don't see anyone saying, "I am sorry".

People can feel bad or guilty for what they have done, but without approaching the one that was hurt, they have left out the most important step.

Replay the last four portions in your mind and just imagine if at some point someone said, "Hey, I messed up, I see how hurt you are. If I had a chance to do this again I would do it differently. I am truly sorry".

Jewish law teaches us: One who hurts his friend and caused physical and/or emotional damage and paid for that damage (medical fees, psychologist etc.) must still ask forgiveness from the one who was hurt. The one who was hurt may not be cruel and refrain from accepting the apology.

We conclude Bereshit this week and we move onto Shemot – to the book of Exodus. Genesis begins with Adam sinning and when confronted Adam looks for

excuse after excuse. Probably his greatest mess up is his inability to admit what he did and to say he was sorry.

I always thought that the Avot – the forefathers made up for what Adam did – they from Abraham to Joseph in Egypt were his tikun – his reparation. But still we end up in Egypt with more to fix. And why? Because at the end of Genesis we still have not learned to fess up and apologize.

Last night I was confronted with how I may have thought I was doing good, but a part of me was hurting others. I could have gone into denial and justified my actions, but instead I'm trying to let those words settle in. I must face my actions, admit my guilt and apologize. Just being on the road I feel better about it. I can see more clearly.

I am sure if we all replay our lives, we need to ask, "Would things be different if I just had the guts to admit I messed up and to say that I was sorry?"

Well, we still can!

Shabbat Shalom  
David Bibi

PS ... And yes, Halacha teaches us we can even apologize to one who has departed this world. So while we are around, it's never too late.

PSS. With John Kerry set to replace Hilary Clinton as Secretary of State, I found the following of interest ... It dates back to 2004 and Kerry's presidential run.

**Irish Catholic or Czech Jew?  
John Kerry's Jewish Roots  
From Lisa Katz, former About.com Guide**

Fooled you! And you, and you, and you.

Even the best friends of Senator John Forbes Kerry, a practicing Catholic from Massachusetts (the state which contains America's largest Irish Catholic population), thought of him as an American Irish Catholic through and through.

The discovery of Kerry's European Jewish roots has surprised many people, including the senator himself.

Benedikt Kohn (Great-Grandfather)

Benedikt Kohn, the great-grandfather of Senator John Kerry, was born about 1824 in southern Moravia. Benedikt was successful as a master brewer of beer.

In 1868, after the death of his first wife, he moved to Bennisch (today called Horni Benesov) and married Mathilde Frankel Kohn. Benedikt and Mathilde Kohn were two of the only 27 Jews living in Bennisch, which is listed as having a total population of 4,200, in 1880.

Soon after Benedikt died in 1876, Mathilde moved to Vienna with her children Ida (7), Friedrich "Fritz" (3) and Otto (newborn).

Fritz Kohn/Fred Kerry (Grandfather)

Fritz and Otto excelled in their studies in Vienna. However, like other Jews, they suffered greatly from the anti-Semitism that prevailed in Europe at this time. As a result, both Kohn brothers abandoned their Jewish heritage and converted to Roman Catholicism.

In addition, in 1897, Otto decided to shed the Jewish-sounding name of Kohn. He chose a new name by dropping a pencil on a map. The pencil landed on Ireland's County Kerry. In 1901, Fritz followed his brother's example and officially changed his name to Frederick Kerry.

Fred, who worked as an accountant at his uncle's shoe factory, married Ida Loewe, a Jewish musician from Budapest. Ida was a descendant of Sinai Loew, a brother of Rabbi Judah Loew, the famous Kabbalist, philosopher and Talmudist known as the "Maharal of Prague" who some say invented the character of the Golem. Two of Ida's siblings, Otto Loewe and Jenni Loewe, were killed in Nazi concentration camps.

Fred, Ida and their first son Erich were all baptized as Catholics. And in 1905, the young family immigrated to America. After entering through Ellis Island, the family first lived in Chicago and then settled in Boston. Fred and Ida had two more children in America, Mildred (1910) and Richard (1915).

