

JUDGING EVERYONE FAVORABLY ACCORDING TO THE PRESENT TIME (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Israel saw Joseph's sons and said, 'Who are these?'" (Genesis 48:8). The Midrash cites Rabbi Yehudah bar Shalom in stating, "Did he not know who they were? They studied Torah with him every day, and yet now he asks, 'Who are these?' Although they took care of him in Egypt for 17 years, did he not know them? The answer is that he saw Jeroboam the son of Nabat and Ahab the son of Omri, who would arise from Ephraim and worship idols, and the Divine Presence left him. When Joseph realized this, he bowed to the ground and asked the Holy One, blessed be He, for help: 'Master of the universe, if they are worthy of the blessing, do not send me away today in shame!' Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, returned the Divine Presence to Jacob, and he blessed them" (Tanhuma, Vayechi 6).

This is quite surprising. Since Ephraim and Manasseh cared for Jacob during the 17 years that he lived in Egypt, why was it only now, when they came to him for a blessing, that Jacob saw the wicked that would arise from them? Why didn't he sense this before? We also need to understand, given that the Divine Presence left him because the wicked would arise from them, why it did not leave him when he blessed the other tribes (it left him only when he wanted to reveal the end time), since the wicked would arise from them as well! To explain this, we may say that as long as Ephraim and Manasseh were close to Jacob, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) did not leave him. It departed only when he was about to bless them, for he saw by Divine inspiration that the wicked would arise from them. Jacob did not want them to benefit from these blessing as well, for in that case he would be empowering the forces of impurity. Since at that point Jacob was grieved to see that the wicked would arise from Ephraim, the Shechinah left him, as it is written: "The Shechinah abides...only through a matter of joy" (Shabbat 30b). This lasted until Joseph brought joy to his heart by saying, "These are my sons" (Genesis 48:9). In other words: Just as I descended into Egypt, and just as I retained my righteousness and did not damage the covenant of circumcision (Zohar I:71b), so too for my sons. They are tzaddikim like myself, and they did not damage the covenant. Therefore they are also worthy of a blessing.

Joseph also said to Jacob, "Just because the wicked will be among their descendants, must they now be deprived of a blessing? At the present time they are tzaddikim, and as for their future, their descendants may repent." Thus the Midrash teaches: "Gilead is mine and Manasseh is mine. Also Ephraim is the strength of my head. Judah is my lawgiver. Moab is my washbasin. Over Edom will I cast my shoe; over Philistia will I shout in triumph" [Psalms 60:9-10]. Gilead is mine alludes to Ahab king of Israel, who died in Ramoth Gilead. Manasseh is mine refers, literally, to Manasseh the son of Hezekiah. Also Ephraim is the strength of my head alludes to Jeroboam, the son of Nabat, the Ephraimite" (Bamidbar Rabba 14:1; see also Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:2).

Why did Joseph say, "These are my sons, whom G-d has given me here" (Genesis 48:9)? It seems that the word "here" is redundant. What he was doing, however, was telling Jacob by allusion: "Bless them according to their present state, for hear and now they are tzaddikim." Rashi tells us that Joseph showed his father the betrothal document and marriage contract, and also that he prayed for mercy concerning the matter and that G-d's spirit returned to rest upon Jacob. From this we learn that we must not judge based on what may happen in the future, or in later gene-

rations. Instead we should look at others in a positive light, as they are now, righteous and pure at the present time. It is from this perspective that we must explain the verse, "Israel's eyes were heavy with age; he would not see" (v.10). This statement is difficult to understand, for was Jacob really so old? After all, he had yet to reach the age of his fathers (ibid. 47:9). This is especially hard to understand in light of what the Sages have said, namely that Jacob is not dead (Taanith 5b). That is, his eyes must still be good. Why was this verse not written immediately after Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill" (Genesis 48:1)? Why does Scripture break off to speak about Joseph's children?

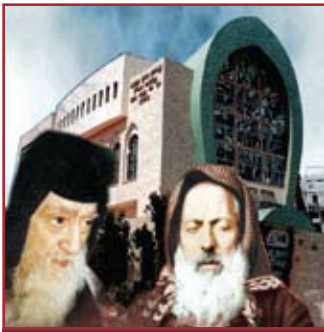
According to what we have said, Jacob asked Joseph to help him through his prayers. He made this request so as not to be grieved when he looked to the future of his children – whose descendants would not be worthy on account of their misdeeds – for Jacob wanted to wholeheartedly bless them with love. Joseph answered his father's request, and his prayer was heard. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, dimmed the eyes of the tzaddik – who could see from one end of the world to the other – so that he would only see his descendants at favorable times. Even if he should see that some among them would sin, that should not cause them to lose out.

