



## VAYECHI

YOU CAN CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS

*No Mistake Is Too Great to Fix*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Vayechi*

Jacob lives the final seventeen years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators, and kings; priests will come from Levi; scholars from Issachar;

seafarers from Zebulun; schoolteachers from Simeon; soldiers from Gad; judges from Dan; olive growers from Asher; and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon and Levi, for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer; Benjamin, the ferociousness of a wolf; and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession, consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt, and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy

Land, where he is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Imagine a disaster strikes your city, leaving your family and neighbors helpless. With no authorities in sight, someone needs to step up. What do you do?



## RASHI'S RULES

1. Rashi does not use extra words. If extra words seem to appear in his writing, they are not superfluous; they are highly instructive.
2. Rashi uses explanations that make the most sense in the plain meaning of the text. If Rashi opts for an explanation that seems overly sophisticated, we did not understand his intent.
3. If Rashi disregards a reason brought by other commentaries, there must be a reason for it.

# TEXT 1

*Genesis 49:27*

בְּנִימִין זֶאֵב יִטְרֹף בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכֹל עֵד  
וְלָעֶרֶב יַחְלֹק שָׁלָל.

Benjamin, a preying wolf; in the morning he will devour plunder, and in the evening, he will divide the spoils.



Benjamin:  
a wolf that preys  
and devours.

## TEXT 2A

*Midrash, Bereshit Rabah*  
49:3

שָׂאוֹל אֶת הַמְּלוּכָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְשָׂאוֹל  
לְכַד אֶת הַמְּלוּכָה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל"  
(שְׂמוּאֵל א יד, מז).

Saul [plucked] the kingdom, as the passage states, “Saul captured the kingdom” (I Samuel 14:47).

## TEXT 2B

*Midrash, Bereshit Rabah*  
*49:3*

רַבִּי פִּינְחָס פָּתַר קִרְיָא בְּמִזְבֵּחַ. מַה  
הִזְאֵב הַזֶּה חוֹטֵף, כִּךְ הָיָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ חוֹטֵף  
אֶת הַקֹּרְבָּנוֹת.

Rabbi Pinchas applied the blessing to the altar [in the Temple]. As a wolf snatches its prey, so did the altar snatch the offerings.



## TEXT 2C

*Rashi, Genesis 49:27*

"בְּנֵימִין זֶאֵב יִטְרֹף": זֶאֵב הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִטְרֹף. נִבָּא עַל  
נְשֵׂיהֶיו עֲתִידִין לִהְיוֹת חֲטָפָנִין, "וַחֲטָפְתֶּם לָכֶם אִישׁ  
אִשְׁתּוֹ" (שׁוֹפְטִים כֹּא, כֹּא), בְּפִלְגֶשׁ בַּגְּבֵעָה.

“Benjamin, a preying wolf”: Jacob prophesied that the tribe of Benjamin would become snatchers, as the verse states, “And each man must snatch his wife” (Judges 21:21). [This occurred] during the event of the concubine in Gibeah.

Rashi dismisses other interpretations of Benjamin's blessing and offers a seemingly negative explanation that's difficult to understand.



# TEXT 3

*Rashi, Genesis 49:27*

א. וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל נִשְׁבַּע בְּמִצְפָּה  
לֵאמֹר, אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא יִתֵּן בְּתוּ  
לְבָנִימָן לְאִשָּׁה.

