

THE END OF DAYS

by Shlomo Katz

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Volume XII, Number 12
12 Teves 5758
January 10, 1998**

Sponsored by:

**The Verschleisser family
on the shloshim of mother,
Sarah Rosa bat Moshe Leib a"h**

Vayechi

Just before Yaakov's death, he gathered his sons and told them (49:1), "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days." Then, after they had gathered around him, he did not discuss the End of Days at all. Chazal explain that just as Yaakov was about to reveal when the redemption would take place, the Divine Inspiration left him. At that moment, Hashem said to Yaakov (in the words of Mishlei 11:13), "He who reveals a secret is a talebearer, but the faithful of spirit conceals a matter."

What was G-d teaching Yaakov at that moment? R' Chaim Moshe Reuven Elazary z"l (20th century; Canton, Ohio and Israel) explains as follows:

Both Ralbag and the Vilna Gaon interpret the quoted verse in Mishlei to mean that a teacher must

teach his students on their own level. If one speaks to students above their level, i.e., if he reveals that which should be kept secret, he is harming them, just as one who bears tales hurts others.

In a similar vein, writes R' Elazary, Pirkei Avot (1:11) teaches, "Wise men! Be careful with your words, lest the students who follow you will drink and die." Rather, one must teach lessons that are on the students' level.

For whatever reason, Yaakov's sons were not fit to know when the redemption would be. Thus, if Yaakov would reveal the secret, he would be harming them. (Netivei Chaim p.429)

An Astonishing Midrash

The students asked the Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi (known simply as "Rebbi"), "Why was Yosef buried in Shechem?"

Rebbi responded, "Since he was kidnaped from Shechem, they returned him to Shechem."

The students refused to accept this answer until Rebbi showed them the verse [in this week's parashah] in which Yosef said, "You must bring my bones up with you."

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l explains: The halachah is that a thief must return the object which he stole. If the object no longer exists or no longer exists in its original form, the thief cannot return it and he cannot achieve full atonement. This was the objection raised by Rebbi's students: Since Yosef was taken from Shechem as a living person and was returned as a corpse, how can that be considered to be a true return?

The answer is as follows: The halachah also provides that even if the stolen object is changed, so long as it has the same name in its original and present forms, the thief can return it for full atonement. Thus Rebbi answered, "Even in Yosef's lifetime he referred to himself (in the quoted verse) as 'bones.' Therefore, when his body was returned to Shechem, it is as if the stolen object was returned."

(Midrash Yehonatan)

"Then Yisrael prostrated himself towards the head of the bed." (47:31)

Rashi explains that Yaakov bowed to show his gratitude to G-d that Yosef had remained a tzaddik despite being a king and despite growing up in captivity among gentiles.

R' Shlomo Ganzfried z"l (died 1886; author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch) asks: Why does Rashi mention the two events in Yosef's life out of order? In fact, first he grew up in captivity, and only afterwards he became [deputy] king!

R' Ganzfried explains that sometimes Hashem tests a person with poverty and sometimes He tests a person with wealth. Which is a greater test? Wealth is, because a poor person will by nature be humble, and therefore he is less likely to rebel against G-d.

Yosef was tested with both wealth and poverty. Because wealth is the greater test, Rashi mentions it first.

(Apiryon)

"Yaakov was told, 'Behold - your son Yosef has come to you'." (48:2)

This verse implies that it was unusual for Yosef to visit Yaakov. Why was this the case? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (19th century) explains that Yosef's stature as deputy king of Egypt might have required Yaakov to stand when Yosef entered the room. Yosef did not want Yaakov to stand for him, so he did not visit Yaakov. (Yaakov could, of course, visit Yosef.)

Only now, when Yaakov lay on his deathbed, could Yosef be sure that Yaakov would not stand for him, and therefore he visited Yaakov.

