

Circle Time: At Your Shabbos Table: Parashas Vayechi

Dvar Torah in a Story: The Haunted House

This section relates a story, with a dvar Torah embedded within it.

מז:כט וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים
רש"י ...חֶסֶד שֶׁל אֲמִתּוֹ, שְׂאִינוֹ מִנְפֵה לְתַשְׁלוֹם גְּמוּלָה

47:29 “And do for me kindness and truth...”

Rashi: ...Kindness of truth- for he does not expect any repayment.

Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron was scheduled to speak at the local *shul*. Who could miss such a *drasha*? Reb Moshe Shushan certainly did not want to miss it.

Reb Moshe was not a young man, but he hurried to the *shul*, took his place in the back row, and listened, spellbound, as Rav Shalom wove *divrei Torah* and stories seamlessly together. One of the stories Rav Shalom related was an incident concerning his rebbi, Rav Eliyahu Dushnitzer.

A very talented, dedicated, and hard working *bochur* studied at a *yeshiva* in *Yerushalayim*. This *bochur's* father was a *ba'al teshuva*, someone who was not born into a Torah-observant family, but drew near to Torah on his own. Such major life changes were less common in the early 1900's than they are today, and when the *bochur's rebbi* met the father, he was interested to learn the turning point, or inspiration, that had set him off on his search to understand Torah.

The man related that it had all begun one *erev Yom Kippur*. The hour was late; the horn announcing the arrival of the holy day had already sounded. Men wrapped in *tallis* and *kittel* were rushing quickly through the streets, heading for *shuls* and *yeshivos* to begin the *Kol Nidrei* service. But this man, then a teenager, was not. The day meant nothing to him, he was loitering insolently about the streets as usual, bored and looking for entertainment.

Something caught his eye. A very saintly looking man was walking near large *yeshiva* was on the block. He was dressed all in white, in honor of the holy day. His long, flowing beard was snow white, and his face reflected an elevated spirit. It was none other than Rav Eliyahu Dushnitzer. But he wasn't heading to the *yeshiva*, he was going to the public restrooms on the street nearby.

Fascinated, the teenager watched this rabbi enter each of the public restrooms, one at a time, intent on something. What could he possibly be doing? He was no janitor, what did he need from each restroom? He couldn't contain his curiosity, and strode up to the rabbinical-looking figure.

“What are you doing? Are you a janitor or a rabbi?”

“Neither.”

“So what do you want from all the toilets?”

“I'll explain,” Rav Eliyahu said calmly. “People walk to

the *yeshiva* for *Yom Kippur tefillos* from far and wide. Many will need to use the facility during the prayers. They will need pre-cut toilet paper. I have cut up stacks and stacks of rolls of paper, and I am stocking the restrooms for their benefit.” (Pre-cut tissue paper was not available at the time.)

The young man watched Rav Eliyahu, moments before the highest day of the year, busying himself with the most mundane of needs- simply because it was an opportunity to help others.

“With each tear of toilet paper, he tore at my heart!” the man told his son's *rebbe*. “In that moment, I knew, I promised myself, that no matter what would happen, I needed to lean from this man. As soon as *Yom Kippur* was over, I was going to knock on his door and ask to learn more about Torah and Judaism.”

Reb Moshe Shushan heard all this from Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, and he was electrified. From that moment onward, he had a new mission. Come what may, he visited the local *shul* near his home, called the “*Chisda Shul*,” every night. On the night of children's weddings, family trips, you name it! For the last fifteen years of his life, R. Moshe Shusham stocked toilet paper in the restrooms at the local *shul* at one AM every night.

“It's simple,” he explained to his family. “There aren't many things left that are '*chesed shel emes*,' kindness that you can do which you know you for which you will never get repaid, recognized, or honored. Today, burying abandoned people would win you lots of recognition. Stocking toilet paper maybe the only *chesed shel emes* still available!”

Parasha Riddles

Interesting riddles about the parasha, on several levels.

Riddles for Parashas Vayechi

1. Which two people said אֲנִי וְאֵנִי אֶלְקִים אֲלֹהִים?
2. About which 2 individuals does the Torah say וַיְחִי? About which 3 groups does it use that word?
3. Can you think of the four times the Torah tells us about Machir *ben* Menashe?
4. Only four times in *Chumash* are Avraham and Yitzchok mentioned together, as in וַיִּצְחָק (וְ)אֲבְרָהָם . Where? (Two are in consecutive *pesukim* in this week's *parasha*.)
5. The word יָשִׁית appears only 3 times in *Chumash*, two of which are in discussion of Yaakov's final moments. What are the three?

