

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

ויהי ימי יעקב

“And the years of Yaakov’s life were...” (47:28)

The grammatical structure of our verse presents us with a problem. While the first word, ויהי, is singular, the second word, ימי is plural. Were it to be translated literally, the verse would read, “*And it was the years of Yaakov’s life.*”

The Torah is conveying to us a message. Although ימי, *the years*, of a *tzaddik’s* life are indeed plural – many – in purpose they are all singular. The *tzaddik* lives for one ideal – to sanctify Hashem in this world. All the years of his life are thus really one. (Torah Treasures)

ויקרא לבנו יוסף...ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת אל נא תקברני במצרים ושכבתי עם אבתי

“Yaakov said to Yosef... ‘do unto me kindness and truth: please don’t bury me in Egypt, rather I will lie with my fathers.’” (47:29-30)

Dozens of analyses have been written about the paradox of “*chesed ve’emet*” – kindness and truth, for *chesed* implies going beyond the call of duty, while *emet* signifies an obligation. Some explain simply that *Yaakov* made two requests of *Yosef*: (1) fulfill your obligation to bury your father (*emet*); (2) bury me not in Egypt but with my forefathers, despite the difficulties involved (*chesed*).

Alternatively, although G-d had promised that *Yaakov* would be brought out of Egypt, he dreaded even temporary burial there. Hence, his plea that *Yosef* do him the *chesed* of sparing him this fate. Yet since *Yaakov* had already prepared his grave at *Machpelah*, his request to be interred there was *emet*. (Panim Yafot)

ברך יברך ישראל לאמר ישמך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה

“By thee shall Israel bless saying, ‘May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menashe.’” (48:20)

Why should *Yaakov* have wanted all his descendants to bless their children with the example of *Ephraim* and *Menashe* rather than that of some other of the Tribes of Israel?

Because the two young sons of *Yosef* had conducted themselves in accordance with the fundamental law of the Torah; namely, that one should neither consider oneself greater than another nor envy another. Even though *Yaakov* had set *Ephraim*, the younger son, before *Menashe*, the first-born, *Ephraim* did not become arrogant and *Menashe* did not become jealous. Seeing this,

Yaakov expressed the hope that all the Children of Israel would be like *Ephraim* and *Menashe*, free of arrogance and envy. (Igra deKallah)

Klal Yisrael bless their children that they should become like *Ephraim* and *Menashe*. *Ephraim* learned much Torah by his grandfather *Yaakov*; he represents Torah. *Menashe* was in charge of the palace of his father, he represents *gevurah* – strength. We *bentch* our children using *Ephraim's* name first because Torah takes precedence over everything that one should want for his children. (Nachal Kedumim)

האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב
“Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days. Assemble and hear, sons of *Yaakov*.” (49:1-2)

QUESTION: The word "יקרא" with an "א" means calling. The text should read "יקרה" with a "ה", which means happen?

ANSWER: *Yaakov* called his children and told them he would tell them "אשר יקרא", what should be the “call” to the Jewish people in the end of days, so they can merit the coming of *Mashiach*. The rallying cry should be הקבצו – “gather together in unity” and ושמעו – “listen and learn the teachings of Torah.” Through this we will merit the revelation of *Mashiach*. (Iturei Torah)

זבולן לחוף ימים ישכן
“Zevulun will reside at the seashore...” (49:13)

According to the famous *midrash* quoted in *Rashi*, *Zevulun* supported *Yissachar*, sharing in the reward for his brother’s Torah study. *Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno* and others note that this *midrash* explains why *Yaakov* blessed *Zevulun* before the older *Yissachar*: to teach us the great merit of underwriting Torah study. As *Seforno* quotes, “If there is no flour, there is no Torah” (*Avot* 3:21).

To help us appreciate such philanthropists even more, *Likutei Batar Likutei*, quotes an interesting point from a volume called *Givat Pinchas*: Says the well-known *beraita*: “Torah scholars increase peace in the world...There is great peace for those who love Torah, and there is no stumbling for them (*Tehillim* 119:164) [*Brachot* 64a]. Why the change from “peace” to “great peace?” Also, how can scholars never “stumble? Surely, they are not infallible.

The answer to these questions is that the verse speaks not of scholars but of their supporters, “those who love Torah.” They truly enjoy “great peace” for they do not rule on *halachic* issues; therefore, they never stumble. Such is the special merit of the *Zevuluns* of the world who have expanded Torah study all over the globe, sharing fully in the rewards of those who dedicate themselves to learning. (Rav Shmuel Alter)

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