Fred and Ida and their three children lived in Brookline, where Fred became a prominent man in the shoe business and regularly attended Sunday Catholic church services. Fred did not tell and no one would have guessed that the family had Jewish roots.

In 1921, Fred Kerry, at age 48, entered a Boston hotel and shot himself in the head. Some say the suicide was due to financial stress or depression. Perhaps the transition from Czech Jew to American Catholic was too great and unsupported a spiritual, psychological and social change.

Richard Kerry (Father) - Richard was six years old when his father committed suicide. It has been said that he dealt with the tragedy by ignoring it. Richard attended Phillips Academy, Yale University and Harvard Law School. After serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps, Kerry worked in the U.S. Department of State and later the Foreign Service.

He married Rosemary Forbes, the beneficiary of the Forbes family trusts. The Forbes family amassed a huge fortune in China trade.

Richard and Rosemary had four children: Margery (1941), John (1943), Diana (1947) and Cameron (1950). John, a Massachusetts Senator, is the 2004 Democratic Nominee for President. Cameron, who married a Jewish woman and converted to Judaism in 1983, is a prominent Boston lawyer.

John Forbes Kerry - In 1997 Secretary of State Madeleine Albright learned three of her four grandparents were Jewish. Then Wesley Clark announced that his father was Jewish. And now a researcher has discovered that John Kerry is really John Kohn.

So what if John Kerry has Jewish roots? If the discovery had been made in Europe in the 1940's, Kerry would have been sent to a Nazi concentration camp. If the discovery had been made in America in the 1950's, Kerry's political career would have been negatively affected. Today, however, the discovery of Kerry's Jewish roots seems inconsequential and unlikely to affect the 2004 presidential race.

The story of Kerry's Jewish past is of interest because it reflects the story of many European Jews who shed their Jewish heritage en route to America at the turn of the century. The story makes one wonder how many Americans today have Jewish roots of which they are unaware.

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: In the year 2255, Yakov was 147 years old and Yoseph was 56. Yakov had been living in Mitzrayim for 17 years. (Note that Yoseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery and that the numerical value of the word "Vayichi" is 34.) Yakov summoned Yoseph to his bed-side. Yoseph came with his 2 sons. Yakov greeted them and appointed Menashe and Ephrayim to the status of "Tribe". Yakov then insisted that Yoseph "swear" that he would bury him in Canaan, and not in the land of Mitzrayim.

2nd Aliya: The parsha relates the famous scene of Yakov crossing his arms in order to place his right hand on the head of Ephrayim (who was standing to Yakov's left) and his left hand on the head of Menashe. Yakov blessed his grandchildren with the renown blessing of Hamalach Hagoel. (48:16)

3rd Aliya: Yoseph attempted to straighten Yakov's hands. Yakov resisted and told Yoseph that, although Menashe was destined for greatness, Ephrayim would be even greater. The classic blessing of a father to his son is stated. (48:20)

4th & 5th Aliyot: Yakov summoned his twelve sons and blessed each one.

6th Aliya: Yakov instructed all of his sons to bury him in Canaan, next to his wife Leah, and then passed away. Mitzrayim mourned Yakov for 70 days. Yoseph arranged with Pharaoh to bury Yakov in Canaan. After sitting Shiva (50:10) and the burial, the 12 sons returned to Egypt. Following Yakov's death, the brothers expressed their concern to Yoseph that he would now take revenge against them for having sold him into slavery. Yoseph cried as he heard their concerns and assured them that he bore no grudges against them.

7th Aliya: Yoseph ruled over Egypt for another 54 years. He made his brothers promise that at the time of their exodus from Egypt his bones would be transported for re-burial in Canaan. Yoseph died in the year 2309 at the age of 110.

