

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Keep The Faith

In this week's *parasha* we are told of Yaakov *Avinu* blessing Yosef's sons, Menashe and Ephraim. However, we do not find any mention of Yaakov blessing the children of any of the other *Shevatim* (Tribes).

This is puzzling, particularly considering that the Gemara (*Shabbos* 10b) instructs us to refrain from showing favoritism to one child over another, and bases this on the fact that it was Yaakov's showing favoritism to Yosef that caused the Jewish People's original descent to Egypt. (Because the jealousy subconsciously created by that favoritism led to Yosef's brothers rationalizing that it was proper for them to sell him.) If so, why would Yaakov seemingly show favoritism to Menashe and Ephraim?

Additionally, in the course of Yaakov's blessing Menashe and Ephraim he refers to them as (48:5) "... your (Yosef's) two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt..." as opposed to using their names. Why did Yaakov choose to refer to them in this way?

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky addresses both of these questions in his *sefer*, *Emes L'Yaakov*. The explanation he suggests is that the children of all the other *Shevatim* were raised in Israel, in the rarefied environment created by Yaakov's presence. Raising a family in such spiritually sensitive surroundings did not require any special blessing. However, Menashe and Ephraim were raised in Egypt, which was infamous for the immorality and decadence of its inhabitants. They also did not have the luxury of being able to turn their backs on the surrounding society, as they were sons of Egypt's

second in command and as such were expected to be fully involved in the political sphere.

It is for this reason that Yaakov blessed Menashe and Ephraim, not out of favoritism, but because the environment they found themselves in required them to have the additional protection of Yaakov's blessing. This is also why Yaakov referred to them as the "sons born in Egypt." It is to stress this point. They require this blessing specifically because they were raised in Egypt.

The strength of character displayed by Ephraim and Menashe staying true to their beliefs despite the hostile environment they found themselves in is the reason why Jewish parents bless their children to be specifically "like Ephraim and Menashe." We are telling our children that yes, our beliefs are fundamentally different than that of surrounding society. You will face an overwhelming barrage of messages inconsistent with what we value. Still, despite it all, be like Ephraim and Menashe. Continue living the beautiful G-d given way of life that has sustained us for all these years.

Have a wonderful Shabbos! 🕍



RABBI
MORDECHAI
BERINSTEIN

CREATE YOUR
JEWISH LEGACY



WITH
RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

Much of our *parasha*, *Vayechi*, deals with Yakov *Avinu* sharing blessings, admonitions, and guidance in anticipation of his death. We are reminded to be attentive to the realities of death and beyond and to prepare for those realities in advance. It is in this context that we are sharing the following translated highlights of a fascinating piece on the topic of "*zavda*" – provisions – from the very early 19th century encyclopedic work, *Peleh Yoetz*.

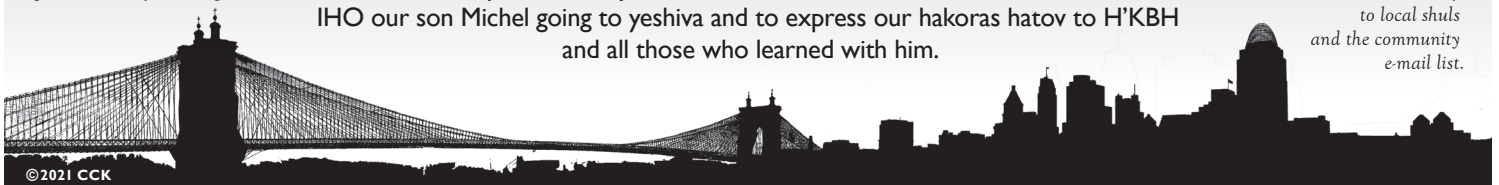
When the Talmudic sage Mar Ukva was about to pass away, he tallied all the tzedakah he had ever given and determined that it totaled seven thousand gold dinar. He commented, "Such a long road with so few provisions" [although, it should be noted that the dinar was a very expensive coin] and he distributed half of his possessions to tzedakah. Although Jewish law generally discourages gifting more than a fifth of one's possessions to tzedakah, when preparing for the "ultimate journey" it is appropriate to prepare appropriate "provisions" and one should be "very generous" in what one prepares for that trip. Ma'aser, the appropriate tithing of one's earnings, should not be seen as sufficient for the long term. After determining what one's children will need to support themselves with dignity, the rest should be "kept for oneself"

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CREATE YOUR JEWISH LEGACY



CONTINUED

[i.e. dedicated to tzedakah so as to generate a long-term merit.] One should at least view himself as one of his children and “keep for himself” part of the estate by gifting a portion of his possessions to needy Torah scholars. One who desires eternal life will prepare [spiritual] provisions that will provide enjoyment for his soul.

