



# 4 Minutes Of Torah

A Project of the Department of Synagogue Services

The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI) is proud to present a new series called "4 Minutes of Torah."

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## Sense and Sensitivity

Rabbi Binyamin Hammer

As we begin Parshat Vayechi, the concluding parsha in Sefer Bereishis, the intrigue and challenges in previous parshiot, of dreams and destiny, come to fruition. Now, with the brothers united, the baton of Torah leadership has been passed from Yaakov to Yoseph. The Bnei Yaakov will be faced with their greatest challenge together, an enslaved galut (exile) that will last 400 years, a trial by fire to forge One Nation – the Bnei Yisrael.

It appears, however, that more intrigue is found at the beginning of this parsha. Yaakov, who is near death, has Yoseph swear that he will bury him in Eretz Canaan – specifically the Ma'arat Hamachpela in Chevron next to his wife Leah (and not with Yoseph's mother at Kever Rachel near Beit Lechem). Rashi [chapter 48, verse 7] explains that Yaakov's concern was how could he request this of Yoseph, when Yaakov did not bury Rachel (Yoseph's mother) in the Ma'arat

**Hamachpela? Rashi (quoting the Navi and Talmud) tells us of the famous prophecy whereby HaShem instructed Yaakov to bury Rachel in this very spot which would become a source of comfort for Israel in future exiles (as it is today). What a special chizuk it was for Yoseph to know that his saintly mother Rachel would have an everlasting memorial in her own right and that, as the mother of Klal Yisrael, she will plead to HaShem for mercy throughout history.**

**Yet, it seems that the text, in verse seven, gives us an entirely different version of what Yaakov shared with Yoseph. Yaakov's conversation appears to be apologetic and hesitant as he explains that Rachel, his beloved wife, died on the road outside Beit Lechem near the Ma'arat Hamachpela, and that he buried her "there" on the road, outside of Beit Lechem. What possible chizuk could Yoseph have felt from such a response? How does telling Yoseph that he buried his mother on the side of the road – not even in the city of Beit Lechem, and within a short distance of Chevron and the Ma'arat Hamachpela – make it clear why Yoseph should fulfill his father's request?**

**It seems to me, that Yaakov was teaching all of us a lesson on how far a human being must go to show sensitivity to another person. Yes, Yaakov Avinu was speaking to Yoseph HaTzadik, a man who reached great heights of perfection while facing enormous spiritual and physical challenges of brotherly animosity, exile from his family, incarceration, and more. But while Yaakov was speaking to his most beloved son, his chavruta (study partner) – and the son that would lead the Jewish people after his death – he was also speaking to a child who tragically lost his mother at childbirth, a loss whose pain is unimaginable and unforgettable. The apologetic and hesitant lashon (wording) of verse seven introduces us to Yaakov Avinu, a widowed father, who recognizes how this heartbreaking loss must feel to a child, and who transmits to Yoseph, his orphaned son, the pain and questioning that he, himself, went through, while wondering if he did enough for his most beloved wife who passed on tragically during childbirth. Yaakov was explaining to his child, the true emotions he felt for his son's mother, and that it was only because HaShem said it was the best way, that he buried her on the road, not even in a city.**

**Being sensitive to the feelings of one another, by seeing life through their eyes, and to constantly examine our true intentions, are the legacies that Yaakov Avinu has bequeathed to us. They are the attributes he encourages us to strive for as an Am HaNivchar, a Holy and sensitive Chosen People.**

**Chazak, Chazak v'Nischazek!**

**Shabbat Shalom**