

שבת

י"ח
Vayechi

In our *Parashah*, Yaakov Avinu takes leave of his children and passes away. Our Sages relate that, before his passing, Yaakov wanted to reveal to his children the "Ketz" / "End," but that information was hidden from him. R' Hillel Zaks z"l (1931-2015; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) writes that we do not even know what piece of information Yaakov meant to reveal; it could not have been the date when *Mashiach* will come, R' Zaks notes, for that is not preordained, but rather is dependent on our deeds. Moreover, many Sages throughout history have tried to predict when *Mashiach* would come; obviously, they did not think that they knew something that was hidden from Yaakov. In short, we do not know what Yaakov was planning to reveal before Heaven prevented him from doing so.

As a general matter, R' Zaks continues, there are two types of exiles. When *Bnei Yisrael* first went down to Egypt, they were given a hint that it would be for 210 years (see *Bereishit* 42:2 and *Rashi* z"l there). Likewise, when the Jewish People were exiled to Bavel (Babylon), they were told that the exile would last 70 years (see *Yirmiyah* 25:11-12). In both cases, however, no one knew when the count started (see *Daniel* ch.9); therefore, no one knew when the Ketz would be. Thus, says the *Gemara* (*Megillah* 12a), kings Belshatzar of Bavel and Achashveirosh of Persia both made feasts celebrating the "failure" of the Jewish People to be redeemed at the end of 70 years (as each of them erroneously counted the years, with disastrous results for both. – *Continued in box inside* –

Shabbat

R' Aryeh Finkel z"l (1931-2016; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi'in Ilit, Israel) notes that *Shabbat* is associated with "Shalom," a term that encompasses peace, harmony, and completion. For example, we welcome *Shabbat* in *Lecha Dodi* with the words, "Bo'ee / Enter in Shalom, crown of her husband." In *Ma'ariv*, we expand the last *Berachah* before *Shemoneh Esrei* by adding multiple references to Hashem's "Sukkah / shelter of Shalom." The angels who visit us on *Shabbat* are called, "Angels of Shalom," as we say in *Shalom Aleichem*. And, for many, the greeting on this day is "Shabbat Shalom."

R' Finkel continues: The *Mishnah* (end of *Uktzin*) teaches that Hashem found no vessel suitable for holding blessings other than *Shalom*. *Shabbat*, we are taught, is the source of all blessings. It follows, therefore, that *Shabbat* itself is "Shalom." This explains many *Halachot* of *Shabbat*. (The purpose of lighting candles in honor of *Shabbat* is to avoid the fights that would occur if people were tripping over each other in the darkness.) *Halachah* even dictates that one should sharpen his knives before *Shabbat* lest the frustration one experiences because of a dull knife lead to quarrels in the home.

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; the "Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'kadosh") quotes the *Zohar* which teaches that the seven days of the week parallel seven *Tzaddikim*. The day of *Shabbat* parallels Yosef, who is described as the essence of *Shalom*. How so?

R' Finkel explains: We read (*Bereishit* 45:1), "Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, 'Remove everyone from before me!' Thus no one remained with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers." *Midrash Rabbah* states that, in doing so, Yosef behaved irresponsibly, for his brothers could have killed him. Nevertheless, Yosef felt that it was worth endangering himself in order to spare his brothers from embarrassment.

R' Finkel concludes: *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* teaches that the ultimate *Shalom* will come about in the merit of the love and *Shalom* that Yosef showed his brothers. We read (in our *Parashah*--50:21), "He comforted them and spoke to their heart." Says the *Midrash*: If Yosef could comfort his brothers and speak to their hearts, how much more so can we be assured that Hashem will speak thus to Yerushalayim, as we read (*Yeshayah* 40:1-2), "Comfort, comfort My people -- says your *Elokim*. Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim..." And we read further (*Yeshayah* 51:3), "For Hashem will comfort Zion, He shall comfort all her ruins, He shall make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem; joy and gladness shall be found there, thanksgiving and the sound of music." (Yavo Shiloh p.411)

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"Then Yosef fell upon his father's face; he wept over him and kissed him." (50:1)

"He ordained a seven-day mourning period for his father." (50:10)

R' Moshe Scheinerman *shlita* (Brooklyn, N.Y.) asks: We are taught that we are supposed to accept suffering with love. Moreover, as believing Jews, we know that everything that happens is for the best. Why, then, is mourning not only permitted, but an obligation?

