



RABBI JOSH GRAJOWER

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At the very end of his life, Yaakov sits down with each of his sons and gives each one a unique bracha. After blessing each of his twelve sons the Torah says:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּבָרְכָתוֹ בִּרְךָ אֹתָם

"And he blessed them, each man according to his blessing he blessed them." (49:28)

Rashi points out that grammatically the pasuk should have ended with the word אוֹתוֹ ("him") not אוֹתָם ("them"). Quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, Rashi answers that God included each of the tribes in all the blessings.

What does this mean? Were they unique blessings for each of the children or were they shared blessings for all of them? I believe the midrash here is trying to teach us a very important lesson regarding how one should view his personal abilities and traits. Yaakov highlighted for each of his sons their personal strengths of character. However, after highlighting each one's personal gifts and talents, Yaakov contextualized them within the framework of the community. One's strengths must be used not (just) for personal growth, but for the betterment of the Jewish people and the entire world. Yaakov was leaving his sons with a mission. Each of you have strengths – now unite and combine your strengths for the greater good. Therefore, the pasuk states that he blessed "them," meaning to say, use your blessings for "them" not just for yourself.

As Jews in the "selfie" society, we must turn the camera around and use our personal skills, talents and resources to contribute to the world. We must not view these as personal brachot, rather as brachot that are meant for "them," meant to service the community.

WE WILL PREVAIL

JORDAN LANDES ('18)

SEFER BEREISHIT CONCLUDES ON A POSITIVE NOTE with this parsha. The family of Yaakov unites and lives peacefully in Egypt. The last 17 years of Yaakov's life are his most tranquil. He studies Torah with his family and Hashem does not allow him to envision the upcoming years of pain and anguish for the Jewish people. Everyone knows of the prophecy given to Avraham predicting the enslavement of his descendants, but this vision does not seem to bother Yaakov's family or affect their daily lives.

Rabbi Berel Wein gives a great explanation as to why this prophecy did not bother Yaakov or his descendants while they resided in Goshen. The nature of human beings is to postpone or prevent thoughts of concerning signs and bitter forecasts. This is why the early and immediate troubles of Sefer Shmot do not appear in this parsha. But why was the Torah not as straightforward with discussing the enslavement early on in the Egyptian section of the story of בני ישראל? And why did God not speed up the enslavement process? What was the purpose of the 130-year delay?

There is a pattern throughout Jewish history that times of trouble always follow times of peace. The 130 peaceful years in Egypt allowed the Jews to survive the eighty years of persecution and slavery. Spanish Jews enjoyed many positive years before being forced into apostasy. Eighteenth and nineteenth century anti-Semitism laid the foundations for the Holocaust, but at the same time, Western and Central European Jews benefitted from civil rights and economic success.

Rabbi Wein explains that nothing lasts forever, but the history of the Jewish people provides us with the knowledge that God's plan will be accomplished, and the periods of peace allotted to us are crucial for our survival and development as a nation. Whether in times of peace or conflict, we should always attempt to make the best of our situation in the present and in the future.

KEEP ON STRIVING

YITZY LANNER ('19)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT VAYECHI, YAAKOV Avinu gives his two grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, arguably one of the most famous brachot that we know of. Yaakov gives his two grandchildren the bracha of:

יִשְׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וּכְמִנַּשֶּׁה

"May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe" (48:20)

Why is this the bracha that so many have the custom to recite every Friday night? Why not recite a bracha that our children should be like the Avot or Moshe Rabbeinu? Why do we specifically bless our children that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe?

A possible answer given to this question is that Ephraim and Menashe were the first relatives to not have a life-long feud between each other. Avraham had a feud with his father, Terach, Yitzchak was brothers with Yishmael, Yaakov was being pursued by his brother Esav and his uncle was Lavan. Lastly, Yosef's brothers tried to get rid of him forever by throwing him into a pit and then selling him. Then, we have Ephraim and Menashe, who got along perfectly, with no intentions to kill each other. Another answer proposed is that Ephraim and Menashe were just born and known as the sons of Yosef. That's it. They weren't looked upon as anyone special. However, later on in their life, they were able to take their tribes and greatly contribute to the Jewish nation.

There are very important lessons that we can learn from these two special brothers. First of all, they teach the very obvious, yet important lesson, which is to avoid fighting with our relatives. Moreover, they teach us to make the best of our situation. These brothers were born into a wonderful family with their father being Yosef Hatzadik and Yaakov Avinu as their grandfather. They were able to take their two new tribes, use their new situation, and make the best out of it. This teaches us to always strive to do the best that we can in the situations that we are given.

