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Parshat Vayechi
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WORDS LIKE ARROWS

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

There is an interesting Midrashic interpretation of two words in this week's portion that seem to contrast starkly with their simple meaning. In fact, on the surface the interpretation seems even to contradict the simple meanings!

Yaakov blesses Yoseph's children and then tells Yoseph, "as for me, I have given you Shechem one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the Emorite with my sword and with my bow." Rashi explains that after the brothers attacked the city of Shechem in response to the assault on their sister Deena, the Emorites, a neighboring country, tried to conquer Yaakov at his time of weakness, similar to Jordan's joining against Israel in the Six-Day War. They, too, were miraculously defeated.

So Yaakov tells Yoseph that he acquired those lands with his sword and bow. But Rashi and the Targum Unkeles, who is known for his almost literal translation of the Torah, deviate and translate the words bow and sword in a different light. Rashi explains they are wisdom and prayer, and the Targum explains the words as two forms of supplication.

The allegory is understandable. Prayer surely surpasses the pen in its might over the sword. And some prayers, like a sword, are strong and sweeping and affect all those they strike. Others, like an arrow, reach one specific point from a far distance. The question is: we know that Yaakov prayed. Of course, he prayed! Yaakov's prayers are documented throughout the Book of Genesis. He prays throughout his encounters with his adversaries, yet this time he chose to talk about his battle prowess. Why then translate his expression of utensils of war as prayer?

The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, of blessed memory, was renowned for his efforts in rebuilding Torah from the ashes of the Holocaust. He established the jewel in the crown of the Torah city of B'nai Berak by building the Ponovez Yeshiva and its myriad affiliate institutions. He built a Yeshiva for pre-teens, another for young men, and still a third for married scholars. He built the Batei Avos, a huge housing complex with hundreds of subsidized apartments for needy families. He built schools for orphaned boys and girls in B'nei Berak, Ashdod, and numerous cities across the State of Israel. Often, he would visit wealthy patrons in the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Europe, and appealed to them to contribute monies for the Ponovezer Institutions. The story is told, perhaps apocryphally, that one particular donor once confronted him in jest. "Why is it, Rabbi Kahaneman," he wondered, "that all the other Rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva who visit me never mention money? All they talk about is Torah and mitzvos. But you come here and cut right to the chase. You don't talk about Torah or mitzvos. Your appeal, however, is, direct and to the point. You come here and say that you need one hundred thousand dollars to finish a girls school in Ashdod. Why don't you also give me a speech about Torah, mitzvos, and Jewish continuity?" Rabbi Kahaneman did not draw back. He took the man's hand and looked him in the eye. Then he told him a profound statement. "You know me well. Many fund raisers talk, 'Torah, Torah, Torah,' but they mean money, money, money. I talk money, but I mean Torah, Torah, Torah."

Our Chazal, who understood the essence of Yaakov's being; who saw his deep faith in running from Esav, fighting with the angel, and confronting the tragedy of Shechem; and who appreciated his travail with Lavan, understood quite well what his bow and sword were. They were very comfortable with the greatness of Yaakov's persona, one steeped in a spirituality constantly connected to his Creator.

They understood that when Yaakov said sword he meant the swift and sharp result of prayer, and when he said bow and arrow he meant the piercing cry of supplication. Every word, even the seemingly mundane words, of our forebears, were the foundation of our faith and are filled with spiritual meaning. Everything pointed to the One Above.

It is when we as temporal beings preach prayer and espouse faith, that we must be suspect. Do we really mean prayer & faith or are we just talking prayer but thinking bows & arrows?

"Keitz" Closed

By Sheldon Stern

Parshas Vayechi is unique in that it's called "Stumah" closed, which means that there's no separation between the end of Parshas Vayigash and the beginning of its neighboring Sedra. Rashi offers two explanations for this anomaly; of which I'd like to address the latter. Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal the "Keitz" to his sons but it was concealed, or if you will, closed from him by Hashem. This leads us to ask, "Why did our Patriarch deem it important to share this information, and why did Hashem put the Kibosh on his plan?"

