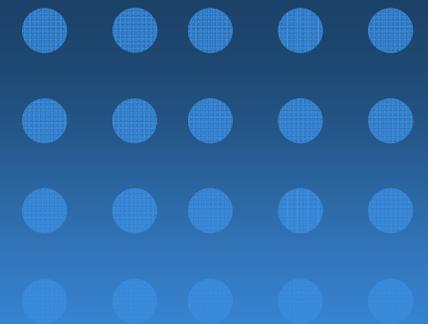




Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

Ceaser



Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

Overview

- Jacob lives the final 17 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 Shimon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon 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 Machpeilah Cave in Hebron.
- Joseph, 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 of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

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- "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty seven years." So begins the Torah section of Vayechi ("and he lived") -- the closing Parshah of the Book of Genesis and the last of the seven Parshahs describing the life of Jacob.
- And the days drew near for Israel to die. And he called his son Joseph, and said to him... "Do me a kindness and truth: please, do not bury me in Egypt. I will lie with my fathers; and you shall carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burial place."
- Joseph swears to do his father's bidding, and Jacob bows to his son. Shortly after, Jacob falls ill, and Joseph brings his two sons, Menasseh and Ephraim, to their grandfather's bedside. Jacob blesses them that they will each father a tribe in Israel, thereby elevating them to the status of his sons: "Ephraim and Menasseh... as Reuben and Shimon they shall be to me."
- In blessing them, Jacob places his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Menasseh's, crossing his arms, since Joseph had placed the elder Menasseh to his father's right. Joseph thinks that his father--who has grown blind in his old age and illness--doesn't realize that the elder son is to his right; but Jacob says:
- "I know it, my son, I know it; he (Menasseh) also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."
- Jacob grants Joseph an extra portion in the Holy Land--the city of Shechem, "Which I took out of the hand of the Emori with my sword and with my bow."

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- *And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years (47:28)*
- *These seventeen years were the best years of his life -- years of prosperity, goodness and peace; his other 130 years were filled with toil and pain.*
- *(Midrash; Baal HaTurim)*

- *When Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866) was a child attending cheder, his teacher taught the verse, "And Jacob lived for seventeen years in the land of Egypt," according to the commentary of the Baal HaTurim -- that Jacob lived the best years of his life in Egypt.*
- *When the child came home he asked his grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: How can it be that our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, lived the best years of his life in pagan Egypt?*
- *Replied Rabbi Schneur Zalman: It is written that Jacob "sent Judah ahead of him... to show the way to Goshen" (Genesis 46:28). The Midrash explains that this was to establish a house of learning, where the sons of Jacob would study Torah. When one studies Torah, one is brought close to G-d, so that even in Egypt one can live a true "life."*
- *(HaYom Yom)*

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- *Nevertheless, in the very next verses we read how Jacob entreats Joseph: "Carry me out of Egypt!" So great is his urgency that he is not content with an agreement or promise on Joseph's part, but insists that his son take a solemn oath to fulfill his request.*
- *A Jew might find himself living a most ideal life in galut (exile)--a life of material comfort and spiritual fulfillment, a life of Torah, mitzvot and charitable works. Nevertheless, galut can never be our true home. We constantly sense that this is not our place, constantly beseech G-d to "carry us out of Egypt."*
- *Nor do we content ourselves with the guaranties and promises written in the holy books that the redemption will eventually come. After praying for the redemption in the morning prayers, we do so again in the afternoon prayers, and yet again in the evening prayers. We approach G-d every day, many times a day, to plead and clamor: Take us out of Egypt!*
- *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

- *And the days drew near for Israel to die (47:29)*
- *Said Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: the days of the righteous die, but they do not die... It does not say, "and Israel drew near to die," but "the days of Israel drew near to die."*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

- *Do me a kindness and a truth (47:30)*
- *A kindness done to the dead is a true kindness, for one does not expect a favor in return.*
- *(Rashi)*

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- *The Midrash relates that when G-d desired to create man, Truth argued that "he should not be created, for he is full of lies." Kindness, however, said, "He should be created, for he is full of kindness."*
- *To this, Truth might have replied: "But that, too, is just another of man's lies. Yes, man does acts of kindness to his fellows, but not because he is 'full of kindness'--only because he expects them to be kind to him in return."*
- *However, there is one act of kindness that proves Truth wrong: the kindness done to the dead. This "kindness and truth," as the Torah calls it, shows that man is capable of a truly altruistic deed, thereby attesting that all our acts of kindness--even those superficially tainted by selfish motives--are in essence true, deriving from an intrinsic desire to give of ourselves to our fellows.*
- *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