Haftorah: The Talmud in Bava Matzia 87a tells us that Yakov Avinu [our father] was the first person to "get weak" prior to dying. In fact, he asked Hashem for this "gift" so that he would have the time to put his affairs in order. This week's Haftorah is from Kings I Chap. 2 which relates Dovid Hamelech's final instructions to Shlomo prior to his death. Just as Yakov arranged his final affairs with his children, so too Dovid finalized his personal affairs with his son.

Dovid's unfinished business dealt with situations of personal loyalty and treachery. In order for the succession of the throne to be secure and peaceful, Dovid identifies two key individuals who had betrayed him during his 40 years as King - King David's General, Yoav ben Tzeruah, and Shlomo's own Rebi, the great scholar Shimi ben Gera. In addition, he set apart the family of Barzillai the Gileadite for special royal consideration and reward.

Dovid Hamelech was not interested in revenge. Dovid, the father of Mashiach, was not consumed with anger. Dovid, the sensitive poet and magnificent

singer, was interested in justice and the future well being of his nation. It was essential that he teach the young Shlomo the meaning of strong leadership and how to care for a problem, before it becomes a crisis.

Undoubtedly, it would have been easy for Dovid Hamelech to forgive those who had betrayed him, especially at the very end of his life; but that isn't the quality of leadership, which brings eventual redemption, and the building of the Bais Hamikdash. As the King, Dovid and Shlomo had to be devoted to Hashem's Torah, social justice, and the eternity of the nation

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Do kindness and truth with me" (Beresheet 47:29)

There are times we are called upon to do a kindness. Sometimes there is a possible benefit to gain by responding in a positive way and sometimes not. Ya'akob Abinu asked his son Yosef to do him a hesed of emet, a kindness without any benefit to the doer. However, sometimes we think we are doing a hesed of emet, but Hashem has His own plan that there will be a benefit. Sometimes this benefit can be huge.

Rabbi Baruch Brull tells an amazing true story. Chaim and Chavi Weinstein were not people of great means, but they managed. One day they got a call from their close friend Moshe. He needed a loan of \$20,000 to invest in a certain product for Pesah and stood to make a big profit. It just happened that the Weinstains had a wedding coming up. They were marrying off their daughter and they had just that amount saved for the wedding. They decided that if Moshe could pay it back before the wedding they would lend it to him. Moshe agreed. Now the money was money that Chavi was saving for a rainy day. For years every time they received a gift she put the money aside. The money was kept in a rarely used room in the basement, wrapped in newspapers and in a plastic bag. Chavi told Chaim to go down and get the money. Chaim went down but couldn't find the money. They both frantically searched the entire basement and turned up empty-handed. Suddenly Chavi remembered that she just got a new cleaning lady and she told her to clean out the laundry room in the basement. The cleaning girl had come up and proudly told her she "clean out" the entire basement. Both Chavi and Chaim guessed that the cleaning lady took the money. She seemed nice and came with good recommendations, but, who else could it be?

They drove to the other side of town to her apartment. Chaim began, "We know you cleaned the

basement today. We are looking for money that we know was there, but it is gone. Did you take it?" "No," she said. "I never saw any money and I have never taken anything from anyone," she answered softly, with a hurt expression on her face. "Well, we are missing a black plastic bag that contained a large sum of money and it is no longer in its proper place in the basement. What did you do with it?" Chaim asked. The cleaning girl gasped, "I cleaned out a room in the basement and found a black plastic bag with old newspapers in it, so I threw it away. If that's what you mean, it must be with the trash outside."

They felt bad to have accused her and apologized and started racing home, to see if the garbage men had already come to collect their trash that day. Driving as quickly as he could, Chaim reached their home in time to see their garbage cans still full of trash. Never in their lives did they think that they would be so happy that the garbage men always came late. They opened bag after bag until they found their treasured black bag totally intact and containing all the money. They could hardly believe their good luck.