BUILDING A FAMILY

REBECCA ROSEN ('18)

THE BOOK OF BEREISHIT COMES TO ITS CONCLUSION in this week's parsha, Parshat Vayechi. The story of the creation of the Jewish people through the development of one family over many generations, as well as by the perseverance of our forefathers and foremothers, is now complete. This raises a question that Rashi originally posed in the very beginning of Bereishit: Why does the Torah, which appears to be a book of commandments and laws, bother with so much detailed description of creation and continued familial-based narrative? Why is the knowledge of our ancestors so necessary to be included in the Torah and how does it impact the Jewish people's survival throughout the ages?

The Rabbis taught us that the events that occurred to our ancestors are indeed the forerunners of events that will occur during the time of their descendants. However, it is often difficult for later generations to make this connection, except in the most general way of experiencing repetitions of history. The book of Bereishit, which comprises a substantial part of the entire written Torah, contains almost no commandments, and is seemingly just a book of narrative that traces the development of one family – which eventually becomes seventy – and the difficulties that this family experiences over the course of generations.

Rabbi Berel Wein offers the following lesson of family and its importance to be learned from the book of Bereishit. The Torah purposely describes the details of how difficult it truly is to create and maintain a cohesive family structure. Every one of the generations described in Bereishit from Kayin and Hevel to Yosef and his brothers is engaged in the difficult and often heartbreaking task of family building. The book of Bereishit confronts the errors of human beings in sibling rivalry, violence, different personality traits, and marital and domestic conflict. Although the greatest of our people, our forefathers and foremothers, encountered great difficulties and tragedy in attempting to create cohesive families, they persevered in the attempt because without this strong

sense of family, there can be no basis for eternal Jewish survival. The perseverance of family building, despite all of the disappointments that come with the task, is the reason for the book of Bereishit. The behavior of our ancestors remains as a guide for their descendants, because the task of family building is the only sure method of ensuring Jewish survival.

THE POWER OF UNITY

AYALA BROIDE ('17)

BEFORE YAAKOV'S DEATH, THE TORAH TELLS US, "And Yaakov called to his sons and he said, 'Gather together and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days' " (Bereishit 49:1). The "end of days" refers to when the Jewish people will be redeemed from the final exile, but what did Yaakov mean when he told his sons to gather together?

By telling his sons to gather together, Yaakov meant that they should have *achdut*, a sense of unity amongst themselves. Only when there is unity can there be redemption, so without unity, redemption is not possible.

This explanation allows us to understand what Yosef's brothers meant later on when they told Yosef that before Yaakov's death, Yaakov had requested that Yosef forgive them. Nowhere in the Torah is it recorded that Yaakov asked Yosef to forgive his brothers. However, the Shlah explains that Yaakov's request is found within the phrase, "gather together." Yaakov asked all of the brothers, including Yosef, to achieve unity and the deep love and brotherhood that comes from unity. Where there is love, there is forgiveness.

This message for the brothers applies to all of Yaakov's descendants. We are in a school, in a community, and in a world with various different types of people who are unique in many ways. However, if all of Yaakov's descendants realize the importance of *achdut*, their unity will create a love that transcends the specific complaints and prejudices of one person against another.

KRIAH CONUNDRUMS

1. *Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim for 17 years. Where else in the book of Genesis is 17 years referred to?*

2. *What similar ailment occurs to both Yitzhak and to Yaakov?*

3. *Which two pairs of brothers are mentioned in the same pasuk?*

4. *Where in this parsha does one person place his hand upon the head of another? Where else in the Torah does it say explicitly that one person places his hand on another? (2 answers)*

5. *In what context are fish mentioned in this parsha?*

6. *Where in this parsha is the same person mentioned twice in a verse, but referred to by different names?*

7. *Which beverages are referred to in Yaakov's blessings to his sons? (3 answers)*

8. *What location appears in this parsha and is not mentioned anywhere else in Tanach?*



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Answers: (1) Parshas Vayeshev begins when Yosef is 17 years old (Bereishit 37:2). (2) Both

Yitzhak and Yaakov had trouble with their eyesight during old age (Bereishit 27:1, 48:10). (3) Ephraim and Menashe, and Reuben and Shimon, are all mentioned in the same verse (Bereishit 48:1). (4) Yaakov places his hands on the heads of Ephraim and Menashe when giving them a blessing (Bereishit 48:14). In Vayikra 24:14, witnesses who heard someone curse Hashem place their hand on his head before executing him. In Bamidbar 27:23, Moshe rests his hands on Yehoshua to transfer the leadership. (5) In the blessing to Ephraim and Menashe, the verse states "And they should multiply like fish in the midst of the land" (Bereishit 48:16). (6) In the same verse, Yaakov is referred to both by the name Yaakov and by the name Yisrael (Bereishit 49:2). (7) Water is referred to in the blessing of Reuben (Bereishit 49:4). Milk and wine are referred to in the blessing of Yehudah (Bereishit 49:12). (8) The eulogy for Yaakov took place in Goren Ha'atad (Bereishit 50:10-11). This place does not appear anywhere else in Tanach.