

# BLESS YOU!

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

*Ya'akov settled in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the land of Canaan. (Bereishis 37:1)*

When Ya'akov had left home to escape Eisav after taking the blessings, he had been 63 years old and a single man. He then sat and learned in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver for fourteen years before heading for Lavan's house. He arrived there at the age of 77 years. Ya'akov worked seven years for Rachel, and then an additional seven years when Lavan switched Leah for Rachel, and stayed another six years before leaving for Canaan at the end of last week's parshah, at the age of 97 years. He took two more years in transit, and arrived at this week's parshah at the age of 99.

And his troubles had only begun. If Ya'akov hadn't aged naturally until this point, the next 22 years of his life, from the time that his favorite son Yosef would mysteriously disappear and then reappear, would certainly do the trick. This is why, as the rabbis point out, Pharaoh (in Parashas Vayigash, 47:8) felt compelled to ask Ya'akov his age, for, he looked much older than he ought to have.

As a side note, it is interesting to point out the following:

It is also taught by the House of Rabban Gamliel: They did not say, "Become healed" in the Study Hall because of waste of [time in] the Study Hall. (Brochos 53a)

The Talmud is referring to a common practice that continues even into this day, that is, to say "Bless you!" after someone sneezes. For us, it is more of a tradition, more of a gesture of goodwill; however, as the "Gilyon HaShas" explains (on the side of the page of Talmud), it could have been a matter of life and death:

"... From Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, Chapter 52, we learn that from the time that G-d made Heaven and Earth a person never became ill. Rather, he could be along his way or in the marketplace, and sneeze, and his soul would leave him through his nostrils. Ya'akov Avinu came along and said, "Master of the Universe! Please don't take my soul until I can command my sons and daughters, and He listened to him. Therefore, a person is obligated upon sneezing, "Life!" because death was turned to light ..." (Gilyon HaShas, Brochos 53a)

Death is never something to be sneezed at, especially until the time of Ya'akov Avinu, for that was the very cause of a person's death. The soul was breathed into the first man through his nostrils, and

that is from where it leaves as well. There were probably no allergies in those early days, and people probably avoided things that itched the nose, because, any sneeze could be the fatal one. Until Ya'akov Avinu's time, if someone sneezed and survived, it was reason to celebrate!

Hence, as recent as 2208 (from creation), that is, 3,552 years ago, the physical nature of man was changed. Even from Avraham to Ya'akov there seems to have been a significant difference. Though it is true that Avraham is called an "old man" before dying, and that Yitzchak was blind, still, they seemed to have maintained a certain amount of virility all the way to the end of their lives. By the time Ya'akov stands before Pharaoh, he seems to have become a beaten and weathered man.

In a sense, this mirrors the descending into exile of the Jewish people. The period of the Avos was a special unique time, a singular epoch in world history, never to be repeated again. And, even though Ya'akov would recover his favorite son at the end of his life, and know only peace and tranquillity the last seventeen years of his life, still, one can sense the world itself entering into a long period of exile during this phase of Ya'akov's life that would only really come to an end in Moshiach's time--perhaps before our very eyes.

Thinking along these helps to connect up this week's parshah with this period of history.

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## Shabbos Day:

*He (Yosef) dreamed again and told it to his brothers. He said, "I have dreamed another dream. The sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." He related it to his father and his brothers. His father berated him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall we really come, I, your mother, and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground!" (Bereishis 37:9-10)*

Starting from Parashas Vayaitzai, when Ya'akov dreamed of the ladder that reached into Heaven, dreams have become a reality. Now, in this week's parshah, dreams have become a central part of the overall plot that is going to have a dramatic effect on ALL of Jewish history. It will be dreams that will cause Yosef to be reduced to a slave, and, in Parashas Mikeitz, it will be dreams that will free Yosef from prison and elevate him to second-in-command over Egypt. It is worthwhile to discuss the topic of dreams.

First of all, there is the following:

The prophet that has had a dream, let him relate his dream--he has received My word; let him speak the word of truth. "What does straw have to do with corn?" says G-d ... (Yirmiyahu 23:28). What connection is there between straw and corn, and a dream? Rebi Yochanan said in the name of Rebi Shimon: Just as it is impossible for corn to be without straw, so is it impossible for a dream to be without some nonsense. Rebi Berachyah said: When it comes to dreams, even though part may

come true, not all of it will come true. We can learn this from Yosef, for it is written, "The sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars ... [Ya'akov answered Yosef] 'Shall we really come, I, your mother ...'." (Bereishis 37:9)--at that time his mother (Rachel) was already dead. (Brochos 55a)

Having said this, the Talmud then goes on to add:

Rebi Levi said: A person should look forward to the fulfillment of a good dream for twenty-two years, for, it says, "These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef was seven years old ..." (Bereishis 37:1), and then it later says, "Yosef was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh ..." (Bereishis 41:46). Now, how many years are there between seventeen and thirty? Thirteen. Add to this seven years of plenty and two years of famine, and you arrive at twenty-two. (Brochos 55b)

--and that is when Yosef's brothers came down to Egypt in search of food, and bowed down to him just as he had dreamed twenty-two years earlier.

In the book, "Derech Hashem" ("The Way of G-d"), by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto ("Ramchal"), the concept of dreams is also discussed (3:1:6). There, the Ramchal discusses sleep in general, and dreams specifically. Though, he says, dreams can result from various different sources and stimulants, one source is the result of a loosening of the bond between souls within a person during sleep itself.

As a result of this loosening of souls, the higher levels are allowed to roam somewhat freely in the spiritual realm, interacting with spiritual beings such as angels. It is a realm that is above time, and associated with prophecy. What is perceived by these levels of soul -- including information about the future -- can often be transmitted down to the lowest level of soul that remained with the body the entire time, keeping it alive.

The images themselves are projected onto a "screen," something we call the "imagination." However, in the imagination, such images usually intermingle with all other images that can result from a number of physical sources, making it next to impossible to discern truth from falsehood, in most cases.

Unless, that is, G-d wants the person to know what was transmitted to him during his sleep, either because he is a prophet with a message to deliver to the Jewish people (in such a case, the dream is of a much higher quality), or, because the individual is meant to know what he was shown for a reason only G-d may know at the time. The Talmud even states:

If one wakes up in the morning with a [Torah] verse in his mouth, it is a minor form of prophecy. (Brochos 57b)

Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote:

" ... Likewise, every night when a person sleeps and he deposits his soul and ascends to Above -- the one who merits to ascend is taught the particular explanation [of Torah] that is crucial for the

rectification of the root of his soul. Depending upon what he achieved that day [spiritually], that is what they teach him that night -- one verse, or a certain section, and that night it will be clearer to him than at any other time ... Every night, my master (the Arizal) used to look at the student who was before him, and see on his forehead the verse that was best revealed through that person ... He would clarify a little of that verse, according to the explanation relevant to his soul. Before the person went to sleep, he would concentrate on the explanation and say the verse, in order that when he would ascend Above he would be ready to be taught the explanation in its entirety ... They would reveal other things to him as well ... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, 17)

People often speak of going to bed with a difficult question and waking up with the answer; this can help to explain why. And, even though the Talmud calls sleep "one-sixtieth of death," that is only with respect to the body, which has been temporarily paralyzed. As far as the soul is concerned (and the body once it wakes up), sleep can be a crucial time for reaching into levels of consciousness that, for many people, are closed off during waking hours.

However, as Rabbi Chaim Vital warned: this is entirely based upon a person's spiritual accomplishments from the previous day.

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## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

*While she (Tamar) was being taken out, she sent for her father-in-law saying, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong. Please identify to whom this signet ring, cloak, and staff belong." Yehudah recognized [them] and said, "She has been more righteous than me ..." (Bereishis 38:25-26)*

There are some stories in Tanach that you simply don't start with, not when teaching children and not when doing outreach. They are in the Torah, so they are true -- absolutely true. And they are holy, just as every word of Torah is. And, if they're in the Torah, then it is because G-d wants them there, and because they teach a crucial moral lesson about the service of G-d.

Nevertheless. Nevertheless, such accounts can be uncomfortable because, even by Western standards, they raise eyebrows -- not because the average person is above such an act, but, because the average person appreciates that the characters in question ought to have been above such acts.

Take the story of Yehudah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. That Tamar was desperate to remarry after losing her first two husbands is understandable. That Yehudah, after losing his own wife, would want to remarry again -- after the appropriate period of mourning -- is equally acceptable. However, that Tamar would dress up as a woman of ill-repute to catch the attention of her own father-in-law, and that Yehudah would fall for the ploy, thinking that she was what she appeared to be, is a difficult "pill" to swallow.

Or is it?

It depends upon how one is reading the story, and what one is focusing on. If the reader is merely "peeking" in on a character's personal life, then he might be horrified to find out what was going on "behind the scenes." The reader is then forced to shake his head and say, "Tsk, tsk, tsk ... We expect more from our leaders."

However, for the last three parshios, we have not been merely studying the lives of Biblical characters from the remote past; we have been observing the formulation of the Jewish people -- a supernatural people with a supernatural past and a supernatural future. In other words, a nation with whose existence G-d is constantly and directly involved.

