

# PARSHAS VAYECHI

תשפ"א

We talked last week about the confrontation between Yosef and his brothers. There is another part of the parsha we didn't talk about – which continues into this week's parsha.

Yaakov hears two things – Yosef is alive and he is still the same Yosef hatzaddik of 22 years ago. Yaakov's immediate reaction – now as Yisroel – the father of the nation – is to go down to Egypt to see Yosef before he dies. He does this for two reasons. One, he has a beloved son who he hasn't seen in 22 years. But more than that, Yaakov wanted to see the fulfillment of his life-long dream of raising 12 sons who would become the nucleus for the nation of Klal Yisroel. Remember that in Parshas Vayeitzei, before Yaakov went to sleep, he took stones and said if these stones merge, it will be a sign that he would achieve what Avrohom and Yitzchok didn't achieve – to have children who would carry on the mesorah of the Ovos as a complete nation of twelve shevotim. If Yosef is dead, it would mean he failed just like Avrohom and Yitzchok before him. Yaakov had to see for himself that Yosef was still Yosef Hatzaddik and he could die knowing he really had that zechus to raise the shivtei Koh.

Yaakov leaves his home and goes to Be'er Sheva and is afraid of going to Egypt. What was so frightening? I never understood this posuk until I came to Eretz Yisroel for the first time in 1967 and visited Be'er Sheva. Then it was a little town at the edge of the desert. It was green until the city limits and then the green suddenly ended on a line and it became desert all the way to Egypt. Yaakov saw the stretch of midbor before him and realized that the way back would not be easy. He hesitated. He wanted to see Yosef. But he wanted to stay in Eretz Canaan and have the food shipped to him from Egypt. Would his descendants become trapped in Egypt? Would they become influenced by Egyptian culture?

Yaakov made a mizbeiach and brought korbanos. Hashem came to him. Yaakov was afraid that the dream he had of his children becoming the shivtei Koh and inheriting the land of the Ovos is in jeopardy. Hashem came to reassure Yaakov that Hashem will bring him back. Why does Yaakov think his dream is suddenly in jeopardy? It is a very obvious reason. Egypt was two things. It was the most powerful and technically advanced culture in the ancient world. Until today, no-one knows how such massive structures were built. On the other hand, Egypt was a morally corrupt and decadent society. True, Canaan was also corrupt, but Yaakov maintained a separate existence in Canaan and was unaffected by Canaanites. But in Egypt, Yosef is in charge of the whole thing! How can Klal Yisroel be a part of the ruling family of Egypt and not have a very close connection to the people? So Hashem reassured Yaakov that Klal Yisroel would grow and develop and become a nation in Egypt and eventually come back.

Yaakov offered korbanos to the G-d of his father Yitzchok. Why not Avrohom? Rashi says it is because one has a greater obligation to honor one's father than to honor one's grandfather. The Ramban here explains that each of the Ovos had a different middoh. Avrohom Ovinu's middoh was unlimited chessed. This produced a Yishmoel who was dominated by taivoh. Chessed needs to be limited and defined. The western world has lost control of taivoh. The chessed wasn't balanced properly.

Yitzchok is gevuroh, and din – self-restraint and uncompromising justice – the opposite of chessed. But an imbalance of this middoh produced Eisov who had an extreme lack of chessed which results in murder. Yishmoel's unlimited taivoh produced theft – just like the dor hamabul's unlimited taivoh produced a culture of chomos – theft.

Yaakov knew he needed to take these two middos and modify them to produce the perfect combination. But which do you start with and which comes second to modify the first?

The Ramban explains there is an emes of Heaven which is absolute and uncompromising and an emes which needs to function in this world which is balanced by chessed. How do you know if you have the proper balance? It is done only with the Torah, which tells us how to function in this world. So Hashem is telling Yaakov that he has achieved that proper balance through Torah.

Yaakov sent Yehudah to establish a yeshiva in Goshen before Klal Yisroel would arrive. If Klal Yisroel are going to be able to survive the Egyptian influence, there is only one way – to set up a place for limud haTorah in advance so that when they show up they already have a place to learn. Yehudah provided the material necessities for the yeshiva, and Levi became the Rosh Yeshiva.

