

# INSIGHTS

*Into The Weekly Parsha*

JANUARY 3, 2026

*This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rav Shmuel ben Rav Usher Zelig Halevi z"l. Sponsored by Kalman & Chana Finkel.*

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*"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"*

14 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYECHI

## Critical Criticism

***Reuven, you are my first born [...] unstable like water [...] you desecrated and ascended my bed. Shimon and Levi are brothers [...] in their rage they killed a man and uprooted an ox [...] (49:3-7).***

This week's *parsha* contains Yaakov Avinu's final directives to his children, his last will and testament, as it were. Naturally, one would suppose that a final message to one's child would be one of love and empowerment. For the most part, Yaakov's individual message to each child was exactly that; describing that particular child's strength and unique contribution to the family as a whole. Yet curiously, Yaakov also singles out a few of his children for fairly severe criticisms.

Even more troublesome: the criticisms that Yaakov levels at his children are related to actions that took place many decades before – almost fifty years prior. If Yaakov Avinu felt that they should have been criticized for their improper behavior, why did he wait so long to rebuke them?

Rashi (*Devarim 1:3*) addresses this issue. Toward the end of his life, Moshe admonishes Bnei Yisroel for their many misdeeds in the desert. Rashi points out that Moshe followed the example of Yaakov Avinu and waited to rebuke Bnei Yisroel at the end of his life. Rashi goes on to explain that Yaakov was concerned that if he had criticized Reuven earlier he would have driven him away, and that Reuven would subsequently join Eisav. Yet, if that were true, what difference does it make when he criticizes him, either way he may end up driving him away?

Criticism is a very tricky concept. The word criticize is actually derived from the Greek word "kritikos," which means to judge, and the *kritikoi* were the judges who gave verdicts. In other words, the very word itself requires a dispassionate view of the circumstances. As discussed in a prior issue of INSIGHTS, most people do not understand this. They criticize actions of others that they find bothersome, not behavior that is detrimental to the perpetrator's wellbeing. In other words, our criticism of others is usually about us, not them.

When criticizing one's child there is a whole other layer of complication. With our children we don't merely criticize actions that we find annoying, we also criticize actions that we feel reflect poorly on us or our family. This comes from the mistaken notion that our children are merely an appendage, an extension of ourselves. One of the most complicated aspects of parent child relationships is rooted in the decisions that a child makes for him or herself such as their profession, spouse, clothing, appearance, etc.

To be sure, often our children make poor decisions, inevitably leading to mistakes. Of course there are some situations in which we must try to save them from making a critical error. But as much as we would like to help them avoid what we feel are mistakes, we must internalize that their lives are their own and that

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their decisions might actually be the right choice for them.

Yaakov Avinu recognized that criticizing one's children can be fraught with peril. He was therefore extremely careful about how and when he leveled criticism at his children. To this end, he made two remarkable innovations: First, he waited until the end of his life. At that point it was clear that the criticism wasn't about Yaakov's own embarrassment stemming from their behavior. He didn't have much longer to live so how his sons chose to lead their lives from then on would have no emotional effect on Yaakov. It was thus clear that the criticism was about them, not Yaakov.

Secondly, he didn't merely criticize their actions; rather, he pointed out character flaws that they could identify and work on to improve themselves. He told Reuven that his impulsive behavior led him to careless acts that ultimately made him unworthy of leadership. He then told Shimon and Levi that their uncontrolled rage led them to making poor decisions that could have very well brought peril upon the entire family. By criticizing in such a manner, Yaakov conveyed the message that he was simply trying to help his sons – not control them.

# Plotting a Plot

*In my grave, which I have hewn for myself in the land of Canaan [...] (50:5).*

Rashi (ad loc) informs us that requirement of the children of Yaakov bought the rights to the Avraham Avinu to go down to Me'aras Hamachpeilah from Egypt, he lost all rights to Eisav with the funds he had accumulated while shepherding in the house of Lavan. The Midrash (*Rabbah* 31:17) goes on to explain that Yaakov did this because he didn't want to benefit from those funds. This

raises the obvious question: If Yaakov didn't want to benefit from those funds then how does he use them to acquire the burial grounds from his brother Eisav?

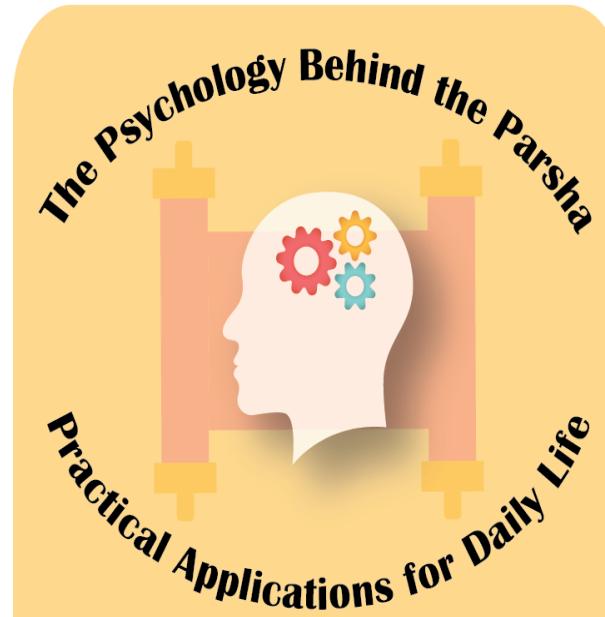
Although Yaakov did not want to benefit from this wealth, he also did not want to destroy it. This creates a dilemma; even if Yaakov were to give it away as a gift, the recipient would owe him a favor, and subsequently Yaakov would be benefiting from the tainted money. If Yaakov would use the funds in a sale, he received in exchange, and would ultimately be benefitting from those funds.

When Eisav claimed to be the rightful heir to Me'aras Hamachpeilah, Yaakov

recognized an opportunity to resolve his dilemma. In actuality, Eisav had sold the *bechorah* to Yaakov, this included all the rights that went along with it – including the double portion that comes with being a first born. In addition, once Eisav turned his back on the legacy of Avraham Avinu, and the subsequent *shalom*.

Thus, Yaakov came up with the perfect solution. He recognized that Eisav would not freely admit that he no longer had a right to Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, Yaakov did not give the money to Eisav to buy the land - he was merely allowing Eisav his delusion that he was entitled to the burial grounds. He thus gave Eisav the money as a way of placating him. Eisav did not consider the money to be a gift, for he maintained that he sold land that belonged to him. Hence, Eisav felt no gratitude for the money he received and the land that Yaakov received "in exchange" for the sale could not be considered benefitting from those funds as he had already owned the rights to the Me'aras Hamachpeilah.

Often, for the sake of *shalom*, we must put aside what we know to be reality and descend to another person's view of what reality is. Working through a painful situation by accepting another person's version of what the facts really are, and arriving at solutions acceptable to all, is the highest level of creating *shalom*.



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Wednesday Mornings at 9:30am

Meeting ID: 2765819544

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Friday Mornings at 11:15am

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