

PARSHAS VAYECHI

תשפ"ו

In this week's parsha, Yaakov calls his sons to give them his final brochos.

The posuk says Yaakov wanted to reveal what will happen in the end of history to bring the geuloh, but Rashi says he couldn't continue because the Shechinoh departed from him. But the Zohar gives us a slightly different version. It says that in reality, what Yaakov told them was about the geuloh, but the shevotim were no longer on the level to understand this. In this understanding, the Shechinoh departed from Yaakov's sons. Why?

When Yaakov came down to Egypt, he understood well that Egypt will be a dangerous place. When he left Chevron towards Egypt, he stopped at Be'er Sheva to make a mizbeach.

Be'er Sheva is at the edge of the desert. It is like an oasis. When you look at one side – to the north, it is green. When you look south, all you see is a sandy desert going all the way down to Egypt. The contrast is striking. Yaakov Ovinu comes and sees this great desert going to Egypt and he hesitates. He realizes that coming back will not be so simple. Hashem Himself has to come and guarantee that Hashem is going down with him and will bring him back up to Eretz Canaan.

So Yaakov wanted to prepare Klal Yisroel to be able to survive in this dangerous golus Mitzrayim. He makes sure they live in a Jewish ghetto – Goshen. Yaakov knows Egypt is a very wealthy and powerful nation – thanks to Yosef. And it was the most sophisticated and technologically advanced culture in the ancient world. Till today, no-one understands how they built the Pyramids. They possessed all kinds of knowledge of engineering and techniques that we still don't have.

Klal Yisroel were coming from a very primitive culture of Eretz Canaan. Both cultures were morally corrupt, but Egypt was much more alluring, which made it dangerous.

One strategy was they refused to give up their profession of being shepherds – a profession the Egyptians despised. They remained socially isolated.

Hundreds of years later, Bilaam expresses this idea – Klal Yisroel are secure when they are separate. This was the vision of Yaakov – to avoid being contaminated by Egyptian culture.

But the pesukim tell us that as time went on, Klal Yisroel did become attracted and enamored by Egyptian culture. Although this happened after the generation that knew Yaakov, it had already begun in a very subtle and slight way when Yaakov was still alive. Once it began, the level of the shevotim went down, and they couldn't understand the hidden content of what Yaakov was telling them about the final geuloh.

Yaakov's first brocho is to Reuven – which doesn't seem like a brocho at all – but a harsh rebuke.

When Yaakov first leaves his parents' home to Lovon's house, he takes stones to surround him and then he wakes up to find they are one stone. There is a midrash about this – which I have mentioned many times before – about how many stones Yaakov set up and why. One opinion says there were two stones, one says there were three, and one says there were 12.

The goal of Yaakov Ovinu's life was to build Klal Yisroel – to found a nation dedicated to avodas Hashem. He succeeded. Why did he set up 12 stones that night? There was a mesorah from the Ovos that the one to found Klal Yisroel would do it by having 12 children. Each of

those children would have very different personalities and pathways to avodas Hashem. The Ari Z"l says that during Bayis Rishon, Klal Yisroel had 12 different nuscho'os hatefilloh – one for each shevet. Now we basically have one.

Yaakov Ovinu was the most perfect of the Ovos and he had to embody all twelve derachim within himself. The 12 stones merged into one.

Yaakov explains why Reuven lost the bechorah – it was because he acted too quickly, too impulsively, and didn't think things through. He didn't take the kochos he was given to channel them in the proper way.

I want to focus on Shimon, Levi and Yissochor.

The posuk says Shimon and Levi are passionate people with strong emotions. They can be used for good or evil. They have to be scattered among the shevotim because if it is too concentrated, it will explode in very harmful ways.

At this point, Yaakov does not want to associate with this passion and rage because it was misdirected to wipe out Shechem and sell Yosef. But as history continued, we see that Levi took that passion and devoted it to avodas Hashem.