What is the significance of Levi being the rosh yeshiva?

Levi was the rosh yeshiva. When the rest of Klal Yisroel wanted to assimilate, only one shevet resisted. Only one shevet didn't stop bris miloh – Shevet Levi. The only shevet that never became slaves was Shevet Levi because they remained separate and removed from Egyptian society and culture. Why? They were busy learning Torah.

In this week's parsha Yaakov gave his children brochos. Shimon and Levi were passionate people. They misdirected their passion and turned it against Yosef. Yaakov criticized them for it. Levi decided to redirect his passion to learning Torah. Levi was successful. At the end of the Torah when Moshe Rabbeinu blesses Shevet Levi, it is all about his primacy in Torah and avodas Hashem. He became the shevet that was closest to the Shechinoh while the other shevotim were on the periphery. It wasn't apparent that Levi would succeed at first. But, in the end, he proved himself. He channeled his incredible passion into Torah.

There is a very interesting posuk at the end of Vayigash.

Yaakov and Yosef had a plan to settle Klal Yisroel in Goshen and keep them separated from the rest of Egypt. The posuk in Parshas Bolok says the vision of Yaakov is to keep Klal Yisroel isolated from the rest of the nations – that is how they remain secure from harm. But certain things are easier said than done. At the end of parsha we read that Klal Yisroel were grabbed by the land, they were impressed by Egyptian society.

Why is Parshas Vayechi a parshoh stumoh? Rashi explains it was because Yaakov wanted to reveal how the rest of Jewish history would develop. But it was hidden from Yaakov and he couldn't reveal it. The Zohar has a variation of this idea. The Zohar says that really Yaakov did reveal the end of days, but the shevotim were not on the spiritual level to understand it. Once they were taken by Egyptian culture and were impressed by it, massive buildings and technological advances, they went down a level and were not worthy of understanding what Yaakov was revealing to them. They didn't reject the decadence and corruption. They weren't disgusted enough by it to instinctually reject it.

The greatest intellectuals in the non-Jewish world can still live the most disgusting morally corrupt lives. I've seen it. They can't produce a morally superior human being.

Rav Yeruchom, the mashgiach of Mir, was on vacation in Switzerland. In the next room was a German philosopher – a professor of ethics. This professor was telling Rav Yeruchom about all the lofty ethical concepts and ideals in German philosophy. This was well before Hitler and the Nazis. Rav Yeruchom asked the professor point-black – has your ethics ever produced anyone like the Chofetz Chaim? If not, what are all the high-sounding morals and ideals worth?

The challenge is to not be taken by the sophistication and advanced technology they produce, and see that the culture is rotten to the core. One should be disgusted by it instead of being impressed by it.

There is another shevet who excelled in Torah and this was Shevet Yissochor. There are differences between Shevet Levi and Shevet Yissochor.

Yaakov is not talking about Yissochor now but what will be 233 years later when they enter Eretz Yisroel. Yaakov says Yissochor will develop and grow into a beast of burden who works day and night and when he rests, he rests along the way. He was given one of the most fertile parts of Eretz Yisroel, but he didn't dedicate his life to cultivate his fields. Instead he dedicated his capacity for hard work to Torah.

Each of us is given a personality and character traits which come with nisyonos. Levi has a passion which could lead to violence. He took that passion and channeled it into limud Torah. Yissochor has a capacity for hard work. He had a nisyon to use that work ethic for furthering his wealth and developing his fertile land and become very wealthy. But instead he channeled that hard work into accepting the yoke of limud haTorah. He said goodbye to his fertile land and decided to work for what is important and what is infinite. These are different types of challenges. In the end he was supported by Shevet Zevulun.

We are at a very interesting crossroads in history in general and Jewish history in specific.

We have had a year of total upheaval. Anyone with any brains and sees how Hashem runs the world has seen that Hashem has given us tremendous challenges.

Each one of us grew up fully integrated into western society. We are intimately familiar with their culture. We are negatively impacted by it. Taking music as an example. There are different problems with non-Jewish music. There is the explicit subject of the song which is obviously anti-Torah, and there is the beat – the tempo. The music itself arouses the most base and depraved animal emotions people can have. The Rambam was asked in a teshuvah about the permissibility of listening to Arab songs. He said if there is a woman singing the song – there is a problem with kol isha. If it is a typical Arab love song, it is forbidden as well. But even the music alone without the words can be problematic if it stirs up unrefined emotions of taivoh that are antithetical to Torah and it is forbidden.

When I first came to Eretz Yisroel, I was approached by a baal teshuvoh who, in his previous life was a world-class Latin Rock musician. He was learning in a yeshiva for a number of years and left the music world. After a while he felt he was strong enough in his Torah to try to integrate his old musical talent into his new life. He asked me if it was permitted to compose a Latin Rock song to the words of the posuk of Shma Yisroel. Those who are familiar with Latin Rock know it is a very low type of music. I asked him one question: does the music express the ideas of Shma Yisroel, or is it a typical Latin Rock song with the words of Shma Yisroel slapped on it as a fig leaf? He told me

the music is not expressing the words of Shma Yisroel. I told him that it was forbidden for two reasons. One is because the music of Latin Rock evokes very powerful, violent emotions. Secondly, it is forbidden because you are making a mockery of the holy words of Shma Yisroel by putting it to such depraved and animalistic music.

When I look at people interested in non-Jewish music, one issue I have with them is that it evokes such base and low emotions which damages one's sensitivity to kedushoh. Another issue I have is how can you admire music that is produced by such immoral, degenerate people? You should be totally disgusted by them and not want to have anything to do with what their twisted minds and hearts produce. If you are not disgusted by these people and their lifestyle and what they represent, it means you don't appreciate the value of a life of kedushoh and taharoh.

Klal Yisroel were impressed by their sophistication and their technology. But they should have been repulsed by their culture and way of life. When you say we can pick what is good and leave out those things which are bad, it's not enough to save you from being dragged down. You should be so revolted by their morally corrupt lifestyle that you want nothing to do with them. Klal Yisroel were not sufficiently revolted, and they were influenced and went down many levels in their spiritual life as a result.

Only one shevet totally rejected Egyptian culture – Shevet Levi. They were only able to do so because they were so engrossed in their own culture of their mesorah from the Ovos and limud haTorah. It gave them a counter-balance and allowed them to say we don't want anything to do with them. So while the other shevotim became slaves, Shevet Levi were learning without distractions. Who was paying the bills? The Egyptian government – just as it was arranged from when they first came down from Canaan.

Yissochor was a different shevet. They went through the slavery of Egypt. They weren't shevet Levi. But then they came through the midbor. They did nothing but learn Torah with Moshe Rabbeinu for forty years. They understood that the only thing worth investing hard work and effort into is something that lasts – something that's forever. They left their fertile land in Eretz Yisroel and all the potential wealth behind and dedicated themselves to limud haTorah exclusively. They put their tremendous capacity for hard work into Torah.

We are at a critical point in human history. The past year in the western world, the United States went through social collapse. A twisted way of thinking became dominant – totally free of restrictions and limits. Taivoh and worship of the human body have become the hallmark of the western world generally. They have no spiritual values. As bnei Torah, we have to be disgusted by this culture and not want anything to do with it. The only way we can do this and survive this golus and remain the children of Yaakov, is by being connected to limud haTorah. That is how shevet Levi avoided the slavery of Egypt, that is how Yosef survived alone in Egypt, and that is how Klal Yisroel have survived throughout the generations in every golus. The Torah is our anchor. It keeps us focused on who and what we are. It is how Yaakov found the perfect balance between chessed and gevuroh and was able to raise the 12 shivtei Koh. It was only with the emes of Torah.

The whole world has gone crazy for almost an entire year. If the vaccine works, we will soon see how it will emerge after all the economic devastation and social devastation has run its course. We have to remain balanced and anchored by limud haTorah.