On first reflection, it's hard to fathom Yaakov's reasoning. Much of Sefer Devarim found Moshe Rabbeinu offering Mussar to his flock. He constantly exhorted the people to stay on the path of Torah and Mitzvoths, and he stressed that Hashem doesn't make any untoward demands of us. So why would Yaakov tell his children about the "End of Days" which will come after an interminable exile, pockmarked by an endless litany of horrific tragedies? So we can answer that the "Third Rope" simply wanted to disclose the Keitz itself, without mentioning when it would occur, nor the tragic events that would transpire in the interim. But why was this uppermost on Yaakov's mind as he was about to take leave of this mortal coil? The Mishna in Avos 4:29 quotes R Elazar Hakapar, "Against your will, you're born against your will you'll die etc." So, what does that mean? The Meraglim took a beating; not only in the Torah, but also by our commentators. But if we think about their actual "sin", what was so terrible? The worst we can say about them is that they were Gedolei Hador and didn't want to lose their coveted positions so they maligned the land in order to keep the status quo. But that's what the Mishna is teaching us. There are times in one's life that he must not only welcome, but embrace change, because this is part of Hashem's grand scheme. But for most of us, dealing with a new reality is scary. There was an episode of Taxi in which the cabbies' union rep was fired because he had been taking bribes from ownership. When it came time to choose a new spokesman, Rev Jim, the resident loon, nominated the disgraced official. When challenged he responded, "I believe it's always best to go with experience." The point is that the unknown frightens us, and Yaakov Avinu knew that. Therefore he wanted to provide the cure ahead of the disease, which is he wanted to implant in his family the everlasting desire for Moshiach's arrival. And this would accomplish two things. Rebbe Elimelech, the famed Lyzhensker Rebbe, said more than 200 years ago, that when Moshiach comes we'll try to fly on wings to see him, but we'll be weighed down by the money in our pockets. Despite the harrowing poverty of Eastern European Jewry of his time he had a tradition that at the time of the Keitz, many Jews will be uber-rich and this wealth will tie them down. I'll explain with a story. About 30 years ago I was at Rabbi Friedman's Yeshiva for Tisha B'Av. The Rosh Yeshiva repeated the aphorism, "Those who don't mourn the Churban won't celebrate the rebuilding of the Bes Hamikdash." There was a Russian Jew in attendance who blurted out, "Come on Rabbi, do you think that someone with a million dollar house in Flatbush is going to leave when Moshiach comes?" As you can imagine, everyone stared him down, but I knew he was right. Why should people give up their cushy lives and relocate? As the saying goes, "Better the devil you know, than the devil you don't know." And here it's a no-brainer. You've got generational wealth. Your children and grandchildren are following the Torah, why risk losing it all in a foreign land? Our Elder foresaw all this and so he wanted to make sure that no matter how alluring Golus may seem it pales in comparison to the halcyon era of the Redemption. The point he wanted to emphasize is that we won't be able to fully appreciate the Torah until we can follow it in its entirety and that will only occur when Moshiach comes. And why is that? We say in the Shema that Hashem is One and Chazal teach that Hashem and the Torah are One. But presently we're only able to keep about 180 of the 613 Mitzvoths so the Torah is fragmented, which also means that Hashem is in a state of flux Kaviyochol.

Seemingly the Ish Tam's logic was unassailable, so why did Hashem reject it? Arguably, the most popular Seder song is Dayeinu, but how many of us have taken the time to consider its message? Let's look at one of the early stanzas, "If He had given us their (Egypt's) wealth and not split the sea for us, it would've sufficed us." Does that make any sense? Of what value was opulence with their former taskmasters bearing down on our ancestors? So this is a key to understanding what it means to be a Jew. We don't say thank you at the end of the process, rather we must recognize what Hashem does for us at each step along the way. There's an interesting Gemara which began with one Amora asking his colleague for the difference between Jews and gentiles. His colleague responded, "We have Mitzvoths but they don't." This answer was challenged, "They also have Mitzvoths." Then the first Amora said, "They do their Mitzvoths to get rewarded, but we act Leshem Shamayim." This was parried, "We also want to receive Schar." But then we got the winning point, "If a gentile does a Mitzvah and doesn't get a reward he's upset, but a Jew would still be happy." To borrow a sports analogy, "When one team wins the championship all the others are called losers." But that's not the attitude that Hashem wants to drill into us. The Midrash tells us that the tribe of Ephraim left Mitzrayim thirty years before its compatriots, but they were caught and killed. One can play Monday Morning Quarterback and pity them for missing out on the Exodus, but that's not how Hashem looks at them. They were heroes for wanting to bring the redemption. So by nixing our forefather's suggestion, Hashem was conveying to us that He assesses each generation and each individual on its and his merit. And it makes complete sense. So often we speak of Zehus Avos as the key to explaining why someone found his way back to the Torah. It could've been some simple gesture by a Poshut Yid hundreds of years in the past and yet it unlocked G-d's storehouse of Chesed.

So what do we take from this? We all know that when Bes Hillel and Bes Shammai argued in the Talmud, the Halacha generally accorded with the former, but by no means do we dismiss the latter's teachings. While Hashem didn't allow Yaakov to reveal the Keitz at that time, he was, as the Animals sang, "Just a man whose intentions are good." There's a recent podcast which pitted an ex-Brooklynite who made Aliyah several years ago, against a Rabbi still living in New York. The Oleh made the case that anyone who hasn't moved to Israel is a sinner in G-d's eyes and he'll have no way to exonerate himself when he comes to the next world. The Rabbi, on the other hand, offered arguments to justify remaining in the Diaspora. This is a very complex issue and I'm certainly not qualified to address it but I wonder what will happen when Moshiach comes. Let's picture the scenario. An APB will go out to Jews throughout the world, "The time of your redemption has arrived." As McCartney sang, "Pack up the bags get in the limousine." Will you hem and haw? I've got to sell my house(s) and business(es.) Could this be what the Lyzhensker was alluding to? So Yaakov Avinu wanted to eliminate this doubt. He was making a definitive statement, "There's nothing comparable to Moshiach," and as Van Halen sang, "Right now, there's no tomorrow, right now it's everything." It was Tisha B'Av of 1990 and Rabbi Eziel Tauber was the speaker. He said something that made a tremendous impression on me, "Believe me, I'm talking to myself, but I speak loud enough for you to hear me." Frankly, I don't know what I'll do if I'm alive when Moshiach arrives. But we must also address Hashem's attitude, that the Keitz shouldn't become the focus of our lives. So what should we emphasize? Growing up I'd often hear, "Kinder un Gelt is the Shenster Velt." Yes, we all want to leave a physical legacy, and we all want to be financially comfortable, but there's more to life. One must find his voice in the Torah. I'm so grateful to the Shtieble and Bialystoker for giving me the opportunity to express my thoughts. But it's more than that. Not everyone is necessarily blessed with material blessings. Such people should see this as a test from Hashem and this is ennobling because it means that He has great aspirations for us. Every Jew is essential. Hashem looks at us thinking, as John Lennon wrote, "Don't Let Me Down." There's so much that every one of us can accomplish if we realize that we're all important cogs in Hashem's universe. In deference to my namesake's position let me end with the following:

Yes, our bags are packed
We're ready to go
We're waiting just to hear the call
That Redemption has arrived for one and all
We're leaving on a jet plane
L-rd knows we won't be back again
Today, it's time to go

Ephraim and Menashe: Role Models for Jews in Galus

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

In this week's parsha, Yosef brings his two children to his father Yaakov for a *bracha* (blessing). Yaakov gave Yosef's children a tremendous *bracha*: "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menashe'" (Bereishis 48:20). What a *bracha*! In the future, whenever the Jewish people would bless their sons, they would invoke the prayer that they should be like Yosef's two sons: Ephraim and Menashe.

There is a very obvious question. Yaakov had twelve illustrious sons. Why didn't Yaakov say, for example, that the perennial Jewish *bracha* would be "May you be like Yehudah and Yosef" or "like Yissocher and Zevulun"? Why did Yaakov single out these two grandchildren to be the prototypes of *bracha*?

Several *meforshim* (commentators) offer the following explanation, which I most recently saw from Rabbi Eliyahu Munk (1900-1978; Germany, England). Yaakov saw a special quality in Ephraim and Menashe that he did not have the opportunity to see in his own children. Yaakov's own children were raised in the best of environments. They lived in the Land of Israel, in the house of the patriarch Yaakov, insulated from any bad environment. Granted, it is not trivial to raise good children even in the best of circumstances. However, there is nothing novel in the fact that Yaakov's own children turned out well. It is no surprise if a child who is raised in Bnei Brak or Meah Shearim grows up as an observant Jew. However, if people raise a child in a city such as Sioux City, Iowa — where their family is, perhaps, the only observant Jewish family in town — and the child is subject to foreign influences from all of his surroundings — and nonetheless, the child grows up as a faithful Jew, that is truly a great accomplishment.

In preparation for generations of Jews spending so much of their time in *galus* (exile), Yaakov Avinu formulated the greatest *bracha* for the Jewish people to give over to their children. "May they be like Ephraim and Menashe." Ephraim and Menashe were raised in the Sioux City, Iowa of their time. They were the only Jews in the entire country! They grew up knowing that so many things that they saw around them were not the way things should be. Despite this, they turned out just like Yaakov's own children. This is the special *bracha* that the Jewish people would need — the ability to be raised in a non-Jewish environment and yet turn out to be good and honest Jews.

The time approached for Yisrael to die, so he called for his son Yosef, and said to him: Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh and do kindness and truth with me – please do not bury me in Egypt” (47:29)

The Gemara on Berachos 13a teaches that while Avraham and Sarah had their names changed permanently, Yaakov’s name change to Yisrael did not entirely supersede his old name. While Yisrael became his primary name, the name Yaakov was still used occasionally. While we see Yaakov referred to by both names throughout Sefer Bereishis, the pesukim in Parshas Vayechi seem to constantly switch back and forth between names. What determines when the Torah uses Yaakov and when the Torah chooses to call him Yisrael? Rabbeinu Bachya suggests that the name Yaakov refers to physical characteristics while the name Yisrael refers to spiritual characteristics. Since one cannot live in a purely spiritual way without caring for his physical needs, the name Yaakov was never completely phased out. However, a person’s spiritual pursuits are to be his primary concern, which is why the name Yisrael is considered the more important name. This rationale can be used to explain the constant shift between names in this week’s parsha. When describing the length of Yaakov’s life, the Torah calls him Yaakov because this is a description of his physical life. When discussing Yaakov’s impending death, he is called Yisrael because death is really just the beginning of a purely spiritual existence. When he issues his final command to his sons, he is Yaakov because it is his last earthly action. Following his death, he is only Yisrael because at that point his soul lived on after leaving his body. This understanding of the distinction between Yaakov and Yisrael can explain the statement of Chazal that Yaakov Avinu did not die. While he certainly did depart this world, his soul still exists to this very day as Yisrael, in a purely spiritual form. This is true of all tzadikim, who are considered to be “alive” even after their deaths.

“He told Yaakov and said, Behold, your son, Yosef, is coming to you. Yisrael gathered his strength and sat up on the bed” (48:2)

The Baal HaTurim that the phrase “on the bed” occurs in only one other place in Tanach (Esther 7:8): “Haman was falling on the bed that Esther was on.” There is a lesson to be drawn from comparing Yaakov strengthening himself to sit up on his bed and Haman falling on a bed. It teaches us that “the righteous, even when they are weak, can become stronger... but the wicked, even in their prime, are in the process of falling.” There are stories of the Chofetz Chaim and other great rabbis who traveled far and wide to assist with Jewish causes even in their older age and somehow had the strength to keep to grueling schedules. Hashem helps give energy to those who are faithful to Him.

“He blessed Yosef, and he said: The G-d before whom my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, walked, the G-d who has tended to me ever since I have been until today” (48:15)

Yaakov describes the way that Hashem took care of him by comparing it to a shepherd taking care of his animals who are totally dependent on him. In the same way, our health, wealth, and everything else in our lives has nothing to do with our own talents. It all comes from Hashem and we would be helpless without Him. Just like Yaakov, we should not take credit for any of our achievements. We have to notice that everything we have been given, from the day that we came into this world until this very day, is entirely due to Hashem. That is how a person has to think and talk. The gemara in Pesachim 118a says that earning a livelihood is more difficult than bringing the redemption. Yaakov said that “an angel redeemed me from all evil,” but for sustenance, it was “Hashem who shepherds me.” Redemption can be accomplished through an emissary while parnassa can only be provided by Hashem Himself. We must recognize the blessings that we have in our lives and acknowledge that they come to us directly from Hashem.