(Imrei Shefer)

"He maneuvered his hands, for Menashe was the firstborn." (48:14)

This verse implies that the fact that Menashe was the firstborn was the reason that Yaakov crossed his hands and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head. In reality, however, the fact that Menashe was the firstborn was a reason why Yaakov should not have crossed his hands, observes R' Yisrael Isserlin z"l (died 1460; author of Terumat Ha'deshen). He offers two answers:

First, R' Yisrael writes in the name of his grandfather, "The chassid, R' Chaim, who was nicknamed Henschel of Heinbrucke, the son of our teacher, R' Yisrael of Krems who wrote glosses on the Rosh": The verse means, "Yaakov maneuvered his hands rather than embarrass Menashe by asking him to change places with Ephraim, for Menashe was the firstborn." [R' Yisrael's reference to his great-grandfather is of historical interest because it is the source for our ascribing authorship of those important glosses to R' Yisrael of Krems. (Shem Hagedolim)]

Alternatively, we are taught that everything that happened to Yaakov had a parallel in Yosef's life. Yaakov decided to bless Yosef's son, Ephraim, as the first born just as Yaakov himself received the blessings of the firstborn. In this light, the verse can be understood literally: "He maneuvered his hands, for Menashe was the firstborn," and he did not wish to bless the firstborn.

(Beurei Mahary)

"May they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land." (48:16)

The midrash says: "Fish, even though they live in the water, surface when it rains to catch the raindrops in their mouths. So, too, the Jews, even though they live in the water - i.e, the Torah which is likened to water - when they hear a new Torah thought, they drink it thirstily as if they had never heard words of Torah before."

R' Aharon Kotler z"l (died 1962) explains: The midrash does not only mean that Jews love the Torah. Just as fish recognize that water is the essence of their existence, so Jews recognize that Torah is the essence of their existence.

This idea has halachic implications. The gemara states that when one commits involuntary manslaughter and is exiled to a city of refuge, his Torah teacher is exiled with him. Why? Rambam explains that for a true student of Torah, the lack of a teacher is a fate worse than death. Since the Torah did not condemn an involuntary manslaughterer to death, he must be given his teacher.

(Mishnat Rabbi Aharon, Vol. I, p.30)

R' Avraham ben David Halevi z"l
born 1110 - died 1180

R' Avraham, the first of three sages known by the acronym "Ra'avad," was a grandson of R' Yitzchak Albaliah (the subject of last week's biography). Ra'avad I, as he is known, was a student of his uncle, R' Baruch Albaliah. (The famous Ra'avad who wrote glosses on Rambam's Mishneh Torah was Ra'avad III.)

Ra'avad I is best remembered for his historical work Sefer Hakabbalah - "The Book of the Transmission" - which he completed in 4921 (1161 C.E.). His division of Jewish history into periods of Zugot, Tannaim, Amoraim, Rabbanan Savorai, Geonim, and Rabbanim became the norm for later works of Jewish history. [Zugot were the first sages of the Mishnah, those named in the first chapter of Pirkei Avot, ending with Hillel and Shammai; Tannaim were the later sages of the Mishnah; Amoraim were the sages of the Gemara; Rabbanan Savorai were the sages after the Gemara (corresponding approximately to the 6th century C.E.) who edited that work; Geonim were the heads of the Babylonian yeshivot (until 1038); and Rabbanim were the sages after that time - today we call them Rishonim - when the Torah centers of Bavel declined and Jewish learning moved to Spain, North Africa, and France.]

The purpose of Sefer Hakabbalah was to refute Karaitic beliefs by delineating the unbroken chain of tradition from Moshe Rabbenu until the rabbinic authorities of Ra'avad's own day, thereby proving the authenticity of the Oral Law. Ra'avad also wrote a polemic against the Karaites, which has been lost. [The Karaites were a sect of Jewish descent that denied the validity of the Oral Law.]

Ra'avad also wrote a philosophical treatise entitled Emunah Rabbah on the topics of free will, prophecy and Divine omnipotence. He died a martyr, hanged by the king of Toledo for refusing to leave the Jewish faith. (Source: The Artscroll Rishonim pp.77; Sefer Zemach David; Shem Hagedolim)

Copyright © 1998 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