From here we see the power of Jacob, the chosen one and crown of the Patriarchs (Bereshith Rabba 76:1; Zohar I:119b), a man of truth whose Torah was perfect truth. Jacob was convinced by what Joseph said, namely that his children were tzaddikim like himself and were not responsible for the sins of their descendants. Even if some individuals within a tribe did wrong in the eyes of Hashem, the entire tribe should not be punished by depriving them of blessings. Happy is the generation in which the greater agrees to what the lesser says.

Above all else, here we see that Joseph only wanted the best for his brothers when he brought his two sons to Jacob. By doing so, he ensured the Jacob would not see or regret what would become of his sons' descendants. All the tribes would also be blessed, each according to its characteristics, even if there would be sinners among their children in future generations.

Such was the righteousness of Joseph, who hastened to bring his children to Jacob so they could be influenced by him. In this way all the tribes would receive a blessing, even though Joseph's brothers seemed to have wronged him by selling him as a slave into Egypt. Joseph did not pay any attention to this, for he wanted all his brothers to be blessed. Hence he brought his sons before Jacob, all while knowing that sinners would arise from them many years later.

Since it was because of Joseph that all the tribes were blessed, after the death of their father his brothers said to him: "We are your slaves" (Genesis 50:18) – for without you, we would not have received blessings from our father. From here we must all learn a lesson for life: We are not to look at what might happen in the future, but instead we must strive to bless people and judge them according to the present time.



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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Taking the Initiative

While talking with Shimon, Reuven spoke Lashon Harah about Levi. Since Shimon knows Reuven quite well, he realizes that he won't stop there. Instead, Reuven will tell other people the same thing about Levi. That being the case, Shimon should take the initiative and warn prospective listeners that Reuven is inventing harmful stories about Levi. As we know, most people commit the error of believing the Lashon Harah they hear, and it is difficult for them to rid themselves of the impression it makes. Therefore when Shimon takes the initiative by telling others that Reuven is speaking against Levi, he is helping to ensure that Reuven's portrayal of Levi will not be trusted. Furthermore, when Reuven realizes that his words are greeted with suspicion, he will avoid speaking ill of Levi. Therefore Shimon's words will prove helpful in two ways: They will save Levi from being hurt and put to shame, and they will save Reuven's soul.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Write That Down for Me

It is written, "Israel saw Joseph's sons, and he said, 'Who are these?' And Joseph said to his father, 'These are my sons, whom G-d has given me here'" (Genesis 48:8-9).

We may say that Jacob asked Joseph how his sons had remained upright Jews in such a foreign and impure land as Egypt. To this Joseph replied, "G-d has given me here" – I merited it here, by the fact that I was careful not to neglect them. They have always been my sons, and even when they grew up I ensured that they walked along the right path. I was careful that they did not spend time among people without values, which is what supported them in times of trial.

We can understand this by a story that occurred about a dozen years ago in New York. A Jewish boy by the name of Yaakov lost his father while still very young. His mother had great difficulty making ends meet, and she was forced to send the boy to a public school. The school was free, but it enrolled both Jews and non-Jews.

The heart of this woman sank when she saw Yaakov's friends. However she attempted to strengthen the boy's sense of Jewish identity in every conceivable way. When the time for his Bar Mitzvah drew near, she did everything she could to enroll him in a Jewish school. She sought the advice of a Rav, who agreed to help her. His work wasn't easy, for the boy had never even learned a page of Gemara. Therefore how could he be introduced into a class with students of his own age? He eventually found an administrator who at least agreed to interview the boy.

During the interview, Yaakov proved to be very strong-willed, though he had nothing in terms of Jewish learning. The administrator excused himself and said that he could not enroll him. Yaakov, however, offered to enter the lowest class and start learning at the beginning. The administrator rejected his suggestion and told him that there was no place for him there.

Yaakov reacted forcefully: "Isn't it true that you just don't want to accept me? Write that down for me on a piece of paper!"