Cliffhanger Cholent Story NEW STORY!

A story told in parts, designed to get children to

come back to the table for the main dish!

Recap: Reb Aharon and his wife, a childless couple from Lunchitz, cannot pay the rent on their field because the crop has failed.

Chapter Two

Reb Aharon stood nervously at the end of the long driveway leading to the nobleman's mansion. He trembled slightly at the thought of the dangerous task before him. If this didn't go well, he and his wife would soon be homeless and starving, at best. And if this meeting went *really* badly... he may never return home at all.

Reb Aharon had *davened* and fasted for days, visited several *tzaddikim* for *brachos*, and prayed at this father's grave, before daring to ask for a meeting with the nobleman who controlled the entire area and owned most of the land in Lunchitz.

Here he was. He needed this extension on the due date for the rent on the land he worked, which was past due. He approached the surly-looking guard at the gate and stated his name.

"On what business?!" the guard demanded.

"Please tell the nobleman that it is about the rent I owe."

The guard muttered something under his breath, and sent the message into the mansion with a runner. Shortly, the runner returned.

"The nobleman will see you now," the guard said, in a way that made it sound like a threat. "Good luck!" he added, sarcastically, with a snicker in his voice.

Reb Aharon strode down the long driveway toward the house, fervently reciting one last *kapittel Tehillim*. When he entered the nobleman's room, he proceeded to explain about the fungus that had affected the crop that year, the problems with the rainy season, and –

The nobleman cut him off. "Do I look like a farmer to you?" he demanded. "Am I interested in a lecture about farming? No! *Where's the money??* My rent! Now!"

"I won't be able to get it this year, sir," Reb Aharon said in a rush. "But next year, if Hashem wills it, we can have a great crop of wheat like we had in the past, and I'll be able to pay off the year's rent, plus next year's. Please grant me an extension."

A muscle worked in the nobleman's jaw at the audacity of the question. He was silent for a while, until money signs flashed in his eyes.

"An extension! Aaron wants an extension on my rightful rent! I'll tell you what, sonny. I'll give you an extension for a year. Even two years. You know what? I'm feeling generous. I'll give you a three year extension. But know two things.

"One, for each year you do not pay, your rent will be increased by fifty percent. That means that if you get the money next year, you need to pay one and a half times the normal amount. Second, if you dare delay even one day longer than three years... It will be the end of you! Long and painful will be your quick demise!"

"Thank you, thank you!" Reb Aaron cried, trying to feel grateful to the nobleman for offering to hold off killing him for a while. But at least he had three years, and with Hashem's help, he would be able to pay back the rent.

A year passed. To Reb Aharon's great disappointment, that year's wheat crop was no better! This time the rain was too scarce, and the crop grew dry and inedible. Again, Reb Aharon and his wife could not sell the grain, and had to borrow money for basic supplies and to buy seed to plant next year's crop.

The second year was just as bad. The third and final year began, with Reb Aharon trusting firmly in Hashem, that whatever he would decide would be for the best. If there was a successful crop, or even if the extended deadline passed without a payment... Hashem was in charge.

To be continued...

Litvak, Chassid, Sefardi

Three different angles on a dvar Torah, one each in classic Litvish, Chassidic, and Sephardic styles. Can your children guess which idea comes from which school of thought!

מז:כט וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ... אַל נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם
47:29 And Yisroel's days drew to [a close,] to die, and he called his son, Yosef, and said to him... "Please don't bury me in Egypt."

How did Yaakov know he was going to die soon? He didn't get sick until much later (see possuk 48:1 and Rashi to 15:1)

1. **Kol Yevaser (L):** All the *avos* were supposed to live 180 years. Yaakov died at 147 because he lost 33 years of his life. According to one Midrash, he lost 33 years was because he told Lavan, "The person with whom you will find your idol will not live (יחיה)," which caused the death of Rochel. He lost 33 years, *gematria* of the word יחיה. Yaakov knew about that, and therefore knew he was going to die this year.
2. **Rav Chaim Vital (C):** This *possuk* means something else entirely! Yaakov did *teshuva* wholeheartedly every day of his life, as *Chazal* advise everyone should. The *possuk* is telling us that he lived all his days "יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת," as if he were about to die. This is what was *יקרבו*, finally coming to pass. And this is what accomplished *יקרבו*, bringing him close to Hashem.
3. **Ohr Hachaim (S):** Every person has a list of missions, target *mitzvos* he must complete in life. When he does each one, a corresponding part of his *neshama* "lights up," as it were. If he misses one, it remains defective until he does *teshuva*. Yaakov felt all of his *neshama* burning brightly, and he knew he had completed all his missions!