Exhausted but elated, Chaim looked at his wife and remarked, "Do you understand what just happened? Had we not agreed to lend Moshe the \$20,000, we never would have looked for it today and by tomorrow we would never have found it. Because we wanted to do this hesed, Hashem immediately repaid us in cash, in full!" Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"The grave which I have purchased..." (Beresheet 55:5)

Ya'akob Abinu, giving his last request to be buried in Israel, says to bury him in the grave which he has purchased. The word ???????? is understood by the Midrash to mean "pile", that Ya'akob made a pile out of the money he had, and with this pile, he bought the burial place from Esav. This is the same Ya'akob who went back over the river to retrieve small jars that he had left, thereby having to meet up with Esav's angel.

This is no contradiction. To waste money by leaving jars, that Ya'akob would not do. To spend money for something important, like the proper burial place, that Ya'akob would do, even if it meant making a huge pile of money to buy this grave. It's only a question of priorities!

When we hear that a mezuzah or tefillin or a sefer Torah costs a certain amount of money, we are amazed and say, "Wow, so much!" When we hear of mundane things that people spend an inordinate amount of money on, we shrug our shoulders and think nothing of it. Ya'akob is teaching us to

reassess our priorities. Let's not waste our money, but rather spend it on what's really important!  
Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel  
Choueka

## JUST ENOUGH

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"  
"Love your neighbor as yourself."

The teachings of our Sages have infiltrated many cultures other than our own, to the extent that most people can quote well-known Torah sayings without realizing that the source is our Holy Book.

One aphorism that always rings true regards the perception of personal wealth. "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion" (Abot 4:1). The simplicity of the statement belies the difficulty of achieving this state of bliss. Most denizens of this material world get caught up in the unsatisfying pursuit of physical pleasure. This senseless race with no finish line only yields dissatisfaction. It is like chasing the horizon. One perceives the horizon as being a mile away, and starts running towards it. Minutes later, the mile has been run, but the horizon still stands exactly one mile away. It is a moving finish line that can never be reached.

In the world of business, it is always the "next deal" that will bring happiness. Yet as soon as that transaction is concluded, it's on to the next one, then the next. "He who loves money will never be satisfied with his money." That is another, not-as-well-known piece of Rabbinical wisdom.

In life, you will be faced with situations which require decision making. What you might like to do at a particular time may conflict with what you must do to earn more money. When you stand at that crossroads, consider which of the two paths before you will yield more happiness. If you start to collect happy moments rather than dollars, you will find out years later how truly rich you have become. (One Moment With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
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The Fall of the Hashmonaim  
We read in Parashat Vayehi of Yaakov's blessings to his sons just before his passing. In his blessing to Yehuda, he declares, "Yo Lasur Shebet Mi'Yehuda" – "The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda." The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides, Spain, 1194-1270) explains this verse as establishing that the monarchy should remain exclusively in the tribe of Yehuda; members of other tribes should not assume

the role of king of Israel, as this role is destined to be served by the tribe of Yehuda.

The Ramban adds that this is the reason why the legendary family of the Hashmonaim, the leaders of the revolt against the Greeks, disappeared. The Hashmonaim were righteous people who courageously resisted the religious persecution of the Greeks and, with pure faith in God, waged an unlikely war and earned God's miraculous salvation. Yet, just several generations later, there was not a single survivor left from that family. In fact, the Talmud remarks that if anyone claims Hasmonian ancestry, he is not to be believed, because the family was entirely destroyed. The reason for this fate, the Ramban suggests, is because after ousting the Greeks, the Hashmonaim – a family of Kohanim, who descended from the tribe of Levi – served as kings. During the period of Hasmonian rule, the Kohen Gadol was also the Jewish monarch. The Hashmonaim thus violated Yaakov's proclamation of "Lo Yasur Shebet Mi'Yehuda," that the position of kingship should forever remain within the tribe of Yehuda, and for this they were punished.

