



#185 • VAYECHI • 12 TEVET, 5778 • 12/30/17

DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH ASHER'S RICH BREAD

Yaakov blessed his son Asher with the words “מֵאֲשֶׁר שְׂמֵנָה לֶחֶמוֹ” – From Asher his bread is rich (literally, fat)” (Bereishit 49:20). Yaakov seems to have blessed Asher with agricultural richness. However, if that was all Yaakov meant why did he say “מֵאֲשֶׁר” – “**from** Asher” – instead of “לְאֲשֶׁר” – “**to** Asher”? Furthermore, why is the possessive “וְאִי” added to the end of the word “לֶחֶמוֹ” meaning “**his** bread”?

The author of the Kli Yakar (Harav Shlomo Efraim of Luntschitz, זצ"ל, 1550-1619) offers an answer that draws upon the following Talmudic anecdote:

“A poor person came before Rava. Rava (wanting to make the appropriate donation) asked him, ‘What do you normally eat at a meal?’ The man answered, ‘Stuffed chicken and mature wine.’

“Rava (surprised) replied, ‘Aren’t you worried about putting too much pressure on the community (since you are supported by community funds and these are expensive delicacies)?’ The man answered back: ‘Am I eating of their food? I am eating the All-Merciful One’s food. For the verse says, ‘עֵינֵי כָל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – The eyes of all wait for You – וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לָהֶם אֶת אֲכֻלָּם בְּעֵתוֹ – and You give them their food in its time’ (Tehillim 145:15). The last word of this verse is ‘בְּעֵתוֹ’ – literally, in **his** time – and not ‘בְּעֵתָם’ - in **their** time (which would have been in grammatical agreement with the plural ‘לָהֶם’ earlier in the verse). This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, gives each and every person the parnasah, the sustenance, appropriate to him in his proper time.

“As this conversation was going on, Rava’s sister – whom he hadn’t seen for thirteen years (!) – arrived, and she brought him a stuffed chicken and mature wine (!). [Rava] said, ‘What is this before me?’ (Rashi: What has just happened to me? This is certainly unnatural, that my sister, whom I haven’t seen for years, suddenly appears with a stuffed chicken and mature wine?) He said to the poor man, ‘I have spoken improperly towards you. Please partake of this food.’”

In this anecdote Rava applied the lesson he learned from the poor man. Because Hashem provides for the poor – through the donor – and He gives each person exactly what is coming to him, Rava gave him delicacies.

The biblical Iyov (Job) also took this approach: “Did I ever eat my bread alone?” said Iyov. “Did the orphan ever not eat of it?” (Iyov 31:17). As the author of the Kli Yakar points out, Iyov gave the poor the same bread he ate himself – not lower class bread. This is also the meaning of Yaakov’s blessing and prophecy about Asher. **From** Asher to the poor will come rich, high-quality, bread – bread Asher would eat **himself**, not lower quality poor-man’s bread. As the verse continues, “וְהוּא יִתֵּן מֵעֲדָנֵי מֶלֶךְ” – He will **give** delicacies fit for a king” to the poor.

This type of generosity, not only giving the poor enough to subsist, but honoring them with princely food, would result in Asher being praised by all. As Moshe says when he blessed their tribe: “בְּרוּךְ מִבְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר” (Devarim 33:24): Asher is not only blessed **more** than others, he is blessed **by** all others.

SOURCE GUIDE: FIRSTBORN, PRIESTHOOD, ROYALTY

Even though Yaakov's parting words to Reuven are, "You are my firstborn son," Reuven and his descendants did not carry the benefits and responsibilities of the firstborn of Israel. Why did Reuven lose that role? And why was the בכורה, firstborn's double portion transferred to Yosef through Menasheh and Efraim; כהונה, priesthood, to Aharon and his descendants; and מלכות, royalty, to David and his descendants? This source guide is based on the answers to these questions that appear in an essay in the Shem Mishmuel on Parshat Vayechi.

A. "Reuven, You Are My Firstborn Son"

These were the words that Yaakov, on his deathbed, said to Reuven:

<p>1. Bereishit 49:3-4 (3) Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my power, superior in level and superior in power (Rashi: you should have been superior in level – priesthood – and in strength – royalty). (4) [You were] as impetuous as water, [therefore] you will not be superior, for you ascended the sleeping place of your father; then you profaned when you ascended on my bed.</p>	<p>בראשית מט:ג-ד (ג) רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֶתָּה פָּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת וְיִתֵּר עָוֹ. (ד) פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֶל תּוֹתֵר כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבִי אֲבִיךָ אֶז חִלְלֵת יְצוּעֵי עָלָה.</p>
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Reuven's impetuosity, his hasty reaction to Yaakov's behavior after Rachel's death (see Rashi's comments on Bereishit 35:22), was the cause for losing his supremacy. In the words of the author of Shem Mishmuel (Harav Shmuel Bornshtein, זצ"ל, 1855-1926, Poland, in his comments on Parshat Vayechi 5673):

<p>2. Shem Mishmuel on Parshat Vayechi - 5673 It seems that the explanation of this verse is that he lost all three things – firstborn, priesthood, and royalty – through anger.</p>	<p>שם משמואל פרשת ויחי - שנת תרע"ג נראה לפרש הא דאיכד כל שלשת הדברים בכורה כהונה ומלכות ע"י הכעס.</p>
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There is a common thread tying together all three of these:

The firstborn son is a middle level connecting parents with the rest of the children.