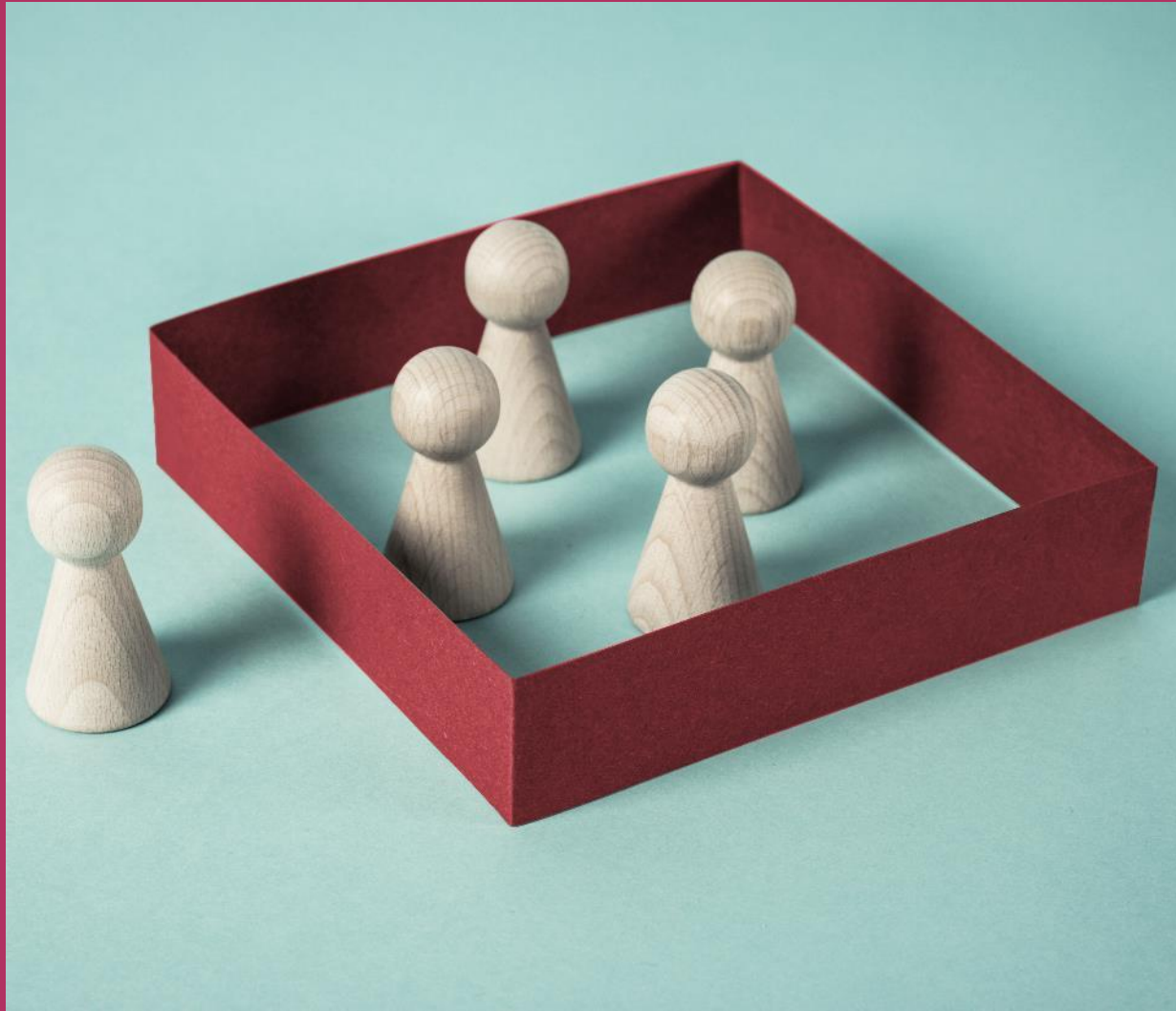
ב. וַיָּבֹא הָעָם בֵּית אֱ-ל וַיֵּשְׁבוּ  
שָׁם עַד הָעֶרֶב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים,  
וַיִּשָּׂאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכוּ בְּכִי גָדוֹל.

ג. וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָמָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הִיָּתָה זֹאת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, לְהַפְקֹד  
הַיּוֹם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁבֶט אֶחָד.

1. The men of Israel swore in Mizpah, saying, “No man among us will give his daughter to Benjamin for a wife.”

2. The people came to Bethel and sat before G-d until the evening. They raised their voices and wept profusely.

3. And they said, “Why, O G-d, G-d of Israel, has this come to pass in Israel that one tribe of Israel should be missing today?”



The tribe of Benjamin was cut off from Israel as a result of their actions.

