

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### *A Good Innings?*

*“And Yaakov lived...” (00:00)*

I just got up from sitting shiva for my mother who passed away three months short of 102. Many people said to me, kindly and sincerely, *“At least she had a good innings.”* I think the Torah teaches us the opposite.

The longer someone lives, the more deeply they enter your inner world. Over decades, they don't just accompany you — they shape you. Their values quietly become your compass. Their presence becomes so much part of you that you don't even notice it anymore.

And that makes the loss greater, not smaller.

Yaakov Avinu's life is shorter than the other Avos. And precisely because of that, the Torah seems to 'slow down', as it were, at his death. The Torah records every word, every blessing, every gathering of the family. Yaakov Avinu's life was *full of relationships* - and so the pain of parting is correspondingly profound and more extended.

Grief, the Torah is telling us, is not about how short a life was. It's about how **close** that life was.

Parashas Vayechi teaches that a long life doesn't soften loss — it deepens it. The ache we feel is the echo of love built patiently over time. And in that pain itself is testimony to a life lived with meaning, presence, and enduring connection.

That was my mother.

May I be an atonement for my mother. *Hareini Kaporas Mishkavoh*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close, so he summons Yosef and has him swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka.

Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion, which removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather, who kisses and hugs them. Yaakov had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua, who descends from Ephraim, will be both conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and teacher of Torah to the Jewish People.

Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them all. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron.

After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his remains out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak*

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## Q & A

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### Questions

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet* — kindness of truth”?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “*When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...*” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Ephraim and Menashe?
6. What does “*pillalti*” mean?
7. What does “Shechem” mean as used in this week's parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the Emori”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. Which congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “*strong-boned donkey*”?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, “*They embittered him...*” Who are “*they*”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “*will divide the spoils in the evening*”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

## Answers

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the Ma'arat HaMachpela.
5. 48:8 - The Shechina departed from him.
6. 48:11 - "I thought."
7. 48:22 - a) The city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When Mashiach will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of the Hebrew language.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Tefillat HaDerech  
The Wayfarer's Prayer (Part 1)

*"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."*  
Lao Tzu – Chinese Philosopher

Introduction

Bon Voyage!

The Talmud (*Brachot* 29b) relates that Eliyahu HaNavi said to Rabbi Yehuda the brother of Rav Salla Chasida, "Do not become angry and you will not sin; do not get drunk and you will not sin; and when you set out on the way, consult with your Creator, and then set out."

The Talmud asks, "What is the meaning of 'consult with your Creator, and then set out'?"

The Talmud answers: "Rabbi Yaakov said in the name of Rabbi Chisda: this refers to *Tefillat HaDerech* - the Wayfarer's prayer."

The Talmud continues: "And Rabbi Yaakov said in the name of Rabbi Chisda that anyone who sets out on the road must recite *Tefillat HaDerech*." So before we explore *Tefillat HaDerech* itself, I think it is incumbent upon us to analyze these words of our Sages and try to understand what, exactly, they are teaching us.

Many commentaries express surprise that Eliyahu HaNavi added his advice about setting out on a trip together with his exhortation about avoiding anger and over-drinking. What do drink, anger, and travel have to do with one another? And whilst the first two items on his list share much in common, and they both - more often than not - lead to sin, it seems as if travelling shares no commonality with them at all.

Among the many brilliant approaches to this question is that of the Maharal in *Netivot Olam* (*Netiv Ha'Avodah*), where he offers a particularly thought-provoking insight: In general, writes the Maharal, people want to be good; their intentions are to be thoughtful and kind to those around them. The problems begin when a person loses control of himself; it is then that a person behaves in a destructive and hurtful way. Eliyahu HaNavi teaches us that the most common causes for such destructive behavior are anger and drunkenness. There is, however, a third, much more subtle trigger, which is when a person changes their environment. The disruption of moving from one place to another, even if only temporarily, can throw a person's routine off to the point that they might be capable of behaving in a way that they would never normally do.

