

## פ' בראשית

בראשית (1:1) There is the classic question which is brought by Rashi in his first comment on the Torah. Why does the Torah begin with Bereshit? It should begin with the middle of Parashat Bo, where the laws in the Torah basically begin. Rashi then answers that the reason the Torah begins with the Creation of the World is that since G-d created the world, it belongs to him and he can give it to whoever he wants. He decided to give Eretz Yisrael solely to the Jewish people.

As a proof Rashi brings the verse "Koach ma'asov higid l'amo latet lahem nachalat goyim" (He declared to his people, the strength of his works in order that he might give them the heritage of the nations). One might immediately ask: "Why amo," why tell this to the Jewish people, instead tell it to the non-Jews. The answer is simple. If the Jewish people do not recognise their right to Eretz Yisrael, can one expect the non-Jews to do so?!

When the United Nations team UNSCOP came to Eretz Yisrael in 1947, two of its more friendly members towards the Jews had a meeting with Begin and his fellow Irgun members. At this meeting Begin asked them to recommend that all of Eretz Israel be given to the Jews, rather than sharing the land with the Arabs. They answered that since the official [*sic*] representatives of the Jews, namely, the Jewish Agency, were prepared to accept partition, they could not go beyond this. This tragically illustrates the "amo" in "Koach ma'asov higid l'amo"!

If we are now handing parts of Eretz Yisrael to a so-called "Palestinian Authority," can we really expect the world to sympathise with us when we send our army into these "Palestinian" areas after a terrorist action?!

בראשית ברא א-לקים (1:1)The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible, changes these words to read "Elokim bara bereshit" (G-d created bereshit). This was done so that nobody could come along and "suggest!" that a person called "Bereshit" created G-d! This may seem very far-fetched. However, the lesson is clear; there are always people who want to twist the Torah to their own convenience, however absurd the twisting might be. An example of this today are the non-Orthodox movements and then they expect to be accepted as authentic Judaism! Some of these movements even go as far as to claim they are observing the Halachah (Jewish law)!

פרו ורבו (1:28) This is the first of the 613 commandments in the Torah. The world was not created just for one generation. Man was immediately commanded to reproduce subsequent generations. Today one can especially see how important this is for the Jewish people to have large families especially due to the Holocaust, and now the intermarriage rate in the Diaspora which has reached catastrophic proportions. How sad it therefore is to have seen in the past how the Israeli Government reduced the child allowances for large families.

וישב ביום השביעי ... ויכל א-לקים ביום השביעי (2:2) There is no contradiction between these two phrases. On the Shabbat, G-d created menuchah (rest). After 6 days of work, one must rest for one day. [Even the non-Jews have accepted this, although their idea of rest is far from our observance of Shabbat.] Resting on Shabbat gives berachah (blessing) for the other 6 days of the week. A Jew should not say how much extra money he could have earned had he worked on Shabbat, and that he is doing G-d a favour by not working! He would be far worse off, in all respects if he worked 7 days a week. All the owners of cinemas, malls and shops which are beginning to open in Eretz Yisrael on Shabbat, do not know what they are losing by their activities. Today they might think they are gaining by their actions, but a later date they will come to realise the error of their ways.

ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו (2:17) Man was first given a life of luxury with only one rule, namely not to eat from the etz hada'at (tree of knowledge), but he spoiled it. One can compare this with the spies who gave a bad report of Eretz Yisrael and as a result delayed our entry there by 40 years. Throughout our history we have brought a lot of the troubles on ourselves by our own doing. In the "Six Day War" we liberated large portions of Eretz Yisrael. There could today be two million Jews in these areas and any talk of a "Palestinian State" or a "Road Map" would be completely meaningless. But there are only about half a million Jews living in these liberated areas. Moreover, we have had to continually to this very day fight with the Government even to have reached this number.

לא תאכלו ממנו ולא תגעו בו (3:3) There was no command not to touch the tree. This was an addition by Chava. If you add to the laws of the Torah, you will then come to detract from them, and this is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Chava both ate from the tree.

There is the story of a man who borrowed a silver spoon from his neighbour and later returned it together with a small silver spoon saying that "your spoon gave birth to a baby spoon." A few weeks later a similar thing occurred with the neighbour's silver goblet. At a later date the man asked his neighbour to loan him his gold watch. The neighbour was more than happy to oblige, expecting to receive back in addition a baby gold watch. However, instead, the man informed his neighbour that the gold watch had died. "How can a watch die?" asked the neighbour. Replied the man, "If a spoon and goblet can give birth, then a watch can die." If you start adding, you will then come to detract.

ויאמר האדם האשה אשר שנתה עמדי (3:12) This is the old story of not taking responsibility, namely, passing the buck. "I'm not guilty - it was the woman." And the woman saying "I'm not guilty - it was the snake." In today's language: The manager is guilty" or "The machine is faulty" or "It is the computer giving the wrong data" or "The Government doesn't know how to govern."

והל קין ואל מנחתו לא שעה (4:5) Kayin brought an offering, but he was capable of bringing a better one, namely he was a schnorrer. Therefore it was not acceptable to G-d. Had it been exactly the same offering, but the best that he could bring, it would have been acceptable to G-d. One can see this at the beginning of the book of Vayikra. There it is written that whereas the richer people bring offerings of expensive animals, but the poor man brings just some flour, the Torah is more pleased with him than with the rich man. It is not the amount of money you give to charity. The important thing is, are you able to give more?

לא ידעתי השמר אחי אנכי (4:9) Again we see the running away from responsibility. If you do wrong, admit it; this is the first stage of teshuvah (repentance). It is true that this was the first time in the world that a person had died and Kayin did not know that hitting or attacking Hevel could kill him. However, he knew that such an action was wrong.

זה ספר תולדת אדם (5:1) There were ten generations from Adam to Noach. During this period the world became corrupted to such an extent that G-d went as far as to regret having created it. But in the last verse of the Parashah, one can see light at the end of the dark tunnel. "Noach found favour in G-d's eyes."

When one is in a dark period, as we are today in Eretz Yisrael. both politically and financially, one must look for the light at the end of the tunnel. If one has the proper emunah (faith), one will surely see this light.

## פ' נח

נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו (6:9) Noach lived in a totally non-observant community. Yet despite this he was observant. This is to his great credit. It is much harder to observe Torah and mitzvot (commandments) when one lives in a community which is non-observant. Kosher food will not be readily available. Shabbat is a working day; even if people are not at their place of business, they will be shopping, or in the cinema, or on the golf course. Shuls will generally be far away from one's house. The town often does not have a mikva (ritual bath). Observant women in Vilna used to have to travel 14 hours each way to Moscow each month to use the mikva. Such a person requires great mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) to carry out the requirements incumbent on a Jew.

עשה לך תיבת עצי גפר (6:14) One might readily ask why G-d did not provide Noach with a ready-made ark. Instead, Noach had to build it himself. It took him 120 years and all the inhabitants saw him building it. They naturally asked him what he was doing and his answered that G-d intended destroying the world because of their evil deeds and they should therefore repent. But they did not listen to Noach, and they even scoffed at him. G-d does not want to punish the wicked; he wants them to repent. Even a person who has been wicked all his life can repent and be forgiven. However, Noach, unlike Avraham did not ask G-d to spare the wicked but he just told them to repent. He was therefore on a lower level than Avraham.

זהר (6:16) This can be translated as a "light." Even in a time of darkness, there is always a spark of light. When everything seems black, one must look for the "white."

אשר לא טהרה (7:2) One should note the language of the Torah. It does not use the word "temaya" (unclean) but "lo tehorah" (not clean). A person must accustom himself to use clean language. There was a time when, in general, the newspapers and the media would not use unclean language or print disgraceful photographs. Unfortunately, today, in the majority of the cases this is no longer so.

כי לימים עוד שבעה (7:4) These were the seven days of mourning for Metushelach. He was Noach's grandfather and was a tzadik (righteous person) and G-d therefore did not want him to see the flood and therefore he then died.

In the years preceding the Shoah (Holocaust), when a person died young from natural causes, the family might well have asked why did he die so young? It was after the Shoah that one could understand. The alternative might well have been a gas chamber had he not died a few years earlier of natural causes.

ויסגר ה' בעדו (7:16) G-d himself closed the door of the Ark. We must always remember that in time of trouble. G-d gives protection to the Jewish people.

וישלח את הערב (8:7) Noach first sent to orev (raven) to scout around outside. This bird did not return to inform Noach that it was safe to leave the ark. He then sent a yonah (dove), who unlike the raven, returned to warn him. The raven is a non-kosher bird who preys on other birds; it has no feeling for other species. In contrast, the dove is a kosher bird and would not have wanted Noach and his family to come to harm by a premature departure from the ark. The lesson to be learned from this is to prevent others from coming into dangerous situations.

ויבן נח מזבה (8:20) Noach was immediately appreciative of the fact that G-d had saved him and his family from the flood. To appreciate the good that someone has

done towards a person is an important attribute. Sadly, this is so lacking in this world. In particular, individual Jews or the State of Israel have repeatedly helped non-Jews or other countries, but when it is convenient for them, they conveniently forget these deeds.