- *And Israel bowed [to Joseph] upon the bed's head (47:31)*
- *This bears out the popular saying, "A fox in its hour--bow down to it."*
- *(Talmud, Megillah 16b)*

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- *And it came to pass after these things, that it was said to Joseph: Behold, your father is ill (48:1)*
- *Abraham introduced aging to the world, Isaac affliction, and Jacob illness.*
- *Abraham requested old age, pleading before G-d: "Master of the Universe! When a man and his son enter a town, none know whom to honor." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked a proper thing, and it will commence with you." Thus, from the beginning of the Book aging is not mentioned, but when Abraham came, old age was granted to him, as is written: "And Abraham was old and come along in days" (Genesis 24:1).*
- *Isaac asked for affliction, pleading thus: "Master of the Universe! When a man dies without affliction, Judgment threatens him; but if You afflict him, Judgment would not threaten him." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked well, and it will commence with you." Thus affliction is not mentioned from the beginning of the Book until Isaac, as is written: "And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dimmed" (ibid., 27:1).*
- *Jacob requested illness, saying to Him: "Master of the Universe! A man dies without previous illness and does not settle his affairs with his children; but if he were two or three days ill, he would settle his affairs with his children." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked well, and it will commence with you." Thus it is written: "It was said to Joseph: Behold, your father is ill."*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

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- *And I, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan on the way, when yet there was but a little way to come to Efrat; and I buried her there in the way of Efrat, that is Bethlehem (48:7)*
- *Why did Jacob evoke the memory of Rachel's burial?*
- *So said Jacob to Joseph: I am asking you to trouble yourself to take me to be buried in the Land, even though I did not do the same for your mother. She died a short distance from Bethlehem, and I did not even take her to [Bethlehem] but buried her at the wayside.*
- *I know that there is resentment in your heart to me over this. But know that it was by Divine command that I buried her there, so that she should be a help for her children when Nebuzaradan will exile them and they will pass by there. Then Rachel will come out upon her grave and weep and plead for mercy for them, as it is written (Jeremiah 31:14): "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel is weeping for her children..."; and G-d will answer her, "There is reward for your toil... The children shall return to their own borders" (ibid., v. 15).*
- *(Rashi)*
- *"[Menasseh] also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he..." (48:19)*
- *Menasseh shall be great in that Gideon shall come from him, and G-d will perform miracles through him (see Judges chs. 6-8); but his younger brother shall be greater yet in that his descendant, Joshua, will conquer the Land and teach the Torah to Israel.*
- *(Rashi)*

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- *I have given to you... Shechem (48:22)*
- *As it is written, "And Joseph's bones... they buried in Shechem" (Joshua 24:32).*
- *This is analogous to thieves who stole a barrel full of wine; when the owner found them, he said: "Be so kind, when you finish drinking up the wine, put the barrel back in its place." So, too, Joseph was kidnapped by his brothers in Shechem, and to Shechem they returned his bones.*
- *(Daat Zekeinim)*
- *Shechem... which I took out of the hand of the Emori with my sword and with my bow (48:22)*
- *Jacob had not desired his sons to perpetrate that deed; yet when they did perpetrate it, he exclaimed: "Shall I leave my sons to fall into the hands of the heathens!" What did he do? He took his sword and bow and stood at the gate of Shechem, saying: "If the heathens come to attack my sons, I will fight against them."*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*
- *Did Jacob then conquer Shechem with sword and bow? But "my sword" is his prayer, and "my bow" is his supplication.*
- *(Mechilta; Rashi)*
- *Why is prayer like a bow? Just like a bow, the more a person draws the bowstring to himself, the further the arrow flies, so it is with prayer: the deeper one delves into one's own heart, the higher one's prayer ascends...*
- *(The Rebbe of Kotzk)*

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Genesis 47:28-50:26

- Reuben, Shimon, Levi and Judah
- And Jacob called to his sons, and said: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days."
- Jacob then proceeds to bless each of his twelve sons; his blessings define the respective roles of the twelve tribes which will issue from them to comprise the nation of Israel. Some of the sons are also rebuked for their failings.
- Reuben is rebuked for his interference in Jacob's marital life:
- Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first of my strength; the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.
- Hasty as water, you shall not excel; because you went up and violated your father's bed...
- Shimon and Levi are rebuked for the massacre of Shechem and their role in the sale of Joseph:
- Shimon and Levi are brothers; instruments of violence are their weapons... in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they maimed a bull. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.
- Judah is praised for saving Joseph's life and is invested with the leadership of Israel: the kings, governors and legislators of the Jewish people, up to and including the Messiah, shall be from the tribe of Judah:
- Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have risen...
- The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the legislator from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and nations submit to him.
- Judah's portion in the Holy Land will be blessed with vineyards and prime pastureland: "His eyes are red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

