



Parshas Vayechi

For the week ending 18 Teves 5757
27 & 28 December 1996

Overview

After living 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close, and summons Yosef. He makes Yosef swear to bury him in the cave of Machpela, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov becomes ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion which removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael, and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at the age of 147. A tremendous funeral procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishis, the first of the five Books of the Torah.

Insights

WAITING TILL IT'S TOO LATE

“So Yosef went up to bury his father...” (50:7)

Scene One: A diner in New York City. Abe and Sol, two senior citizens, are seated in a booth. Abe puts down his cup and looks up into the distance. When he speaks, it is as though 2,000 years of history are passing in front of his eyes.

Abe: “Y’know Sol... I always wanted to go to Israel.”

Sol: (somewhat cynically) “Yeah? So why don’t you go?”

Abe: I’m waiting.

Sol: Yeah? So what are you waiting for?

Abe: (dreamily) I’m waiting... till it’s too late.

Yaakov Avinu had a tough time getting buried in the Cave of Machpela. He had four formidable opponents to his plans to be buried there: Yosef his son; Pharaoh; the Kings of Canaan; and his brother Eisav.

Yosef was unwilling to let his father be buried in the Cave of Machpela, because it was the burial place of Leah. Rachel, Yosef’s mother, wasn’t buried there, but on the Bethlehem road. So Yosef had no great desire to see his father buried with someone who wasn’t his mother. This was the reason that Yaakov Avinu made Yosef swear that he would bury him in Machpela.

Pharaoh didn’t want Yaakov’s body to be removed from Egypt for he was concerned that there would be another famine.

The Kings of Canaan were reluctant to let Yaakov Avinu be buried in Machpela which was part of their kingdom because they feared a royal cortege by a foreign power on their ‘turf’. They saw it as a challenge to their authority.

And Eisav didn’t want Yaakov to be buried in the Cave of Machpela because he felt that he was the rightful heir to his father Yitzchak, and it was for him alone to be buried there.

Four who stood against Yaakov Avinu. Four formidable adversaries. So why did Yaakov go to such lengths to make sure he was buried in the Land of Israel and not in Egypt?

Yaakov was sending a message to all generations: “I may have lived in exile, but **I wasn’t buried in exile.**”

Yaakov was saying to all his descendants in all lands and at all times: “You may be very comfortable in your exile — whether that exile is in Egypt, or Rome, or Spain or America. You may have lived in exile, **but this is not where you belong.** Your place is in the Land of Israel.

Don’t wait till it’s too late...

(Based on the Meshech Chochma as heard from Rabbi Moshe Carlebach)

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AFTER THE NIGHT

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years...” (47:28)

History repeats itself. Things that were, will be again. The smallest action of the avos (forefathers) reverberates down the corridors of all time.

Hashem revealed to Avraham that his descendants would be exiled in Egypt. Hashem also told Avraham the precise length of that exile. History repeats itself — Hashem revealed to Yaakov the Diaspora of the Jewish People and the inevitable end of this exile. Just as Avraham was the first, Yaakov is the last. Because Yaakov is the last, he epitomizes the ultimate purpose of the forefathers. For that which comes last always reveals the ultimate purpose.

That's why the Jewish People are called 'Israel' — Yaakov's other name. Israel is the ultimate expression of Yaakov. From him, we inherited our purpose and our destiny.

Yaakov's seventeen years in Egypt were the essence of his whole life. During those years Yaakov lived without anguish, free from the yetzer hara (negative drive) and was living as though he was in the World to Come.

Those years that Yaakov spent in Egypt are like a matrix, a precursor of the final days of world history.

Yaakov spent most of his days in pain and anguish. So too, the history of the Jewish People has been a seemingly endless catalogue of oppression and tyranny.

But Yaakov lived out his last years in tranquillity. And similarly, the Jewish People, after the long, long night of exile, will find peace and tranquillity in the final redemption.

(Based on the Zohar and the Maharal)

THE ASSAULT COURSE

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey... He saw tranquillity that it was good... yet he bent his shoulder to bear...” (49:14)

Take a look at a soldiers' barracks. Do you find it equipped with luxury orthopedic beds? Is the cuisine five star? Are there waiters dressed in tuxedos standing poised to fulfill every whim and fancy? Soldiers are trained for battle. In order to perform their task, they must be able to function effectively under the most stressful of circumstances.

For this reason, soldiers are deprived of every home comfort; they are trained day and night to be able to cope where normal people would crack. All of this is to prepare them to fulfill their appointed task of defending their country and the lives of its citizens.

Even with the lack of the most basic comforts they have the peace of mind to be able to be effective.

The same is true in studying Torah. If you train yourself to the correct level, you will be able to learn with serenity, whatever is happening on the battlefield of life.

Yissachar is the tribe devoted to Torah study. “He saw tranquillity that it was good.” Yissachar saw that in order to learn Torah, his mind needed to be at rest despite whatever battles were raging.

Thus “He bent his shoulder to bear” — i.e., he put himself through the necessary spiritual ‘assault course’ so that whatever difficulties he encountered he would emerge from the melee with the necessary peace of mind to immerse himself in the study of Torah.

(Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz)

Haftorah: Kings I 2:1-12

THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

As in the Parsha where we read the final will and testament of Yaakov Avinu, so too the Haftorah deals with the final words of King David.

David commands his 12 year-old son, Shlomo, to act as a man of wisdom and piety, despite his tender years, and to guard and uphold the Torah.

David promises Shlomo that if he will serve Hashem in truth, with all his heart and soul, he will merit that all the kings of Yisrael will descend from him.

In the same way that Yaakov Avinu illuminated the path that transformed his children into a people, David Hamelech illuminates the path that will make Shlomo the father of Kings.

However, there is a striking difference between the death-bed scene of Yaakov Avinu and that of King David. When Yaakov took leave of this world, he summoned all 12 of his sons, whereas David calls for only Shlomo, for he alone was a comfort to him and was worthy to inherit the Davidic line.

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

SHALOM ALEICHEM - o'f'fkg ouka
“WELCOME...”

Come in Peace...
...Depart in Peace

בואכם לשלום
צאתכם לשלום

Boachem L'Shalom...
...Tsaschem L'Shalom

How do we welcome the heavenly angels and then so quickly speak of their departure?

When Yaakov Avinu was on his way out of *Eretz Yisrael* the Torah tells us that he had a prophetic dream in which he saw angels going up a ladder and angels coming down. Rashi explains that the angels who accompanied Yaakov in *Eretz Yisrael* returned to Heaven, while the angels assigned to accompany him outside of the Holy Land came down to meet him.

To the angels who will accompany us on the holy day of Shabbos we say “Come in peace,” and to our weekday angels we say “Depart in peace.”

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