

Every Jew Counts – Parashat Vayechi

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Redemption? only when everyone would be united and be drawn into holiness, the tzaddikim along with those who were far away!

This week's *parashah*, *Vayechi*, is a *parashat chazak* – a Torah portion in which we complete one of the books of the *Chumash* and say, “*Chazak chazak v’nitchazek* (Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!)” This *parashah* deals with the passing of Jacob, his will, and the blessings he gave to his sons and to the generations after him.

When Jacob became ill and saw that he was nearing the end of his life, he assembled his sons, saying, “Gather together and listen, sons of Jacob. Listen to your father Israel” (Genesis

49:2). Rashi says, "He wished to reveal to them the End of Days, but the Shekhinah departed from him [causing him to forget what he intended to say] and he began to speak of other things."

The Midrash explains that Jacob said to his sons, "Behold, you have in your hearts some questions about HaShem." They responded, "Hear o Israel"—Our father, just as there are no questions about HaShem in your heart, so too, there are no questions in our hearts, but "HaShem is our God, HaShem is One." Whereupon Jacob exclaimed, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity!" (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayechi* 98:3).

It was an awesome wonder that Jacob – the chosen one of the forefathers and the first to merit that all of his sons would follow his path and continue in their absolute faith in One God – wanted, during the final moments of his life, to reveal to his sons the End of Days. And then suddenly the Shekhinah departed from him, and instead Jacob spoke about other things. Reb Noson explains that certainly Jacob's words reflected what he wanted to say from the beginning, but his message was more general, with the meaning hidden and concealed.

Why did Shekhinah depart when Jacob wanted to reveal the End of Days to his sons?

Jacob saw that all his sons were going on the straight path. They all were pure and holy tzaddikim. And they all were completely devoted to serving their Creator. Jacob thought that gathering his righteous sons together was enough to speed up the redemption, despite the fact that the Shekhinah had left him. However, God, in His mercy, desired that "no one be banished from Him." That is to say, He wanted the entire Jewish people to gather together. When everyone would be united and be drawn into holiness, the tzaddikim along with those who were far away, then and only then would the redemption take place. This means that the final redemption is

specifically dependent on the gathering together of those who are distant and those who are close to holiness. Why is this?

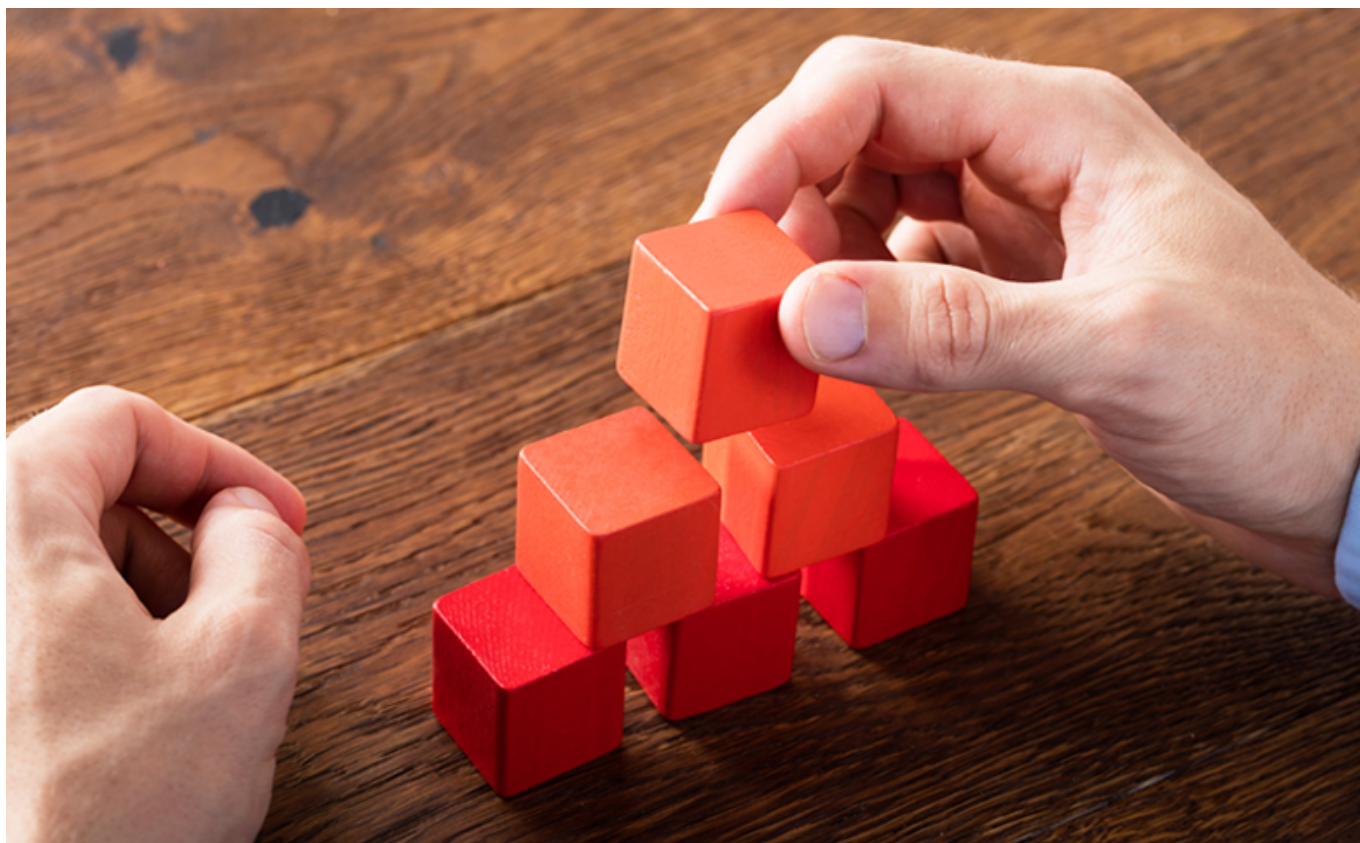
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Rebbe Nachman explains this idea with a teaching based on the *Sefer Yetzirah*, The Book of Formation (which was written by Adam, the first man; others say it was written by Abraham): “Two stones build two houses, three stones build six houses, four [build] twenty-four houses, five [build] one hundred and twenty, six [build] seven hundred and twenty...”

