

PARSHAS VAYECHI

תשפ"ד

This week, we conclude Sefer Bereishis. This sefer includes the stories of unusual individuals who shaped humanity, like Odom and Noach. They also include the personalities of the Ovos – Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov – and the 12 shevotim, who all shaped the character of Klal Yisroel. In Sefer Shemos, we also read about individuals like Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, but on the whole, it is the story of the nation of Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov Ovinu's dream was to found Klal Yisroel. When he left Beer Sheva to Choron, Yaakov knew he had to reach a certain high level in order to achieve this objective. He was aware that Avrohom and Yitzchok weren't able to found Klal Yisroel because they had children like Yishmoel and Eisov. They had a mesorah that the one who would found Klal Yisroel would have 12 children who would develop 12 different darkei avodoh that need to be expressed.

When Yosef went missing, Yaakov Ovinu lost his talmid muvhak – but it also meant he would not be able to found Klal Yisroel because he was missing one of the 12 shivtei Koh. When he hears 22 years later that Yosef is alive, Yaakov doesn't immediately celebrate. He isn't sure if it is worth celebrating if his son turned out to be this terrible monstrous dictator of Egypt terrorizing his family. Only when Yosef shows that he is still the same tzaddik that he was when he left, is Yaakov relieved to have his son back.

Yaakov comes down to live his last 17 years in Egypt. In Parshas Vayeishev, we learned that at that point in his life, Yaakov wished to live in peace and tranquility. He went through 20 years with Lovon and 2 years on the road encountering all kinds of difficulties and tragedies, and now he wants to settle down and raise his family as the shivtei Koh that he envisioned. But Hashem had other plans. He has to survive this last nisoyon of Yosef and continue to grow in other ways. Finally, for the last 17 years, Yaakov receives this tranquility.

At the end of his life, Yaakov is gathering his 12 sons and blesses them. He identifies where their destiny lies, shows them their traits and weaknesses and how they will fit together as one unit of Klal Yisroel. It is interesting to contrast these brochos given by Yaakov with the brochos given by Moshe at the end of the Torah.

Yaakov calls his children together to tell them about the end of days. But Chazal say Yaakov was nervous. He had this plan for Klal Yisroel to be separate and distinct from the rest of the world. This is what keeps Klal Yisroel safe and secure. He made sure they settled in Goshen – in a separate Jewish ghetto. But it was still within Egypt – the most advanced and sophisticated society in the world. It is very different from primitive Canaan. As a result, Klal Yisroel were struck by Egypt and were attracted to their culture. But they were prevented from assimilating because they had the images of Yaakov and his sons right in front of them at all times. Parshas Vayechi is a parsha stumoh. Once Yaakov and the generation of the shevotim died, Klal Yisroel become less inhibited and start integrating into Egyptian society – and the shibbud of Mitzrayim immediately begins.

There is a rule of Jewish history that we see in front of our eyes today. Jews are more secure when we are separate and unintegrated into the wider non-Jewish society. The minute Jews feel insecure about themselves and try to become accepted by the non-Jews, and try to blend into their culture, they are hated and rejected by their host population. The non-Jews make them outcasts and we become persecuted. Rav Chaim of Volozhin said: if the Jews don't make

kiddush, then the non-Jews will make havdoloh. This is what happens throughout Jewish history.

Another explanation as to why the parsha is stumoh, is because Yaakov wished to reveal the time of the final geuloh to his sons, but Hashem withheld from Yaakov the ability to do so. The Zohar gives more detail to this Chazal. In truth, Yaakov did reveal the geuloh to his sons, but he realized that his sons weren't capable of understanding what he was telling them. Why? Klal Yisroel were starting to get involved in the culture of Egypt and this contact with tumoh blocked their understanding. Yaakov is upset. He knows that if he has 12 sons who will continue his legacy, they have to be completely with him in emunoh in the achdus of Hashem. Were they really committed? They reassure Yaakov by saying Shema Yisroel and proclaim their belief in the achdus of Hashem. Yaakov responds with Boruch Shem. Now he knows he can move on to finish his life. He has fulfilled his dream of founding Klal Yisroel.

Let us focus on the brochos given to Shimon, Levi, Yissochor and Zevulun.

Shimon and Levi are passionate people and their passions got out of control and became destructive. They killed the entire city of Shechem and even suggested to kill Yosef. So Yaakov cursed their anger – not them personally – only their anger. A person has to be in control of his passions and their emotions. These are sources of strength, but they need to be channeled and directed to the proper places. So Shimon and Levi had to be separated from each other and spread out among Klal Yisroel.

But Moshe Rabbeinu only praises Levi at the end of the Torah. He is zocheh to the Urim V'Tumim and to serve in the Beis Hamikdosh. The Rambam says Levi was the Rosh Yeshiva to the yeshiva which Yehudoh set up when the brothers came to Goshen. Apparently, Levi channeled his passion into limud Torah.

When the family of Yaakov came down to Egypt, Pharaoh promised that the Jews living in Goshen would all be able to live off the government payroll. They didn't have to worry about parnossoh. But then the Jews start spreading out and didn't want to be confined to the ghetto and learn all day in Kollel. So they entered Egyptian society and started being oppressed and enslaved. Levi and his shevet stayed in Goshen, stayed learning in Kollel, and stayed on the Egyptian payroll. So now you have two very different sections of Jewish society – one remaining in Kollel and being supported by the government, and one trying to integrate into Egypt and being enslaved by the government!