When the administrator asked him why, the boy said, "When the time comes for me to stand before my Creator and give an accounting, I'll say: 'I wanted to learn and I tried, but I was told that it was impossible. Here's the proof.' And with that I'll show Him this letter."

The administrator thought for a few moments, and then he got up from his chair and said, "You won't need that letter, because we'll find you a place to study. Welcome to the school."

Today that boy is an avrech with children of his own, a man who teaches in the same school that enrolled him. He even established a special class for students who are beginning their Jewish education at an older age.

As was the case with Joseph, the success of that boy's mother was due to the fact that she did everything she could to keep her son within the realm of Judaism. Not only was she concerned with his studies and behavior, she even paid attention to where he spent his time, and especially to whom his friends were. Her devotion and strength of character were infused into her son, giving him the ability to succeed in times of trial.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, "Jacob called his sons and said: 'Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days. Gather yourselves and listen'" (Genesis 49:1-2).

Rashi states, "He attempted to reveal the end, but the Shechinah withdrew from him. Therefore he began to say other things."

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why the Shechinah left Jacob so as to prevent him from revealing the end times. On the contrary, everything he planned on revealing to them would have taken place, and their faith would have been strengthened!

It seems that Jacob did indeed reveal everything that he intended to. However

he wanted to do so using straightforward language, and it was here that the Shechinah disagreed, which is why it left him. Revealing things by allusion was possible, and therefore Jacob was allowed to hint to the reason for the exile, the time of their deliverance, and the end of days.

Jacob warned his sons that the sole reason for the exile was an absence of unity among the Jewish people. However if they would gather together in a spirit of brotherhood and unity, rather than to stay in small groups, their deliverance would occur automatically. The exile would also come to an end and the Final Redemption would take place, all due to the power of unity. This is precisely what Jacob told them by allusion: "Assemble yourselves.... Gather yourselves and listen."

Kindness and Truth

It is written, "Deal with me according to kindness and truth. Do not bury me, please, in Egypt" (Genesis 47:29).

Rashi states, "Kindness that is done with the dead is true kindness, for one does not expect any payment or reward."

We may understand this verse by means of a parable. A wealthy man wanted to give his friend an expensive and beautiful gift, but he was afraid that his wife would not approve. He decided to write a legal document stating that he owed his friend this gift, and he had witnesses sign it in accordance with the law. At the given time, the document would obligate him to pay everything stipulated within it, in which case his wife could not protest because the court could order him to pay to the last penny.

That this man agreed to write, of his own volition and under no pressure whatsoever, a legal document that bestowed a gift to his friend – that was an act of kindness, for he did it through generosity and of his own accord. However when the time came to give the gift according to the obligations placed on him by the document – that was an act of truth, for the court could tell him: "You obligated yourself to carry out everything in this document, and you cannot change your mind."

Jacob asked Joseph to do the same. If Joseph had not sworn to do so, his act would have consisted entirely of kindness. However since he obligated himself by means of a vow, his act became one of truth. This is why Jacob said, "Put your hand, please, under my thigh and deal with me according to kindness and truth" – first kindness and then truth.

– Ohel Yaakov

The Missing Years

It is written, "The days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years" (Genesis 47:28).

Why is the phrase "the years of his life" used with regard to Jacob? The expression seems redundant. With regard to Adam, we also notice a seemingly redundant expression: "All the days of Adam, which he lived..." (Genesis 5:5). This means that he should have lived 1,000 years, but instead he gave 70 years of his life to King David. The same applies to Jacob: He should have lived 180 years, but instead he only lived to be 147. Why the difference? The Baal HaTurim states, "He lived 33 years less than his father because it is written, 'An unwarranted curse returns to him [who utters it]' [Proverbs 26:2], which bears on the curse that Jacob pronounced on Rachel by saying, 'With whomever you find your gods, lo yichyeh [he shall not live]' [Genesis 31:32]. Now the numerical value of yichyeh is 33, the number of years that were missing in Jacob's life."

The Role of the Sick

It is written, "One told Joseph, 'Behold, your father is ill'" (Genesis 48:1).

Concerning the tzaddik Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrovitz Zatzal, it is said that a chassid once came to him and complained because a member of his family was very ill and in serious condition. Although his family member needed a great deal of Heavenly mercy, he was still not getting any better.

The tzaddik answered him, "How is it my fault if the Holy One, blessed be He, has not yet healed this sick person?"

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Facial Expressions

It is written, "His teeth white from milk" (Genesis 49:12).

Rabbi Yochanan said, "The man who [by smiling affectionately] shows his teeth to his friend is better than one who gives bins of milk to drink, for it is said in Scripture: 'His teeth white from milk.' Do not read 'teeth white,' but 'showing the teeth'" (Ketubot 111b).

One who shows his friend a cheerful face, meaning that he shows him his teeth, and who demonstrates love and affection, does more than by giving him milk to drink. We may explain this with a parable: On the night of Shavuot at the Kotel, numerous Jews stay awake and learn the holy Torah until morning. After a night of spiritual elevation, Shacharit is recited with tremendous enthusiasm and the reading of the Torah is heard with great joy. Finally Musaf is recited with deep concentration, after which everyone returns home, tired and exhausted. Since Jews are merciful and generous, someone had the idea of giving everyone who prayed on that morning some milk before they returned home. For this, he set up several milk bins at the exit, from which everyone could pour as much milk as he wanted. A Jew who couldn't afford to give anything to anyone nevertheless stood at the exit and smiled to all who passed by. Everyone felt a wave of love, generosity, and joy, a sense of sweetness and contentment emanating from him. If we were to ask what was more important, Rabbi Yochanan would say: "The man who shows his teeth to his friend is better than one who gives bins of milk to drink." It is said that a person may give his friend the finest gift possible, but if he does so with a withdrawn look on his face, Scripture regards him to have given nothing (Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 13). As for a person who greets his friend with a friendly smile, it is as if he has given him the finest gift possible. This means that by a cheerful expression on his face, a person is offering his whole heart to his friend.

On the statement, "Receive every person with a cheerful countenance" (Perkei Avoth 1:15), the Meiri asks why it says *beseiver panim* ("with a cheerful countenance") rather than simply *panim* ("face")? It is because sometimes we are not in a good mood, and when someone pays us a visit we view it as a real chore. Since this person has come to visit us, however, we must act pleasantly and ensure that we do not display a stern expression, which would hurt his feelings. It is enough for this guest to think (sover) that we are pleased with his visit.

Therefore when a person finds himself in synagogue and has forgotten his wallet at home, meaning that he cannot give *tzeddakah* as he should, he must at least provide the poor person standing before him with a word of encouragement and a friendly smile. How much more is this true when he can give him some money! In that case he should add his heartfelt wishes that Hashem will bless and sustain him.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Taste of Eden

When Rabbi David of Lelov came to visit Rabbi David of Zeilin, the latter quickly told his Rebbetzin that an esteemed visitor had arrived, and to immediately prepare a good meal for him. Rabbi David of Zeilin, however, was extremely poor, and the Rebbetzin only had a little flour in her kitchen. She went into the forest to gather some twigs, and then she kneaded the flour with a little water and presented this extremely modest meal to their guest.

When Rabbi David of Lelov returned home, he said to his wife, Rebbetzin Chana, that in Zeilin he had been a guest in the home of Rabbi David, and there he had eaten something that tasted like Gan Eden.

Rebbetzin Chana, who knew just how removed her husband was from the pleasures of this world, traveled to Zeilin to see this for herself.

When Rebbetzin Chana raised the question with her friend, the wife of Rabbi David of Zeilin, she replied: "Believe me, I have nothing at home but some flour and water. That's why I prayed to Hashem and said, 'Master of the universe, You know that I would willingly give all the delicacies in the world to this tzaddik, but I have nothing. Yet You are in Gan Eden! I beg You, lend some of its flavor to this meal!'"

In his bitterness, the chassid exclaimed, "In the Talmud our Sages said: 'Whoever has a sick person in his home, he should go to a sage and ask for mercy,' which is what I've done. I have come to see the Rebbe so he can awaken Heavenly mercy for my sick family member!" The Rebbe shook his head with sadness and said, "Notice carefully that it does not say: He should go to a sage in order to ask for mercy. Instead it says that he should go to a sage and ask for mercy. This means that the sick are expected to do two things. First, they must go to the sage, whose merit can annul evil decrees, and second they must ask for mercy. That is, the sick must themselves pray to Hashem and ask for mercy. They must not simply rely on speaking to the Rebbe."