The principle behind this multiplication is as follows:

From two letters, only two letter-combinations can be formed. The letters *aleph* and *bet* yield only two possibilities: *aleph-bet* and *bet-aleph*. If we add to these two letters the letter *gimmel*, we can build six letter-combinations. Adding a fourth letter, *dalet*, yields 24 letter-combinations, and so on. (The reason for making this type of accounting is clarified and explained at length in *Tzaddik* #169 and in *Sefer Pardes*, Gate 30, of the Gate of Combinations.)

In a quick calculation, when it comes to 13 letters, we are already talking about innumerable letter-combinations, millions upon millions. What does all this mean? In the teachings of Rebbe Nachman, this concept is called “the multiplicity of houses.” When there is a small addition, the power of the foundational core is increased, and its power is multiplied to an unimaginable and immeasurable power.



Two stones build two houses, three stones build six houses...

Rebbe Nachman takes the idea regarding the letter-combinations from the introduction to *Sefer Yetzirah*, showing how this relates to the human dimension, as it applies to the soul of each person. When there is a group made up of a number of people who are engaged in serving God, and an additional person is added to that group, there is the same effect of multiplication. Moreover, this idea exists regarding every aspect of holiness – in prayer, in Torah, and in everything that pertains to serving God. (In addition, it is clear in the written texts that souls can be referred to as “stones,” as we see in the verse “Holy stones are cast out at the head of every street” [Lamentations 4:1]. Here the prophet Jeremiah is referring to Jewish souls who were thrown like filth out into the field, and he calls those who were cast out “holy stones.”)

This is what Jacob understood when he first thought that he could gather together his righteous sons and, with them, bring the redemption. But when the Shekhinah departed from him, he

understood that it was God's will that the entire Jewish nation be gathered together, not giving up on any Jew. And specifically by drawing close every person in the nation, especially those who had strayed far away, and bringing them within the realm of holiness and adding them to the building of holiness and the multiplication of houses, this would bring the final redemption.

Jacob is called both Yaakov and Yisrael, so we can understand the verse in this week's *parashah* as follows: "Gather together and listen, sons of Jacob. Listen to your father Israel." "Sons of Jacob" represents the small souls that need to fight to survive spiritually. This idea is embodied in the name Jacob (YAaKoV), who from his birth was holding on to the heel (EiKeV) of Esau and fighting with him. Similarly, Jacob was left alone when a man (Esau's ministering angel) wrestled with him (Genesis 32:25). All this refers to the distant ones who are the aspect of "Jacob."

When Jacob understood that he could not bring the redemption by assembling the righteous ones alone, he called for all the souls to be gathered together, as in "Listen to your father Israel." The name Israel (Yisrael) refers to completion. When Jacob defeated Esau's ministering angel, the angel told him, "No longer will your name be said to be Jacob, but Israel. For you have battled with angels and with men and have been victorious" (ibid. 32:29).

The name Israel also hints to the inclusivity of the 600,000 letters of the Torah, which correspond to the 600,000 root-souls of Israel. The name YISRaEL itself is an acronym for *Yesh Shishim Ribo Otivot LaTorah* (There are 600,000 letters in the Torah).

Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek!

(Based on Likutey Halakhot, Piryah v'Rivyah 5)