When the cheit ho'egel happens, it is after Shevet Levi have been intensely focused on learning Torah and staying faithful to the mesorah of the Ovos. So they respond to Moshe's call and channel their passion to killing those who worshiped the egel. There always has to be kohanim and levi'im on the Sanhedrin. They are the ones who are the most passionate in spreading Torah and preserving the mesorah. When Yaakov cursed their anger, Shevet Levi took that middoh and channeled it into the avodoh of the mikdosh and became the disseminators of Torah. When it came to the golus of Yovon, who saved Klal Yisroel and gave us the yeshuoh of Chanukah? It was the Kohanim – the lomdei Torah of Shevet Levi.

Shimon wasn't able to channel that passion to the extent that Levi did and he wasn't blessed by Moshe at the end of the Torah. They were scattered and became teachers of young children.

Now we come to the other shevet known for limud Torah besides Shevet Levi – Shevet Yissochor. Yissochor is described as being capable of hard work – toiling day and night. Hashem gave them the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel. Combine these two things and they could build a powerful financial empire. But Yissochor isn't interested. They channel their hard-working ethic to Torah and they became the poskim of Klal Yisroel.

Zevulun were merchants and traders and they made a deal with Yissochor and provided the material support for Yissochor's learning. It was a business deal with equal responsibilities and equal share of the profits. Zevulun understood that he is a partner in Yissochor's learning. They aren't simply donating support from their income as charity – they are doing their part of the business partnership and giving Yissochor his rightful share. But Yissochor could have done fine financially without any help. He voluntarily gives up financial independence for learning. He doesn't have the burning passion that Shevet Levi has, but he puts his capacity for hard work in the service of Torah. Shevet Zevulun wasn't willing to give up their financial independence but they join in a joint enterprise with Yissochor's learning and guarantee Yissochor's needs are provided.

How is Shevet Levi supported without any shevet backing them and no land to cultivate? Moshe says Hashem Himself is backing shevet Levi. The Rambam says this ability to rely on Hashem and be free of financial effort is open to anyone in the world. But it requires three conditions. One is to understand what the purpose of life is and what is really worthwhile. Another is to be inspired by this lofty purpose, and the third is to abandon all worldly pursuit and focus exclusively on avodas Hashem.

The Rambam says most worldly needs are actually manufactured and sought out by people intentionally – in order to indulge in material luxuries and comforts. To become a part of Shevet Levi means to be preoccupied exclusively in Torah and avodoh and forget about the comforts and luxuries of the world. Then that person is free from all physical responsibilities and Hashem will provide for his basic needs – just as Hashem gave shevet Levi the matonos of terumah and maaser.

So there is Shevet Levi, Shevet Yissochor, and then the Rambam describes the ideal Jewish baal habayis who supports himself. The Rambam's ideal baal habayis is someone who is learning Torah 9 hours a day! Apparently, he only allows 3 hours to be devoted to earning a parnossah while learning the rest of the day!

There are two types of people who commit themselves to learning Torah. There is shevet Levi – and those like him – who become inspired and are kodesh kodoshim. In the midbor, all the shevotim

are equidistant from the mishkon, and Shevet Levi is within the inner circle. Shevet Yissochor is different. He has an equal partnership with Zevulun.

The Shulchan Aruch says everyone is obligated to learn Torah. But if you don't know how to learn or you are too preoccupied to learn, then you can support those who learn and get credit as if you learned. But it is a 50-50 partnership according to the Shach.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות תלמוד תורה סימן רמו סעיף א

כל איש ישראל חייב בתלמוד תורה, בין עני בין עשיר, בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורים, בין בחור בין זקן גדול. אפילו עני המחזר על הפתחים, אפילו בעל אשה ובנים, חייב לקבוע לו זמן לתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה, שנאמר: והגית בו יומם ולילה (יהושע א, ח) וכו' ומי שא"א לו לתלמוד מפני שאינו יודע כלל לתלמוד או מפני הטרדות שיש לו, יספיק לאחרים הלומדים. הגה: ומתקן לו כליל לומד זעלמו (טור). ויכול אדם להתנות עם חברו שהוא יעסוק בתורה והוא ימציא לו פרנסה ויחלוק עמו השכר, אבל אם כבר עסק בתורה אינו יכול למכור לו חלקו בשביל ממון שיתנו לו. (תא"ו נתיב ב' מש"ס דסוטה).

ש"ך ס"ק ב. ויחלוק עמו בשכר, כלומר שכר תורה ושכר מה שירויח זה יהיה בין שניהם ביחד.

There are different approaches to avodas Hashem and all are valid. Each one has its special qualities. Shevet Levi is exclusive preoccupation with avodas Hashem and he is able to simply forget about the world and rely on Hashem for his parnossah. Yissochor makes an arrangement with Zevulun in order to secure his parnossah on a steady, reliable basis. The Gra explains that Yissochor didn't have to ask Zevulun for any hand-outs. It was part of the contractual obligation to share half his profits with Yissochor.

באור הגר"א יורה דעה סימן רמו ס"ק ז

(ז) ומי שא"א כו'. בב"ר פרק צ"ט זבולן לחוף ימים ישכון הרי זבולן קדם ליששכר ולמה כן אלא שהיה זבולן עוסק בפרקמטיא ויששכר עוסק בתורה וזבולן בא ומאכילו לפיכך קדמו, עליו אמר הכתוב עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה כו', וכן משה אומר שמח זבולן בצאתך למה שיששכר שלך הן שאתה מסייעו לישוב בהן כו'.

These are the three ways we look at the foundation of our lives. There is Levi's passion and preoccupation with Torah, Yissochor's hard work and dedication, and Zevulun's understanding that he is in a full partnership with Yissochor's Torah.