Two important lessons emerge from the Ramban's comments. Firstly, we see the importance of recognizing and accepting the notion of different roles assigned to different groups. When we look over Yaakov's blessings to his sons, we see that he assigns different roles to different tribes – Yehuda was destined for royalty, Yissachar produced scholars, Zevulun were the businessmen, and so on. Jewish life can be compared to an orchestra, which consists of musicians playing very different instruments, that blend together to create a beautiful sound. If one musician tries to do somebody else's job, the result is cacophony. The different instruments blend together in a perfect, harmonious melody only if each musician knows his role and does it well. Another example might be a football team. If everybody on the team wants to be the quarterback or running back, obviously the team won't be able to play the game. The same is true of the Jewish people. We must each recognize the role we need to play, and not to try to do somebody else's job. In fact, Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky (1891-1986) writes that this is precisely the reason why Yaakov delivered all these blessings publicly, in front of all the sons, rather than give each blessing to each son privately. It was important not only for each son to hear his assigned role, but also for all the sons to hear the roles assigned to the others, to ensure that nobody would encroach upon another tribe's domain. In order for the nation to function properly and fulfill its role, we must all identify our individual roles and fulfill them to the best of our ability, without trying to usurp the roles

of others. The Hashmonaim were eliminated because they encroached upon the territory of Yehuda, extending beyond their role as Kohanim and usurping the kingship.

Secondly, the downfall of the Hashmonaim teaches us that "the ends do not justify the means." The Hashmonaim assumed the monarchy not for selfish reasons, but in order to help the country. They felt that in order to rebuild Torah after the period of Greek persecution, it was important that specifically they, the spiritual leaders, should serve as kings and provide the leadership that was needed. And this was their mistake. We do not violate the Torah in order to achieve an important goal. If somebody earns lots of money by deceiving people and then uses that money to build a large yeshiva, the yeshiva must be closed down; it has no validity. Judaism teaches us to pursue noble goals through noble means; lofty intent does not justify illicit behavior. We learn from the mistake of the Hashmonaim to ensure the purity and legitimacy of both the ends and the means, that we endeavor to pursue ambitious spiritual goals only with the appropriate spiritual means.

### **Rabbi Wein**

The holy book of Bereshith comes to its conclusion in this week's parsha. The story of the creation of the Jewish people through the development of one family over a number of generations and by the perseverance of the great personalities of our patriarchs and matriarchs is now complete.

This raises the question originally posed in Rashi's commentary to the very beginning of the book of Bereshith – why does the Torah, which appears to be basically a book of laws and commandments, bother with all of this detailed description of creation and continued familial based narrative? Why is this seemingly anecdotal knowledge of the lives of our ancestors so necessary to be included in the eternal Torah and how does it register in the survival of the Jewish people throughout the ages?

In response to this question of relevance, the rabbis taught us that the events that occurred to our ancestors are indeed the harbingers of happenings that will occur to their descendants. But many times it is difficult for later generations to make this connection, except in the most general way of experiencing historic repetitions of circumstances.

This book of Bereshith, which comprises a substantial part of the entire written Torah, contains within it almost no commandments and is basically a book of narrative tracing the development of one

family – eventually seventy in number – and of the difficulties that this family encountered over generations. So what therefore is its main message to us living in a far different world, millennia later?

I think that the message of Bereshith is the obvious one of family and its importance. The Torah purposely and in minute detail describes for us how difficult it truly is to create and maintain a cohesive family structure. Every one of the generations described in Bereshith from Kayin and Hevel till Yosef and his brothers is engaged in the difficult and often heartbreaking task of family building.

There are no smooth and trouble free familial relationships described in the book of Bereshith. Sibling rivalry, violence, different traits of personality, and marital and domestic strife are the stuff of the biblical narrative of this book. The Torah does not sanitize any of its stories nor does it avoid confronting the foibles and errors of human beings.

The greatest of our people, our patriarchs and matriarchs, encountered severe difficulties in attempting to create cohesive, moral and cooperative families. Yet they persevered in the attempt because without this strong sense of family there can be no basis for eternal Jewish survival. There is tragic fall out in each of the families described in Bereshith and yet somehow the thread of family continuity is maintained and strengthened until the family grows into a numerous and influential nation.