## QUESTIONS

1. Is it a blessing to foretell a terrible crime to be perpetrated by the descendants of his son?
2. Is it a blessing to foretell a civil war that tore a gash through the Jewish people?
3. Is it a blessing to foretell that Jewish men would have to resort to snatching their wives from a vineyard?
4. Rashi cites the Book of Judges to prove that Jacob was referring to the snatching of women. On top of that, Rashi points out that this event occurred during the terrible event, the concubine in Gibeah. Why did Rashi deliberately draw attention to this event?
5. Rashi had several plausible explanations from which to choose. Why did he not select one of those?

## TEXT 4

*Rashi, Genesis 49:27*

"בְּנֵימִין זֶאֵב יִטְרֹף:" זֶאֵב הוּא  
אֲשֶׁר יִטְרֹף.

“Benjamin, a preying wolf.”  
Benjamin is a preying wolf.

# TEXT 5

*Rashi, Genesis 8:11*

"טָרַף", קָטַף.

To prey means to snatch.

## ANSWER 5

Rashi wasn't satisfied with the other explanations from the Midrash because none of them include any sort of "plucking."



# TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 5744:2, p. 731*

לאחרי המאורע ד"פלגש בגבעה", מאורע בלתי רצוי לגמרי, היפך הקדושה בתכלית - לא היו יכולים להסתפק בעבודת הצדיקים "תמידים כסדרם", אלא היה הכרח בעבודת התשובה כדי לבטל את הענין הבלתי רצוי.

ובודאי היתה עבודת התשובה בשלימותה (אצל אלה שנותרו משבט בנימין, לאחר ביצוע העונש המגיע כו'), באופן של חרטה על העבר וקבלה טובה להבא, בריש גלי ובפירסום (שהכל ידעו שעלתה בידו לנצח את ה"א-ל זר אשר בקרבך", חלל השמאלי שבלב, ולהפכו לקדושה - בדוגמת הפירסום שהיה בענין החטא, וכמאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה "באותו פרק באותו מקום").

שלכן, חזר שבט בנימין להיבנות בשלימותו ולהיות בתוך כלל ישראל, כך שעל ידי זה חזרה השלימות דכלל ישראל.

The unfortunate, unholy episode of the concubine in Gibeah warranted genuine repentance. It was not enough to return to ordinary good behavior. It was necessary to cancel out the negative behavior.

The Benjaminites who survived the war repented wholeheartedly; they regretted their past and made positive resolutions for their future openly and publicly. As the entire nation knew of their sins, so did everyone know of their repentance. Everyone knew that they successfully overcame their sinful predilections and transformed them into merits.

This is why the tribe of Benjamin was completely restored and reinstated into the nation of Israel. Their repentance repaired the nation's integrity.

Benjamin's complete and total transformation struck the rest of the tribes by surprise. The Benjaminites pulled themselves up and “plucked” the admiration of the tribes, defying all expectations.



# TEXT 7

*Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel of Lubavitch,  
Or HaTorah, Bereshit,  
p. 417a*

ועל כן נקרא "זאב יטרף", שטורף נפש הבהמית.  
ועל ידי זה טורף וממשיך מבחינה שלמעלה  
מהשתלשלות.

Benjamin is called a preying wolf because he preyed on his own beastly impulses.

By doing this, he snatched and drew down levels of holiness that were otherwise beyond his reach.



The Benjaminites' comeback brought them to even greater spiritual heights that they otherwise would not have been able to reach.

# TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 5744:2, p. 731*

ומכיון ששלימות ענין התשובה הוא  
לא רק ביטול הענין הבלתי רצוי  
מכל וכל, אלא גם העילוי דאתהפכא  
חשוכא לנהורא, הפיכת הדבר  
הבלתי רצוי גופא לקדושה - התבטא  
הדבר בענין החטיפה, "וחטפתם  
לכם איש אשתו" (שופטים כא, כא).

מכיון שלא יכלו להסתפק בסדר  
הרגיל ד"כי יקח איש אשה", אלא  
היה צורך בהתגברות והתאמצות  
מיוחדת (חטיפה) בענין הנישואין,  
באופן של מהירות והיסח הדעת  
למעליותא.