Our local CreateYour Jewish Legacy program makes such planning very easy and provides immediate benefit to local organizations at no cost to participants. 🇺🇸

A SHINING EXAMPLE

Al was a man who enjoyed what he did. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, he had grown up on the lower east side of Manhattan, and had always taken to the hustle and bustle of New York. Now driving a taxi in New York City, the adrenaline rush of driving the around the Big Apple, and feeling like he was a part of the pulse, movement, and energy of the city always felt good to him. As far as what he kept of the Judaism that he inherited from his parents, there was not much he still did, though for his mother’s sake he would go to synagogue on Yom Kippur and eat matzah on Pesach. Then, all of a sudden, his lifestyle came

to a screeching halt. “You have ulcers, Al,” said the Doctor. “Bad ones. If one of these ruptures you are going to be in deep trouble. You need to quit your day job and take it easy for a while. We’ll check back and see how it’s doing in a few months.” Al was not sure what to think. “What am I going to do with myself?” he wondered aloud to himself. He wasn’t sure that the stress of finding something else to do wasn’t worse than still driving a taxi. After a few days, his wife Lois came in to the room where he was listening to the radio and announced, “I know where we are going!” “Where?” “We are going to the Catskills. I just found an advertisement of a store looking for someone to help manage it. You can work in the store and the relaxed atmosphere and mountain air will do you good!” Al was not really looking forward to this but went along with it. The move went as smoothly as anyone could hope and they were soon installed in their new home. The family’s surprise though, was that they had just moved into a neighborhood populated by many religious Jews. Never living amongst his fellow Jews, it was a novel concept. After a few Saturdays where there was not much doing in the store, Al asked if he could just have Saturday off. As Al was not working on Saturdays anyway, he thought he might as well go check out services at what he knew was a synagogue up the block. As time passed the family became more and more conscious of the things religious Jews did that were different than what they were used to. Wanting to feel more at home in

TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

There is a dispute between the Rambam and the Ramban regarding the biblical obligation to pray. The Rambam is of the opinion that one must pray once a day, while the Ramban contends that the mitzvah to pray is only when one is in distress. It is important to note that distress is not limited to “big problems”; even the smallest mundane inconvenience would qualify as distress, thereby obligating biblical prayer according to the Ramban. 🇺🇸

the neighborhood, Lois started wearing skirts all the time instead of pants. Al started keeping his covered, first with a cap, and eventually with a kippah. Neighbors took note and warmly invited Al, Lois, and family for Shabbos meals. After a time, when Al looked at his current life compared to what it had been in the city, he knew he was happier and more fulfilled now than he ever had been. And his ulcers? Never caused a problem again. 🇺🇸



THE MYSTERY OF THE FAST OF THE NINTH OF TEVES (PART III)

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

There is an interesting tradition that, if it be true, would give a fascinating explanation to the mystery of the fast of the ninth of Teves. Christianity and Judaism are certainly two distinct religions; however, this was not always the case. In fact, in the decades following the death of Yeishu ha-notzrei, Judaism and Yeishusim (it wasn’t yet Christianity) were actually quite intertwined. Yeishu and his disciples were Jews, and the early adherents of Yeishu’s new faith observed all the *mitzvos* of the Torah. They donned *tallis* and *tefillin*, observed Shabbos, and kept a kosher kitchen. Essentially, the divide between traditional Jews and Yeishu’s adherents lay only in the mind; the former were loyal to Hashem while the latter were idol worshippers. Consequently, Yeishu’s followers, who lived in the Jewish communities of Eretz Yisrael and would marry into traditional Jewish families, posed a serious threat to the preservation of traditional Judaism.

The Sages of the time were quite concerned with this problem, and as related in the manuscript *Toldos Yeishu*, they convened to come up with a solution. During the conference, one sage named Shimon Kayfa suggested a plan. One of them must infiltrate the new sect, make his way up to the top, and abrogate the laws of the sect. This would draw a clear line between Judaism and the Jewish Christian sect. The other rabbis were supportive of the idea, but none of them volunteered themselves for the vital mission. The Sages pointed to Shimon and elected him to put his plan into action. Shimon agreed to accept the mission on condition that the other rabbis promise him a share in the World to Come. The rabbis assured Shimon that he would retain his portion in the World to Come and he set out to infiltrate the Jewish-Christian sect.

Eventually, Shimon made his way up to the top, moved to Rome, and successfully abrogated the laws of Christianity. According to this account, Shimon was none other than Simon Peter (Saint Peter), one of Yeishu’s prime disciples who became the first bishop of Rome. Although Shimon died in Rome and was buried as a founding leader of Christianity, he was one of the most heroic figures in all of Jewish history who risked his life to save the Jewish nation from a spiritual holocaust.

Shimon died on the 9th of Teves, and we commemorate his heroism by fasting. Now we can understand why the Sages didn’t want to record the reason for the fast of the Ninth of Teves. Such a text would certainly be censored. 🇺🇸

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