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- **Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Asher and Naphtali**
- "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea, and he shall be a haven for ships," for his descendants will be seafaring merchants.
- Issachar is endowed with the perseverance that is demanded of the tribe of Torah scholars he will yield; he is "a strong-boned ass couching down between the boundaries, bowing his shoulder to the load..."
- Dan shall produce great judges. Foreseeing the heroic life of one such judge, Samson, Jacob prophesies:
- Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I hope for your salvation, O G-d.
- Gad shall produce the victorious warriors of Israel; Asher is blessed with a bounty of olive oil that will be grown and produced on his lands; "Naphtali is a deer running free, who delivers words of beauty."
- **Joseph and Benjamin**
- Joseph is granted the blessings of fertility:
- Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.

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- **The archers fiercely attacked him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength...**
- **The blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and womb.... they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of the elect of his brothers.**
- **Benjamin is likened to "a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."**
- **All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is that which their father spoke to them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.**
- **And he charged them, and said to them: "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers... in the cave that is in the field of Machpeilah...There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife; and there I buried Leah."**

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Genesis 47:28-50:26

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- *And Jacob called to his sons, and said: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days." (49:1)*
- *Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the end of the days (i.e., the time of the ultimate Redemption) whereupon the Divine Presence departed from him.*
- *(Talmud, Pesachim 56a)*

- *[When the Divine Presence departed from Jacob] he said: "Perhaps, Heaven forbid, there is one unfit among my children, like Abraham, from whom there issued Ishmael, or like my father Isaac, from whom there issued Esau?" His sons answered him: "'Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d the L-rd is One.' Just as there is only One in your heart, so is there in our heart only One." In that moment our father Jacob exclaimed, "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."*
- *Said the Rabbis: How shall we act? Shall we recite it (the verse, "Blessed be..." after the Shema) -- but our Teacher Moses did not say it. Shall we not say it -- but Jacob said it. Hence they enacted that it should be recited quietly.*
- *(ibid.)*
- *Shimon and Levi are brothers (49:5)*
- *Said Jacob to them: You were brothers to Dinah, but you were not brothers to Joseph.*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

- *Instruments of violence are their weapons (49:5)*
- *Said Jacob to Shimon and Levi: These instruments are stolen by you. They are not yours but Esau's, to whom it was said (Genesis 27: 40), "And by your sword shall you live." (The word used by the verse for "violence," chamas, also means "robbery.")*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

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- *In their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they maimed a bull (49:6)*
- *"In their anger they slew a man" -- the inhabitants of Shechem, who could offer no more resistance than a single man; "And in their selfwill they maimed a bull" -- Joseph, who is likened to a bull (Deuteronomy 33:17).*
- *(Rashi)*

- *Cursed be their anger (49:7)*
- *Even when he rebuked them, he cursed only their anger; thus Baalam says (Numbers 23:8): "How can I curse whom G-d has not cursed?"*
- *(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)*

- *I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel (49:7)*
- *The tribe of Levi did not receive a province in the Holy Land (like the other tribes) -- only cities scattered throughout the land. And all the paupers, scribes and schoolteachers of Israel, who are scattered about the land, are of the tribe of Shimon.*
- *(Rashi; Lekach Tov)*

- *Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have risen (49:9)*
- *From the prey of Joseph you rose, preventing his killing; from the prey of Tamar you rose, by conceding, "She is more righteous than me."*
- *(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)*

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- *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