“Thus should you say to Yosef: I beseech you; please, forgive the crime of your brothers and their sin for they have dealt badly with you. And now, please, forgive the crime of the servants of your father's G-d. Yosef wept when they spoke to him” (50:17)

In relating the command that Yaakov purportedly gave for Yosef, the brothers referred to themselves as “servants of the G-d of your father.” Why did they use this description? Perhaps they were hinting that Yosef should be forgiving, just as Hashem is always forgiving. They were hoping to arouse his compassion so that he should not hold their wrongdoing against them. Another lesson that we can learn is to always envision ourselves as servants of Hashem. That should be our primary self-definition and it should guide our actions in whatever we do. Though it is easy to feel like our own desires are paramount, we must remember that we were put in this world to work for Hashem. We all have to know what Hashem wants from us so that we can act in the way that He expects because He is our Boss and we exist to do His will. That feeling is what it means to be an “Eved Hashem,” a servant of Hashem.

A True Understanding of Blessings

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Bereishis, 48:17-19: “Yosef saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head and it displeased him, so he supported his father’s hand to remove it from upon Ephraim’s head to Menashe’s head. And Yosef said to his father, ‘Not so, father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head. But his father refused, saying, “I know my son, I know; he too will become a people and he too will become great; yet his younger brother will become greater than he, and his offspring’s [fame] will fill the nations.””

Bereishis, 49:28: “All these are the tribes of Israel – twelve – and this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them; each according to his appropriate blessing he blessed him.”

Rashi, Bereishis, 49:28, Dh: According to his appropriate blessing: “The blessing that in the future will come upon each one.”

A recurrent theme in [Vayechi](#) is that of blessings. The early part of the Torah Portion covers Yaakov blessing Yosef’s two sons and later, the Torah relates Yaakov’s blessings to all his sons before his death. A close analysis of certain aspects of these accounts can help us attain a deeper understanding of the purpose and significance of blessings, which we will see is a much-misunderstood concept.

When Yaakov came to bless Yosef’s sons, Menashe and Ephraim, Yosef expected him to place his stronger right hand on the elder Menashe and to give him the blessing suitable for the first-born. However, Yaakov placed his right hand on the younger Ephraim. When Yosef tried to correct him, explaining that Menashe was the first-born, Yaakov asserted that he was aware of that, but Ephraim was destined to have greater offspring, therefore he should merit the greater blessing. The question arises as to what exactly was the nature of the disagreement between Yaakov and Yosef. In addition, as Rabbi Yerucham Levovits points out, it is not immediately apparent how Yaakov answered Yosef’s argument. Yosef was claiming that since Menashe was the older one, he deserved the blessing that goes to the first-born. Yaakov answered that Ephraim would be great than Menashe, but why does that dictate that Menashe should not get the blessing of the first-born?

This can be answered by explaining an enigmatic statement by Rashi at the end of the section of the blessings that Yaakov gave to his sons. The verse states that he blessed each one according to his appropriate blessing. The exact meaning of this is unclear – Rashi explains that it refers to the blessing that in the future will come upon each one. Rashi’s explanation also needs clarification. This can be explained with a principle of Rabbi Levovits about blessings.² He notes that people often make a mistake when they go to a Tzaddik for a blessing. They think that he has a box full of blessings and they ask him to give him one of the blessings from his box. But we know that a blessing can only serve to add to what a person already has. For example, in the case of the miracle when Elisha blessed the oil of Ovadiah’s wife, he requested something already extant that the blessing could be activated upon.³ The same idea applies to giving a person a blessing for success in a certain area. If he has no potential in that area, then the blessing is pointless.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand gives an analogy to help make this idea tangible. “There is plant food. There is a plant food that is custom made for roses. When a person applies these nutrients to a rose bush, one will be able to grow lush and beautiful roses. If a person uses the same plant food (designed for roses) on daffodils, it is not going to work because this food is only designed to bring out “rose potential”, not “daffodil potential”. Likewise, explains Rabbi Frand, “If someone does not have a good voice and he goes to a Tzaddik (righteous person) and says, “I want to be a world class chazzan like Helfgot⁴” he should not expect miracles. No Tzaddik can give a blessing to make a person who cannot carry a tune into a world-class chazzan.”