Eliyahu HaNavi is thus actually teaching two fundamental lessons about how a person should retain their emotional equilibrium: Firstly, a person should always try to avoid getting angry and drinking too much. For most people, this does not require drastically changing their lifestyle and can be done with relative ease. Secondly, travel, which is completely normative and can not always be avoided, requires constant mindfulness. That is why Eliyahu HaNavi describes *Tefillat HaDerech* with the somewhat abstruse phrase “consulting one’s Creator”, because when travelling, a person should concentrate on praying to Hashem that throughout their journey that they be successful and safe because they are not following their regular routine.

*Note: Tefillat HaDerech should not be confused with the “HaGomel” blessing which is recited after a person has safely passed through a dangerous situation; and although we will not be going through the Halachot pertaining to Tefillat HaDerech, which are detailed and complex, we will mention that Tefillat HaDerech is obligatory even for a regular journey that does not seem to be inherently dangerous.*

*To be continued...*

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## TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### **Love Your Fellow Jew**

Mitzvah 243

*Do not take revenge, do not bear a grudge, and love your fellow like yourself; I am Hashem (Vayikra 19:18).*

*Sefer HaChinuch* observes that the benefits of this Mitzvah are far-reaching, for whenever someone shows love for others and practices lovingkindness, the recipients respond in kind, and peace abounds among the Jewish people.

The Torah introduces this Mitzvah by instructing us not to take revenge or bear a grudge, meaning that the Mitzvah to love Jews applies even—and especially—to those who have harmed us. How can a person be expected - not only to abstain from taking revenge - but also to feel genuine love?

The Sages explain in *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Nedarim* 9:4) that a Jew harming another is comparable to a butcher holding a cleaver in his right hand and accidentally striking his left hand. Just as it would not enter the butcher’s mind to take the cleaver in his left hand and strike his right hand in revenge, it should not enter the mind of a Jew to take revenge against another Jew, because we are all like one body. *Radvaz* (§13) explains further that our souls were carved out of the same source in Heaven, which means that we are essentially one and the same.

The Gemara there (*ibid.*) cites the famous teaching of Rabbi Akiva that “*Love your fellow as yourself*” is a great rule in the Torah. *Rashi* (*Shabbos* 31a) explains that this is because “your fellow” alludes to Hashem, and this Mitzvah thus includes every single Mitzvah. Alternatively, *Rashi* explains that this Mitzvah includes all Mitzvos between man and his fellow, which is most of the Torah.

The Gemara also cites Ben-Azzai’s view, which is less known, that the “great rule of the Torah” is the verse “...*On the day that Hashem created man, in the image of God He created him (Bereishis 5:1)*”. This is a similar idea: The reason one must love his fellow as himself is that all are created in the image of God, and whatever one does to his fellow Jew is therefore considered as if it had been done to Hashem.

In the story of Yosef and his brothers, we find a paragon of forgetting, forgiving, and repaying hatred with love. Not only did Yosef show great love for his brothers, but he also tried his best to convince them that they had not really wronged him and that they had no reason to fear retribution (*Bereishis* 45:5). Yet, despite all this, the effects of their sin against him were etched for the ages. About two thousand years later, ten saintly Jews were executed to atone for the ten brothers who sold Yosef. Even this did not achieve full atonement, and ten men die to atone for this sin in every generation (*Midrash Mishlei* 1:13). Moreover, R’ Elchanan Wasserman suggests that the repeated phenomenon of blood libels throughout the generations that resulted in the spilling of much innocent Jewish blood, despite total lack of rational basis, may well be a punishment for selling Yosef and dipping his garment in blood (*Kovetz Haaros, Yevamos, Beiurei Aggados* 6:8). Such are the devastating effects of sinning against one’s fellow Jew, because man was created “*in the image of Hashem*”.

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