Personal Growth Avodah of the Week

Parasha Summary:

Parashas Vayechi asks us to face the ultimate destination of all mankind on this earth, and to prepare

for that day with equanimity, *teshuva* and an eye on our spiritual legacy.

No one lives forever. Even Yaakov, about whom it does not say that he died, made extensive preparations for his departure from this world. He felt his impending change of “location,” and did *teshuva* daily. He arranged for his funeral and foresaw potential problems well in advance. He called his family together and gave them a legacy- that of the family as a whole, telling them as much about their destiny and future as he was permitted to reveal, and touching the root of each's soul and life challenge. Later, Yosef makes similar preparations for his own death.

The *parasha* describes the process of sickness -which began with Yaakov- dying and death, burial, mourning, and the acceptance that follows. The *parasha* itself is heralding the momentous change that was occurring not only to Yaakov and Yosef, but to the Jewish People and the world as a whole. The era of the *avos*, the roots of the nation, was ending, and along with it the universal era of world “root nations” came to a close. The stage has been set, the actors has been introduced, and the world story is about to begin.

Avodah of the Week:

1. It is dangerous to focus an *avodah* on death and dying, for this can be very paralyzing to some. This should only be done by *ovdim* confident in their stability.
2. Big problems become small ones when we keep an eye on larger perspectives of the totality of our lives. When something seems wrenching and painful, it can help to think, will this make a difference to my life in 5 years? In ten? After 120?
3. What do you think Yaakov would have told you, if you would have been one of the *Shevatim* at his bedside in his final moments?

Answers to this week's Riddles:

1.
 - א. ל:ב ויחר אף יעקב ברחל ויאמר התחת אלקים אנכי אשר מנע ממך פרי בטן
 - ב. נ:יט ויאמר אלהם יוסף אל תיראו כי התחת אלקים אני :
2. The Torah uses the word ויחי to sum up the years of Yaakov and Yosef. It also uses it for the ten generations from Adam to Noach and from Noach to Avraham, and twice about Klal Yisrael, in Devarim 4:33 and 5:23.
3.
 - א. בראשית נ:כג גם בני מכיר בן מנשה ילדו על ברפי יוסף
 - ב. במדבר כז:א ותקרבנה בנות צלפחד בן חפר בן גלעד בן מכיר בן מנשה
 - ג. במדבר לב:לט וילכו בני מכיר בן מנשה גלעד וילכדה
 - ד. במדבר לו:א ויקרבו ראשי האבות למשפחת

בני גלעד בן מכיר בן מנשה ממשפחת בני יוסף וידברו לפני משה ואדני צנה בה' לתת את נחלת צלפחד אחינו לבנותינו... ונגרעה נחלתן

4.
 - א. בראשית לה:כז קרית הארבע הוא חברון אשר גר שם אברהם ויצחק :
 - ב. בראשית מח:טו האלקים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפני אברהם ויצחק... המלאך הגאל אתי מפל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק
 - ג. שמות ג:טז ה' אלקי אבותיכם נראה אלי אלקי אברהם ויצחק ויעקב לאמר פקדתי אתכם
5.
 - א. בראשית מו:ד ויוסף ישית ידו על עיניו :
 - ב. בראשית מח:יז וירא יוסף כי ישית אביו יד ימינו על ראש אפרים
 - ג. שמות כא:כב כאשר ישית עליו בעל האשה ונתן בפללים :

Haftara from the Headlines

Haftara Summary: The *haftara* details the final moments of the life of Dovid Hamelech.

Dovid feels his death approaching, and calls Shlomo -his only worthy son- to charge him with his final instructions and missions.

Although only 12, Dovid tells him “be strong, and be a man.” He tells him to keep all the *Torah* and *mitzvos* of Moshe, and that through this his rule we be solid and he will have Hashem's *bracha*.

Dovid also instructs Shlomo to support the family of Barzilai *Hagiladi*. He tells him to execute Yoav ben Tzruya and Shimi ben Geira for their crimes, including murder and rebellion.

Then Dovid passes on, and the mantle of leadership passes to Shlomo *Hamelech*.