When Tamar cleverly, but daringly challenged her father-in-law's sense of honesty and responsibility, by sending back the belongings she had saved for that day, Yehudah responded:

"She has been more righteous than me ..."

How did he know? How was he able to assume with certainty that the child his daughter-in-law was carrying was, in fact, legitimate (according to the pre-Torah laws of Levirate Marriage)? Well, the signet, the cloak, and the staff! Maybe yes, and maybe no. After all, we're talking about the daughter of kohen over here, and, a married women ... not to mention the honor of the leader of the Twelve Tribes.

The Talmud asks the same question, and has an important answer:

Three things were made known by Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh): [once] in the Bais Din of Shem, [once] in the Bais Din of Shmuel HaRamsi, and [once] in the Bais Din of Shlomo. [We learn about] the Bais Din of Shem, as it says, "Yehudah recognized [them] and said, 'She has been more righteous than me ...'." (Bereishis 38:25-26). How did he know [that the child was from him]? Maybe, just as he had been with her, perhaps another had also been with her? Thus, a voice [from Heaven] proclaimed, "From Me (G-d) are the hidden things!" (Makkos 23b)

That is, the whole fiasco and near catastrophe originated with G-d. Elsewhere, the Midrash says that Yehudah wasn't even going in Tamar's direction, but that an angel came along and "steered" Yehudah towards her. That doesn't mean that Yehudah is blameless in the whole affair; quite the contrary (as we have discussed in previous years), it was his own approach to life that set him up for this source of great embarrassment.

However, in the end, though these stories do reveal the mistakes made by the great individuals of the past and fathers of the Jewish nation, their main mission is to convey that, when it comes to Jewish history, the nice events and the not-so-nice ones all emanate from G-d. They reveal to us how, behind the scenes, G-d helps His people achieve goals that we, on our own, might completely overlook or fail to achieve.

## MELAVE MALKAH:

*When G-d will reign, the earth will rejoice ... numerous islands will rejoice. (Tehillim 97:1)*

Conveniently, this tehillah, the third of Kabbalos Shabbos and eighth from Moshe Rabbeinu, is dedicated to the tribe of Yosef. The first few verses describe the conquering of Eretz Canaan at the hands of Yehoshua, a descendant of Yosef. However, according to the Midrash Avakir, this tehillah is also an allusion to the future, when G-d will reign over all of the earth forever.

Yosef has a major role to play in that final victory of good over evil as well, as we have seen in Rashi:

Ya'akov settled in the land of the sojournings of his fathers, in the Land of Canaan. These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef was seventeen years old ... (Bereishis 37:1)

"Ya'akov settled ... A flax-driver came into town with camels laden with flax. A smithy wondered, 'Where will all this flax go?' A certain wise-guy answered, 'One spark from your bellow will burn it up!' Thus Ya'akov saw all the chieftains of Eisav mentioned in the previous chapter and asked, 'Who will be able to conquer them?' What's written after? 'These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef ...' as it says, 'The house of Ya'akov will be fire, the house of Yosef will be a flame, and the house of Eisav will be straw': one spark will go out from Yosef and burn it (Eisav) all up." (Rashi)

It is well-known in Talmudic and Midrashic literature that Moshiach ben Yosef -- the first Moshiach who will descend from the tribe of Yosef -- will pave the way for Moshiach ben Dovid, the final Moshiach and redeemer of the Jewish people. Just as Yehoshua from Ephraim (Yosef) preceded the kings from Yehudah, and Shaul (Binyomin) preceded Dovid (Yehudah), Moshiach ben Yosef will precede Moshiach ben Dovid -- and die heroically in battle (Succah 52a).

Unfortunately, the tribe of Yosef is one which was exiled by the Assyrians before the destruction of the First Temple, and is therefore part of the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel." Perhaps not everyone was exiled, and enough of the tribe of Yosef remains to produce one Moshiach ben Yosef for the generation of the Final Redemption. Perhaps the coming of Moshiach ben Yosef heralds the return of the Lost Tribes, after all these millennia. When the times comes, b"HY, we'll know the truth.

And when Moshiach finally comes, what will we say then?

Of the many things we may want to say, according to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, we will certainly recite three brochos:

1. Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Knower of secrets. (Recited upon seeing 600,000 or more Jews together.)
2. Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has given of His wisdom to those who fear Him. (Recited upon seeing an outstanding Torah scholar.)

3. Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this time.

--the time of the Final Redemption, that is. Won't it be nice to be able to make THAT brochah! Talk about dreams coming true ...

Have a great Shabbos,  
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