שפך דם האדם (9:6) The Torah stresses how one must always remember the sanctity of life. Unfortunately, under some conditions, some people or governments feel that one can just disregard this fact.

הקשת (9:16) Why did G-d create the rainbow? Something visible is invariably better than something non-tangible. This is a reason for the ceremonies of Tashlich and Kapparot; in themselves they don't atone, but hopefully they will bring a person to repentance. One picture is worth a thousand words. When teaching, it is advisable to use visual methods. For example, it is much more effective to teach halachah (Jewish law) in a practical manner than by just using texts.

ויטע כרם (9:20) In this incident, Noach showed his weakness. One of his sons enjoyed this weakness. In contrast, his other two sons did their best to cover it up. If one looks carefully at this verse, one sees that it goes as far as to stress that these two sons took all the precautions not to look at the nakedness of their father.

An important lesson in honour to parents can be learned from this incident. Most parents have some weakness and it is important for their children to try and hide this weakness from outsiders, and they should certainly refrain from publicising it.

ואלה תולדת בני נח (10:1) If one counts all the names in the verses which follow, one finds that it comes to seventy, namely the seventy nations of the world. All these nations have assimilated, and only the Jewish people have survived.

ומגדל וראשו בשמים (11:4) There were people who thought they could "compete" with G-d in that they could build a tower to reach the heavens! In today's language, there are people who think that there are laws which are above the laws of the Torah.

ויירד ה' לראות את העיר (11:5) Why does the Torah write "And G-d came down." Doesn't G-d know from above what is happening on the earth? This teaches us an important lesson. A judge must not rely on hearsay. He must personally see the facts for himself, and he must certainly not make up his mind before seeing and hearing all the evidence.

אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו (11:7) Wicked people do not want to hear what the other person is saying, but they even argue amongst themselves. As an example, we see that the Pirkei Avot does not refer to the argument between Korach and Moshe, but instead that of between Korach and his own followers.

Today there are leftist groups calling themselves "civil rights" activists but they are not prepared to listen to views they disagree with! They should be the first to support free speech! Instead, they even ask the police and the attorney general to investigate whether these views constitute incitement, sedition or any other terms they can think of. In contrast, leading Rabbis respect each other's opinions, even if they differ from theirs.

אלה תולדת שם (11:10) The Parashah ends by listing the ten generations from Noach to Avraham. By the end of this Parashah, two thousand years have already passed since the Creation of the World. Now begins the era of Torah and the history of the Jewish people.



## פ' לך לך

This Parashah begins about two thousand years after the Creation of the World. Until now the Torah dealt with the world in general. From now on the stress is on the Jewish people.

לך לך מארצך (12:1) G-d commands Avram, Get out of the Diaspora and go to Eretz Yisrael! Rashi explains that this is for your benefit and your good. How this theme has repeated itself time after time throughout the history of the Jewish people. The Jews considered Spain to be their homeland and the period was known as the "Golden Age in Spain," but then came the Spanish Inquisition. The Jews considered Germany their homeland, but then came the Holocaust. In the 1930s, families begged their relatives to leave Germany, but they did not listen. They felt they were safe in Germany.

Physically, Diaspora countries may have been for many Jews their "homeland," but one still needs to get out! Making Aliyah is not easy, but looking back the price is worth it.

וילך אברם כאשר דבר אליו ה' (12:4) Avram immediately went because G-d had commanded him to do so. This was not the case however with his nephew Lot. He saw that Avram was old and rich and had no children and assumed he would inherit all his riches. True, he also left the Diaspora but not for the right reasons.

The reason we observe Mitzvot (commandments) is because G-d has commanded us to do so and not because we think that they are good things to do. Unfortunately, there are many Jews who observe selected Mitzvot because they think they are good, but neglect others because they can see no reason for keeping them.

את הנפש אשר עשו בחרן (12:5) Avram did not limit his Yiddishkeit (Jewish religious observance) to himself He would actively go out and make Ba'alei Teshuvah (a Jew returning to observing the Torah). This is especially important today when there are many of our fellow Jews who do not observe Torah and Mitzvot. Often it is not their fault, because they have not had a Torah education. They are "lost in the wilderness." It is the duty of every Jew to return these "lost souls" to Yiddishkeit. Groups such as Chabad have set up Chabad houses wherever there are Jews, even in the most far flung place in the world, such as Alaska and Bangkok. Every year "Yad l'Achim" manages to persuade many thousands of non-observant parents to send their children to religious schools.

ויט אהלה (12:8) "And he set up *her* tent."- note the "her." First he set up his wife's tent. This was the character of Avram, namely, first of all, think of others!

ויהי ריב (13:7) There was an argument between Avram's and Lot's shepherds. It is easy for an argument to get out of hand and spread. For example, children often fight with each other. The parents sometimes unnecessarily interfere and this leads to fights between parents. Parents need to think twice before entering into such quarrels.

From the following verses one can see that Avram immediately acted to stop these arguments. One can learn from this that as soon as someone sees an argument taking place between two forces, they should try and make peace between the two sides.

והכנעני והפרזי אז ישב בארץ (13:7) The Jews had not yet been given Eretz Yisrael. The promise was that in the future it would be theirs forever. Thus arguments today brought by the Arabs that they are descendants of these nations and were thus there first (which is also historically completely incorrect) has no substance.

וישא לוט את עיניו (13:10) Lot looked at the physical beauty of Sodom without any thought for its spiritual content. Today one sees Jews who go and live in a place because there are beautiful villas, lovely landscaping, a lot of theatres and cinemas, a sports stadium and like trappings. The fact that there are barely any Shuls, no mikva

(ritual baths), hardly any facilities for Kosher food, nor Torah education for them and their children does not seem to worry them. The lesson is that before one moves to a place, one must look carefully where one is moving to!

ויבא הפליט (14:13) During the war between the four and five kings, Lot was taken captive. As soon as Avram received the message, he immediately sent out a large rescue party of three hundred and eighteen people to bring him back. Sadly, one can contrast this with our brethren who have been held captive in Arab countries and America for nearly twenty years. What serious efforts have we made to rescue them?

הם יקחו חלקם (14:24) Avram himself did not personally want to take any reward from Malki-Tzedek. However, this was not so regarding his helpers, and he thus accordingly said that they can take their reward. From this incident one can learn an important principle. For oneself, one can follow a strict opinion in Halachah (Jewish law). For others, one tells them the Halachah. If they then want to follow a stricter opinion it is for them to decide.

הכוכבים (15:5) Sometimes the numbers in the future for the Jewish people are likened to the "dust of the earth," and on other occasions to the "stars." The former can be trampled upon; the latter cannot be, since they shine and give out light. We must decide what we want to be, either trampled upon by others, such as the U.N. or America, or alternatively, we can shine and give out light. The choice is solely ours.

והאמן בה' (15:6) First Avram put his belief in G-d and only afterwards asked for signs. One learns from this that one must not make one's belief in G-d be dependent on what or what does not happen on earth.

וענו אתם (15:13) Together with the promise of Eretz Yisrael, G-d warned us we would first have affliction. We do not receive Eretz Yisrael on a "silver platter." As we especially see today, it is given to us with affliction and we must accept this affliction with love.

מנהר מצרים עד הנהר הגדל נהר פרת (15:18) This are the borders of Eretz Yisrael in the future. The Arabs continually say that these words are painted on the wall of the Knesset. We vigorously deny this, and here we speak the truth. But in fact, it should be on the walls of the Knesset. What have we got to be ashamed of?!

מקץ עשר שנים לשבת אברם בארץ (16:3) From this one can learn that when one comes on Aliyah, it is like being born again.

פרא אדם (16:12) In modern language "terrorist," namely, people who wage war not in accordance with the accepted conduct of war.

והיה לאות ברית (17:11) The Mitzvah of Brit Milah (circumcision) is the only Mitzvah where one must give one's blood. It is very rare indeed for a Jew, however assimilated or non-observant, not to have a Brit done on his son. We have seen the mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) of Jews in countries such as the former Soviet Union, to perform this Mitzvah.

בעצם היום הזה (17:26) On the very same day that Avraham received this command he performed it. One must especially remember that he was already an old man of ninety-nine years old. There were not the modern instruments one has today. It wasn't pleasant for him. It would have been easy to say that he would "wait a bit." One can learn from this that even something which is unpleasant that needs to be done now, must be done without any delay!

## פ' וירא

וירא אליו ה' (18:1) This parashah begins just three days after the Brit Milah (circumcision) of Avraham. At the time he was ninety-nine years old and then there were not the modern instruments for performing a Brit which are available today. The third day after the Milah was traditionally the most painful. Another person would have spent the day in bed or sitting in front of his television or computer or searching through the internet. But not Avraham. Even though it was a hot day, he sat at the door of his tent looking for passersby to extend them hospitality. This example again illustrates the greatness of Avraham, who would always first of all think of others.

וירץ לקראתם (18:2) As soon as Avraham saw people in the distance, he ran towards them, even though he was in the middle of a conversation with G-d. At the time, Avraham did not know that they were angels. In fact, he thought they were idol-worshippers. We can see from this that we should extend hachnasat orchim (hospitality – hosting visitors) to everybody. Some people, for an important guest will make a big effort, but for a simple person, just do the minimum. Needless to say, this is of course not right!