This perseverance of family building, in spite of all of the disappointments inherent in that task, is the reason for the book of Bereshith. It is the template of the behavior of our ancestors that now remains as the guideposts for their descendants. The task of family building remains the only sure method of ensuring Jewish survival

### **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky - Parsha Parables Who's on First**

Parshas Vayechi begins as Yosef hears the news of his father's illness, and knowing that Yaakov's end is near, he rushes to see him with his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim. Yosef asks his father to bless his children before he dies. But, Yaakov sees the boys and is hesitant. "Who are these?" he asks. Yosef explains that they are his children, and, according to Rashi he shows his father a kesubah, a marriage contract, legitimizing them. But there is a bit more to the story. Rashi explains that Yaakov in his prophetic vision saw trouble down the road. He saw that a descendant of Ephraim, Yeravam ben Nevat, a man who would cause ten

tribes to serve an idol that he erected as a substitute for the Bais HaMikdash.

But somehow he is convinced to bless the children, and that too is a curious episode. The Torah tells us that Yaakov placed his right hand on Ephraim, the younger son's head, and it displeased Yosef. Yosef attempts to remove his father's hand from Ephraim's head [to place it] on Manasseh's head. But his father, rebuffs him, saying that he knows exactly what he is doing.

And then he blesses the children and again Yaakov switches the chronological order. "And he blessed them on that day, saying, "With you, Israel will bless, saying, 'May Hashem make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh,' "and he placed Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:20)

I am bothered by the entire scenario. Why did he not want to bless them and how would the blessing rectify his vision of the impending reign of the evil progeny, Yeravam ben Nevat? Also, why does the Torah say, ". . . and he placed Ephraim before Manasseh"? Can't we read the quote? The name Ephraim is before the name Menashe!

The Story: One morning my zaide, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt"l, was about to enter Mesivta Torah Vodaath, when a teenager sprinted forward to open the door for him. The boy was holding his own Tefillin while also holding the door open for him to enter. Rav Yaakov stopped at the door. "You are holding Tefillin, you must go first. Anyone who is carrying a sacred item has precedence." The boy was taken aback. "I can't enter before the Rosh Yeshiva! That would be disrespectful!" My zaide insisted. "But you are holding Tefillin! You go first." The boy stood frozen. "Rebbe, I am not moving!" Then my zaide smiled, "Let me help you," he said. He took the boy's Tefillin and walked into the building with them. The boy followed behind, and as soon as my zaide was inside, he turned around and gave the boy his Tefillin.

The Message: Our sages teach us that Yeravam ben Nevat, refused to let the Jewish nation visit the Temple because had they gone, they would have seen the King of Judah, the progeny of King David receive preferential treatment there. Davidic descendants were the only ones allowed to sit in the Azarah, the Temple Court. Yeravam hated to play second fiddle. In fact, in one of the more famous Midrashic scenarios in which the Almighty entreats Yeravam to repent G-d says, "Repent and I and you and the son of Yishai shall walk together in the Garden of Eden" Yeravam, snaps back, "Who goes first? Me or him?"

(Indeed, with that question, Hashem changed the previously said order and responds, "King David the

Son of Yishai will go first!) Yeravam thus refuses to repent.

Perhaps Yaakov Avinu foresaw the terrible doom caused by Yeravam who stood on protocol and destroyed a nation because he would feel disrespected. By putting the younger Ephraim in front of the older Manasseh and incorporating in " Klal Yisroel's blessing" Yaakov was teaching that the greatest blessing is not to stand on protocol.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks  
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations  
of the Commonwealth**

**Generations Forget and Remember**

The drama of younger and older brothers, which haunts the book of Bereishit from Cain and Abel onwards, reaches a strange climax in the story of Joseph's children. Jacob/Israel is nearing the end of his life. Joseph visits him, bringing with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. It is the only scene of grandfather and grandchildren in the book. Jacob asks Joseph to bring them near so that he can bless them. What follows next is described in painstaking detail:

Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand towards Israel's right, and brought them near him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. . . . When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." He blessed them that day, saying: "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. (48: 13-14, 17-20).