- *The kingship of Israel originally belonged to Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. But Reuben forfeited this right when he sinned by "violating his father's marriage bed," and the sovereignty was transferred to Judah. In his blessing to Judah, Jacob alludes to two virtues for which Judah merited the leadership of Israel:*
- *a) When the other sons of Jacob plotted to kill Joseph, Judah saved his life by arguing that selling him into slavery would be a more "profitable" solution (Genesis 37:26-27).*
- *b) Judah publicly admitted his culpability in the incident of Tamar, thereby saving her and her two unborn sons from death (ibid., 38:26).*
- *It would seem, however, that on both accounts, Reuben was Judah's equal, if not his superior. Regarding the plot to kill Joseph, it was Reuben who first saved Joseph's life by suggesting to his brothers that, instead of killing him, they should throw him into the pit. The Torah attests that he did this "to save him from their hands, in order to return him to his father" (Reuben did not know that there were snakes and scorpions in the pit, and that he was in fact jeopardizing Joseph's life). The Torah also tells us that Reuben was not present when Joseph was sold and was shocked at not finding Joseph in the pit when he returned to take him out, and that he berated his brothers for what they had done. Judah, on the other hand, only suggested a more profitable way of disposing of Joseph (the Torah says nothing about any hidden intentions), and was the cause of Joseph's sale into slavery. Indeed, we later find the others accusing Judah: "It was you who told us to sell him. If you would have told us to return him to his father, we would have listened to you" (Rashi on Genesis 38:1).*

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- *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*
- *As for Judah's public penance, here, too, Reuben excelled him. Reuben, too, admitted and repented his sin. And while Judah was faced with a choice to either admit his responsibility or cause the destruction of three innocent lives, the need for Reuben to publicly confess was far less compelling. Furthermore, Reuben's penance did not end with a one-time admission of guilt, but continued to consume his entire being for many years. Our sages tell us that the reason that Reuben was not present at the time of Joseph's sale-nine years after his sin-was that "he was occupied with his sackcloth and fasting" (ibid., 37:29).*
- *Indeed, as far as personal virtue is concerned, Reuben surpassed Judah, both in the purity of his intentions regarding Joseph and the intensity of his repentance over his failings. But Judah was the one who actually saved Joseph, while Reuben unwittingly placed him in mortal danger. In the same vein, Judah's repentance saved three lives, while Reuben's remorse helped no one-in fact, had he not been preoccupied with "his sackcloth and his fasting" he might have prevented Joseph's sale into slavery.*
- *Accordingly, Reuben retained his rights as Jacob's firstborn in all that pertained to him as an individual (see ibid., 35:23). But Judah surpassed him in the most basic prerequisite for leadership: that concern for one's fellow must always take precedence over one's own pursuits, no matter how pious and lofty these pursuits might be. Believing Joseph safe for the time being, Reuben rushed back to attend to his prayers and penance, in effect abandoning him to his fate.*
- *While Reuben prayed and fasted, Judah acted. Judah earned the leadership of Israel because he recognized that when another human being is in need, one must set aside all other considerations and get involved. Even if one's own intentions are still short of perfection and one's own character is yet to be refined. Sometimes, one cannot afford to wait.*
- *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

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- ***Until Shiloh comes (49:10)***
- ***The disciples of Rav Shilah would say: The Messiah's name is Shiloh, as it is stated, "Until Shiloh comes." The disciples of Rabbi Chaninah would say: His name is Chaninah, as it is stated (Jeremiah 16:13), "I will not give you Chaninah." The disciples of Rabbi Yannai would say: His name is Yinnon, for it is written (Psalms 72:17), "E'er the sun was, his name is Yinnon."***
- ***(Midrash Rabbah)***

- ***Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea, and he shall be a haven for ships... Issachar is a strong-boned ass... bowing his shoulder to the load (49:13-14)***
- ***The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar formed a partnership: Zebulun engaged in commerce and Issachar occupied himself in Torah study.***
- ***Thus Jacob placed Zebulun before Issachar (although Issachar was the elder of the two)--since if it were not for Zebulun, Issachar would not be able to occupy himself with the Torah.***
- ***(Midrash Tanchuma)***

- ***Issachar is a strong-boned ass, couching between the boundaries (49:14)***
- ***"A strong-boned ass" enduring the yoke of Torah, like the ass who is capable of carrying very heavy loads; "couching between the boundaries" like the ass who walks day and night, never sleeping at home, resting only at the city limits where he delivers his bundles of merchandise.***
- ***(Rashi)***

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- ***"Couching between the boundaries"--between the secrets of creation and the secrets of the Divine Chariot.***
- ***(Yalkut Albichani)***

- ***Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel (49:16)***
- ***One who says, "Give me justice," indicates that he is from the tribe of Dan; as it is written: "Dan shall judge his people."***
- ***(Talmud, Pesachim 4a)***
- ***Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backward (49:17)***
- ***This refers to Samson, who was of the tribe of Dan.***
- ***(As related in the Book of Judges (16:27-30), when Samson was captured by the Philistines, blinded, and brought in chains to a palace where "on the roof were three thousand men and women to watch the torment of Samson," he "grasped the two central pillars on which the house stood... and he bowed with all his might, and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were in it. And the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those he slew in his life.")***
- ***(Rashi)***