ואקחה פת להם (18:5) Avraham promised them a little, but he gave them a big meal. There are sadly many people who promise a lot, but in the end, give little or nothing. We are not just talking about hachnasat orchim, but a whole variety of things such as workers promising to finish a job or suppliers promising to deliver merchandise, by a certain date. Better not to promise and then deliver, rather than to promise and then not honour one's promises. If there are problems and limitations, one should tell the person at the outset. They will appreciate frankness.

וימהר אברהם (18:6) Avraham hurried to provide the meal. One can learn from this not to keep guests waiting, since they may be hungry, and one should immediately offer them a drink, even a glass of water, especially if it is a hot day.

ויתן אל הנער (18:7) Avraham brought in both Sarah and Yishmael to participate in preparing the meal. One needs to train one's children to participate in the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim. One should even train them to give up their bedroom for the orchim (guests) and the children could even sleep on mattresses in the salon.

ויקה המאה וחלב ובן הבקר (18:8) One might immediately ask how Avraham could serve both milk and meat at the same meal?! The Gemara informs us that Avraham observed the whole Torah. However, if one studies the wording, one can see that he began with the milky foods and only later brought in the meat, which is permitted provided certain steps have been taken.

ואדני זקן (18:12) Sarah laughed inwardly saying that there could be no children since Avraham was old. However, when G-d spoke to Avraham, he changed Sarah's wording and told him that Sarah had said that *she* was old; G-d made this change so as not to make strife between Avraham and Sarah. Normally one is forbidden to say something which is untrue. However, to prevent arguments and bad feeling, one is permitted to do so.

ותכחש שרה (18:15) Sarah later denied laughing since she was frightened to admit it. Often it is difficult to admit what one has done, but one must brave and do so.

ואברהם הלך עמם לשלחם (18:16) Avraham accompanied his guests after they left his

house. Hachnasat orchim does not end when the guests leave through the front door. The halachah (Jewish law) requires one not only to give food and drink to one's guests, but also to accompany them for at least the beginning of their journey.

ועם רשע (18:23) As soon as Avraham heard G-d's plans for Sodom, he began "bargaining" with him to spare the city. This is another example of Avraham's concern for others. He would try and find the good even in a place such as Sodom. Sadly there are people who do the opposite; they look for the bad in people. People regularly write letters of complaint, but how many write letters of thanks?!

ומה (19:1) As soon as Lot saw these two people he offered them hospitality. He had obviously learnt this when he was in the company of Avraham. If one associates with good people, one learns their traits. In addition, special praise must be given to Lot, since Sodom, to say the least, was not a hospitable town! He did the maximum to protect his guests from the inhabitants of this city. It was thus much harder to keep this mitzvah in Sodom than in another place.

There was a new city in Eretz Yisrael, where the founders decided that there would be no social cases in that city. To this, the Rabbis cried out that this was like Sodom!

וידי (19:14) Had it been Avraham, they would have believed him immediately, but because of the character of Lot they were skeptical. If one wants people to always believe what one says, one must accordingly have a good character.

אל תביט אחריו (19:17) Despite this order, Lot's wife did so and she was encrusted in salt. It is not for us to look at the wicked being punished, even those as wicked as those in Sodom.

וימל אברהם את יצחק (21:4) Avraham did not say that his son was only a "little pitchkela" of eight days old and that he would therefore wait until he was older to do the Brit Milah. He had complete faith in G-d that one could do a Milah on such a baby. We have seen throughout thousands of years of our history that no harm comes to children when they have a Brit at this age. After they receive their first sip of wine after the Milah, they are quite happy!

גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה (21:10) Yishmael was already a teenager and Sarah could already see his character; he was "pere adam" (a rascal). Avraham, in contrast was spending all his time outside his house helping others, and thus he had no time to bring up Yishmael, and this was the result. A father needs to divide up his time between bringing up his children on the one hand, and helping others on the other hand.

והא-לקים נסה את אברהם (22:1) Here was the supreme test. Avraham had longed and waited so long for Yitzchak and now G-d was telling him to offer him up as a sacrifice. Like with everything else, Avraham rushed to do this. He had complete faith in G-d.

We will never be asked to do such a thing, but we have other tests. For example, would we give up our employment if it were suddenly to involve us working on Shabbat, especially when it is difficult to get other employment. This is a common situation in the Diaspora.

ואיה השה לעלה (22:7) Avraham answered that G-d will provide the lamb. He gave Yitzchak such an answer in order not to worry him. One can learn from this that it is important not to cause other people to be worried unnecessarily. One should therefore give evasive answers in such situations.



## פ' חיי שרה

וְתָמָת שָׂרָה בְקָרִית אַרְבַּע (23:2) The question can immediately be asked why did Avraham wait until Sarah died in order to buy Meorat Hamachpelah (Cave of Machpelah)? We know from the Zohar that Avraham had previously discovered this Cave and he saw that Adam and Chava were buried in it, and he then realised that this would be an ideal burial place for his family. However, to suddenly go to Ephron, the owner, in order to purchase it, might cause Ephron to demand a higher price. Therefore, Avraham waited until Sarah died which was a more natural time to purchase it. One can learn from this that when making financial purchases, one should try to choose one's time carefully in order to get a cheaper price!

גֵר וְתוֹשָׁב אֲנִי (23:4) The words "ger" (stranger) and "toshav" (resident) are in fact opposites. Why then did Avraham use this expression? The answer is that he said to Ephron that in the first instance, I am coming to you as a stranger to ask you to sell me the Cave. However, if you refuse, I will then come as a resident and insist on the rights that G-d has given me to Eretz Yisrael. One can learn from this that one should not push one's rights in the first instance. First be polite and gentle, and only if this fails, one should utilise one's rights.

אֶפְרוֹן דָּבַר רַב לָךְ (23:11) Ephron spoke a lot but in the end demanded a lot of money for the site; he even insisted on the larger size shekels! (Contrast this with Avraham in the previous Parashah, when he spoke a little but did a lot.) Today, there are sadly many people who talk and promise a lot, but in the end, do little or even nothing.

מֵת ... קֵבֶר (23:4-15) These two words "kever" (grave) and "meit" (dead) come together seven times in this section on Meorat Hamachpelah; the first six times "kever" precedes "meit" and in the seventh case the reverse. For a righteous person "kever" figuratively precedes "meit." Even after a righteous person is dead, people are studying their writings, for example Rashi, Rambam, the Mishneh Berurah. However, for a wicked person, "meit" comes before "kever." In Meorat Hamachpelah are buried six righteous persons, Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Rivka, Yaacov and Leah. In addition, there is the head of the wicked Eisav which rolled there after he was decapitated by Chushim the son of Dan, after Eisav tried to prevent Yaacov's burial there.

וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעַפְרָן אֶת הַכֶּסֶף ... בְּכָל בְּאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ (23:16, 18) The Torah goes to great lengths to show how Avraham bought the Cave - money, witnesses etc. - in order that there should be no doubt in the future on its ownership. This point is again stressed at the end of this Parashah and also in Parashat Vayechi. The Midrash states that there are three places in Eretz Yisrael where the non-Jews will not be able to say that the Jewish people stole them from them, namely, the Temple Mount, Meorat Hamachpelah, the grave of Yoseph in Shechem. Ironically these are the three places where the Arabs are claiming that they belong to them!

אֵשָׁה לְבָנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי (24:3) Avraham wanted to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Why then did he send Eliezer to his relative's house, which was a house of idol worship? The answer is that this was the best available option; it was better than him marrying the daughter of a Canaanite and it was thus the lesser of two evils. One cannot always have an ideal solution to a particular situation; one can only do one's best considering all the circumstances.

By analogy, a person living in an isolated place in the Diaspora cannot maintain such a high standard of Kashrut as a person living in Eretz Yisrael. The Torah

education for his children is likely to be of a lower standard that he could get in Eretz Yisrael. That is the real situation and one must act accordingly.

וגם גמליך אשקה (24:14) Eliezer took on his job as a Shadchan (marriage broker) very seriously. He realised that a girl who would have consideration even for camels who had arrived after a long journey, would be a person of good character. In this case, it would be especially so for a girl whose brother Lavan only thought of himself. One must judge a person, not only on how they keep Mitzvot (commandments) between man and G-d, but also on how they keep Mitzvot between man and his fellow man.

ויאמר בת מי את (24:23) Eliezer asked Rivka a number of questions. She immediately answered politely, straightforwardly and in the correct order. Simple questions merit simple answers, not like politicians who speak through both sides of their mouth!

והנכי פניתי הבית (24:31) They removed the idols from the house when Eliezer came. We can see from this how one must have respect for the religious needs and feelings of others. For example, on a family level, this could be getting the hechsherim (Rabbinical supervision) on food that a guest requires, and on a public level, not driving in religious neighbourhoods on Shabbat. Unfortunately, one sees today in Eretz Yisrael, that there are people who will deliberately go out to offend the religious sensibilities of others. There are even political parties whose aim is for a secular government.

