

This week's *Parashah*, *Vayechi*, is written in the Torah in a unique way. Every other *Parashah* starts at the beginning of a new paragraph or, at a minimum, after a gap nine letters wide separating it from the previous *Parashah*. *Vayechi* is the exception, for it is separated from last week's *Parashah* by a gap only one letter wide. *Rashi* z"l explains: Why is this *Parashah* "closed"? Because, it describes the death of Yaakov and, as soon as Yaakov Avinu departed this life, the hearts and eyes of Israel were closed because of the trouble of the subjugation which the Egyptians began to impose upon them. Another reason is that Yaakov wished to reveal to his sons the date of the End of Days, but that vision was "closed" from him. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l *Hy"d* (1885-1945; rabbi of, and *Rosh Yeshiva* in, Piešťany, Czechoslovakia) asks: Why did *Rashi* write, "The trouble of the subjugation," instead of, simply, "The subjugation"? He explains: We read (*Shmot* 1:7), "*Bnei Yisrael* were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong--very, very much so--and the land became filled with them." In response, Pharaoh said (*Shmot* 1:9-10), "Behold! The people, *Bnei Yisrael*, are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us outsmart it . . ." The Torah is reminding us that, in exile, we should not to flaunt our wealth and power, nor occupy all of the highest financial and mercantile positions, for ultimately that leads the gentiles to be jealous. As long as Yaakov was alive, he kept his descendants rooted in his spiritual world. But, as soon as Yaakov died, his descendants' eyes and hearts closed somewhat to spiritual concerns, and material pursuits became foremost. That is what *Rashi* refers to as the "trouble" of the subjugation, which preceded the subjugation itself. (*Mishneh Sachir*)

## Bitachon

This year--a *Shemittah* year--we will iy"H devote this space to discussing the related subject of *Bitachon* / placing one's trust in Hashem.

In previous issues, we described the *Bitachon* that R' Avraham ben Ha'Rambam z"l (son of Maimonides; Egypt; 1186-1237) writes is expected of prophets and the level that is expected of ordinary people. R' Avraham also writes about a third group of people in relation to *Bitachon*:

There are deniers who have no *Bitachon* at all. Rather, as relates to their livelihoods, they place their trust exclusively in their own efforts. As relates to their health, they place their trust exclusively in doctors and medicines. Some such people deny openly, like the Greek philosophers whose wisdom was limited to nature, and who denied Hashem's *Hashgachah Pratit* / Divine Providence. Others' denial may be in secret, while they pay lip service to the concept of *Bitachon*. They say that Hashem is the One Who makes people rich or poor, Who gives life or takes it away, etc., but in the inner recesses of their hearts, they believe only in man's powers. Those in this latter group of *Resha'im* / wicked people are not so different from those who openly deny G-d's Providence. About such people, the Torah says (*Devarim* 8:11-18), "Take care lest you forget Hashem, your *Elokim* . . . Lest you eat and be satiated, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep and goats increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase. And your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your *Elokim* . . . And you may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' You shall remember Hashem, your *Elokim*--that it is He Who gives you strength to make wealth."

We read (*Yirmiyah* 17:5), "So says Hashem, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in people and makes mortals his strength, and turns his heart away from Hashem.'" R' Avraham observes: My father (*Rambam* z"l) commented that if not for the last phrase ("and turns his heart away from Hashem"), nearly every person would be included in this curse, for sons place their trust in their fathers, wives in their husbands, and businesspeople in their partners. However, the last phrase makes clear that the curse is reserved for those who rely exclusively on other people, not for those who trust in Hashem but use the "natural" means Hashem Himself created to achieve their goals--which is the level of *Bitachon* appropriate for the average person.

(*Ha'maspik L'ovdei Hashem*, ch. 8)

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**“Pharaoh said, ‘Go up and bury your father as he made you swear’.” (50:6)**

*Rashi z”l* writes: Pharaoh said, “If you had not taken an oath, I would not permit you to go.” Pharaoh did not dare to tell Yosef, “Break the oath to your father,” lest Yosef retort, “Then, I, too, may break the oath I made to you not to reveal that I understand *Lashon Ha’kodesh* / the Sacred Tongue (Hebrew), in addition to the seventy languages, while you do not understand it.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Moshe Yirmiyahu Narol Hakohen z”l (rabbi in Narol, Poland and Metz, France; died 1659) asks: Just because a person ate pork he is permitted to commit murder--in other words, even if Yosef was forced to commit one “sin” by violating his oath to his father, would that permit him to commit a second sin by violating his oath to Pharaoh?!

R’ Moshe Yirmiyahu explains: Surely, Pharaoh would not have told Yosef to violate his oath to Yaakov. Rather, he would have told Yosef to go before a *Bet Din* to nullify his oath. To that, Yosef would reply: Before a *Bet Din* can nullify an oath, it must hear the exact words of the oath. I took the oath to my father in *Lashon Ha’kodesh*, so I would have to violate my oath to you in order to nullify my oath to my father. (*Birkat Tov*)

*Another explanation:*

Obviously, Yosef would not have broken his oath to Pharaoh. Rather, *Rashi* means that Yosef would have asked a *Bet Din* to annul his oath. But, how would that work? asks R’ Yehuda Shapira z”l (1923-2009; rabbi and *Rosh Kollel* in Bnei Brak, Israel). One who wants to annul a vow is required to reveal the vow’s contents to the *Bet Din*, which Yosef could not have done without violating his vow to Pharaoh to keep his secret!

R’ Shapira answers: The purpose of revealing the vow’s contents to *Bet Din* is so *Bet Din* can assess whether the vow is of a type that may not be annulled. Therefore, it would have been sufficient for Yosef to tell the *Bet Din*, “I am not asking you to annul a vow which may not be annulled.” Indeed, this is what we say when we perform a general annulment of vows on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, R’ Shapira notes.

Alternatively, R’ Shapira writes, Yosef could have said, “I am seeking annulment of the vow that I will reveal to you after you have annulled it.” [Ed. note: This latter answer is difficult to understand, for, if Yosef would reveal the vow after it was annulled and the *Bet Din* would decide, after the fact, that the vow was of a type that could not be annulled, then, retroactively, the annulment would be ineffective, and Yosef would be violating his vow by revealing the vow to the *Bet Din*.]

(*She’eilot U’teshuvot B’karmeit Yehuda* No.2)

**“Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road . . . and I buried her there on the road to Efrat, which is Bet Lechem.” (48:7)**

*Rashi z”l* writes: I did not carry her even the short distance to Bet Lechem. I know that in your heart you feel some resentment against me. Know, however, that I buried her there by the command of G-d. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Noach Weinberg z”l (1930-2009; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva of Aish Ha’Torah*) asks: Rachel had passed away almost 50 years earlier. Why, now, did Yaakov decide to explain his decision to bury Rachel on the road? If Yaakov thought that Yosef was bothered by Yaakov’s decision, as *Rashi* writes, why did Yaakov not explain himself earlier?

By way of explanation, R’ Weinberg asked his students: If you experienced prophecy and *Hashem* spoke to you, would you reveal this fact to other people? Many people would, but Yaakov did not. Surely, his children suspected that he was a prophet, but he did not tell them.

Then, why now? R’ Weinberg explains: Yaakov wanted to inform Yosef of the gift that *Hashem* had promised him--*i.e.*, that his sons Ephraim and Menashe would be recognized as separate tribes. This required Yaakov to disclose that *Hashem* had spoken to him. And, once he was disclosing that, there was no reason not to explain that it was based on prophecy that he had buried Rachel where he did.

R’ Weinberg adds: From this we learn that we do not need to inform others of our accomplishments or the good deeds that we have done, nor do we need to seek others’ approval. Instead, our good deeds should, generally speaking, be a secret shared only by each of us and *Hashem*. (*48 Derachim L’Torah* p.167)

**“You had bad thoughts about me, but *Elokim* intended it for good.” (50:20)**

R’ Yosef Yozel Horowitz z”l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) asks: How was this meant to calm the fears of Yosef’s brothers? The very reason they were now afraid was that they had had bad thoughts about Yosef! So what if *Hashem* stymied their plans?

The *Alter* explains: Yosef was not referring to the fact that his brothers had intended to do him harm. Rather, he meant: “The reason you are afraid of me now is that you continue to misjudge me, just as you did years ago, so you think I have ill will toward you.” Our Sages explain that, after Yaakov died, Yosef stopped eating with his brothers. Yosef’s reason was that he did not want to sit at the head of the table in front of his older brothers, which his official position would have required him to do. They, however, interpreted Yosef’s actions as putting distance between them. “The only reason you think this,” said Yosef, “is that you have not eradicated your earlier bias against me.”

Many times, continues the *Alter*, we worry about how to avoid the harm we think others are planning to cause us when, in fact, those others are not thinking bad thoughts about us at all. Rather, all of “their” bad thoughts are in our own imaginations. Frequently, this mistake leads to other sins as well, such as “preemptively” harming or insulting the imagined, but actually innocent, “aggressor.” (*Madregat Ha’adam: Ma’amar Yir’ah Ve’ahavah* ch.4)