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## פרשת ויחי

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### פרק מט פסוק א-ב

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִסְפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים:  
הַקְּבֹצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:

רש"י

א וַאֲגִידָה לָכֶם. בְּקֹשׁ לְגִלוֹת אֵת הַקֶּץ וְנִסְתַּלְקָה מִמְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה, וְהִתְחִיל אֹמֵר דְּבָרִים אַחֲרִים

מושג

בְּקֹשׁ לְגִלוֹת אֵת הַקֶּץ וְנִסְתַּלְקָה מִמְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה.

### Translation:

Yaakov sought to reveal the end, but the Shechinah left him.

### Explanation:

Yaakov sought to reveal the **אחרית ימים** to his sons. He realized that in order to do so they would have to achieve unity both in a spiritual sense – **האספו** – and in a physical sense – **הקבצו**. When the Shechinah left him even after his sons declared **אחד** **אלקינו ה' אלהינו ה' אחד**, he realized that harmony among the brothers was missing. He addressed this by blessing each son with an expression of their unique talents, allowing each to understand their distinct place in the mosaic of **ישראל**. Yaakov thus taught that true unity is only possible when we all work towards the same spiritual goal and each person recognizes their unique contribution towards the attainment of that goal.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

Our Musag is coming to explain why Yaakov begins by telling his sons that he is going to reveal to them what will become of them in **אחרית הימים**, and then does not do so but instead he blesses them. In addition, there a number of words in **פסוק ב** which require explanation. First, why does the Pasuk switch from **האספו** to **הקבצו**? Second, why does it switch from **בני יעקב** to **ישראל**? Third, why does it say **שמע** twice? And finally, why does it need to say **אביכם**?

## NOTES

Rashi's source is a גמרא in (נו.) מסכת פסחים which teaches:

תנו רבנן: כיצד היו כורכין את שמע (רש"י – כלומר שהיו מדבקים כל הקרייה כמות שהיא ולא היו מוסיפין)? אומרים שמע ישראל ה' א-להינו ה' אחד ולא היו מפסיקין (רש"י – בין אחד ולאהבת), דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יהודה אומר: מפסיקין היו, אלא שלא היו אומרים ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד. ואנן מאי טעמא אמרינן ליה (ואנו מה הסיבה שאומרים את זה)? כדדריש רבי שמעון בן לקיש, דאמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם. ביקש יעקב לגלות לבניו קץ הימין, ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה. אמר: שמא חס ושלוש יש במטתי פסול, כאברהם שיצא ממנו ישמעאל, ואבי יצחק שיצא ממנו עשו. אמרו לו בניו: שמע ישראל ה' א-להינו ה' אחד. אמרו: כשם שאין בלבך אלא אחד כך אין בלבנו אלא אחד. באותה שעה פתח יעקב אבינו ואמר: ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד. אמרי רבנן: היכי נעביד (כיצד נעשה)? נאמר, לא אמרו משה רבינו. לא נאמר, אמרו יעקב. התקינו שיהו אומרים אותו בחשאי (בלחש).

The גמרא explains that יעקב wished to reveal to his sons the קץ<sup>1</sup>. As he continued he lost his רוח הקודש. He was bothered by the loss of the שכינה and wondered if it was the result of one of his sons not being worthy. To this his sons said אחד ה' אלקינו ה' שמע ישראל, and tell their father אחד אלא אחד ה' אחד ה' so too to us אחד ה'.

There are a number of questions which arise from the story told by the גמרא:

1. In almost every instance in which the גמרא or מדרש inserts a story into the text of the Torah, there are textual hints that allude to the story. In fact, the purpose of the Chazal is to explain these textual irregularities by telling us that there is something going on behind the scenes to which the Torah is hinting. Where is the hint to this discussion that is taking place between יעקב and his sons?
2. The גמרא tells us that יעקב feared that the שכינה had left him due to a fault in his sons. Rashi tells us that after his sons reassured him that there was no such fault he moved on to something else. What is not clear is if indeed his sons were telling the truth when they said שמע, why did the שכינה leave him? For example the מדרש רבה (צ"ט:ה) teaches that יצחק also wanted to reveal the קץ to עשו but was not allowed to do so due to the fact that עשו was a רשע<sup>2</sup>. But the Midrash gives us no clue as to why the sons of Yaakov were denied. And finally, why did יעקב move on by starting to bless his sons? Was this somehow a reaction to what had happened? Was he planning to bless his sons anyway?

While our Pasuk seems fairly easy to understand, the next Pasuk presents a number of textual peculiarities, which will become the basis of our Musag. The Pasuk reads:

הַקְּבָצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל-יְשׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:

The following issues arise:

1. Why did יעקב change from האספו to הקבצו?
2. Why does יעקב use the word שמע, which was not said in the previous Pasuk, and why does he use it twice?
3. Why does the Pasuk switch from בני יעקב to בני ישראל?
4. Why does Yaakov add the term אביכם?

