



Parashat Vayechi



English version

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YEHUDA – I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU

Yosef's last wish was to be buried in Eretz Yisrael. He made his brothers swear that when G-d would remember them and take them out of Egypt, they would take his bones along with them, at the Exodus. He told them, "Return me to the place you sold me from."

When Moshe was ready to go, he stood on the Nile and said, Yosef, Yosef, the time of redemption has come. G-d is waiting for you, and the Jews are waiting for you; the Clouds of Glory are waiting for you. If you reveal yourself now, good, etc. There are opinions that Moshe wrote the Name of G-d on a piece of clay and threw it into the Nile. Suddenly, the coffin rose. Etc.

Throughout their travels in the desert, Yosef's Aron (coffin), would travel with Moshe, right alongside the Ark. And the Nations of the world would ask, what is the ark of the Ever-living doing next to the ark of the dead? And the Jews would say, the one who is in this Aron (coffin) kept what is in this Ark. The Ark has in it the Ten Commandments that say, "I am Hashem your G-d", and Yosef said, Am I in the place of G-d? "You should not have other gods", and Yosef said, I am afraid of G-d. etc. etc. "Do not covet" He did not covet the wife of Potiphar. Etc. (Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach 247 225)

There seems to be a lesson here, in the fact that Yosef's coffin was placed next to the Ark. It seems that it was done to make a statement. What message were the Jews trying to convey by placing the two together?

The answer seems to be, to the Jews and to the world, that the person who lives Torah is not just following a list of rules, guidelines and restrictions. It is not that when one faces tests in life, when one deals with conflict or crisis and stands strong, that he has kept to a manual. Rather, by keeping the Torah, you become the Torah, you become the manual. And that is a huge difference. Allow me to explain.

My wife was taught by Rebbetzin Spetner, that when you see in your child or someone you love something about which you feel that they need to be rebuked, do not say anything yet. Hold your tongue for about 3 weeks. In the meantime, work to improve yourself in that area, and you will see that your child/loved one will improve without your saying a word. This really works. Why?

This is the secret power of coaching and its fundamental belief. That "telling" doesn't work. Advice does not work. Words don't work. "Shoulds" don't work. The person has been "shoulding" himself/herself for so long and is not only not getting anywhere, but becoming more and more frustrated. So why should my "should" be any more powerful than his/her own? But when we focus on living differently, not on just words, the person changes, and those who are around learn by example. By influence. By osmosis.

Yosef brought the Torah to life, by living it. He became a living Torah. And this is a huge lesson in leadership and effective parenting, which is leadership parenting. All the best leaders lived the



life they wanted to preach, so they did not have to preach it. This is the difference between the Jewish leaders who lead by example, and other “leaders”, who can be orators, manipulators, or dictators, but in effect, are not real “leaders”.

The Aron of Yosef is not the coffin of a dead man, but of a living Torah, a real leader, that the gentiles could only wish they had. This is why when Yaakov died, and his coffin was in transit to burial in Maarat Hamachpela, Yosef and all the kings put their crowns on the coffin. Because when a great man dies, he does not die. He is still leading those people who knew him. That is how you know if someone was a leader or a dictator/manipulator. If after he dies, his lessons, lifestyle, virtues and values live on. That is Jewish Leadership. When Yaakov chose Yehuda to be the forefather of the Jewish Kings, it was in the merit of Yehuda's responsibility to Yosef, to Binyamin, for being honest about his episode with Tamar, and for doing the right thing, without being afraid of what anyone else would say or do. These are all traits of a real leader, the secrets of effective leadership. Of Jewish Leadership.

This last week I could not stop crying. I lost one of my best friends, Yehuda Brenig, ז"ל. He did not know he was one of my best friends, but he was. He died in the late 40's, leaving his wife and ten kids. His life was Torah, and he was one of the nicest people I have ever known. He projected serenity, positivity and calm to the world who knew him; there was not a dry eye at the levaya. He asked for no eulogies, no announcements, no posters. “What if the Heavenly Courts hear people saying about me that I learnt the tractates Berachot,

Shabbat, etc., and they test me, and I don't know them?” As I write this, I have in my pocket a letter he wrote to his family and close friends, telling them what they can do for him. “That each one tries to do G-d's Will.” Yehuda, I will miss you dearly.

I sat at the Shiva, introducing myself as Yosef Farhi, the one to whom Yehuda would give rides back from the Mir Yeshiva to Bayit Vegan. Whenever he did not have room in his car, he would try to find me some other ride home. I always loved to ask his advice. Not that he would say much, but he would listen and stay positive. And Yehuda projected positivity because that is how he lived. And the last thing he told me, when I asked him about some difficulty I was dealing with, while he was sick and dying and nobody knew that, he looked at me in the eye and said, “Yosef, you could look at this as a slap from G-d, or a pat on the cheek from G-d. It all depends how you look at it. And Yosef, I promise you, it is a pat of love.”

When I told this to the family, Mrs. Brenig, may she live and be well and strong and positive, said to me, He was like that to everyone. All day, people are coming and telling stories like yours. And now, when we need his counsel and encouragement, we need to ask ourselves, what would Yehuda say if he were here?

I cried with Mrs. Brenig and the family, because Yehuda would not say much. He lived his positivity, his serenity and his calm. That is how he projected it so well. He was a living example of Emunah, giving, being in the Now, and he is still a living example to all those who knew him.

