

# LET ME EXPLAIN...

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Vayechi begins with Yaakov's final request of Yosef: Please do not bury me in Mitzrayim (Egypt). To this end, Yaakov goes as far as to have Yosef swear that he will transport his father's body to the hallowed M'aras HaMachpeilah and bury him there along with his ancestors Avraham and Yitzchak. Yosef, currently the viceroy of Egypt, willingly agrees to his father's request, and swears.

At this point, the Torah changes scenes. Yosef is apparently back in the capital (Tzoan?) taking care of business, while Yaakov, living with the rest of his children in Goshen, takes ill.

*"And it came to pass, after these matters, that he said to Yosef, 'Behold! Your father is ill.' And he took his two sons with him; Menasheh and Efrayim. (48:1)"*

Yosef comes to visit his ailing father. Yaakov has a surprise in store: In a previous prophecy from Hashem, he had been informed that one of the 12 tribes would be split into two, bringing the total to 13 (see Rashi 48:4). He had now decided to give this honour to Yosef's two sons, Menasheh and Efrayim.

It is at this juncture in the narrative that Yaakov makes a very strange comment - which seemingly has no connection to the matters at hand:

*"As for me - when I came [home] from Paddan [the home of Lavan], Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan, on the way, while there was still a measure of land before [reaching] Efras. And I buried her there, on the way to Efras, which is Beis Lechem (Bethlehem). (48:7)"*

Yaakov then resumes his previous dialogue, and goes on to bless Menasheh and Efrayim.

Rashi explains the significance of the mention of Rachel's death at this point:

I am troubling you to take me to be buried in Eretz Canaan - although I did not do so for your mother. "And I buried her there [on the way]," - And I did not even take her [to be buried] in Beis Lechem. And I know that you have hard feelings against me. But know: I buried her there by the word of G-d, so that she should be of aid to her children when Nebuzaradan would exile them. [On their way to exile] they would pass by Rachel's tomb, and Rachel would go out onto her grave, and weep, and beseech mercy for them, as it says (Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 31:14), "A voice is heard in the heavens, [moaning, bitter crying; Rachel weeps over her children. She refuses to be consoled over her children, for they have gone]." And the Holy One, Blessed be He, answers her (ibid. 15-16), "There is

reward for your actions, says Hashem... And the children will return to their borders."

Rashi understands that Yaakov is appeasing Yosef: "Although I am burdening you greatly with my burial, while I for your mother seemingly went to no trouble at all, know, my son, that things are not as they appear." If, however, this was indeed Yaakov's intention, then wouldn't the appropriate place for him to mention this episode have been earlier, in the first chapter of the sidrah, when he asked Yosef to bury him in Canaan? Why mention it now, when Yosef had already acceded to his father's request, no holds barred? (See Or HaChaim, Netziv, and others, who address this question).

Rabbi Yaakov Meir Shechter, shlita, once recalled an incident he experienced personally while learning in Tiberias, under the tutelage of "Reb Mottele Dayan," Rabbi Mordechai Chaim of Slonim, the Slonimer Rebbe zt"l, whose Yahrzeit was this Tuesday, 12 Teves, 5714.

"I was fifteen years old then. Throughout the day, yeshiva bachurim would come into Reb Mottele's room, where they would recite before him Mishnayos, Gemara, Rambam, Tur, Zohar HaKadosh, and other holy books. Since his eyesight was poor, it was difficult for him to read, so instead he explained whatever was being read before him from memory. He was fluent in the entire Shas, and had total mastery over all parts of Torah. All his days and nights were filled with the love of Torah.

"I myself learned before him at noon, between study periods. Once, as I entered his room, I saw him sitting with another Jew. Just as I came in, they began chuckling and smiling. After the other Jew left, Reb Mottele began begging me to forgive him - he feared I might have thought that their laughter had been directed at me, which it obviously wasn't. I insured Reb Mottele that I felt not slighted in the least. But he was not satisfied. He felt compelled to explain to me the reason for their laughter, in case I had been offended for even a moment.

"Quite some time ago,' he explained, 'I gave a chair to a carpenter for repair. Just today, he came to return it. A few minutes before you arrived, I noticed the carpenter passing by, and I called him over. I let him know that the chair, which had supposedly been repaired, had collapsed again today - the very same day he returned it to me! If it had fallen apart a week or two later - I reasoned - the matter might then have been questionable. But how could it not hold up for even one day?!

"It seems to me,' he answered me with a smile, 'that someone must have sat down on the chair. That is why it broke. In which case I can obviously take no responsibility!

"That is why we were laughing when you came in,' concluded Reb Mottel.

"Here I was, a youth from the Old City, standing before one of the great tzaddikim of a previous generation. I could easily have been his great-grandchild! Yet he felt obliged to explain himself at length, and excuse himself for something which might have caused me the slightest offense. For me," concluded R' Yaakov Meir, "this incident was a poignant and enduring lesson." [HaRav Yaakov Meir Shechter, shlita, Ve-Nichtav be-Sefer vol. 2, p. 21]

Perhaps this is the reason for Yaakov's delay in explaining his actions to Yosef. Had he excused

himself for burying Rachel "on the way" at the time he was asking Yosef to take care of his own burial, we would have concluded that that was the natural thing for him to do; after all, how can Yaakov ask Yosef to do for him the very thing which he had failed to do for Rachel?! But Yaakov did not excuse himself then. He wanted Yosef to know that his feelings were important to him, that he felt obligated to explain himself and excuse his actions regardless of his own needs. He therefore pushed off his apology until such a time that it would be obvious he had no ulterior motives.

If when dealing with others, particularly our youth, we choose to adopt a harsh, authoritarian attitude, we run the risk of alienating them by giving them the impression that we lack appreciation for their feelings and emotions. It is true that our children and students are obligated to do as told even when they don't understand why - indeed it is our duty to teach them such. But at the same time, by trying to make ourselves understood, when possible, we demonstrate a genuine concern for their feelings, thereby teaching them the equally important lesson of sensitivity and concern for others.

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