Connection to the Parasha Yaakov, Yosef, and Dovid sense their death, call their child(ren), give them *chizuk* for the future, and issue final instructions. The phrase *is used for both of them, as is the phrase* וישפכ. Both pass away and leave the nation in a new era. According to the *Zohar*, 65 of Dovid's 70 years were “borrowed” from Yaakov and Yosef- 28 from Yaakov (who lived 28 years less than Avraham) and 37 from Yosef (who lived 37 years less than Yaakov).

Ripped from the Headlines: The exploding numbers of COVID-19 deaths around the globe, including 300,000 in the United States alone, give us pause to consider our own mortality. When the pandemic has finally ended, our era will be changed forever.

Gematria

Yaakov tells Yosef, “שמעון יהיו וישיבכם אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו”, your sons Efraim and Menashe are like Reuven and Shimon to me.

אפרים ומנשה = 732 = ראובן ושמעון

This Date in Jewish History

On the 18th of Teves, 4229 (469 CE) the Persian King Peroz I (AKA Peroz *Harasha*) arrested three leaders of the Jewish community in Bavel. The *Reish Gelusa* (governor, or mini-king of the Jewish community) at the time was Rav Huna Mori bar Mar Zutra. He, along with Rav Mesharshia bar Pekod, were killed on this day, crucified on a bridge in Pumpedisa. The third *chacham* arrested, Ameimar bar Mar Yenuka, was executed two months later.

The Persians persecuted the Jews of Bavel terribly in those years. Persian priests called *Magi* captured Jewish children and raised them to *avoda zara, r"l*. The Persian king banned *Shabbos*, learning Torah, and closed all shuls.

After the murders, Rav Huna's father-in-law, Rav Chanina, raised Rav Huna's orphaned son Mar Zutra. When the Persian kingdom tottered a bit, the two raised an army of Jewish soldiers, declared independence, and set up a Jewish government with its capital in Mechuza. But the Persian king later regained power, destroyed the Jewish state, and killed Rav Chanina and Mar Zutra. The *yeshivos* of Bavel went on the run and continued learning Torah in hiding, out of reach of the central Persian government.

Halacha: End of Life Issues

Disclaimer: These topics are presented for discussion only, and should not be used for psak halacha l'maaseh. An expert rav should be consulted on each of these issues, many of which are questions of life and death.

What should one do at the bedside of a terminally ill person?

When someone is in the final moments of life (*goses*), it is forbidden to touch him. Any contact could hasten the end of life, like touching a spluttering candle may put it out. If there is a treatment that may extend his life for at least a year, it is permitted to risk touching him to administer it. A treatment that could extend his life for less than a year is questionable justification for touching. No parts of the person's body should be sticking out over the edge of the bed. If that situation does exist, a chair should be placed under those body parts without touching him.

What should one do at the time of *yetzias neshama*?

A *goses* should not be left alone- he should have company at *yetzias neshama*, because it is a very soothing. A candle should be lit at the bed, in order to ward off the *soton*. The *goses* should not see the candle. Many hospitals will not allow an open flame, especially if oxygen is in use. It is forbidden to speak *devarim betelim* at that time. *Tehillim* and *Torah* should be said. At

the moment of *yetzias neshama*, one should recite *kabbolas ol malchus shamayim* (softly enough that the *goses* does not hear).

Is any manner of easing a person's departure from this world permitted?

It is murder to hasten a person's passing. If there is something keeping him from dying, such as repeated loud noises, they may be silenced. Some apply this to the question of removal from life support, such questions obviously require expert consultation.

Is it permitted to make any preparations for burial before death?

Rav Yehuda Hachassid writes that a grave should never be left open overnight, and must be dug only when ready to be filled. If grave is left open overnight, someone from the city will die. Buying shrouds, digging graves, and the like are not permitted, because they may frighten the patient. A healthy person may prepare for his own demise. *Yerushalmis* buy their own shrouds and burial plot, as a *segula* for longevity.

What should one do after the *petira*?

The *petira* is not considered confirmed until about an hour after cardio-respiratory function has ceased, and the *mes* should not be touched until that point. He should then be covered with a white sheet. Eyes, if open, should be closed, preferably by a son, while reciting the *possuk* יְסוּף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינָיו:

All water in cups or bottles at the time of *yetzias neshama* should be spilled out. Some say this is because the *malach hamaves* leaves a drop of venom in the water, others say it is a nonverbal way of notifying others of the *petirah*. Sources say this extends to water in the neighborhood, but the *minhag* today is to pour out water that was in the hospital room or the house. Some do so in the nearest house as well. Water in pipes are not affected.

The Last Word

A one-liner worth remembering.

“The distance from ‘impossible’ to ‘possible’ is... about ten minutes.”

—Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald