VAYECHI

ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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Vayechi means life, yet the parsha begins with talk of death and ends with death. Yaakov demands to be buried in Israel. Yosef swears he will. Yaakov elevates his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, to be equal to his children as tribes settling the Land of Israel. He blesses Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov calls all his sons and blesses each of them. Yaakov dies. He is buried amidst great honor in Maarat HaMachpela. The brothers are afraid that now Yosef will exact revenge. Yosef reassures them. Yosef asks to be buried in Israel when the Jewish people return. He dies and is placed in a coffin in Egypt. The beloved book of Breishit is concluded.

1st Aliya (47:28-48:9) Yaakov asks Yosef to swear that he will not bury him in Egypt but rather with his forefathers. Yaakov falls ill. He tells Yosef that G-d appeared to him in the Land of Israel; he was told his descendants would have a permanent hold in the Land of Israel. Ephraim and Menashe will be treated as equal tribes in dividing the Land. Rachel died on the way into the Land and I buried her there.

The Jewish people are ensconced in Egypt. And that is precisely the theme of this parsha. Yaakov is fighting, pushing, perseverating on one theme; this is not home. All he talks about is the Land of Israel: don't bury me in Egypt, Ephraim and Menashe will be equals in dividing the Land, may they prosper in the Land (of Israel); he blesses the sons emphasizing their locale in the Land.

Yaakov is insisting: we are here but we're going to be there.

In fact, were I choosing where to begin this parsha, I would have backed up one verse. (Though the word "Vayechi" has a nice ring to it). The last verse of last week's parsha is: Yisrael dwelt in the land of Egypt, Goshen, held it, and was exceedingly prosperous.

That is the exact same verse (almost) of the beginning of Vayeishev. There, Yaakov wanted to settle, take root, build a nation in Israel. Now, here he is doing exactly that; settling, taking root. But in the wrong place; in Egypt, not Israel.

Why does Yaakov mention that Rachel died suddenly and was buried on the way to Beit Lechem? Perhaps this is a tender moment between father and son. He is speaking to Yosef. "Yosef, you lost your mother tragically, suddenly. Rachel, my dear

In Loving Memory of
Two Dear Sweet Brothers
כאפרים ומנשה

שמשון רפאל בן אשר ז"ל - ו' טבת
אברהם אליעזר בן אשר ז"ל - ז' טבת

Both forever missed by their sister
and all those who knew them

May the Torah learning
in this issue be לעילוי נשמתם

wife. Your mother. You, so young, it was all so sudden, you did not have a chance to bury your mother in the way I am asking you to bury me. You and I shared that tragic time. Now, it is so different. I elderly. You, a grown man, of great success. Maybe we would have had more children. In her memory, in her honor, your 2 sons take their place as full sons of mine, to fill the void that might have been."

A wistful, tender, shared moment, amidst instructions of national import.

2nd Aliya (48:10-16) Yaakov cannot see. He hugs and kisses Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov places his right hand on Ephraim, the younger; left hand on Menashe the older. G-d before whom my forefathers walked and Who protected me, bless these. And may they increase in the Land.

You can't help but hear echoes of Yaakov's father Yitzchak: blind, gave the bracha to the younger, not the older. But here Yaakov does not bless just one. He blesses both with the same bracha. That makes all the difference. The era of "one is in and one is out" is over. All are part of the Jewish people. And these are grandchildren. Grandchildren means long term, future, legacy, all the children.

3rd Aliya (48:17-22) Yosef does not like the switch of hands. He corrects Yaakov. Yaakov demurs. Both will be great, though the younger will be greater. He blessed them both: The Jews will bless with "May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menashe."

Yosef suffered from his father's favoritism. He does not want the same for his children. But Yaakov insists. Because there is a difference between exclusion and distinction.

Yaakov is not excluding anyone. Both are in. Both are blessed. Jews in the future will bless with both Ephraim and Menashe. But Yaakov tells Yosef: while from now on all Jews are part of the Jewish people, while all are in, they are not identical. Some will be greater, some less great.

4th Aliya (49:1-19) Yaakov calls his sons to tell them what will occur with them. He addresses them individually. Reuven, my first born. Shimon and Levi, due to your anger, do not associate my honor. Yehuda, you saved my child from destruction; authority will not depart from you. Zevulun will dwell on the coast. Yissachar is a powerful worker; he will see the Land's goodness and beauty. Dan, the nation's judge. G-d, we wait for Your salvation.

One word is missing from Yaakov's address to each of his sons: G-d. The Torah does not say he blesses his sons. Blessings are from G-d. Yitzchak blessed his son: May G-d give you of the dew of the heavens… Even Yaakov himself just blessed Ephraim and Menashe: May G-d before whom my forefathers walked bless these young men. And Yaakov told Yosef the Jewish people will bless: May G-d bless you as Ephraim and Menashe.

