

## PARSHAS VAYECHI 5778

Parshas Vayeishev began with Yaakov requesting to live in tranquility to settle down with his 12 sons and build Klal Yisroel without distractions. But Hashem gives tzaddikim nisyonos to keep them growing. He is given the ordeal about Yosef. In this week's parsha, after Yaakov endures the trouble of Yosef, Yaakov finally achieved his proper level and is granted tranquility. But the nisayon for Klal Yisroel is just beginning. It is called Kur Habarzel—a process of removing impurities from metal. Egypt was a smelting furnace removing all the impurities of Klal Yisroel where only 20% survived to leave Egypt. The rest died in makkas choshech because they couldn't bring themselves to leave Egypt.

Rashi comments that the parsha is stumoh because the shibbud was beginning. This is very difficult because the shibbud of Egypt only began after the last of the shevotim died.

Alternatively, Yaakov wanted to reveal all of Jewish history to the shevotim but it was hidden. The Zohar has another version of this idea—he really did reveal the keitz, but the shevatim slipped in their level and were no longer on the level to understand what Yaakov was revealing. Why did they slip? Read the last five words of Parshas Vayigash—they were seized by Egypt and settled in there.

Yosef was unique—he shared Yaakov's vision of Klal Yisroel settling separately. He himself had weathered the nisayon of living in Egypt and retaining his level. But the rest of Klal Yisroel were impressed by the advanced Egyptian culture and slowly began to be captivated by it and it began to filter in.

A similar thing happened when Klal Yisroel emigrated en masse from primitive Eastern Europe to the advanced societies of the West. They were not used to such a sophisticated culture and became enamored by it and started to rapidly assimilate.

While Yaakov Ovinu was alive, his living example held them on their level. When Yaakov died, the Jews started filling the rest of Egypt and went outside the Goshen ghetto and became part of upscale Egyptian society. Of course, they would remain Jewish, but inwardly, they became Egyptian.

The result was that a new king arose in Egypt who didn't know Yosef. The love for Klal Yisroel turned to hatred. Klal Yisroel started to reject bris miloh—they eliminated the physical difference between them and the Egyptians. One Shevet was an exception—Levi.

Yaakov addressed all the shevotim together. He tried to reveal the keitz to them. Even if you want to get a deep understanding of the full scope of Jewish history, you won't be able to get it while you are enamored by a foreign culture.

When Jews confront foreign cultures, there is a question of attitude. Our attitude must be that Torah is the highest form of wisdom and morality and all the other forms of wisdom can't compare. But if you don't appreciate that the wisdom of the

Torah is the infinite wisdom of Hashem and you get impressed by the wisdom of other nations, it shows a weakness in your appreciation of the depths of the Torah. Torah is the foundation of the entire universe and the source of all the other wisdom. Everything else is just a cheap imitation, scraps falling from our table. How can you be impressed by it? One of the greatest chochmos is how Hashem manages the world and human history. But it requires a person to be on a high level.

Yaakov told each shevet what his unique techunas hanefesh is, and how he can channel that unique characteristic towards serving Hashem.

Shimon and Levi are very passionate and have strong emotions with a propensity for violence. Yaakov says I have to scatter them among Klal Yisroel and make them teachers of Torah—this will help them take that passion and fuse it into a passion for Torah to share with others.

Levi achieved the highest expression of this positive passion. By the time Levi came down to Egypt, he was Rosh Yeshiva. This influenced his descendants and they were the only ones who didn't compromise on milah and didn't join the national service. That passion for pure Torah which Levi cultivated came through. Shimon became a melamed tinokos—he took that passion and channeled it towards Torah, and he spread that passion for Torah to infect others. It can be a negative force which killed the entire city of Shechem and sell Yosef, but then they channeled it properly and became teachers of Yeshiva.

Every middoh can be channeled the same way.

Yissochor is a hard worker—like a donkey who carries a heavy burden, the heaviest of burdens. He doesn't have proper sleep. He walks day and night, dozing off here and there. Yissochor took that dedication and strength and put into Torah.

But Hashem gave Yissochor a great nisayon. He gave him an incredibly fertile land and tempted him to use that capacity for hard work to invest it into his fields and make fortunes. But instead, Yissochor chose to channel his capacity for hard work into Torah. He became Klal Yisroel's poskim.

Zevulun was a merchant who supported himself and Yissochor as equal partners in Torah. He saw his portion along the Mediterranean coast and his talent for business as a gift from Hashem. He realized that He gave it to him for Torah. He gave it to me for a purpose—to serve Him by supporting Torah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein explained that the Yissochor-Zevulun arrangement is an equal partnership—you give 50% of your earnings to Yissochor and you get 50% of the s'char of the limud of Yissochor. It is a joint derech avodoh between them from both angles equally. One has the front office and one has the back office—each knows the other's part is indispensable for the success of the business.

When we had a meeting working out the details of putting out the kuntris for the yeshiva dinner this year, someone suggested putting the title of one's profession under their name. One refused, because he declared that "businessman" isn't who I am. Zevulun wasn't just a business man who gave a lot of tzedakah to mosdos of Torah. He was a partner with Yissochor in his business of limud haTorah.

Imagine the nisayon Hashem gave Yissochor! He had the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel. He had every opportunity to be successful in olam hazeh with his work ethic and dedication, and still he channeled it to Torah.

Yaakov was telling the shevatim that every person has his unique techunos hanefesh and the question is how is he going to use it for avodas Hashem? Being a mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh doesn't mean we have only one shevet who are the priests for the nation and they alone are involved in avodoh. No. It means all the shevotim together utilize all their techunos hanefesh to produce this mamleches kohanim.

The 12 shevotim reflected the various techunos of Yaakov Ovinu himself. Before Yaakov went to sleep on the way to Choron, he said that if all these 12 stones become one, this will be a sign that I will succeed in unifying all these aspects in myself and they will be brought out to the fullest within each of my 12 sons—for the purpose of serving Hashem in every conceivable manner. We aren't a cookie-cutter people with each one serving Hashem in exactly the same way. Each individual shevet and each individual Jew can channel his unique talents and personality to avodas Hashem.

Dan is a serpent—Dan produced Shimshon Hagibor who had

tremendous physical power. He was on the highest level in ruchniyus combined with the tremendous physical strength. He was challenged with the contradiction—similar to Yissochor who had the capacity for hard work and was given the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel. Yissochor managed that nisayon and became the posek for Klal Yisroel. Shimshon became a Shofet in Klal Yisroel. He was supposed to be kodosh mibeten with no connection to any tumoh combined with a tremendous physical prowess. He didn't manage that contradiction and fell for Delilah which destroyed him.

Every human being has a contradiction between the body and the neshomo: Does the body serve the neshomo or does the neshomo serve the body? Shimshon could have been a complete kodosh vetohor with that enormous physical strength, but he couldn't stand up to the nisayon.

So Yaakov davens for Shimshon's last moments. After he fell and was blinded, Shimshon asked for his physical power one last time—to take revenge on the P'lishtim and be mekadesh shem shomayim—destroying himself in the process. This was his teshuvoh.

The great personalities in Tanach had tremendous kochos and were given tremendous nisyonos. We are all given nisyonos that address our unique kochos hanefesh to grow from and channel correctly. Each Jew is given tremendous power and has to ask himself why he was given them and decide how he is going to use it.

A person can only appreciate the kochos he has and the nisyonos he is given and overcome them when he is immersed in limud haTorah.