The Explanation of the Reclusive Tzaddik

It is written, "Israel's eyes were heavy with age" (Genesis 48:10).

It is said that 20 years before his death, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk (known as the Seraph) enclosed himself in a room and lived apart from the world and all it contained. He explained his outlook to his disciples. Rabbi Zev Wolf of Strikov, the sage of the community, wrote: "Israel's eyes were heavy with age; he could not see." This is surprising, for Jacob was the fourth pillar of the Divine 'Chariot.' How could it be that his eyes were heavy with age?

However Onkelos translated this verse as: "They became precious because of age. They could not see the vanities of this world."

Why Ephraim and Manasseh?

It is written, "He blessed them on that day, saying: 'With you shall Israel bless, saying, "May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh" ' " (Genesis 48:20).

Rashi states, "Whoever wishes to bless his sons will bless them with their blessing, and a man will say to his son, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'"

Why do sons receive the blessing, "May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh"?

The author of Yalkut Yehudah explains that Ephraim and Manasseh grew up in Egypt outside of a Jewish environment. Nevertheless they retained their faith and did not assimilate among the Egyptians. Since Jacob knew that the Children of Israel would be dispersed among the nations, he gave this blessing to the generations to come. In this way they would retain their faith wherever they happened to be, just like Ephraim and Manasseh.

– Vayakhel Moshe

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Vayechi ends the book of Genesis, which describes the world that witnessed the formation of the Jewish people. The book begins with Creation as a whole, including the origins of man, and it continues until the lives of our Patriarchs come to an end. Joseph was also among the Patriarchs, and his personality and the events surrounding his life had a profound impact on the development of the Jewish people. Joseph is also considered as being the father of two tribes, since his two sons took their place among the tribes of Israel "like Reuben and Shimon." When Jacob felt his death approaching, he called for Joseph, who swore that he would take him out of Egypt and bury him with his fathers. Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, placing them among his own sons. Jacob finally called for his sons and told them what would happen in the future, and as he was about to die he ordered them to bury him with his fathers. After embalming him and observing a period of mourning, Jacob's sons went to bury him in the land of Canaan, being accompanied by Pharaoh's servants, the elders of his home, and the wise men of Egypt. Since Joseph's brothers feared that he would hate them, they attempted to appease him. Joseph then reassured them, and by the end of his life he saw the third generation of Ephraim, and the children of Machir (Manasseh's son) were born on his knees.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hacohen Heller The Author of Ketzot HaChoshen

The gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hacohen Heller Zatzal was among the greatest figures of his generation. He came from a noble family, being the son of Rabbi Yosef Zatzal from the town of Kalish. In fact Rabbi Aryeh Leib was the grandson of the gaon Rabbi Yom Tom Lipman Zatzal, the author of Tosaphot Yom Tov on Mishnayot. From his early youth, Rabbi Aryeh immersed himself in the study of Torah, thereby meriting a tremendous reputation throughout the Torah world. He initially served as the Rav of Rozniatow, and later as the Rav of Stry. It was there that hundreds of disciples gathered around him to eagerly drink in and spread his words.

Rabbi Aryeh's brilliant books left a deep impression on all who studied them, both young and old. Even today, his books help people sharpen their reasoning abilities and delve deeply into the heart of Talmudic issues. The gaon Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa Zatzal debated Rabbi Aryeh Leib's views (as expressed in his book Ketzot HaChoshen) in his famous work entitled Netivot HaMishpat. Rabbi Aryeh Leib vigorously defended his views in the pamphlet Meshovev Netivot.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib wrote his famous Ketzot HaChoshen while he served as the Rav of Rozniatow. He wrote it under conditions of extreme poverty, during the wintertime, and while in bed. Sometimes the ink in his pen froze because of the tremendous cold, and he was forced to place it under a pillow to warm it up. Rabbi Aryeh Leib is also known for his books Avnei Miluim and Shev Shemateta. He departed for the Celestial Academy on Tevet 19, 5573.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Rabba bar Nahmani