The גמרא comments on the above Pesukim in a similar fashion to the גמרא mentioned above (see footnote 2). The Midrash is somewhat different than the גמרא in that it does not directly connect יעקב wanting to reveal the קץ to the saying of שמע. However, the Midrash does add an explanation as to why יעקב told his sons האספו. The Midrash reads:

<sup>1</sup> What exactly he wished to reveal to them is unclear. The מדרש רבה brings various possibilities.

Also see Rashi in פסחים.

<sup>2</sup> The Midrash reads

מִסִּיר שְׁפָה לְנֶאֱמָרִים וְטַעַם זְקָנִים יָקָה (משלי יב:כ): זה יצחק ויעקב, יצחק היה מחבב את עשו שהיה הקב"ה שונא אותו, ואמר לו (בראשית כז) ועשה לי מטעמים, ובקש לברכו ולגלות לו את הקץ מה עשה הקב"ה העביר טעמו הימנו ולא ידע אלא התחיל חרד שנאמר (שם בראשית כ"ז) ויחרד יצחק, וגוי כיון שלא מצא מה לומר אמר (שם בראשית כ"ז) גם ברוך יהיה, ואף יעקב בקש לגלות לבניו את הקץ שנאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא, וגוי והעלים הקב"ה ממנו והתחיל אומר ראובן בכורי אתה הרי טעם זקנים יקח.

צוה אותן על המחלוקת אמר להון תהיו כלכון אסיפה אחת, הה"ד (יחזקאל לז)<sup>3</sup> ואתה בן אדם קח לך עץ אחד וכתוב עליו וגוי לבני ישראל וגוי, חבירו כתיב נעשו בני ישראל אגודה אחת, התקינו עצמכם לגאולה מה כתיב אחריו ועשיתי אתכם לגוי אחד וגוי<sup>4</sup>

According to the Midrash יעקב realizes that there is a prerequisite to the revealing of the גאולה, namely unity. He therefore calls to his sons and tells them האספו, to gather together as one and this will allow him to reveal to them אחרית הימים. However, something goes wrong and the שכונה leaves him denying him the required רוח הקודש. The Midrash teaches that Yaakov believed this to be a result of a lack of unity of purpose towards the service of Hashem:

אלעזר בן אחוי אמר מכאן זכו ישראל לקריאת שמע, בשעה שהיה יעקב אבינו נפטר מן העולם קרא לשנים עשר בניו אמר להם שמעו "א-ל ישראל שבשמים, אביכם" שמא יש בלבבכם מחלוקת על הקב"ה אמרו לו (דברים ו) שמע ישראל אבינו כשם שאין בלבך מחלוקת על הקב"ה, כך אין בלבנו מחלוקת אלא ה' א-להינו ה' אחד אף הוא פירש בשפתיו ואמר ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, רבי ברכיה ורבי חלבו בשם רבי שמואל הדא הוא שישראל משכימים ומעריבים בכל יום ואומרים שמע ישראל אבינו ממערת המכפלה אותו דבר שצויתנו עדיין הוא נוהג בנו ה' א-להינו ה' אחד. (שם:ג)

According to the Midrash the words in the Pasuk in which Yaakov says אל ישראל אביכם are thus not to be understood as Yaakov telling his children to listen to him, which would be redundant, but rather he is telling his children to 'listen' meaning to understand that קל ישראל שבשמים אביכם, the G-d of ישראל who is in the heavens, He is your father. To this Yaakov's sons answer their father ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. This exact declaration, continues the Midrash, is said twice every day by every believing Jew. We say שמע ישראל, focusing our words towards יעקב buried in מערת המכפלה, and tell him that we still believe ה' אלקינו ה' אחד.

With all the above we may now fully understand the intent of Yaakov and answer all the textual questions asked above:

Yaakov wishes to reveal to his sons אחרית הימים but realizes this can materialize only once there is unity among the brothers. There are two states of unity that must be achieved, a spiritual unity and a physical unity. The brothers must display a unity of purpose in their belief in Hashem, and a state of harmony and peace among themselves. This is why the מדרש speaks of Yaakov addressing both types of possible division: שמא יש בלבבכם מחלוקת על הקב"ה and צוה אותן על המחלוקת, the first addresses the harmony among the brothers while the second addresses spiritual unity.

