

PARASHAS VAYECHI

A Glimpse of the Future

If we could look into the future and discover when the major events in our lives will take place, would we do it? If we could ascertain the exact dates on which we will marry, have children and pass away from this world, would we want to know? Most people would rather live with the uncertainty than face the possibility of an unpleasant certainty.

In this week's portion, however, we seem to find an opposite view. As the final minutes of his life draw near, the old patriarch Jacob summons his sons to his bedside. With his great powers of divine inspiration, he sees the long exile of the Jewish people stretching far into the future, but as he continues to look, he also sees the arrival of the End of Days when the exile will come to an end.

"Gather around," he says to his family, "and I will tell you about the End of Days." But then he goes on to speak of other matters. What happened? The Sages tell us that Jacob attempted to reveal the end of history to his family. But the Divine Spirit departed from him, and his vision faded away.

The questions immediately arise: Why did Jacob want to tell them when the exile would come to an end? Especially in light of what we now know, that it would take thousands of years, wouldn't it only have disheartened and discouraged them? Furthermore, if Jacob felt there was a purpose in telling them, why indeed didn't Hashem allow him to do so?

The commentators explain that Jacob had no intention of revealing the date of the End of Days to his children. There certainly would have been no point in doing so. Rather, he wanted to give them a glimpse of what awaits them in the End of Days. He wanted them to see the idyllic future world suffused with the unrestricted emanations of the Divine Presence, a world of perfect harmony and peace in which all humankind will be blessed with unlimited knowledge and transcendent insight. This was the image he wanted to impress on their minds so that they would not succumb to despair during the tribulations of the dark years of exile.

But Hashem did not allow him to do so. The kindness of a father's heart had motivated Jacob to reveal this image to his children, but as is often the case, this well-intentioned kindness would ultimately deprive them of immeasurable reward. If the Jewish people had seen a clear prophetic image of the rewards in store for them in the future, they would naturally be motivated to persevere and struggle against all odds

to fulfill the Torah and achieve those rewards. In that case, though, they would be doing it for their own benefit rather than out of love for Hashem. But as long as they have no such images in their minds, their continued loyalty to the Creator through the worst of times remains an expression of incredibly powerful faith and love for Him, and their reward will be proportionately bountiful.

A mother gave her two sons jigsaw puzzles and sent them off to play.

A long while later, she went to check on the them. Both boys had completed their puzzles.

One of them jumped up and ran to her. "Look, it's all done," he said proudly. "Could you frame it and hang it on the wall?"

"Certainly," she said. Then she turned to her other son and asked, "Do you want me to frame yours as well?"

The boy shrugged and shook his head. "Nah. It was no big deal. You don't have to."

The mother was perplexed. "But your brother wants his framed. Why don't you want the same for yours?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the boy. "He didn't look at the picture before he did the puzzle, so I guess it was a pretty big deal for him. But I looked at the picture first, so it wasn't such a big deal."

In our own lives, we are all faced with periods of discouragement and even hopelessness during which we would be much relieved if we could steal a glimpse of Hashem's hidden hand at work. How much easier it would be to deal with the vicissitudes of fortune if we understood how everything leads to the ultimate good. But it is in this very darkness, when we stand on the verge of despair, that we must discern Hashem's closeness by our faith alone and feel ourselves enveloped in His loving embrace..