In its most complete sense, repentance  
is not just canceling the negative but  
transforming that darkness to light.  
The undesirable behavior is  
transformed into holiness. Accordingly,  
they expressed repentance through  
plucking: "And each man must snatch  
his wife" (Judges 21:21).

The ordinary consent-seeking approach  
to marriage would not suffice for them.  
Their unique situation demanded an  
unusually intense and powerful  
"plucking" approach: one that is  
expressed through swiftness and  
transcendental absentmindedness.

The Benjaminites did not “pluck” their wives in the literal sense. They radiated a powerful, holy energy that drew the women toward them.



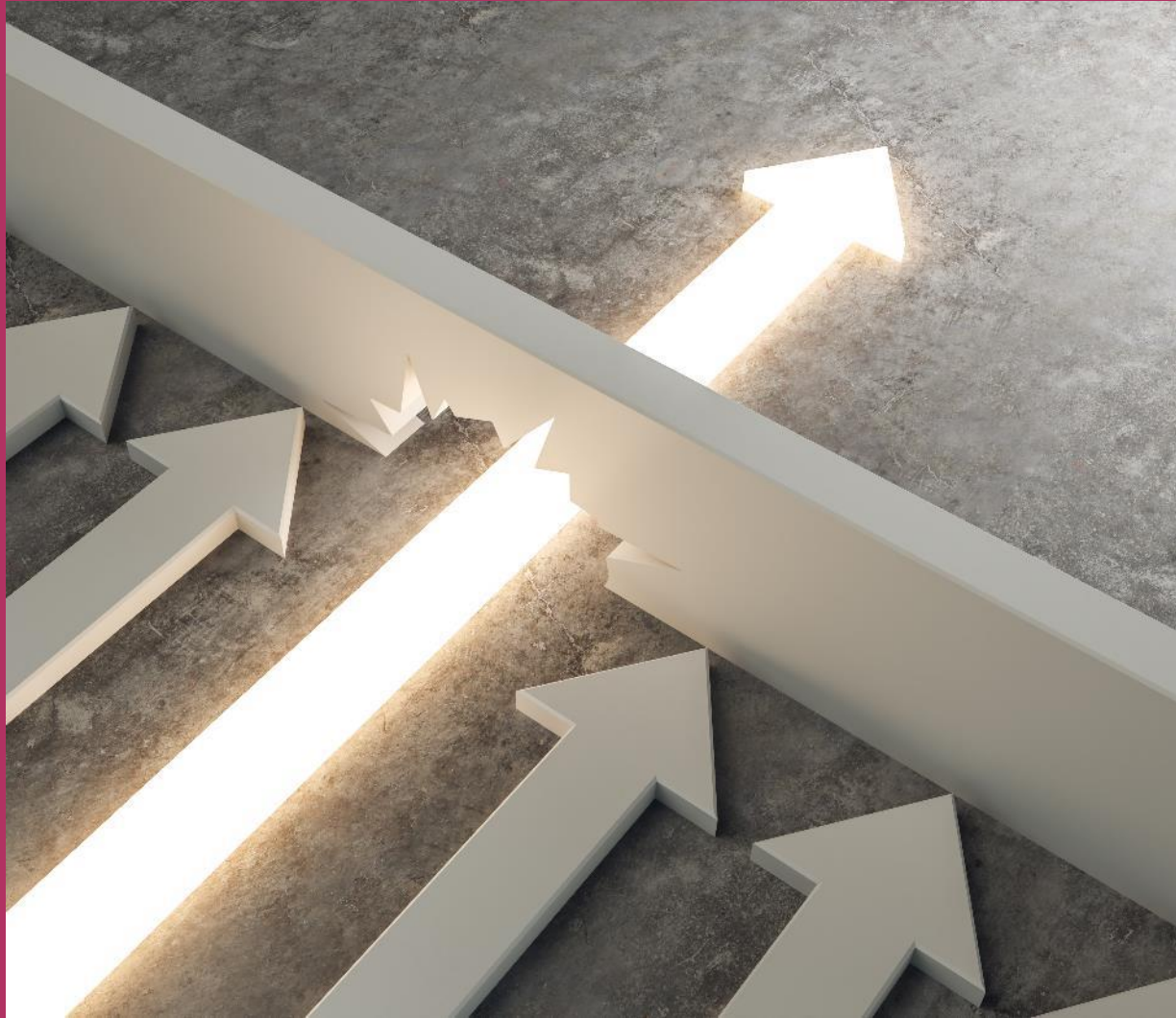
## ANSWERS 1-3

The blessing to Benjamin was not about foretelling a crime, civil war, or forced marriages in a negative sense. It was about the transformative power Benjamin's descendants would achieve. After repenting for the incident in Gibeah, they reached a level of purity that radiated outward, drawing others to them. This reversal from sin to sanctity demonstrated an extraordinary blessing: the ability to turn negativity into a force of positive change.

## ANSWER 4

Rashi emphasized that the wife-plucking took place during the time of the concubine in Gibeah to highlight the significance of repentance and transformation. By linking the event to this episode, he showed how Benjamin's descendants achieved a remarkable spiritual renewal after their repentance. The women were drawn to them because of their sanctity, which ultimately was a result of the incident in Gibeah.





No obstacle is  
too high for us  
to overcome.

# TEXT 9

*Talmud, Megilah 12a*

שָׁאָלוּ תַלְמִידָיו אֶת רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן  
יֹחָאִי: מִפְּנֵי מָה נִתְחַיְּבוּ שׁוֹנְאֵיהֶן  
שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂבָאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר כָּלֶיהָ?

אָמַר לָהֶם: אֲמַרוּ אֲתֵם.

אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנִּהְיֵנוּ מְסַעֲדָתוֹ  
שֶׁל אוֹתוֹ רָשָׁע.