לא אכל עד אם דברתי דברי (24:33) He realised that his mission came before his personal needs. Public leaders can learn a lot from this incident. Available money must first and foremost be used for the public and not for the personal convenience and comfort of the leaders. Sadly, this is usually not the case. There always seems to be money to pay the salaries for extra Government Ministers or Deputy Mayors, but no money for the poor and the various institutions.

אז תנקה מאלתי (24:41) One must always do one's best to accomplish one's missions. But sometimes one is not successful, however hard one tries. Rav Yisrael Salant said that it was the effort which was important and not the results.

ויצא יצחק לשוב בשדה (24:63) Yitzchak went off to daven Minchah (pray the afternoon service). He did not say that he would wait until his prospective bride would arrive and then daven (pray), and if she should arrive after sunset, he would say the Amidah twice in Arvit (evening service)! There is a fixed time for davening and when it arrives, one must stop everything else and go and daven.

ויקברו אתו יצחק וישמעאל (25:9) One should note the order. Yitzchak is mentioned here before Yishmael who was the firstborn. Rashi explains that Yishmael did teshuvah (repentance) and gave Yitzchak precedence. Even a "pere adam" (rascal) can do teshuvah.

שנים עשר נשיאם לאמתם (25:16) One sometimes asks why the Arabs are so numerous. It was Avraham who requested from G-d greatness for Yishmael and G-d answered by promising him that Yishmael's descendants would be very very numerous and twelve nations would come from him. However, at the same time one must remember that G-d also said that the "seed" of Avraham was from Yitzchak and it was to them, and only them, that Eretz Yisrael was promised!

## פ' תולדות

וְיִצְחָק יָצָא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ (25:19) On the face of it, it seems that these words are superfluous. Rashi explains that there were people who would say that Yitzchak's father was not Avraham but Avimelech. Therefore G-d made Yitzchak look the image of his father.

There are always people, in particular the newspapers and the media, who want to blacken other people's names, especially of well-known people. In particular, one can see how the newspapers will delight in bringing out long articles attempting to ruin the reputation of well-known and respected Rabbis. All this is not a new phenomenon. It goes back to the era of the Torah. An attempt was made by Korach and his followers to speak evil about Moshe and Aharon.

וַיִּתְרַצֵּץ וַיֵּצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ (25:22) When Rivka passed near a Yeshivah (Rabbinical College), Yaacov wanted to come out of her womb, and conversely when she passed by a place of idol-worship, Eisav wanted to come out. However, one is left with a question here. By tradition, whilst a child is still in his mother's womb, he is learning Torah. Why then should Yaacov have wanted to come out? The answer is that he did not want to be in the same environment as Eisav.

From this one can learn that one must choose one's environment very carefully. Living in an area bereft of Yiddishkeit, will undoubtedly have an influence on one's character and how one keeps the Mitzvot (commandments). Having bad friends, even in a Yeshivah, can have the wrong influence on a person. Therefore, it is sometimes sadly necessary to make a particular student leave his Yeshivah.

וַיִּשְׁאָל עִשָׂו אֶת יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר (25:28) Eisav would ask Yitzchak whether one had to take ma'asarot (tithes) from salt and thus Yitzchak thought he was very diligent in keeping Mitzvot. One should mention that this is not a silly question. One of the melachot (labours) forbidden on Shabbat is "ma'amer" (gathering), and regarding this melachah, salt is like things which grow from the ground. Yitzchak therefore thought that he was also very learned in Torah. There are people who are able to give the impression outwardly, for example by their long beard and mode of dress, that they have great yirat shamayim (piety), but inwardly they are completely different. Rav Yisrael Salant would tell his students that they should only grow a beard when they felt that they were inwardly ready for it.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִצְחָק (25:28) Rivka who was in the house all day long could observe her twins at close range. She realised the true nature of Eisav's character. and that it was Yaacov who was the tzadik (righteous person). Like Avraham, Yitzchak spent all his time outside the house helping others, and as a result he did not have time for his family, and Eisav was thus the result. One needs to divide up one's time between one's family and the outside world.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִצְחָק (25:30) Eisav gobbled up his food without even making a berachah (blessing). Even when one has returned home from work after a hard day and a long journey and one desperately wants to eat, one must still devote a number of seconds to reciting the berachah over the food.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִצְחָק (25:34) One might be able to understand that at that moment, Eisav was under pressure, and on the spur of the moment sold his birthright. However, he should have regretted it soon afterwards, but he did not. On occasion under pressure we all break Mitzvot, but afterwards when we have had time to reflect, we should regret our actions and do teshuvah (repentance) to correct the matter.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִצְחָק (26:2) Even though the conditions are hard, one should remain in Eretz Yisrael. How many Israelis have gone to live abroad because of the security and

financial situations, thinking that it is safer and better in the Diaspora? How many people living abroad have cancelled their trips to Eretz Yisrael believing it is safer in New York? One woman who worked in the New York "twin-towers" building refused to cancel her trip to Eretz Yisroel, and as a result she is still alive today!

עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקלי (26:5) The Gemara tells us that Avraham observed all the Mitzvot (commandments). The word "eikev" also means a heel, a very small part of the body. There is a hint here that one must be just as particular in observing even small details in mitzvot as with big ones. As is stated in the Pirkei Avot: We don't know the reward for keeping a particular Mitzvah.

וכל הבאר ... סתמום פלשתים (26:15) Water is Torah and there are people who try and entice people away from Torah and Mitzvot. We saw this in the 1950s when there was a massive aliyah from the Arab countries. These were Jews who had observed Torah for countless generations. The leftists who were then in power, did the maximum to indoctrinate them to their socialist anti-Torah ways. They even cut off their peyot (sideburns).

ויחפרו באר אחרת (26:21) One can learn from this that one must not be deterred by any anti-Torah forces. As soon as someone destroys, we must rebuild. As an example, we see the work done by Yad l'Achim in persuading parents to transfer their children from mamlachti (state non-religious) schools to Torah schools. Usually after their children start going to Torah schools, the parents' observance of mitzvot also increases.

וצודה לי צידה (27:3) Yitzchak instructed Eisav to kill the animal by shechitah (Jewish religious slaughter of animals). Yitzchak was so fooled by Eisav that he relied on his shechitah. We all know that a shochet must be a yirai shamayim (a fearer of Heaven). The minutest notch on his knife can possul (disqualify) the shechitah, and the public will then be eating non-kosher meat. Everyone needs to rely on the shochet that his knife is perfect.

One could imagine the following scene. It is a Friday and the wife is pressuring her husband who is a shochet to kill the chicken for the Shabbat meal. But he is having trouble getting his knife perfect. A proper shochet won't take "short cuts" even though it is Friday afternoon, and that Shabbat's meals will, as a result, not be meaty!

כי הקרה ה' (27:20) This word HaShem (G-d's name) appeared naturally in the speech of Yaacov, and this made Yitzchak suspicious. This was not the mode of speech of Eisav. When a Jew speaks, expressions such as "b'ezrat HaShem" (with the help of G-d), "im yirzeh HaShem" (G-d willing) etc. should come naturally from his lips. When religious ministers were taking the oath in the Knesset and they used the expression "b'ezrat HaShem" this raised the ire of some leftist members!

הקל קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו (27:22) One can learn from this that even if one does not agree with or like someone else's opinion, one needs to answer them in an intellectual way by using just one's voice. Sadly, today one sees the left (who claim that they look after citizens' rights!) start bringing in the police to arrest people for the views they don't like.

וקה לך משם אשה (28:2) Yitzchak had seen that his wife, even though she came from a house where there was idol worship, was a shomeret mitzvot (observed the Torah). He realised that this could also well be the case with Lavan's daughters. Maybe he had also received reports about these girls. We well know that in the same family there can be those who are shomrei mitzvot and those who sadly are not.



## פ' ויצא

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע (28:10) From a superficial reading of the text, it would seem that this Parashah follows immediately after the previous one. Yaacov is fleeing from Eisav after receiving the blessing from Yitzchak, and he goes to Haran. In fact, there is a gap of fourteen years. During this period Yaacov went to learn in Yeshivah (Rabbinical College). He knew that he was on the way to the house of his uncle Lavan, a house of idol-worship, and in addition, Lavan lifestyle was not in accordance with the Torah. He therefore realised that he had to strengthen himself spiritually before going to Lavan's house.

Today there are the same luring anti-Torah forces in many places which one associates with, and one likewise needs to strengthen oneself against these forces. For example, young men are advised to spend some time in Yeshivah before going to a University or similar place of higher learning.

Another question on this verse is why is it important to tell us that Yaacov departed from a particular city. The reason is, that when a well-known person such as a great Rabbi leaves a particular city, this fact is felt.

ויפגע במקום (28:11) Night came and before Yaacov went to sleep, he davened ma'ariv (evening service). He was obviously tired after a day's walk, yet he still davened. One often arrives home from work in the evening after a hard day in the office, factory or building site, followed by a tedious journey home. One therefore naturally wants to eat the evening meal, but ma'ariv must come first.

