Points to Ponder

Vayechi 5781

הִשָּֽׁבְעָה֙ לִ֔י Swear to me (47:31) - Why did Yosef need to swear that he would fulfill the deal he made with Yaakov? **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that **Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** explained that when we take on responsibilities sometimes excuses come into play as Yaakov mentioned to Yosef in regard to why he did not buy Rachel in Mearas HaMachpela. By swearing, Yosef would see to it that he would go the extra mile to fulfill his promise to his father. The Midrash explains that this was quite fortuitous insofar as Pharaoh did not want Yosef to go. It was only when Yosef said that he swore in the same way that he swore he would not reveal that he knew a language that Pharaoh didn’t, that Pharaoh relented.

**וַיִּשְׁלַח֩ יִשְׂרָאֵ֨ל אֶת־יְמִינ֜וֹ Yisrael sent forth his right hand (48:14)** - Why didn’t he simply ask them to switch places? **Rav Shimon Schwab ztl.** explained that Yosef had superiority in 2 areas -- he was the man of action and the man of spirit. The Jewish people needed both leadership qualities. Menashe had the action trait and Ephraim, the spiritual one. Yaakov wanted each to be on the right side of him for the Berachos and thus for the active, Menashe stood on the right but for the receptive spiritual, it was the right hand on Ephraim.

**הֵאָֽסְפוּ֙ וְאַגִּ֣ידָה לָכֶ֔ם Gather around and I will tell you (49:1) - Rashi** explains that Yaakov wanted to reveal the future to his children and it was hidden from him. Why did Yaakov want to do this? **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzsky ztl.** explained that Yaakov wanted to strengthen the people’s resolve and faith during the Galus but the revelation of the time would cause the people to give up hope and so he found a different way -- dividing up the land. That, along with the cutting of the cedar trees for the Mishkan gave the people hope that would withstand the pressure of assimilation.

**רְאוּבֵן֙ בְּכֹ֣רִי אַ֔תָּה Reuven you are my Bechor (49:3)** - Why did Reuven lose the Bechora if he did Teshuva? Moreover, even in his sin, he was merely displaying his concern for his mother? **Rav Zeidel Epstein ztl.** explained that while he had acted nobly toward his mother, he ignored his Kibud Av in the process. This he never received kappara for. When we act with noble intent, we need to consider whom we are hurting in the process.

**יִשָּׂשכָ֖ר חֲמֹ֣ר גָּ֑רֶם Yissachar is a bony donkey, lying between the boundaries. (Bereshis 49:14)** - Why is a donkey an appropriate reference for Yissochar? **Rav Shalom Rosner Shlita** suggested that this is a reference to the Talmud’s (Avoda Zara 5a) statement that a man should approach Torah like an ox and a donkey. (l'olam yasim adam atzmo al divre torah k'shor la'ol u'kchamor l'masa). What is the difference between an ox and a donkey and why does the Gemera state that we need to act like both an ox and a donkey in the way we approach the study of Torah?  The **Chafetz Chaim** explains the nuance between an ox and a donkey with respect to Torah. An ox is a strong animal and is used to **prepare** the field for planting. The donkey is used to carry the produce from the field **after** it is ripe.  With respect to work in a field, the ox is pre and the donkey is post.  Rav Rosner suggested that as an ox prepares a field, we need to prepare ourselves for the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos.  As a donkey, after we learn or experience a spiritual high, we must internalize and carry that moment with us– otherwise we will not reap the fruits of our labor. Yissachar is depicted not only as a talmid chacham, who was engaged in learning, but one who brought it home and implemented what he learned.

**אִ֛ישׁ אֲשֶׁ֥ר כְּבִרְכָת֖וֹ בֵּרַ֥ךְ אֹתָֽם Each man according to his blessing (48:28)** - What about Reuven Shimon and Levi? They did not receive Berachos? **Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that there is beracha in receiving Tochacha (reproof) because from it we learn how to return to being better Jews.

**פָּקֹ֨ד יִפְקֹ֤ד Hashem will redeem you (50:25)** - These words (Pakod Yifkod) will serve as a codeword for the Geulah (See Rashi to shemos 3:18). **Ramban** asks what kind of a codeword is it if everyone knows it? **Rav Hutner ztl.** explained that the sign was not for others to test the person but rather for the person to test himself or herself. Sometimes we REALLY believe that which we WANT to be so in our desire to be ehrlich. To those who might have these types of Chalomos, Yosef asked them to apply the Pakod Yifkod test. If those words aren’t there, you are not experiencing Nevuah.

Haftara -

**וְחָזַקְתָּ֖ וְהָיִ֥יתָֽ לְאִֽישׁ And you will strengthen and become a man (Melachim Alef 2:2) - Rashi** explains that Shlomo was only 12 years old at the time. But why does Dovid HaMelech use the word “V’Chazakta”? **Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin Shlita** quotes Rav Chaim who explains that a man (”Ish”) is one endowed with Yiras Shomayim. Sometimes, that Yiras Shomayim needs strengthening. In order to grow and be a Chacham one needs the ability to look out on the future with a clear fear of Shomayim about him.