אִם כֵּן, שְׂבִישׁוּשָׁן יִהְרָגוּ, שְׂבָכָל  
הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ אֶל יִהְרָגוּ?

אָמְרוּ לוֹ, אֲמֹר אַתָּה.

אָמַר לָהֶם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַעֲלָם.

The students of Rabbi Shimon, son of Yocha'i, asked him, "Why were the enemies of the Jews in that generation deserving of annihilation?"

He said to them, "You answer."

They replied, "Because they partook of the feast of the wicked [Ahasuerus]."

[Rabbi Shimon responded,] "If so, only the Jews of Shushan [where the party took place] should have perished. The others should have been spared."

They said to him, "You answer your question."

He replied, "Because they bowed to an idol."

# TEXT 10

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, Torah Or, p. 97a*

אם רצו להמיר דתם לא היה המן עושה להם כלום, שלא גזר  
אלא על היהודים. אלא שהם מסרו עצמן למות כל השנה כולה,  
ולא עלה להם מחשבת חוץ, חס ושלום.  
ועל ידי בחינת מסירת נפש, זכו.

Had they chosen to abandon their faith, Haman would not have harmed them, for his decree was only against Jews. Nevertheless, they risked their lives for an entire year. The possibility of apostasy never even occurred to them, G-d forbid.

They merited [their salvation] on account of their self-sacrifice.

# TEXT 11

*Rabbi Yaakov Katina,  
Korban He'ani on Purim*

מובא בשם הרוקח, שפירוש  
"ועת צרה היא ליעקב וממנה  
יושע" (ירמיה ל, ז), "וממנה"  
אותיות "ומהמן", כי על ידו באה  
לנו הישועה.

כי היו על ישראל ב' חטאים,  
שהשתחוו לצלם בימי נבוכדנצר,  
ושנהנו מסעודתו של אותו רשע.  
והיה עליהם קטרוג גדול, "ועת  
צרה היא ליעקב". ועל ידי גזירת  
המן, עשו תשובה . . .

ועל ידי תשובה זו, נתעלו ישראל  
ברום המעלות, הן למעלה והן  
למטה.

[The prophet said] "It was a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved" (Jeremiah 30:7). The following interpretation is brought in the name of Rabbi Eliezer of Worms, author of *Sefer Roke'ach*. In Hebrew, the words "from it—*umimenah*" can be rearranged as an anagram to read "*umiHaman*—and from Haman." The message is that Haman brought about our salvation.