עלים וירדים בו (28:12) Yaacov was accompanied on his journey by angels. As he left the borders of Eretz Yisrael, the accompanying angels returned to Heaven ("olim") and different angels came down ("yordim") to continue accompanying him. From this one can learn that a person must be conscious of the fact that he is leaving Eretz Yisrael, and that it is not like crossing a border from say, the United States to Canada. A person is going from a Holy to a non-holy land. In fact, one is only allowed to leave Eretz Yisrael for a very limited number of reasons. One is certainly not allowed to just go on holiday to the Diaspora. One should ask oneself who needs Greece or Turkey for their summer holiday?!

Another thing to learn from this incident is that a Jew has angels accompanying him wherever he goes. On Friday night we greet them with the poem "Shalom Aleichem ma'alachei hasharet." We must remember that we are never alone even in very difficult situations.

הארץ אשר אתה שכב עליה (28:13) Yaacov is for his own safety was forced to leave Eretz Yisrael. G-d is thus reiterating his promise that Eretz Yisrael is ours and only ours. In these difficult times today when we there are continually "plans" to give away parts of Eretz Yisrael to the non-Jews, we must especially remember this promise.

וייקץ יעקב (28:16) Yaacov suddenly woke up and he understood the importance of his dream. When there is something important, one should not continue to stay in bed. Instead one should get up and go to Shul. One must not say I will daven in a few hours' time at home. Davening with a minyan (ten men) and in a Shul is of a far higher level than davening at home. (Obviously, when there is no alternative, one might have to daven at home.)

ויקה את האבן (28:18) The Parashah begins by talking about "avanim," namely, stones in the plural. Why now suddenly change to the singular "even"? Every stone wanted the honour to be the one under Yaacov's head and so they all joined together to become one stone. One can learn from this that one should always try and accommodate everybody. When one makes a Simchah, the Ba'alei Simchah (hosts) should not sit a corner and just talk to a few of the guests. They need to circulate and try and speak (and even be photographed!) with all their guests. This will



certainly give the guests great pleasure.

ונתן לי לחם לאכל ובגד ללבוש (28:20) Yaacov did not ask G-d for diamonds and a luxury villa in Caesarea. He just asked for the simple things, namely, bread to eat and clothes to wear. A person can be well satisfied with plain things. Some of our greatest Rabbis of our generation lived very simply. For example, the Chazon Ish slept on an iron bed.

עשר אעשרנו לך (28:22) Yaacov promised that anything he gets, he will give one tenth to charity. A person might think they are rich if they have an enormous balance in the bank. But no-one can see what might happen on the following day. Maybe there will suddenly be a massive devaluation, as has happened in many countries, and he will instead be in overdraft. However, the mitzvah (commandment) of what money he has in the past given to charity can never be taken away from him. This is recorded on his “bank statement” in Heaven.

ויגל את האבן מעל פי הבאר (29:10) Yaacov succeeded on his own in doing what only all the other shepherds could accomplish together. Sometimes there is a task before us and we are sure that we are unable to do it. However, if we have the will and the determination, we can do much more than we think we can do.

ועבדתני חנם (29:15) Yaacov was not a schnorrer. He was living in Lavan's house, eating his food and benefiting from his other amenities. It was only right he should not just sit around idly. If one is a visitor in someone's house, one should see if one can help them, for example, with the cooking, laying the table, washing up, and so on.

ברחל בתך הקטנה (29:18) One might well ask why all these words? Is not just Rachel sufficient? Yaacov realised who he dealing with and tried to close any loophole. When signing an agreement with somebody, it is important to ensure that nothing is ambiguous, otherwise there can be many problems and unpleasantness in the future.

ויהי בבקר והנה הוא לאה (29:25) Yaacov had suspected that Lavan would do this and so he gave some secret signs to Rachel, so he would already know under the Chuppah (wedding canopy) if something was not right. However, Rachel knew this would publicly embarrass Leah and so she passed her on these signs. For Rachel, it was more important for her not to marry Yaacov in order to avoid publicly embarrassing Leah. From this one can learn the seriousness of embarrassing a person in public.

ויעבד עמו עוד שבע שנים (29:30) Yaacov worked just as diligently in the subsequent seven years, even though Lavan had obtained this work through deceit. Yaacov had given his word that he would work just as hard and he kept his word. This teaches us a very important lesson.

אעבר בכל צאנך היום (30:32) The commentator Kimchi explains that this was not trickery on Yaacov's part. He utilised his superb knowledge as a shepherd.

ותגנב רחל את התרפים (31:19) One might easily ask how someone like Rachel could steal things from her father's house. She felt that by doing this she might bring her father to do teshuvah and prevent him from idol-worship.

רחליך ועוידך לא שכלו (31:38) All the 20 years that Yaacov was with Lavan his conduct was exemplary, despite all Lavan's deceitful conduct. This came largely from the fourteen years he spent in Yeshivah. Yeshivah is not just learning Gemara, it is also to instill yirat shamayim (fear of Heaven). If one just wants to learn Gemara, one can register for a few courses of Gemara during two semesters at a College, and even get a few credits thrown in, but as a general rule there will be no yirat shamayim.

## פ' וישלח

וישלה יעקב מלאכים (32:4) Rashi explains the word "malachim" as actual angels. One might ask why was it necessary to send actual angels? Many years earlier, Yaacov had fled from the wrath of Eisav after having obtained the blessing intended for the firstborn. He was now coming "to face the music." How would Eisav greet him? If it would be in a friendly way, would it be genuine? Or might he try and obtain something from Yaacov, as if to be friendly, and afterwards having obtained it, continue as his enemy? Hence the need to send actual angels who would be able to read Eisav's mind.

We have a very similar situation today. Various Arab leaders claim they want peace with Israel but "at a high price!" but having obtained this price, how will they continue to act? Unfortunately, we do not have angels to assess the situation!

עם לבן גרתי (32:5) The letters of the word "garti" rearranged spells out "taryag" - the 613 Commandments in the Torah. All the time Yaacov was in the house of the irreligious Lavan, he succeeded in observing all the Mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah. This was a result of his having spent these fourteen years in Yeshivah (Rabbinical College) before going to Lavan. If one ever needs to go a live for a period in an irreligious area, one must first ask oneself whether one is spiritually able to withstand all the lures and temptations of the area.

קטנתי (32:11) This Parashah is the eighth one in the Torah and this word "katonti" is the first word of the eighth verse. It means "I have become small." A good trait is to avoid pride, but to what extent? From the placing of this word in the Torah, the Vilna Gaon said that a man may have pride to the extent of an eighth of an eighth.

הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו (32:12) Why both "miyad achi" (from the hand of my brother) and "miyad Eisav" (from the hand of Eisav)? Yaacov considered that he is either my brother or he is the wicked Eisav. One should note the order, first my brother and only then the wicked Eisav. One can learn from this than one should give even a wicked person first of all the opportunity to do something good. If however he does not use this opportunity, only then should one act differently towards him.

עזים מאתים (32:15) Yaacov planned his tactics in three stages, namely, first give a present, if this fails offer a prayer and if this fails go to war. We have given our enemies plenty of presents, namely parts of Eretz Yisrael, guns, money, and freed terrorists from jail. We have prayed. But the attacks and killings increase from day to day. We need to learn from Yaacov what to do next!

ורוה תשימו (32:17) Yaacov used his presents to the maximum. Some people are very greedy and are never satisfied with what they have! Therefore, one should arrange them in a way that they appear to be more than they really are!

ויאבק איש עמו (32:25) One can compare Yaacov wrestling with the angel, with the continual fight than one has with the "yetzer hara" (evil inclination). Just as Yaacov was left wounded after his fight with the angel, one can be left wounded after such a fight with the "yaitzer hara," even though one may sometimes be stronger and succeed. Therefore, one should not put oneself in a situation where one will have to fight with it. For example, don't go to disreputable places or read much of the material which is published today. One may think that one is strong enough, but it could easily leave its mark.

ויזרה לו השמש (32:32) When reading this Parashah one is approaching Chanukah and there is a "hint" to Chanukah in these words. Instead of "shemesh" read "shamash" the candle used to light the Chanukah candles. How many lights does one kindle during Chanukah? The answer is 36 and this is the gematria of "lo".

וירץ עשו לקראתו ויחבקהו (33:4) From a simple reading of the text, Eisav ran to towards Yaacov, kissed him and embraced him. However, if one looks carefully at the Torah, one can see that the word "vayishakahu" has dots over the letters. Nothing in the Torah is superfluous and the Rabbis explain that Eisav did not mean it.

Today one has the same situation. Our enemies appear on the lawn of the White House smiling in front of all the world television networks, kiss and shake hands with us and the world says what nice people they are. They even receive a Nobel Peace Prize for it. However, soon after, they are preaching Jihad in a Johannesburg mosque. Before Begin met with Sadat, the Lubavitcher Rebbe told him to read this Parashah.

ויאמר עשו ... יהי לך אשר לך (33:9) But despite these words, he took the lot! Like Ephron, he spoke a lot but did little. All the hard-earned gains of twenty years, Yaacov gave to Eisav. One can compare this with the large portions of Eretz Yisrael which we liberated with the blood of hundreds of our soldiers in the Six Day War. We are now giving them away bit by bit to our enemies and what we have not yet given, even some members of the Likud (let alone the left) are talking about giving away.