When the shevotim went down to Egypt, Yehudoh built the Beis Midrash, but the Rambam tells us that Levi was the Rosh Yeshiva. Shevet Levi channeled their passion into limud haTorah and that is what kept them protected from the negative effects of the golus. Their dedication to limud Torah spared them from becoming enslaved alongside the rest of Klal Yisroel.

Everyone else got totally confused and started to assimilate after Yaakov and the shevotim died. The next generation didn't experience the greatness of Yaakov and his family first hand, and they became a distant memory. They stopped doing bris miloh and tried to integrate, but Shevet Levi remained faithful to the mesorah of the Ovos the entire time. They didn't stop bris miloh, didn't stop learning.

Compare Yaakov's brocho to Levi with Moshe Rabbeinu's brocho. In Parshas V'zos Habrocho it says:

וללוי אמר תומיך ואוריך לאיש חסידך אשר נסיתו במסה תריבהו על מי מריבה: האומר לאביו ולאמו לא ראתיו ואת אחיו לא הכיר ואת בניו לא ידע כי שמרו אמרתך ובריתך ינצרו: יורו משפטיך ליעקב ותורתך לישראל ושימו קטורה באפרך וכליל על מזבחתך: ברח ה' חילו ופעל ידיו תרצה מחץ מתנים קמיו ומשנאיו מן יקומו:

When all of Klal Yisroel worshipped the golden calf, Levi was the one shevet who had nothing to do with it. They had that mesorah of limud haTorah. When Moshe came down from Har Sinai and saw what was happening, he called: מי לה' אלי. And the only Shevet that was able to answer the call was Levi. He told them to take a sword and go through the nation and kill everyone who worshipped the calf. It doesn't matter if they are your relatives! That is passion and commitment channeled in the right direction. Pinchas also stood up with kana'us for Hashem.

That is the difference between Levi and the others. Levi turned himself around and used all those techunos hanefesh – the passion and the drive – for avodas Hashem.

Shimon is completely left out of the brochos of Moshe Rabbeinu. His shevet is missing. But Levi gets very special treatment. Why is Shimon missing? He didn't manage to take Yaakov's rebuke and use it to spur

him to use his techunos hanefesh properly.

There is Yissochor and Zevulun.

Yissochor is a 'chamor' – a hard-working, dedicated man. Barely sleeps. He was given the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel, which means had he applied that serious dedicated work-ethic to the natural resources in his territory, he would become very wealthy. And he saw the potential in his land. But he decided to take that ability to work hard and channel it into Torah learning instead. His shevet produces poskim and members of Sanhedrin.

Zevulun was given territory on the coast and became a merchant making all kinds of businesses overseas. But instead of using his business sense to serve himself and increase his own luxury lifestyle, he uses it to support Shevet Yissochor learning Torah.

Down the line, after 40 years in the desert, Moshe Rabbeinu sees how the shevotim developed their talents and their personalities for avodas Hashem.

At the end of the day, Hashem is going to come to each of us and will ask us how we used the talents and dispositions He gave us. Did we use them for the purposes Hashem gave them?

We live in a very blessed generation. We have opportunities that no other period of history has been given for hundreds and hundreds of years. We are not living under any oppressive regime. We have more money and resources than any Jew could have imagined, and Hashem will ask us how we used those gifts. The gemara says that in the future, Hashem will call in all the nations and interrogate them – how did you use the gifts I gave you? It is part of the din v'cheshbon that Hashem will demand from us as well.

We all face consequences of our actions – in this world and the next.

Yosef became the most powerful person in the ancient world. He deserved it because he passed nisyonos and used that wealth and power to preserve Klal Yisroel in golus.

Hashem gave Levi a tremendous passion and drive. Levi initially misused it, and Yaakov called him out on it. Then he turned himself around and devoted his life to limud haTorah.

Hashem gave Yissochor both a strong work-ethic and a very fertile land. And Yissochor decided he wants to use them for Torah.

This is a lesson we all should learn from.