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- *I hope for your salvation, O G-d (49:18)*
- *Jacob saw Samson and thought that he was the Messiah. But when he saw him dead he exclaimed: "He, too, is dead! Then I wait for Your salvation, O G-d!"*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*
- *Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties... (49:20)*
- *There will be an abundance of olives in his portion of the Land, and it will flow with oil like a wellspring. Moses, too, blessed the tribe of Asher thus, proclaiming: "He dips his foot in oil" (Deuteronomy 33:24).*
- *(Rashi)*

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- *Once the people of Laodicea were in need of oil; they appointed an agent and instructed him, "Go and purchase for us a hundred maneh worth of oil."*
- *He came first to Jerusalem and was told, "Go to Tyre." He came to Tyre and was told, "Go to Gush Halab." When he came to Gush Halab he was told, "Go to So-and-so in that field." He went there and found the man breaking up the earth around his olive trees.*
- *The agent said to him. "Have you a hundred maneh worth of oil that I require"? "Yes," replied the other; "but wait until I finish my work." After he had finished his work, the man threw his tools on his back and went on his way, removing the stones from his path as he went. The agent thought to himself, "Has this man really got a hundred maneh worth of oil? I see that the Jews have merely made game of me."*
- *When the man reached his home, his maidservant brought out to him a bowl of hot water and he washed his hands and his feet. She then brought out to him a golden bowl of oil and he dipped in it his hands and his feet, thus fulfilling the verse, "He dips his foot in oil." After they had eaten and drunk the man measured out to the agent a hundred maneh worth of oil, and then asked, "Do you perhaps need any more oil?" "I do, indeed," replied the agent; "but I have no more money with me." "Well, if you wish to buy more, take it, and I will go back with you for the money," said the man. He then measured out for him another eighteen maneh worth of oil. It is said that he hired every horse, mule, camel and ass that he could find in all the Land of Israel [to carry the oil back to Laodicea]...*
- *(Talmud, Menachot 85b)*

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- *Naphtali is a deer running free, who delivers words of beauty (49:21)*
- *This refers to the Genousar valley (in the province of Naphtali), which is quick to ripen its fruit as a deer is swift to run, and upon which one delivers words of thanks and praises G-d.*
- *Another meaning is that Jacob prophesied on the war with Sisra (Judges ch. 4), in which victory was achieved through 10,000 swift warriors from the tribe of Naphtali; "Who delivers words of beauty," refers to the song of Deborah (from the tribe of Naphtali, sung to celebrate that victory).*
- *(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)*
- *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil (49:27)*
- *This refers to the altar in the Holy Temple (which stood in the province of Benjamin), upon which the sacrifices were offered every morning and evening.*
- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

- *This is a reference to Mordechai and Esther (who were of the tribe of Benjamin) who divided the spoils of Haman, as it is written: "On that day, King Achashverosh gave Queen Esther the house of Haman" (Esther 8:1).*
- *(Midrash Tanchuma)*

- *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel... every one according to his blessing he blessed them (49:28)*
- *Since there were some regarding whom the Torah only records Jacob's rebuke to them, one might, perhaps, think that they were not blessed; so the verse says, "every one according to his blessing he blessed them"-to tell us that each one was also blessed.*
- *(Rashi)*

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- **The Passing of Jacob**
- **And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered to his people.**
- **And Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him.**
- **And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father... and Egypt wept for him seventy days...**
- **And Joseph went up [to Canaan] to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt and all the house of Joseph, and his brothers, and his father's house... a very great company...**
- **And his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the Machpeilah field, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying place from Ephron the Hittite...**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- *And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered to his people (49:33)*
- *Rav Nachman said to Rav Yitzchak: "So said Rabbi Jochanan: Our father Jacob did not die."*
- *Asked Rav Yitzchak: "Was it for no reason that the eulogizers eulogized, the embalmers embalmed and the buriers buried?"*
- *Replied Rav Nachman: "I am only citing a verse. It is written (Jeremiah 30:10): 'And you, my servant Jacob, fear not, says the L-rd, and do not tremble, O Israel. For behold, I shall save you from afar, and your progeny from the land of their captivity.' The verse equates Jacob with his progeny: just as his progeny are alive, he, too, is alive."*