ויבן לו בית (33:17) With Yaacov, the word "house" is used. This is in contrast, with Avraham and Yitzchak where the words "mountain" and "field" respectively are used. Avraham and Yitzchak were most of the time outside their houses, and the result was that their sons, Yishmael and Eisav, turned out wicked. Yaacov however spent more time in his house and all his sons were basically righteous.

ויקן את חלקת השדה (33:19) The Torah specifically records how Yaacov bought the site where now stands Yosef's grave in Shechem. This is one of the three places where the Midrash says that the non-Jews cannot say we stole it from them. However, look what we today let happen to this site!

ותצא דינה ... לראות בבנות הארץ (34:1) Why did a nice girl from a "tzanua" (modest Jewish) house have to run amongst the non-Jews? Is there any wonder what happened to her? Sadly today we see the same thing amongst our youth. Is there any wonder there is all this intermarriage, drug taking, rejecting of the Mitzvot in the Torah? We can easily understand why we have laws of stam yainam (non-Jewish wine) or not drinking beer in pubs.

והתחתנו אתנו (34:9) To this very day, the non-Jews say to us "why can't you intermarry with us? Do you have to be so exclusive?"

ויאמר יעקב אל שמעון ואל לוי עכרתם אתי (34:30) Why was Yaacov furious with Shimon and Levi? Did they not go out of their way to look after the interests of their sister? Yaacov was a man of strong principles. One's word is one's word, as can be seen with the extra seven years' work he did for Lavan. Shimon and Levi did not keep their word with the city of Shechem. Had they just gone in and punished the people of Shechem, without insisting on circumcision and thus weakening them, it is likely that Yaacov would have not objected. One can learn that even in such a situation, one must act correctly.

ותמת רחל (35:19) Why did Yaacov not take her the short distance to Hevron to bury her? He knew by prophecy that when the Jews would go into exile, they would go past her grave, and she would comfort them. Rachel who passed over the secret signs which Yaacov gave her to Leah so that she would not be embarrassed under the chuppah (wedding canopy) is the ideal person to this very day to comfort Jews in time of trouble. One can thus understand our big fight to ensure that we are still able to go and pray at her grave.

ותלד לאליפז את עמלק (36:12) This is the first mention of Amalek in the Torah. One might well ask why G-d even created such an arch enemy as Amalek. When Amalek rises up, and in every generation there is an Amalek, this causes the Jewish people to unite together and do teshuvah (repentance).

## פ' וישב

וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו (37:1) The previous Parashah ends with the words "hu Eisav avi Edom" (this is Eisav the father of Edom). Eisav and his descendants were not given Eretz Yisrael; they were given Edom. It was only to Yaacov and his descendants that Eretz Yisrael was given. This is a theme stressed throughout the book of Bereshit and indeed the rest of the Torah.

ויבא יוסף דבתם רעה אל אביהם (37:2) Yosef caused a lot of the trouble on himself by unjustly accusing his brothers to their father on things that they had not even done. Yosef was accordingly punished for all these things, as can be seen throughout this Parashah. All this shows the seriousness of not observing "shmirat halashon." (purity of speech). The Chafetz Chaim realised the importance of learning all the laws regarding Shmirat Halashon and wrote several books on the subject. More and more groups are continually being established to study these Dinim (Jewish laws).

ועשה לו כתנת פסים (37:3) Yaacov felt that he had been cheated by Lavan, and that had Lavan not done so, Yosef would have been the firstborn, and thus be entitled to more than his brothers. But this was not the case. Reuven was the firstborn, a fact that the Torah continually stresses. As a result of Yosef receiving this coat, the jealousy of his brothers increased, and it "snowballed" leading to the slavery in Egypt. We can see from this that a small incorrect act can inflate to many times its size.

Another lesson from this incident is the danger is of a parent having a favourite amongst his children. The matter was compounded by the fact that Yosef, instead of being silent, made the most of the situation.

ותשתחוין לאלמתי (37:7) In Yosef's first dream, his brothers' sheaves bowed to his sheaf, but not to him. This meant that they would be dependent upon him for food and one should carefully note the words, namely, this made them hate him, but not be jealous of him. No poor person likes to receive food "handouts." This is a reason why gemachim (free loan organisations) giving out food to poor people sometimes ask for a small nominal payment, such as just one shekel. The poor people then feel that they are buying the food.

In contrast, in his second dream, Yosef, said that the sun, moon and stars were bowing to him, namely that he made himself more important than his family and this made them jealous. One must always be careful on how one speaks to other people, and one needs to think of their feelings.

לך נא ראה את שלום אחיך (37:14) Yaacov, unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, was conscious of what was going on in his house, and realised that he must try and make peace. By sending Yosef on a long journey to his brothers to ask how they felt, might help. Unfortunately, in this case it had the reverse effect. However, one must always at least make a serious attempt to make peace between people.

מעמק חברון (37:14) But Hevron is on the Judean hills, so why the word "emek" (vale)?! One can understand this expression by going down to the Cave of Machpelah and looking around when one will see oneself surrounded by mountains, whilst one is standing in a valley.

וישאלהו האיש לאמר מה תבקש (37:15) A man saw Yosef looking around for directions. This man did not wait to be asked for help. He approached Yosef and asked if he could help. One can learn from this, that if one should see somebody, even a stranger, as if lost, one should take the initiative and ask if one can assist him.

והבור רק אין בו מים (37:24) Read not "bor" (pit) but "bur" (ignoramus). A person who is a "bur" is empty of Torah. Torah can be compared to water, and just as one cannot live without water, one cannot live without Torah. The Gemara says that there was



no water in this pit, but there were snakes. In a place where there is no Torah, there are "snakes." If you add some water, you will kill the snakes. Even a little water can save a person's life and a little Torah can save him spiritually and even physically. If one sees a person divorced from Torah, one should try and introduce him to even a little Torah.

ולט נכאת וצרי ולט (37:25) Normally these merchants carried smelly things, such as animal skins, but in order that Yosef should not suffer any more, on this occasion they were carrying spices. One can learn from this that if one sees a person greatly suffering, one should try and do something to alleviate even a little of his suffering. Do, for example, Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick); such a visit will psychologically remove one sixtieth of his illness.

ויטבלו את הכתנת בדם (37:31) It has been written that because of this act, the Jewish people are continually plagued to this very day by "blood libels."

וימאן להתנהם (37:35) As long as one is not sure that a person is dead, a parent or relative will not be comforted. Only when one sees the dead body being buried, will a person accept the comfort. One sadly sees this with the families of our soldiers missing in action. Missing is far worse on the family than knowing a person has been killed.

ויהי כמשלש חדשים (38:24) In these words there is a hint to Chanukah. Chanukah occurs in the month of Kislev which is the third month of the year, and the verse ends with the words "hotziuha v'tisaref"- take it outside and light it, namely lighting the Chanukah candles outside!

וימצא יוסף חן בעיניו (39:4) Potifar immediately saw that Yosef was an exceptional worker. In contrast, many workers today take long tea breaks, spend time playing on the internet and on their cell-phones, talking with other workers and so on. In some places if one works too hard today, one will fall foul of the Workers' Committee!

ויהי כשמע אדניו את דברי אשתו (39:19) Potifar condemned Yosef without having heard Yosef's side of the story. Sadly, we see this today in Eretz Yisrael where, particularly the left, the media and the politicians are ready to condemn a person without investigating the facts. They often do not even want to hear the other side of the story!

ויתן שר בית הסהר ביד יוסף (39:22) The prison governor also saw that Yosef was not the criminal type found in prisons. Sadly, today, some of the people in prison should never be there. They are there because they have been framed or for political reasons.

ויקצף פרעה ... על שר המשקים ועל שר האופים (40:2) One is sure to ask what had they allegedly done wrong to merit being imprisoned? In the case of the butler, a fly fell in the wine as he was serving it. He was therefore really not guilty. In contrast, a fly fell in the dough whilst the baker was kneading it and he should have been paying more attention. The bottom line was that there was a fly in the food being served to Pharaoh, but they were not both guilty and thus the results were quite different. To assess punishment, one must look at all the facts.

כי אם זכרתני (40:14) Yosef put too much trust in the non-Jew instead of in G-d, and as a result remained two more years in jail. In difficult times one must put one's trust not in foreign politicians, but in G-d. If one does not, one must take the consequences.

כי גנב גנבתי מארץ העברים (40:15) Yosef immediately associated himself with Eretz Yisrael. One could contrast this with Jews who goes as far as to tell the world to boycott products from Yehudah and Shomron.



## פ' מקץ

ויהי מקץ שנתיים ימים (41:1) Yosef spent a further two years in prison. The reason was that he had put his trust in Pharaoh's butler, instead of in G-d, and he was accordingly punished for this. It is one thing to ask a favour of a non-Jew but one must not put all one's trust in him. The last verse of the previous Parashah begins "v'lo zachar" (he didn't remember) signifying that one request had been made to him by Yosef. However, the verse ends "vayishkachehu" (he forgot him) signifying a further request, and this was not in order.