It is not difficult to understand the care Joseph took to ensure that Jacob would bless the firstborn first. Three times his father had set the younger before the elder, and each time it had resulted in tragedy. He, the younger, had sought to supplant his elder brother Esau. He favoured the younger sister Rachel over Leah. And he favoured the youngest of his children,

Joseph and Benjamin, over the elder Reuben, Shimon and Levi. The consequences were catastrophic: estrangement from Esau, tension between the two sisters, and hostility among his sons. Joseph himself bore the scars: thrown into a well by his brothers, who initially planned to kill him and eventually sold him into Egypt as a slave. Had his father not learned? Or did he think that Ephraim – whom Joseph held in his right hand – was the elder? Did Jacob know what he was doing? Did he not realise that he was risking extending the family feuds into the next generation? Besides which, what possible reason could he have for favouring the younger of his grandchildren over the elder? He had not seen them before. He knew nothing about them. None of the factors that led to the earlier episodes were operative here. Why did Jacob favour Ephraim over Manasseh?

Jacob knew two things, and it is here that the explanation lies. He knew that the stay of his family in Egypt would not be a short one. Before leaving Canaan to see Joseph, G-d had appeared to him in a vision:

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes. (46: 3-4)

This was, in other words, the start of the long exile which G-d had told Abraham would be the fate of his children (a vision the Torah describes as accompanied by "a deep and dreadful darkness" – 15: 12). The other thing Jacob knew was his grandsons' names, Manasseh and Ephraim. The combination of these two facts was enough.

When Joseph finally emerged from prison to become prime minister of Egypt, he married and had two sons. This is how the Torah describes their birth:

Before the years of the famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh, saying, "It is because G-d has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim, saying, "It is because G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (41: 50-52)

With the utmost brevity the Torah intimates an experience of exile that was to be repeated many times across the centuries. At first, Joseph felt relief. The years as a slave, then a prisoner, were over. He

had risen to greatness. In Canaan, he had been the youngest of eleven brothers in a nomadic family of shepherds. Now, in Egypt, he was at the centre of the greatest civilization of the ancient world, second only to Pharaoh in rank and power. No one reminded him of his background. With his royal robes and ring and chariot, he was an Egyptian prince (as Moses was later to be). The past was a bitter memory he sought to remove from his mind. Manasseh means "forgetting."

But as time passed, Joseph began to feel quite different emotions. Yes, he had arrived. But this people was not his; nor was its culture. To be sure, his family was, in any worldly terms, undistinguished, unsophisticated. Yet they remained his family. They were the matrix of who he was. Though they were no more than shepherds (a class the Egyptians despised), they had been spoken to by G-d – not the gods of the sun, the river and death, the Egyptian pantheon – but G-d, the creator of heaven and earth, who did not make His home in temples and pyramids and panoplies of power, but who spoke in the human heart as a voice, lifting a simple family to moral greatness. By the time his second son was born, Joseph had undergone a profound change of heart. To be sure, he had all the trappings of earthly success – "G-d has made me fruitful" – but Egypt had become "the land of my affliction." Why? Because it was exile. There is a sociological observation about immigrant groups, known as Hansen's Law: "The second generation seeks to remember what the first generation sought to forget." Joseph went through this transformation very quickly. It was already complete by the time his second son was born. By calling him Ephraim, he was remembering what, when Manasseh was born, he was trying to forget: who he was, where he came from, where he belonged.

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim over Manasseh had nothing to do with their ages and everything to do with their names. Knowing that these were the first two children of his family to be born in exile, knowing too that the exile would be prolonged and at times difficult and dark, Jacob sought to signal to all future generations that there would be a constant tension between the desire to forget (to assimilate, acculturate, anaesthetise the hope of a return) and the promptings of memory (the knowledge that this is "exile," that we are part of another story, that ultimate home is somewhere else). The child of forgetting (Manasseh) may have blessings. But greater are the blessings of a child (Ephraim) who remembers the past and future of which he is a part.