- *(Talmud, Taanit 5b)*

- *And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father (50:2)*
- *Why did Joseph die before his brethren? Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] said: Because he embalmed his father. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Could I not preserve My righteous ones? Did I not say thus to him, 'Fear not the worm Jacob (Isaiah 41:14)'?" The Rabbis disagree: It was Jacob who charged them to embalm him, as it says, "And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them" (Genesis 50:12).*

- *(Midrash Rabbah)*

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- *And Pharaoh said: "Go up, and bury your father, according as he made you swear" (50:6)*
- *When Pharaoh appointed Joseph viceroy over Egypt, his ministers protested: "Would you place over us a slave whom his master bought for twenty pieces of silver!" He replied to them, "I discern in him royal characteristics." They said to him, "In that case he must be acquainted with the seventy languages." That night, the angel Gabriel came to Joseph and taught him the seventy languages... On the morrow, in whatever language Pharaoh conversed with Joseph, Joseph replied to him; but when Joseph spoke to Pharaoh in the holy tongue, Pharaoh did not understand what he said. Pharaoh asked Joseph to teach it to him; he taught it to him but he could not learn it. Said Pharaoh to Joseph, "Swear to me that you will not reveal this"; and Joseph swore to him.*
- *When Jacob died, Pharaoh refused to allow Joseph to bury him in the land of Canaan. When Joseph said to him, "My father made me swear, saying..." (Genesis 50:5), Pharaoh said, "Have your oath annulled!" Said Joseph to Pharaoh, "Should I also annul my oath regarding yourself?" So although it was displeasing to him, Pharaoh said: "Go up and bury your father, according as he made you swear."*
- *(Talmud, Sotah 36b)*

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- **The Testament of Joseph**
- **After Jacob's passing, his sons are seized with a new fear: perhaps Joseph has waited these seventeen years out of respect for their father, but will now avenge himself on them for selling him into slavery? So they send word to Joseph:**
- **"Your father did command before he died, saying: 'So shall you say to Joseph: Forgive, I pray you now, the trespass of your brothers, and their sin; for they did evil to you.' And now, we pray you, forgive the trespass of the servants of the G-d of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him...**
- **And Joseph said to them: "Fear not; for am I in the place of G-d? You thought evil against me; but G-d meant it for good, to bring it to pass at this day that much people should be saved alive. Now therefore fear not; I will nourish you, and your little ones." And he comforted them, and spoke to their hearts.**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- **The Testament of Joseph**
- **Joseph lived 110 years, living to see his children's grandchildren: "Also the children of Machir the son of Menasseh were raised on Joseph's knee." Before his passing, he conveys the following testament to the Children of Israel in Egypt:**
- **G-d will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.**
- **G-d will surely remember you; and you shall carry up my bones from here.**
- **It is from these words that the Children of Israel will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come.**
- **Joseph's body is placed in a coffin to await the day of return to the Promised Land.**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- ***And they came to the Goren HaAtad ("the threshing floor of brambles")... and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation (50:10)***
- **But is there a threshing-floor for brambles? Rabbi Abbahu said: The verse teaches us that they surrounded Jacob's coffin with crowns like a threshing-floor which is surrounded with a hedge of brambles, because the sons of Esau, of Ishmael and of Keturah also came... They came to wage war [against the Israelites]; but when they saw Joseph's crown hanging upon Jacob's coffin, they all took their crowns and hung them upon his coffin. It was taught: thirty-six crowns were hung upon Jacob's coffin.**
- **(Talmud, Sotah 13a; Rashi)**
- ***And [Joseph] made a mourning for his father of seven days (50:10)***
- **From here is derived the law of seven ("shiva") days of mourning after the dead.**
- **(Jerusalem Talmud)**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- *And they buried him in the cave of the Machpeilah field (50:13)*
- When Jacob's funeral procession reached the land of Canaan, Esau heard of this and came with many armed men to Hebron, and would not allow Joseph to bury his father in the Cave of Machpeila, saying: "There are eight burial places in the Cave; already buried there are Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob has buried Leah in his portion, and the one remaining plot belongs to me."
- Said Jacob's sons to him: "You sold your portion to our father."
- Said Esau: "Granted that I sold my birthright, but did I sell my ordinary heir's right?"
- Said they: "Yes, you did sell it."
- Said he to them "Produce a document of sale for me."
- Said the sons of Jacob: "The document is in the land of Egypt. Who will go for it? Let Naphtali go, because he is swift as a deer."
- Among those present was Chushim the son of Dan, who was deaf; so he asked them, "What is happening?" They said to him, "Esau is preventing the burial until Naphtali returns from the land of Egypt."
- Said Chushim: "Is my grandfather to lie there in contempt until Naphtali returns from the land of Egypt!" He took a sword and severed Esau's head, which rolled into the Cave of Machpeilah and came to rest in Isaac's lap, where it remains to this day. Thus it came to pass that "Esau's head lies in the bosom of Isaac."
- (Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Rebecca, who said: "Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?" (Genesis 27:45). Although the death of the two of them did not occur on the same day, their burial took place on the same day.)
- (Targum Yonatan; Talmud, Sotah 36b)