SOMETHING FOR THE KIDS

Someone asked me a few days after Hanukah how my vacation was. I answered that I am still בחפז. (I am still on vacation.) He asked me why I am still on vacation a week after Hanukah. I told him בחפז is also the acronym for the four things we all have to deal with in life. All of life's problems usually fall under one of four categories: בריאות – health, הינוך – parenting, פרנסה – livelihood, שלום בית – peace with your spouse, or the people in your life.

Our job in life is to juggle those four. Rabbi Geizler taught us, as coaches, that if the difficult problems in life are hard to solve, the reason is usually because the problems are a solution for some other problem. A parenting problem can be solved with time, thought, money, or patience, but the reason why a parent may lack these resources is because these resources are already invested to a great extent in his livelihood. I can't get to the gym

and care for my health, because I don't have the time to make time for it, because my time is invested in one of the other three. Etc., etc.

Lately, I invented an awareness game that I play with my kids. It's called "the ingredients game". I take something out of the refrigerator, something that everyone eats, and I ask the kids what the main ingredient is. What is the second most important ingredient. What is the third. Most of the time, we do not pay any attention to the ingredients of the things we eat. And most of the time, we do not realize what percentage of our time, money and effort is invested in any one of the four abovementioned factors. Usually, not even 20 percent of our resources are spent on הנינוך, on parenting. Despite the fact that our children are 100 percent of our future. This is something we all know. But something we all forget (or choose to forget) too often.

Probably the person who changed the world the most over the last years was Steve Jobs. What was his motivation? What kept Steve going? "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important." "Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night saying, 'we've done something wonderful', that's what matters to me." Steve wanted to leave a legacy in this world.

Eliyahu Hanavi asked G-d, "Master of the World! With what will a poor man's name be remembered before You? A rich man is remembered because of his money, his silver and gold, for his precious stones and diamonds and all types of fancy utensils he acquired. But the poor man, how will he be remembered?" In other words, a rich man has the ability to put his name on a Yeshiva Building, on an Aron Kodesh, he can donate a Shul... and these will bear his name. But the poor man has nothing with his name on it, to keep the memory of his name before G-d!?

G-d answered Eliyahu, "The poor man will be remembered through his children. The son reads the Torah in shul, and people ask, 'Who's that man's father?' The son asks a good question in the study hall, and people ask, 'Who is the one who asked that question? Who is his father?' And people will bless G-d's Name, because of the poor man's son." The rich man is remembered because of the buildings he donated to the Yeshiva. And the poor man is remembered because his son is the one who is teaching Torah in that Yeshiva. (TDE 18)

When Yaakov blessed Menashe and Efraim, he blessed them with the eternal blessing: המלאך הגאל אותי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי. One who redeemed me from all hard times bless the lads, *and call in them My Name*. What does that mean, that Yaakov's name be "called in them"? The Shevet Meyehuda answers that Yaakov was asking that his name live on through these children. Not by having his name on buildings. But by the actions of his offspring.

When Yaakov blessed Yosef, (ויברך את יוסף) he blessed him by blessing his children. (המלאך הגאל אותי מכל רע יברך את הנערים) Because the greatest blessing you can give a person is to bless his children. Because your sons are you after you are gone.

Did you ever stop to ask yourself what is the greatest thing you can give your children? I thought about this for a while. The secret to having a tranquil home, to having Shalom Bayit and to effective, successful parenting is Triple A. Your wife and kids need Attention, Affection, and Appreciation *from you*. But most husbands and fathers confuse the Triple A with another Triple A. They think that what their family needs most from them is Affordability, Availability and Advice. And that is why most husbands and fathers feel that to be a good father or husband is an impossible task. But the second Triple A is asked for only when there is a lack in the first Triple A. The first Triple A is all your family really need from you.

What did Yaakov leave for his children? He gave them the greatest thing a father can give. He blessed each one and let each one know his strength and weakness. He let them know that he

knows each one has a unique Neshama, and he believes that each one will go on to become the greatest that he can be. ויברך אותם איש אשר כברכתו ברך אותם *And he blessed them, each one with the befitting blessing, did he bless them.* The Or Hachaim explains this to mean that each one of the children had his unique strengths, and Yaakov made sure that each one knew who he could be, and that Yaakov believed in him. Probably the greatest thing I can give my children is the knowledge and certainty that I believe in them, to let them know how great they are, and how great G-d made them.

Unfortunately, the way the world we live in conducts itself is a far cry from these ideas. The problem with the education system we have in our society is that the school system is outdated. The style of education and parenting kids as "factory made, one size fits all" is outdated. The old system builds factory workers and employees. Today's world and market is looking for more creativity and less workers. People need to feel today, more than ever before, that they have a unique identity.

For example, one of my children happens to be an amazing storyteller. Unfortunately, the school

system does not give a child an opportunity to develop such a skill. Quite the contrary. The child can get punished for telling stories in class, while drawing attention. It turns out that one of the greatest skills one can have in life is storytelling. For marketing, bringing your brand to life, for teaching, for parenting, and for holding people's attention. It is the seemingly small traits that our children are blessed with that they need us to glorify and strengthen.

If we bring those unique blessings that G-d gives us to light, we can do tremendous things in the world. Believe it or not, Steve Jobs' greatest life passion and skill was calligraphy, not tech. He knew more about design than he did about technology. And he used that passion to build the iPhone in such a way that, "We made the buttons on the screen look so good you'll want to lick them."

It is up to us to notice the gifts G-d gives our children and to let our kids know how great they can be. To believe in them. Because they are the only future we have.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H