R' Scheinerman offers several answers:

R' Moshe ben Nachman *z"l* (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes (in his commentary to *Devarim* 14:1), "The Torah does not prohibit crying, for it is natural to cry when loved ones depart, even when they are only leaving on a journey." R' Scheinerman explains: Since *Hashem* made it our nature to cry when someone goes away, it must be a proper reaction, so long as it is measured and not excessive. Indeed, the 13th century work *Sefer Ha'yashar* (whose authorship is uncertain) teaches that it is a sign of a defect in a person's soul if he is not moved whenever he hears that another Jew has died. Excessive mourning, on the other hand, could be interpreted as a lack of belief in the eternity of the soul.

In his work *Torat Ha'adam*, *Ramban* gives two more reasons for mourning: (1) to give a person an opportunity to reflect on the insignificance of *Olam Ha'zeh* / this physical world, and (2) to reflect on where one is going, and thus to repent. This, writes R' Scheinerman, is the message of the verse (*Kohelet* 7:2), "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for that is the end of all man, and the living should take it to heart." This also is the message of *Pirkei Avot* (3:1), "Look at three things and you will not sin: where you came from, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting."

R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin *z"l* (the "*Netziv*"; 1816-1893; rabbi of, and *Rosh Yeshiva* in, Volozhin, Belarus) adds another reason: Mourning shows honor to the deceased, which is a very important end in itself.

Lastly, R' Simcha Zissel Ziv *z"l* (1824-1898; the *Alter* of Kelm) writes that mourning is a way of participating in the pain of the deceased, who is now undergoing an exacting judgment in Heaven, as every person must do eventually. The *Alter* compares this to seeing someone carrying a heavy load and helping him with that load. This would explain, R' Scheinerman adds, why there is a *Halachah* that if a deceased person leaves no mourners, the community should designate mourners for him.

(*Ohel Moshe: Badei Nechamah* ch.1)

"He blessed Yosef and he said, 'Elokim before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked ...'" (48:15)

R' Leib Mintzberg *z"l* (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) notes that the Torah speaks in a number of places of the Patriarchs walking "before" *Hashem*. In contrast, the Torah commands us (*Devarim* 13:5), "After *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, you shall walk." The reason seems to be, writes R' Mintzberg, that once the Torah has been given, we must walk in the way that *Hashem* has already shown us--i.e., we must keep His *Mitzvot*. The Patriarchs, however, were not commanded to keep the Torah; there was nothing for them to walk "after." Instead, their role was to blaze a new trail based on their understanding of what *Hashem* wanted. (*Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah*)

"And as for me, I have given you Shechem--one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow." (48:22)

The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 123a) asks: Did Yaakov take Shechem with his sword and bow? Do we not read (*Tehilim* 44:7), "For I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not save me"? (Even if Yaakov did fight for Shechem with weapons, why would he attribute his victory to those tools, not to *Hashem*?) Rather, says the *Gemara*, "My sword" refers to prayer, and "My bow" refers to beseeching G-d. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Eliezer Ben-Zion Brok *z"l* (1904-1985; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Novardok-Bet Yosef Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) writes in the name of R' Avraham Yoffen *z"l* (1887-1970; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Novardok Yeshiva in Bialystok, Poland; New York; and Yerushalayim): Why did Yaakov call prayer his "sword" and "bow"? Because that is the reality. (Prayer is the most reliable weapon we have.) That we don't see this as a fact and live our lives accordingly reflects a shortcoming in our *Emunah* / faith.

(*Hegiyonei Mussar* p.10)

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Nevertheless, continues R' Zaks, the fact that there was an announced *Ketz*, even if no one knew how to calculate it, was some consolation to our ancestors in Egypt and Bavel/Persia, giving them something to look forward to. In contrast, our current exile has no *Ketz*, as we say in *Ma'oz Tzur*, "There is no *Ketz* / end to the days of evil." Of course, we believe that our exile will end, but we have no hint of when or how. That is why *Midrash Rabbah* refers to our exile as "the depths"--like the depths of the sea, which even in our age remain largely unknown. This "mystery," R' Zaks writes, is meant to test our faith and increase our reward for not losing hope. (*Ha'rofeh L'shvurei Lev: Mo'adim* III p.77)