Israel has often done favours to other countries in the world, but do they remember it?! During the war against Iraq in 1991, Israel "received" thirty-nine Skud missiles but in order not to harm the United States war against Iraq did not react. Was America appreciative of this?!

Pharaoh had two dreams. The first one showed a lack of meat, the second one a lack of bread. The first one did not trouble him, since he fell asleep again. One can live without meat; the schnitzel and shipudim (meat on skewers) one eats at a wedding are just extras! However, bread is a different situation; it represents an essential item of one's daily food, and one can thus understand why this worried him. What did Yaacov pray for after he fled from Eisav? He prayed for bread and not for schnitzel! One needs to be concerned with the essential things of one's existence and not the extra luxuries.

They gave Pharaoh all sorts of silly answers and he soon realised this. Anyone can give silly and irrelevant answers. The politicians and their advisers are always doing this, especially before the elections.

One should particularly note how this butler, whom Yosef had done a great favour to, ran him down. In today's language he called him a "Jew-boy." This is an example of ingratitude, something sadly one sees time and time again today. The act of reciprocating good is such an important thing. Rav Yisrael Salant even told a student who was repaying him a loan of money, that even though he was precluded from actually saying "thank you" for the loan by virtue of the laws of interest, he should show his gratitude by his movements.

Yosef did not take any personal credit for being able to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. He immediately said it is G-d that is doing so. When one is able to accomplish something, one should say that one did this "B'ezrat HaShem" (with the help of G-d) and not "kochi v'otzem yadi" (the power and the might of my hand).

Pharaoh did not ask for any advice, but just for the interpretation of his dream. However, Yosef who was "navon v'chaham" (discreet and wise) used the right psychological moment to put his suggestion to Pharaoh. One can learn from this that when one wants someone to give some donation to a charity, one must try and find the right psychological moment and approach.

Pharaoh was immediately impressed by the way Yosef placed the credit for interpreting dreams as coming from G-d. Non-Jews will often respect Jews who proudly display their Judaism in a sincere way.

Pharaoh gave Yosef a "non-Jewish" name. One should note however, that is the only time this name is mentioned. Yosef continued using his name Yosef. Most people from the Diaspora have a non-Jewish name" – the

Rambam had an Arabic name - but there is no reason to continue using it in Eretz Yisrael. One of the reasons the Jews were redeemed from Egypt was that they did not change their names to non-Jewish names.

ויקבץ את כל אכל (41:48) Yosef was a very good planner and business man. He did not wait until the last year of plenty to begin storing grain. He began immediately. Finance Ministers can learn a lot from this. Don't wait until the country goes into a deep recession and then do drastic actions which harm in particular the weak section of the population. One needs to act when the financial situation is good and then start planning for a "rainy day."

ויאמרו איש אל אחיו (42:21) Here one can see how the brothers started having regrets for all the bad things they had done to Yosef. This is one of the stages of teshuvah (repentance), namely, to regret what one has done.

ויאסר אתו לעיניהם (42:24) Rashi comments that as soon as they had gone, he released him from prison. This reminds one of how some Arab leaders "lock up" terrorists in front of the world cameras, and as soon as they have gone, releases them!

והורידו לאיש מנחה (43:11) Yaacov had learnt from his experience with Eisav. First of all, give a non-Jew a present. Throughout the ages Jews acted on this when dealing with non-Jews, in particular in despotic regimes.

וכסף משנה קחו בידכם (43:12) If one receives too much change from a person, one must not quietly keep it, but return the excess. Similarly, if more merchandise arrives with one's order than one has requested (and one has not been charged for it) one must inform the shop. Unfortunately, one has reached such a state, that when one does this, the shop will regard the person as exceptional. However, this should be the norm and not something exceptional.

וטבה טבה והכן (43:16) The last five letters of this phrase spell out Chanukah. This is the third Parashah in a row where there is a hint at Chanukah! These three parshiot are always read around Chanukah time.

שלום לעבדך לאבינו (43:28) Yosef kept silent when his father was referred to as his servant. This occurred five times and for every time he kept silent, one year was taken from his life. He was supposed to have lived 120 years, but he died at the age of 110. Why then did he lose ten years and not just five? The answer is that there was an interpreter between him and his brothers, and so for each mention, he in fact heard it twice. In order to keep the commandment of honour to parents, he should have at this stage revealed himself to his brothers. This is an important lesson for honour to parents.

משאת בנימן ממשאת כלם (43:34) But surely it was this type of action which caused his brothers to be jealous of him and act the way they did. Obviously he did not want a repeat of this with Binyamin. The answer is that a sign of complete teshuvah (repentance) is that when you are put in the same situation as when you originally sinned, you will not sin again. Yosef wanted to see that his brothers had done a complete teshuvah and this indeed was indeed the case.

ויקרעו שמלתם (44:13) From this action one can again see that they had done complete teshuvah. They did not leave Binyamin to his fate. They did their best to save him and they took joint responsibility.

## פ' ויגש

ויגש אליו יהודה (44:18) In these Parashiot, one can see the process of teshuvah (repentance). In Parashat Vayeshev, Yosef's brothers acted towards him with great cruelty, namely putting him into the pit, selling him as a slave, etc. In Parashat Miketz, they began the process of teshuvah by firstly expressing their regrets for what they had done and then not reacting when Yosef gave Binyamin more than he gave his other brothers. In this Parashah, their repentance is complete, when they come to plead for Binyamin and not just leave him to his fate.

We are all human beings and can and do commit sins for one reason or another - even the greatest tzadikim (righteous people) sometimes sin. The important thing is that one must always do "cheshbon hanefesh" (a mental accounting) and repent for what one has done in the past.

ולא עמד איש אתו (45:1) Before Yosef made himself known to his brothers, he asked everyone else to leave. He realised that this would cause an embarrassment to his brothers and so he did this when no-one else was present. Causing embarrassment to a person in public is a very serious matter. Chazal (the Rabbis) compare it to murder. For example, if a person asks a question, which is really a silly question in a public shiur (lesson), one must give him a serious answer, and certainly not ridicule him.

העוד אבי חי (45:3) Is my father still alive after all the suffering he has gone through throughout his life, first with Eisav, then with Lavan, then with Dinah and Shechem and then with Yosef. Yet despite all this, Yaacov did not lose his faith in G-d. Many of our gedolim (greatest Rabbis) throughout their lives suffered either with painful illnesses, family problems, financial problems and so on. Despite all this, they continued with their learning, their meticulous observance of mitzvot (commandments), their educating the world, and their helping of others who needed their help and guidance. They accepted all these sufferings with love and never questioned G-d in these matters. We mortals are unable to understand the workings and programme of G-d.

לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה (45:8) Of course his brothers had sent him to Egypt, and had him sold as a slave. However, Yosef saw that they had done perfect repentance and the matter was thus closed. As the Rambam writes in Hilchot Teshuvah, even if a person sins all his life, he can do repentance in his old age; after he done such repentance, one is forbidden to even mention to him his past sins.

וישבת בארץ גשן והיית קרוב אלי (45:10) One might easily ask, why not have his family live in Pharaoh's palace and have a life of luxury? Yosef realised that in such an environment, they and especially all of Yaacov's grandchildren, would be subjected to non-Jewish influences. It is crucial to live in surroundings of Yiddishkeit (Jewish religious observance). On the other hand, he wanted them to be sufficiently close they could easily visit each other.

It is also often better for elderly parents who are able to look after themselves, to live close, but not too close, to their children, so that they can meet regularly. It is also important for such elderly parents to retain a state of independence. For example, as long as they are able to cook for themselves, clean their house for themselves, they should do so.

ולאביו שלה כזאת (45:23) Yosef sent a whole assortment of things to his father. All this would prove that the brothers were not just making up a story that Yosef was alive and held a high position in Egypt. Only when Yaacov saw the things that Yosef had sent him did he believe his sons. It is no good just telling the parents of soldiers who are missing that their sons are alive; one needs to give them tangible proof. When words are matched by deeds, one can believe them!

אל תירא מרדה מצרימה (46:3) Even though Yaacov really yearned to see Yosef and there was no food due to the famine in Eretz Yisrael, Yaacov was reluctant to leave there,

even temporarily. Since there was a famine, he could halachically (according to Jewish law) leave, but he still asked G-d what to do before making a decision. Elimelech, Naomi's husband in Megillat Ruth, left Eretz Yisrael because of a famine and he died as a punishment; as a leader he needed to show an example. One must not take going out of Eretz Yisrael, even temporarily, lightly. One may certainly not go on holiday in the Diaspora. Does one need to go to Greece, Turkey or Italy for one's summer vacation?!

עמך (46:4) G-d told Yaacov that he would go with Yaacov's family to Egypt. If one counts the number of people, in the list given in this Parashah, who went down to Egypt, one will find 69 names, yet the Torah says 70 people went down to Egypt. There is a Midrash which says that the seventieth person was G-d, and this can be learned from these words in this verse. One can also learn an important lesson from this Midrash. At any time when a Jew is in trouble, he must remember that G-d is with him, and is watching over him to help him over this difficult period.