These two states of unity are referred to with the words האספו and הקבצו. Rov S.R. Hirsch explains that while the שורש of א.ס.פ. and ק.ב.צ. seem to both translate as to gather, they do not share the same meaning:

האספו and הקבצו have by no means the same meaning. This is evident already from the fact that האספו can be said even of a single, individual, e.g. (במדבר יב:טו) עד האספו מרים (במדבר יב:טו). So that האספו demands the spiritual gathering together on the single point, for one singular purpose... קבץ, on the other hand always refers to the external gathering together of people, not uniting in mind but in space.

We may therefore explain that Yaakov tells his sons that in order to merit the revelation of אחרית הימים the brothers must both - האספו - achieve spiritual unity, and - הקבצו - achieve physical unity.

Pasuk א' thus begins with Yaakov's plea for spiritual unity; האספו. Pasuk ב' begins with his plea for physical harmony; הקבצו. In it he uses his birth name, יעקב, which represents his physical state. The Pasuk continues with the words שמעו אל ישראל אביכם, with which, as the גמרא and מדרש above explained, Yaakov and his sons declare ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. Here Yaakov addresses his above plea for spiritual unity, telling his sons that קל ישראל הוא אביכם. He therefore switches to the name ישראל, which refers to Yaakov in his spiritual state.

<sup>3</sup> טו ואתה בן-אדם קח-לך עץ אחד וכתב עליו ליהוה ולבני ישראל חבירו וילקח עץ אחד וכתוב עליו ליוסף עץ אפרים וכל-בית ישראל חבירו: יז וקרב אתם אחד אל-אחד לה לעץ אחד ויהיו לאחדים בידם:

<sup>4</sup> כא ודבר אליהם פה-אמר א-לני-ה הנה אני לקח את-בני ישראל מבין הגוים אשר הלכו-שם וקבצתי אתם מסביב והבאתי אותם אל-אדמתם: כב ועשיתי אתם לגוי אחד בארץ בהרי ישראל ומלך אחד יהיה לכלם למלך ולא יהיה [יהיו] עוד לשני גוים ולא יחצו עוד לשתי ממלכות עוד:

We are left only to wonder why the שכינה does not return. It seems that the spiritual unity, has indeed been achieved as the brothers have pronounced a שמע that becomes the model for the Jewish people for all time. What is missing? Yaakov comes to the painful conclusion that this is a result of a lack of physical harmony among the brothers. He therefore moves on and, in Rashi's words, והתחיל אומר דברים אחרים.

It is interesting to explore why Yaakov did not attempt to address the lack of harmony among his sons. Also perplexing is why Yaakov should move on to bless his children. Was he planning to bless them anyway, or was this somehow actually a reaction to the lack of unity? And, if so, why would he bless them by stating each son's distinct character? Would it not be better to tell them how much they are all alike and not how each one is unique?

Perhaps we might explain that indeed Yaakov is addressing the lack of harmony. He does so, however, in an unexpected fashion. Yaakov notices that on the one hand his sons have achieved a state of unity regarding their belief in Hashem, and thus are in total agreement as to their mission in life. However, on the other hand, they remain in a state of מחלוקת. Yaakov wonders why this is so. Shouldn't unity of purpose lead to brotherly harmony? Should not האספו lead to a הקבצו?

Yaakov comes to the realization that this is not so. While it is certainly true that if we do not share the same spiritual goals true unity is impossible, at the same time spiritual unity does not guarantee physical unity. In fact, we might argue, one may actually hinder the other, as sharing the same exact goal engenders competition and jealousy. People strive to feel a sense of significance, being the same as everyone else makes one feel insignificant, and leads to unhealthy competition. When we all want the same thing we fight over who will get it first or who will do it best. Only when one feels that he or she is unique and has a distinct contribution to make, can true harmony be achieved.

In short, when we all strive towards the same goal, but are cognizant of the fact that each one has a unique role to play in achieving that goal, we then, and only then, work together harmoniously as a team towards the attainment of that goal. Yaakov thus realizes that unity is not achieved through uniformity but rather through diversity<sup>5</sup>. He begins addressing this need by blessing each son by clarifying his unique character, as the פסוק (כה) states: איש אשר כברכתו בריך אתם. This idea is expressed in the מדרש רבה which teaches:

בחקיק יוטל את הגורל<sup>6</sup>, זה גורלן של שבטים, ומדה כל משפטו, שהסכים הקב"ה עמו ליתן לכל אחד ואחד לפי מה שהוא.

### Questions for Further Thought:

- a. As religious Jews we are required by the Torah and the Shulchan Aruch to be very uniform in our observance of Mitzvos. For example, all Mitzvos have a very specific fashion in which they are to be fulfilled. Do you think the Torah allows for individual expression? If so, how?
- b. Which do you think is more important, spiritual unity or physical unity?

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<sup>5</sup> For this reason the מדבר of the שבטים in the דגלים of the חושן.

<sup>6</sup> בחיק יוטל את הגורל ומי-הנה פל-משפטו (משלי טז:לג)