This, then, is what it means when it says Yaakov blessed his sons, each according to his blessing he blessed them and when Rashi refers to the blessing that will come upon him in the future. He only expressed the blessings that each one was destined to already potentially have within themselves. It would not work to give Zevulun the blessing that he should become a Yissachar or vice versa. The purpose of a blessing is that the recipient should become what he already potentially is destined to become, it is not a magic potion that can create something from nothing.

We can now understand the back and forth between Yaakov and Yosef during the blessings of Ephraim and Menashe. Yosef looked at his two sons and argued that Menashe, as the first-born, should get the predominant blessing. Yaakov replied, ‘I know my son, I know’, meaning that he knew through Prophecy something that Yosef didn’t know. That despite their birth order, Ephraim would be the greater of the two, and thus he needs the predominant blessing to enable him to reach his potential. It would simply not work to try to give that blessing to Menashe. Yosef himself was aware of how blessing works, but he naturally assumed that since Menashe was the first-born, he would automatically have greater potential, but he did not have the prophetic vision of Yaakov that showed otherwise.

The lesson that can be derived from Rabbi Yerucham's teaching is that blessings do not work like 'magic' in that a person can go to a great man and get a blessing on whatever he wants. A blessing can only be effective when it builds on what is already extant. So, for example, if a person wants a blessing to become a Torah scholar, it has no chance of working, if he does not make the requisite effort in his learning. Rabbi Levovits also points out that when people came to the Chofetz Chaim for blessings he would often tell them that learning Torah would be more of a blessing. Rabbi Levovits explains that he wasn't merely pushing them away, rather he was saying that Torah was the ultimate source of blessing, so why not directly access that. May we all merit to be vessels to receive blessings appropriate for each of us.

Redemption from All Exiles

By Rabbi Berel Wein

At the end of the book of Bereshith, as we read in this week's Torah reading, there is little warning as to what the very next Torah reading will discuss and describe. The transition, from the benign and idyllic last years of the life of our father Jacob, is a harsh reality of servitude and slavery visited upon his descendants.

From the biblical narrative, it appears to have been sudden and unexpected. However, we already read in this week's concluding Torah reading of the first book of the Bible, that both Jacob and Joseph speak of redemption from the sojourn in the land of Egypt and a return to the land of Israel.

From the nuances of their words and the hope and prayer that they expressed, it is obvious that they wish to warn the Jewish people that their future lay not in the land of Goshen or the flesh pots of Egypt but rather their stay in Egypt, no matter how many centuries long, should be viewed as only a temporary one.

In this, our forefathers indicated to us that this would be the pattern of Jewish history throughout the ages and that no matter how long the Jewish people would live in countries and areas outside of the land of Israel they should never view those societies as being permanent.

The remarkable thing about Jewish history is how repetitive it has been. If the Jewish presence in ancient Egypt was only for a few centuries, the presence of the Jews in areas such as Babylonia, Egypt, and Eastern Europe generally was for many more centuries than that of Egypt. We are all aware that all those societies came to an end, Jewishly speaking, as did ancient Egypt.

The last words of Jacob and Joseph were to the effect that the Lord would take the Jewish people from Egypt and return them to their ancient homeland, the land of Israel. It is this final message of the book of Bereshith that haunts them and follows the Jewish people throughout the biblical narrative of the remaining four books of the Torah.

Whenever troublesome challenges arose, regardless of the great miracles of survival the Jewish people were blessed with, there always was an element within the people that said it was preferable to return to Egypt rather than continue the struggle for Jewish identity and independence that only the land of Israel could guarantee to them.

Apparently, Jacob and Joseph were aware of this tendency towards weakness and assimilation within their descendants.

Their final message to all future generations of the Jewish people concentrated on the belief that the Lord would certainly redeem the Jewish people from all exiles, whether benign or cruel, and restore them to the challenge of independent nationhood in the land of Israel. That is why at the conclusion of this week's Torah reading we will repeat our ancient model and prayer to be strong and to strengthen ourselves and others for the tasks that always lie ahead.