The Kohen connects the nation with Hashem. (The Kohen is also associated with דעת, the inner quality that connects wisdom with character – "כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת" – For the lips of the Kohen will guard knowledge (דעת) (Malachi 2:7).

The king binds together the entire nation.

B. Anger and Connectedness

Anger, on the other hand, is divisive. Directed at others, anger fuels conflicts and fighting. It is, perhaps, the underlying middah – character trait – behind many interpersonal prohibitions, like physical and verbal violence, disrespect, and forbidden speech. Even though the problematic side of what Reuven did was extremely subtle (see Shabbat 55b), and he remains one of the שבטי קה – Hashem's twelve tribes – Yaakov teaches us about anger through his last words to Reuven. Anger lowers the high level of connectedness required for the firstborn status, for Kehunah, and for royalty.

The Shem Mishmuel describes the inner side of how anger causes divisiveness. He cites the following passage:

<p>3. Pesachim 66b Reish Lakish said: Anyone who gets angry – if he is a wise man his wisdom leaves him and if he is a prophet his prophecy leaves him. If he is a wise man his wisdom leaves him: We learn this from Moshe. For it is written, "Moshe got angry at the officers of the army." And it is [later] written, "Elazar the Kohen told the men of the army coming back from the battle, 'This is the law of</p>	<p>פסחים סו: ריש לקיש אמר: כל אדם שכועס אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו אם נביא הוא נבואתו מסתלקת ממנו. אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו: ממושה דכתיב "ויקצף משה על פקודי החיל וגו'" (במדבר לא: יד). וכתיב "ויאמר אלעזר הכהן אל אנשי הצבא הבאים למלחמה זאת חקת</p>
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not in Me'arat Hamachpelah, but rather “בדרך אפרת – on the way to Efrat” (Bereishit 48:7).

It is not clear how this is relevant to this narrative. Rashi on that verse explains that Yaakov was being sensitive to Yosef's potential resentment about his mother not having been given a proper burial place. Yaakov defends himself, explaining that he did it via Divine instruction. Rachel's burial place was chosen so she would beseech Divine mercy upon seeing her children being taken into the Babylonian exile.

A question could be asked on Rashi's comment. According to his explanation, wouldn't it have been more appropriate to have mentioned this reference to the burial of Rachel during the **first** encounter of Yaakov and Yosef in our Parshah? That is, when Yaakov wants Yosef to take an oath that he will undertake traveling a few hundred miles, in order to bury Yaakov in Maarat Hamachpelah – that is when Yosef might have felt some resentment that Yaakov made no such effort when burying **his** mother, Rachel. At **that** point it would have been appropriate for Yaakov to assuage Yosef's feelings by informing him that the decision to bury Rachel near Efrat was “על פי הדיבור – through Divine instruction.”

So perhaps an alternative reason can explain what this reference is doing in the **second** narrative.

Looking back at the conflict of Yosef with his brothers, there are commentators who view the conflict to be one of hashkafah, of how a religious Jew should conduct himself in this world, a conflict that continues until today. The brothers held that Judaism can survive only if we insulate ourselves from outside influences, while Yosef held that one could be immersed in the world and still serve Hashem without compromise.

This hashkafah of Yosef was fully put to the test in Mitzrayim. It was there that Yosef showed that one can remain a tzaddik despite the temptations of Potiphar's wife, even in the depths of an Egyptian prison, and even when experiencing the opulence and power that comes with ruling the world.

One can view the blessings of Yaakov to Efraim and Menasheh as Yaakov's recognition of Yosef's success in his נסיון, his test. His sons were to be regarded as on the same level as Reuven and Shimon.

How does this relate to the burial of Rachel? Says Harav Shlomo Aviner, שליט"א (Rav of Beit El and Rosh Yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim, in his “Tal Hermon” on Parshat Vayechi): Yaakov was hinting to Yosef that Yosef's ability to cope and succeed in galut (exile) actually came from his mother, Rachel.

For **this** reason, Hashem specifically ordered that Rachel's burial place should be on the path of the exiles to Bavel. Hashem is telling us that in order to steel Am Yisrael against the dangers of galut there was no one more worthy of this task than Rachel. Through her tefillot she beseeched Hashem to give her children the strength to survive the harsh galut and eventually return to Eretz Yisrael.

Yaakov Avinu, in mentioning the burial of Rachel, was telling his son – and all of us – that we owe hakarat hatov, a debt of gratitude, to our mother, Rachel Imeinu, for our abilities to survive, and sometimes even thrive, while in exile.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Keshet:
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Hebrewbooks.org, and the Tanach section of Chabad.org.

We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.