Rabba bar Nahmani died through persecution, information having been laid against him to the government. They [informers] said, "There is an Israelite who keeps back 12,000 Israelites from paying the royal poll-tax...." Thereupon a royal officer was sent for him, but did not find him. [Rabba] then fled.... In Pumbeditha he found him, for the royal officer happened to visit the same inn where Rabba [was hiding]. Now they placed a tray before him [the royal officer], gave him two glasses of alcohol, and then removed the tray, at which point his face was turned backward. "He is a royal officer," they [the inn servants] said. "What shall we do with him?" [Rabba] replied, "Offer him the tray again, and let him drink another goblet. Then remove the tray and he will recover." They did so and he recovered. "I know," he said, "that the man whom I require is here." He searched for and found him. He then said, "I will depart from here. If I am slain, I will not disclose [his whereabouts], but if tortured, I will." He was then brought before him, and he led him into a chamber and locked the door upon him [to keep him there as a prisoner]. But he [Rabba] prayed, whereupon the wall collapsed and he fled to Agama. There he sat upon the trunk of a palm tree and studied. Now they were discussing the following in the Celestial Academy: If the bright spot preceded the white hair, he is unclean. If the reverse, he is clean. If in doubt – the Holy One, blessed be He, ruled – he is clean. However the entire Celestial Academy maintained [that] he is unclean. Who shall decide? They said, "Rabba bar Nahmani, for he said, 'I am pre-eminent in the laws of leprosy and tents.'" ... As [Rabba] was dying, he exclaimed, "Clean, clean!" and a Heavenly Voice cried out, "Happy are you, O Rabba bar Nahmani, whose body is pure and whose soul had departed in purity!"

– Bava Metzia 86a

A TRUE STORY

Reb Moshe and the Poor Man

It is written, "His teeth white from milk" (Genesis 49:12).

Rabbi Yochanan said, "The man who [by smiling affectionately] shows his teeth to his friend is better than one who gives bins of milk to drink, for it is said in Scripture: 'His teeth white from milk.' Do not read 'teeth white,' but 'showing the teeth'" (Ketubot 111b).

The conference of the Moetzet Gedolei HaTorah, in which Reb Moshe Feinstein was to serve as chairman, was scheduled to take place following Mincha at the yeshiva. There, outside the yeshiva, was a car waiting to bring Reb Moshe to the conference. At the end of the prayer service, Reb Moshe's students gathered around and immediately escorted him outside, since the other members of the Moetzet Gedolei HaTorah were already waiting for him. Just as he was about to enter the car, however, a poor man approached and asked Reb Moshe for some tzeddakah. Reb Moshe took a few coins from his wallet and gave them to the man, but he wasn't finished. He began to speak with Reb Moshe at length, and in the meantime the driver waited and the students began to lose their patience. Some even wanted to make the man understand that Reb Moshe was pressed for time, but he prevented them from doing so. After a conversation that lasted a full ten minutes, Reb Moshe excused himself, shook the poor man's hand, and entered the car.

Reb Moshe later explained that this conversation was much more important to him than money. "My mitzvah of tzeddakah also includes showing that I'm interested in his opinions. It means that I'm not so busy that I can't listen to him."

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

The Pasha's Spear

It is written, "David lay with his forefathers and was buried in the City of David" (1 Kings 2:10).

Given David's tremendous humility, he wanted to be buried alone, not next to his father Jesse, for his father was among the pillars of the world. Hence David ordered his body to be buried alone in the City of David (Ahavat Yehonathan).

It once happened that a Pasha visited King David's tomb. Located nearby was a window that overlooked an underground passage. When the Pasha looked out from the window, his spear (which was set with costly jewels) fell into the passage. He therefore ordered his servants to retrieve the spear, but each time one of them was lowered into the underground passage, he was hoisted up dead! The Pasha was then advised to order the Rav of the Jews to retrieve his spear, or else! The Rav asked the Pasha for three days, and he ordered everyone to fast. People went to pray by the grave of Rachel, and on the fourth day the lot fell on the Shamash. He therefore immersed himself three times in a mikveh and sanctified himself. He then went to the tomb, where the Pasha and his entourage awaited him. The Shamash was lowered into the underground passage by a rope, and after a few minutes a voice was heard calling out, "Pull me up." He was immediately hoisted up, and in his hands he carried the spear that glittered with all its jewels. From that day on, the Pasha honored the Jews. As for the Shamash, however, the experience left him pale and in shock. He told only the Rav what he had seen: While he was underground, an old man with a dazzling appearance came and brought him the spear.

– Me'am Loez