The Jewish people were guilty of two sins: (a) They bowed to an idol in the era of Nebuchadnezzar, and (b) they partook of the evil one's feast. A terrible fate was decreed upon them [in Heaven]; "it was a time of distress for Jacob." However, when Haman promulgated his decree, the Jews were inspired to repentance.

And it was this repentance that catapulted them to great heights both in Heaven and on earth.

G-d only gives us challenges we can overcome. When we face a difficult trial, it's a sign of G-d's confidence in our ability to overcome it.



## TEXT 12A

*Rabbi Shmuel  
Schneerson of Lubavitch,  
cited in Torat Menachem  
5782:3, p. 1396*

די וועלט זאגט, אז אויב מ'קען ניט ארונטער גייט  
מען אריבער. און איך זאג, אז מ'דארף גיין  
לכתחילה אריבער.

The world says that if you can't wiggle  
past underneath, climb over the top. I say  
go directly over the top.

## TEXT 12B

*Talmud, Eruvin 54a*

אָמַר לִיה שְׁמוּאֵל לְרַב יְהוּדָה: שִׁינָא, חֲטוֹף וְאָכּוּל  
חֲטוֹף וְאִישְׁתִּי, דַּעֲלָמָא דְאַזְלִינָן מִינֵיהּ כְּהִלּוּלָא דְמִי.

Rabbi Shmuel said to [his student] Rabbi Yehudah, “Well-versed one, grab and eat, grab and drink, for this world we will [soon] depart from is like a wedding.”

# TEXT 12C

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber  
Schneersohn,  
Introduction to Kuntres  
Umaayan, p. 22*

מה שכותב כבודו, אבל אנו מה כחינו. זאת לא  
אוכל לקבל בשום אופן.

כחינו רב הוא . . .

ולדעתי, לפי שעתה הוא זמן הבירורים היותר  
אחרונים דעקבות משיחא, וכאשר למשל קדירה  
בגמר בישולה היא רותחת ביותר, ובעת הרתיחה,  
מה שבשולי הקדירה עולה למעלה כו'. כמו כן  
בתוקף הבירורים בזמן האחרון, הנה כמה דברים  
שנראים לנו על פי שכל רחוק מאד שיתוקן, יכול  
להיות שהוא קרוב לגמרי . . .

ולכן אנחנו מצדינו, אין אנו יכולים, וגם אין  
רשאים, בזמן הזה בפרט לברר מה שקרוב או  
רחוק על פי שכלינו. כל אחד מה שאנו מוצאים  
שצריך תיקון, צריכים אנחנו להשתדל בכחות  
עצומות, וה' יתברך יעשה את שלו, ויהיה בעזרינו.

You wrote that we lack the strength [to  
accomplish this task]. This I cannot accept  
under any circumstances.

We have extraordinary strength. . . .

Poised as we are for the coming of  
Mashiach, we are now completing the final  
tasks of our Exile. In my opinion, it is like  
a pot. When a pot boils over, the food on  
the bottom rises to the top. We are like  
that boiling pot. Even tasks that appear  
impossible are eminently doable. . . .

Therefore, we cannot and must not act on  
the basis of what we believe is possible.  
We must take on every challenge we  
encounter and give it everything we have.  
And G-d will do His part and assist us.





If a task placed before you seems too big, it's an opportunity to leap over it and reach greater heights.

## KEY POINTS

1. The ordinary way to worship G-d is to be righteous—avoid all sin and observe all the *mitzvot*.
2. A person who adopts a path of sin, especially heinous sin, is not expected to become a worshipper of G-d. Yet, such people can surprise us and snatch victory from their sins. They can repent and reach a more desirable state than those who have never sinned.
3. Jacob blessed his son Benjamin to be like a preying wolf. As a wolf snatches what is not meant to belong to it, so do penitents snatch their sins and turn them into merits.

## KEY POINTS

4. The moral is that no challenge is too daunting. Every challenge is given to us by G-d in the belief that we are capable of overcoming it. We must never shy away from a challenge. If it is placed before us, it was meant for us to overcome and turn what could have been a terrible liability into a powerful asset.
5. If this is true of challenges that result from our sins, it is certainly true of challenges that come our way when we are in a state of righteousness and spiritual integrity.

