

BENEATH THE SURFACE

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We read at the end of our Parashah that Yosef's brothers sent him a message (50:16-17): "Your father gave orders before his death, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Yosef, "Please, kindly forgive your brothers' spiteful deed and their sin, for they have done you evil." So now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants of your father's Elokim'." Rashi z"l notes: "They altered the facts for the sake of peace, for Yaakov had not given such a command, as Yosef was not suspect in his eyes." Midrash Rabbah explains why the brothers were worried. One opinion says that as long as Yaakov was alive, Yosef invited his brothers to dine with him, but afterwards he did not. Yosef's reason was that, as long as Yaakov was alive, Yaakov ordered him to sit at the head of the table, but after Yaakov died, Yosef was uncomfortable sitting at the head of the table in front of his older brothers. But, the brothers didn't know Yosef's reasoning. A second opinion says that the brothers saw that Yosef stopped on the way home from Yaakov's funeral to see the pit they had thrown him into. Yosef's intention was to thank Hashem for the miracles he had experienced, but his brothers misunderstood. [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yosef Yoizel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) writes that this incident illustrates a profound lesson about man's Bechirah / Free Will. Generally speaking, Bechirah does not involve making choices between what is obviously good/right and obviously bad/wrong. Rather, Bechirah involves making very subtle choices. And, these subtle choices are influenced by a person's prejudices, which can prevent him from seeing that there is a choice before him.

Even great people have prejudices or preconceived notions, the Alter writes. For instance, Yosef's brothers held a certain perception of him deep in their subconscious; therefore, they misinterpreted his actions (not inviting them to dine and stopping at the pit). Had they been aware of their bias, they would have interpreted his actions differently. It follows, concludes the Alter, that exercising one's Bechirah is more about examining every situation carefully to discover what biases are at work, and to avoid the consequences of those biases, than it is about choosing between obvious right and wrong. Indeed, Hashem could have arranged that the funeral attendees not pass the pit on their way home or that Yaakov give explicit instructions before his death about eating together, but that is not

how Hashem operates. Instead, he allows man to experience these very subtle challenges so that he can exercise his Bechirah. (Madreigat Ha'adam: Tikkun Ha'middot ch.2)

"Yisrael extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Menashe's head. 'Sikail' / He maneuvered his hands, for Menashe was the firstborn." (48:14)

The Aramaic translation, Onkelos, relates the word "sikail" to "seichel" / "intelligence," i.e., Yaakov's hands behaved with intelligence.

This requires explanation, notes R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe), for how can one attribute intelligence to a body part? It would seem that intelligence is in the brain, and the hands are merely tools for implementing the brain's will!

He explains: We read (Bereishit 22:10), "Avraham sent out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son." Why did Avraham have to "send out" his hand, implying that a specific act of will was required? The answer is that Avraham had purified himself to such an extent that his body automatically did G-d's Will, which, in this case, was to not slaughter Yitzchak. Thus, Avraham, who did not know that, needed a conscious act of will to override his hand's "intelligence," in order to pick up the knife.

This is alluded to in our verse as well: Yaakov, also, purified himself to the extent that his hands had their own intelligence, i.e., they knew that G-d's Will was to give the primary blessing to the younger son, Ephraim, not to the older son, Menashe.

How can a person in our times aspire to such a level, asks the Vizhnitzer Rebbe? By studying works of mussar such as Chovot Ha'levavot and Reishit Chochmah. Unfortunately, he adds, the yetzer ha'ra also knows this and therefore encourages us not to study such works. (Yeshuot Moshe: Ma'adanei Shulchan)

"Yosef said to his father, 'Not so, my Father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head'." (48:18)

R' Menachem Mendel of Strzyzow z"l (1788-1831; chassidic rebbe) writes: Logically, the phrases should be reversed—"Place your right hand on his head, for this is the firstborn." However, that would have been disrespectful, as he would have been telling Yaakov to do something other than what he was doing. Instead, Yosef phrased his statement as if were giving Yaakov information he might not have known: "For this is the firstborn." And, once you possess that information, you presumably will want to "place your right hand on his head."

This, continues R' Menachem Mendel, sheds light on Yaakov's response (verse 19), "I know, my son, I know; . . . he too will become great. Yet, his younger brother will become greater than he." Yaakov

meant: I do know who is the firstborn. But, I also know that the younger brother will be greater than the older one. (Sova Semachot)

"For Your salvation I have longed, Hashem." (49:18)

There is a custom when reciting this verse as a prayer--for example, some append it to Tefilat Ha'derech / the traveler's prayer--to repeat it with the words in different orders, as follows:

"For Your salvation I have longed, Hashem."

"I have longed, Hashem, for Your salvation."

"Hashem, For Your salvation I have longed."

R' Shmuel Weinberg z"l (1850-1916; Slonimer Rebbe) writes that each of these three formulations has a different meaning.

"Hashem, For Your salvation I have longed" refers to immediate salvation, when Hashem is revealed right away.

"For Your salvation I have longed, Hashem" refers to salvation that comes after man takes some step to "awaken" G-d's compassion--first, "For your salvation I longed," then Hashem was revealed.

"I have longed, Hashem, for Your salvation" expresses the faith of a person who does not see salvation coming. Nevertheless, "I have longed, Hashem." And, in that merit, there is salvation at the end.

Another explanation: "Hashem, For Your salvation I have longed" refers to a person who is successful in everything he does. Hashem is "right there," in the open. This person should remember, "It is not my success, but rather Hashem is revealing Himself openly to me, and I must continue longing for Him in the future." On the opposite extreme, "For Your salvation I have longed, Hashem," refers to a person from whom Hashem seems distant. That person should long for Him and not give up hope. (Divrei Shmuel)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah . . ." (49:30)

The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) records two explanations of the word "Machpelah," which comes from the root meaning "double." One Sage says: "A chamber within a chamber," and one Sage says: "A chamber with a chamber above it."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) notes, based on the Gemara (Bava Batra 58a), that Adam and Chava are buried in the inner or lower chamber, while the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried in the outer or upper chamber. He explains:

Man is born with innate intelligence. However, because that intelligence can exist only along with man's physical body, it is limited by the body and can help man grow only so far. That is why Hashem gave us the Torah, which exists independently of any physical body.

Which is greater--man's intelligence or the Torah? In absolute terms, the Divine Torah is, of course, greater. However, in terms of the impact that each can have on a human being, the Torah, being separate from the person, is at a disadvantage. Thus, writes R' Kook, based on the classical work, Chovot Ha'levavot, what needs to happen is for man's innate intelligence to attach itself to the Torah and then to channel the Torah's influence back to the body. In this way, the body itself can become a holy instrument for carrying out the Torah's will.

However, because man sins, the ultimate holiness of the body also depends on receiving atonement through death and burial. All of this, writes R' Kook, permits us to understand the two opinions regarding the architecture of the burial place of Adam/Chava and the Patriarchs/ Matriarchs. Adam Ha'rishon surely had great innate intelligence. But, he lacked a connection to Torah. That connection began only with the Patriarchs, the first to practice Brit Milah and other mitzvot. Thus, if the burial place of these ancestors was a chamber within a chamber, Adam/Chava certainly are in the inner chamber, with the Patriarchs on the outside, just as the Torah is "outside" and must use man's innate intelligence as a conduit to make its impact felt "inside." But, if the chambers were one above the other, then certainly the Patriarchs, representing the Divine Torah, are on top. (Midbar Shur: Drush 28)