ובני דן השים (46:23) Dan only had one son. In contrast, Binyamin had ten sons. Yet when one looks in Parashat Bamidbar at the number of descendants of the various tribes, one can see that there are more from Dan's one son than Binyamin's ten. It was at the burial of Yaacov, that Dan's son displayed more "mesirat nefesh" (self-sacrifice) than all the others present, and he was rewarded with numerous descendants. "Maaseh avot siman labonim" (the actions of the forefathers are a symbol or sign for the children).

לפניו (46:28) Yosef knew that there were no Jewish religious facilities in Goshen. He therefore sent on in advance Yehudah to arrange them, namely, to build a Mikvah (ritual bath), a Shul, to establish a Talmud Torah (a religious school) and a Yeshivah (Rabbinical College), and to arrange facilities for kosher food. Before one moves into a community, one must know that these facilities exist there. One must not choose a community because of its luxurious villas. Sadly, we often find that these religious facilities are only afterthoughts when building a new community.

ויאסר יוסף מרכבתו (46:29) Yosef himself did this himself, and he didn't call on one of his servants. He was on the way to perform the great Mitzvah of honour to parents. When one is doing a Mitzvah (commandment) one must not think of personal honour. Rabbeinu Yaacov would clean in front of the Aron Hakodesh (Synagogue Ark) every Friday with his beard. There is a photograph of an old Rabbi wheeling an old battered pram containing schach (leafy roof covering) for his Sukkah.

והיה כי יקרא לכם פרעה (46:33) Yosef told them what to say at their meeting with Pharaoh. One can learn from this incident that when one goes to a meeting, one should know what one is going to say and, maybe even more importantly, what one needs to avoid saying!

ויבא יוסף את הכסף ביתה פרעה (47:14) Yosef handed over all the money he collected to Pharaoh; he did not take a commission for himself. Sadly we often don't see this today. In a report which was published on the Amutot (non-profit organisations) in Israel, a list was given of those in which their Directors are taking grossly inflated salaries for themselves, sometimes well over 100,000 shekels per month. In some cases, half the money collected by these Amutot, instead of going to their charitable causes, went to the Directors of these Amutot. One might mention that not even one Charedi (ultra-orthodox) Amuta appeared on this list; the directors worked for the Mitzvah (benefit of the charity) without any inflated salaries. Ironically it is the left who accuses the Charedim (ultra-Orthodox) of taking all the money of the country!

ויאחזו בה ויפרו וירבו מאד (47:27) These last words of the Parashah are terrifying. The Jews went down to Egypt as a temporary measure because of the famine. However, having got there, they took up residence - "vayechazu vah", namely, they went into real estate and prospered at first, but then came the persecution. How many times has this been repeated in Jewish history, to quote a few examples, Spain, Russia, Germany?



## פ' ויחי

ויחי יעקב (47:28) Every other Parashah in the Torah begins either on a new line or after a space on the same line. This Parashah is the only exception and begins immediately after the end of the last Parashah, which ends with the terrifying statement that although the Jews came to Egypt as a temporary measure because of the famine, when they got there, they took up permanent residence. This Parashah immediately follows (without any gaps whatsoever) with the words "Vayechi Yaacov" (and Yaacov lived). This is an indication that in contradistinction to the other Jews in Egypt, Yaacov lived in a simple manner as a person temporarily living in a particular place.

שבע עשרה שנה (47:28) Yaacov only lived a small portion of his life in the Diaspora and then only when he was forced to do so, namely, at that period, and when he fled from Eisav. A Jew needs to live the maximum period possible in Eretz Yisrael. Coming here on vacation is not sufficient!

ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת (47:29) This is "levayat hamet" (taking part in the burial of a person). When one does a favour for a person, one might think, even subconsciously, that today I am doing him a favour, and in return, tomorrow he will do me one. Thus a good turn that one does for one's neighbour is not necessarily one hundred per cent "leshem shamayim" (for the sake of Heaven). However, in the case of "levayat hamet" the person will not be able to return the favour and so it is called "chesed v'emet" (a true act of kindness).

אל נא תקברני במצרים (47:29) Yaacov had lived almost his entire life in Eretz Yisrael and naturally wanted to be buried there. Although it is good to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, one should not wait until one dies to make Aliyah! It is a greater Mitzvah to *live one's life* in Eretz Yisrael.

ויתחזק ישראל (48:2) It was the last days of the life of Yaacov, and was ill. Yosef went to do bikur cholim (visiting the sick) and the Torah says how when he arrived Yaacov strengthened himself. When you go to visit a sick person, however ill they feel, it helps them to know that people care about them. Rav Aryeh Levin would make a point on every Shabbat, and even on Yom Kippur, of going to the hospitals to visit the sick. The Rabbis say that when one visits a sick person, one removes one sixtieth of their illness.

ואקברה שם בדרך אפרת (48:7) Yaacov realised that Yosef might answer him regarding the taking of his body to Hevron, that when his mother died in Beit-Lechem, Yaacov did not take her even the short distance to Hevron to bury her, and he therefore anticipated him on this point. It is often better to anticipate an argument and bring it up oneself together with an explanation.

שכל את ידיו (48:14) Yaacov knew by "ruach hakodesh" (Divine inspiration) that Efraim would be greater than Menasheh, and he therefore gave him the greater blessing. In a like vein one might ask, why Jews often go to great Rabbonim to ask their advice on all kinds of matters? One can compare it to a tall building. The higher up one goes in such a building, the further one can see. A great Rabbi with his great experience and learning is like a person at the top of a tall building.

ישמך א-לקים כאפרים וכמנשה (48:20) To this day a father blesses his sons on Friday night with this berachah (blessing)? What is so special about it? Even though Menasheh was the firstborn and should have got the greater berachah, he was not jealous that Efraim got it. If we contrast this with Yaacov and Eisav, one can soon see why one does not bless children "Yesimcha Elokim k'Yaacov v'k'Eisav!" (G-d make you as Yaacov and Eisav!). It is important in a family that there should be no jealousy between siblings. If one sibling succeeds in something or receives a present, the other siblings should also be happy about it.



באחרית הימים (49:1) Yaacov wanted to tell his sons the date that the Mashiach (Messiah) would come, but his mind suddenly went blank. Would it not be wonderful if we knew the year he would arrive, it would make it much easier for us to bear all our tribulations.

כלי חמס מכרתיהם (49:5) Yaacov was supposed to be giving them berachot, and so therefore why all these reprimands? Sometimes by giving a person reprimands one is giving him a berachah. He may as a result improve his ways. There is a story of a father telling his son off when the boy was not guilty, yet the boy remained silent. When asked afterwards why he had remained silent, he answered that reprimands helps one to improve one's character.

לא יסור שבט מיהודה (49:10) Kings of Israel must come from the tribe of Yehudah. The Hasmoneans, despite their wonderful work during the first Chanukah period, spoilt it all by making one of them a king, although they came from the tribe of Levi. For this reason, the Ramban says they died out. One should not spoil all one's good deeds by then doing something bad. A good name takes years to build up, but it can be destroyed within a few minutes!

יששכר חמר גרם (49:14) Yissachar is always linked with Zevulun. Yissachar would study Torah and Zevulun would support him financially. From this we can see the great Mitzvah of supporting those studying Torah. The Universities receive far more money from the government per student than the Yeshivot do.

אשר קנה אברהם את השדה (49:30) Again in this Parashah, the Torah lays great stress to the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah. Sadly, despite this, today one sees the problems, and who is guilty?!

ויחנטו הרפאים (50:2) The Egyptians were the experts at preparing mummies. When one wants something to be done properly, it is worth going to and paying an expert.

דברו נא באזני פרעה (50:4) One immediately asks why Yosef himself did not ask Pharaoh. Was he not second in charge of Egypt?! The answer could well be that a long period had now passed since Pharaoh's dreams and the longer the period that passes, the less is the gratitude. It would seem that at that period Yosef already had less influence with Pharaoh, and he could not just approach him when he wanted to. How this fact has repeated itself time and time again in Jewish history.

ויקברו אתו (50:13) In fact it did not go so smoothly. Eisav was waiting at the Cave of Machpelah to prevent the burial, and only by the actions of Chushim the son of Dan, who decapitated Eisav, was the burial not delayed.

אביך צוה (50:16) One might readily ask where is such a command from Yaacov to be found? In fact, there is no direct mention of this in the Torah. Although normally it is forbidden to lie, for the sake of "darkei shalom" (ways of peace) it is often permitted.

אנא שא נא (50:17) From this verse one learns that one has to ask his fellow man up to three times for forgiveness for anything wrong he may have done to him. Indeed, this is what one has to do on erev Yom Kippur, if one is not forgiven on the first two occasions,

אל הארץ אשר נשבע (50:24) Before he died, Yosef warned his brothers of the difficult times ahead, but that they must have courage and in the end they would enter Eretz Yisrael. This was reinforced by the fact that he told them to meanwhile keep his body in Egypt and when they left they would take it with them for burial in Eretz Yisrael. Whenever we are in a difficult period, we must always remember that G-d has given us Eretz Yisrael, and it will always be ours.