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- ***And when Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph will hate us, and will pay us back the evil which we did to him?" (50:15)***
- **What did they see that made them fear him now? They saw that on their return from the burial of their father, Joseph went to the pit into which they had thrown him. (Joseph went there to recite the blessing a person is commanded to recite at the place at which a miracle was performed for him, "Blessed are You... who performed a miracle for me in this place" --see Talmud, Berachot 54a)**
- **(Midrash Tanchuma)**
- ***And they sent word urgently to Joseph, saying: "Your father did command before he died, saying, So shall you say to Joseph..." (50:16-17)***
- **Said Rabbi I'laah in the name of Rabbi Eleazar ben Rabbi Simeon: A person is allowed to lie for the sake of peace, as it is written: "And they sent word urgently to Joseph, saying: Your father did command before he died, saying, So shall you say to Joseph..."**
- **(Jacob did not, in fact, say this, for he did not suspect Joseph of revenge.)**
- **(Talmud, Yevamot 65b; Rashi)**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- ***And Joseph wept when they spoke to him (50:17)***
- **He wept that they had suspected him of this.**
- **(Rashi)**

- ***And Joseph said to them: "Fear not; for am I in the place of G-d?" (50:19)***
- **He said to them: If ten candles were unable to extinguish one candle, could one candle extinguish ten?**
- **(Talmud, Megillah 16b)**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- ***"Fear not; for am I in the place of G-d? You thought evil against me; but G-d meant it for good..." (50:19-20)***
- **Joseph was saying: You did me an evil which turned out for the good; if I wished to avenge myself on you, I, too, would have to do the same. But this I cannot do, for only G-d can do so...**
- **(The Oztrotzver Rebbe)**

- ***And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years (50:22)***
- **The life-spans of six pairs were equal: Rebecca and Kehot (both lived 133 years), Levi and Amram (137), Joseph and Joshua (110), Samuel and Solomon (52), Moses and Hillel the Elder (120), Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiba (120).**
- **(Midrash Rabbah)**

Vayechi

Genesis 47:28-50:26

- Why did Joseph die before his brothers? Because he assumed airs of authority. But did not Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] say to Rabban Gamliel, "Rule high-handedly and sow terror in your disciples?" This is to be a leader's public behavior, but not his private behavior.
- (Talmud (manuscript), Berachot 55a)
- *G-d will surely remember you (50:24)*
- The Children of Israel were given this sign: whoever comes and says *pakod yifkod* ("surely remember") is their true redeemer.
- (Midrash Tanchuma)

- *And he was placed in a coffin in Egypt (50:26)*
- The Egyptians placed Joseph in an iron coffin and submerged it in the Nile, so that its waters should be blessed.
- (Talmud, Sotah 13a)

Our Father Yaacov Did Not Die

by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

- **The Talmud describes a discussion between the Babylonian sage, Rabbi Nachman, and the sage from Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yitzchak. The latter repeats one of the teachings of his mentor, Rabbi Yochanan: "Our father Yaacov did not die" [Taanit 5b]. But Rabbi Nachman is surprised to hear this: "Was it in vain that he was eulogized, that the embalmers embalmed him, and that the buriers buried him?" Rabbi Yitzchak replies, "I have derived this from a verse, as is written, 'And you, do not fear, my servant Yaacov, G-d says, and do not be afraid, Yisrael, for I will rescue you from far away, and bring your offspring from the land of their captivity.' [Yirmiyahu 30:10]. Just as his offspring remain alive, so does he." [Taanit5b].**
- **The simple meaning of the above verse is not complicated at all. "Yaacov" and "Yisrael" represent the community of Bnei Yisrael, a collective identity that exists beyond the boundaries of time and space, unifying the nation in the past, the present, and the future, wherever they live in the world. The people of Yisrael are the specific group of people that happens to live in one generation. The redemption will serve as salvation for the people of that specific generation and at the same time as redemption for the nation as a whole. The Midrash, on the other hand, views "Yaacov" and "Yisrael" in the verse as referring not to an entire community but to our forefather Yaacov in person, with the implication that he will join together with his offspring in the future salvation. This then means that Yaacov himself has not died.**

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- **The interpretation of the verse poses no difficulty, and the Midrash seems to be unnecessary. Before attempting to explain in more detail, let us first try to understand the situation. Did Rabbi Itzchak really mean for his statement to be taken literally? Many of the commentators indeed thought that he did, but the phrase the he uses, "I have derived this from a verse," implies that he meant something else. He uses the word "doresh," to interpret in a Midrashic fashion. The homiletic approach creates a virtual world where Yaacov continues to live. But this world also hints at a symbolic world which is hidden within this one. Can we enter this hidden symbolic world? I will try to do so using a key that can be seen in one of the sayings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:**
 - **"Anybody that has a son who toils for Torah can be considered as if he has never died" Bereishit Rabba 49:4]. Rabbi Shimon bases his words on the verse, "For I know him, that he will command his sons and his household after him, to observe the path of G-d, doing charity and justice, in order that G-d may provide for Avraham what He promised to do for him" [Bereishit 18:19]. He explained, "It is not written 'to do to him'— eilav—but 'for him'— alav." Avraham will not only receive a prophesy of redemption, he will take part in it himself!**

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- **Rabbi Yochanan, who was quoted by Rabbi Yitzchak, follows the path set by Rabbi Shimon Bar**
- **Yochai in many ways, and this implies that in this case too we can learn from Rabbi Shimon about Rabbi Yochanan's approach. What the two rabbis say about Yaacov is startlingly similar, but Rabbi Shimon gives more detail in his explanation. To understand them in depth, it is necessary to discuss the concepts of existence and continuation. What is needed so that an object that exists now can be viewed as a continuation of something that has existed in the past? This is a philosophic question that in my opinion has ramifications for the laws of ritual impurity: When does a utensil lose its identity? How is its identity defined across the boundaries of time? The question is of course much more complicated when it is asked about a whole nation. How is the identity of a nation preserved? Many nations define themselves in terms of geography. Those born in a given political-geographical area are considered as the extension of those who came before them. This is clearly absurd. This is seen from the example of the writing found on a tombstone of a Jew from central Europe: "He lived in four countries, but he never left the city where he was born." What then can replace this definition? Can it be based on origins? Many of the inhabitants of Egypt today are undoubtedly descendents of the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Does this mean that they belong to the ancient Egyptian nation? Does the Egypt of the times of the Bible still exist? No, as is shown by the rhetorical question, "Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" [Shemot 10:7].**

Our Father Yaacov Did Not Die

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- **And this leads us to the answer given by Rabbi Shimon: "Anybody that has a son who toils for Torah can be considered as if he has never died." In addition to biological continuity, there must also be a spiritual link. If this condition is not met, the chain is broken. This is also the true meaning of the words of Rabbi Yochanan. Yaacov has not died, since his sons continue on his path, and they express his continued life with the words, "Listen, Yisrael"—Yisrael is Yaacov.**
- **The Rambam expresses a similar thought in explaining the verse, "For just as the new heaven and the new earth that I have created remain standing before me, G-d says, so will your offspring and your name continue to exist" [Yeshayahu 66:22]. He writes, "There are times when the offspring remain but the name does not..." [Moreh Nevuchim 2:29]. For the name to remain it is necessary to maintain spiritual continuity, in our case by observing the Torah, "which is the reason that we have a special name ('Yisrael')" [Rambam, ibid].**
- **This Midrashic interpretation is what gives meaning to the verse, "I will rescue you... and... Your offspring," quoted above. In order that "Yaacov," the community of Yisrael, will be redeemed together with his descendents, Yaacov must continue to live as part of his descendents. And that is what Yirmiyahu has promised. Yaacov's offspring are alive, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. This means that Yaacov himself is still alive.**



A Few Final Thoughts

- **All of what we are, we see, we did and will do, is the Work of HaShem This we celebrate fifty-two times a Year on Shabbat.**
- **“May it be Your Will, HaShem, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt speedily in our days and grant us our share in Your Torah....”**
 - **Shabbat Shalom**