Blessings are from G-d. Why does Yaakov not mention even one time G-d's name in his address to his sons? Because he is not blessing them. He is describing them. He is emphasizing to them, as he is about to die, that their place is not in Egypt. Their place is in the Land of Israel. And they will get there, with all their varied talents. To build a nation. A nation needs leaders, merchant marines, hard working agriculture, justice. Yaakov is stating as a matter of fact to his sons what the state of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel will look like. You will all be included because all your talents will be needed. And you are all different and essential.

5th Aliya (49:20-26) Yaakov's address to each son continues. Gad, a legionnaire. Asher, bread and delicacies. Naftali, a swift messenger. Yosef had adversity but with G-d's help prevailed and was enormously blessed.

With the description of Binyamin in the next aliya, the descriptions are complete. The Jewish nation will be built in the Land of Israel as a result of all of you. None are out, all are in. It will be a nation of agriculture, military, leadership, bounty, justice, commerce, and trade. It will be a colorful, diverse and successful nation.

Yaakov is driving hard, fighting, persevering in his message: we are only here in Egypt temporarily. The Land of Israel is where we will be.

6th Aliya (49:27-50:20) Yaakov's end is near. He commands his sons to bury him in Maarat Hamachpela, describing in detail Avraham's

In loving memory of our dear Father,
Grandfather & Great Grandfather

Jack Beer z"l

יעקב שמואל זנוול בן צבי אריה ז"ל

on his 33rd Yahrtzeit **י"א טבת**

May the Torah learned
from this issue be לעילוי נשמתו

The Maisel, Beer and Carroll Families
Efrat, Cleveland and Norfolk

acquisition of it and the burial there of all the avot and imahot. Yaakov dies. Yosef gets permission from Paro to bury Yaakov in Israel. A great procession accompanies his burial. Upon the return to Egypt, the brothers tell Yosef that Yaakov commanded them to tell Yosef to bear the sin done to him by them. Yosef cries upon hearing this.

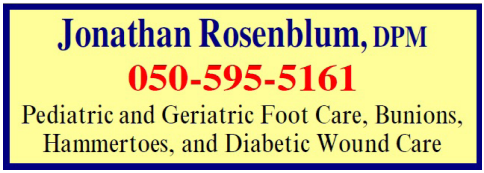
Yaakov's burial in the Land of Israel is the final expression of the message he has been hammering home to his family; Egypt is where we are, but Israel is where our legacy is.

7th Aliya (50:21-26) Yosef counters that G-d has brought them to Egypt so that they may survive. Yosef sees his great grandchildren in Egypt. Yosef has the brothers promise to bring his bones to Israel when they are redeemed.

Yosef is both generous and pious: you, my brothers, did not sell me here. Rather, it was G-d's plan to save our people, placing me in the position to save you all. That is both generous to his brothers and pious in seeing G-d's Hand saving the people.

Only problem is that he is wrong.

You can't fault Yosef. He is correct in what he sees. But he doesn't see what we see. He sees the little picture. We have the benefit of the big picture. We know what happens next. Many years in Egypt, massive growth, Paro, enslavement, suffering, and finally, redemption. Sure, the descent of the Jewish people to Egypt was G-d's plan. But it wasn't just to save the family. It was much bigger than that.



It was the big plan, the dramatic plan that ends with the Exodus from Egypt.

Yosef has unwittingly been the cause of the descent of the Jewish nation to Egypt. He thought it was G-d's plan to save the family. But it is really G-d's plan to ensconce the entire Jewish people in Egypt. For it to grow to a nation. Then to redeem the entire Jewish people from one place at one time. Yosef didn't know what was to come. But we do.

STATS

12th of 54 sedras; 12 of 12 in B'reishit
Written on 148.33 lines (rank: 45th)
12 parshiot, 7 open and 5 closed
In addition, the first part of the sedra is the end of the previous parsha from Vayigash. Vayechi is the only sedra that does not begin at a parsha break.
85 p'sukim - 44th
1158 words - 44th
4448 letters - 43rd
Shortest sedra in B'reishit

MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Vayechi. One of 17 sedras without mitzvot.

HAFTORAH VAYECHI
1 KINGS 2:1-12

In this week's relatively short haftorah King David conveys a message from his deathbed to his son and successor, Shlomo. The words of the haftorah echo this week's reading of the Torah in the sense that Yaakov also offers his parting blessings and guidance to his sons.

The King of Israel exhorts his son Shlomo to remain loyal and be steadfast in his dedication to Hashem and to abide by His word. If he follows in this path, he will surely see success in all his undertakings and moreover will be a link in an illustrious chain and ensure the continuity of the Davidic Dynasty.

King David also details specific guidelines regarding various people that need to be punished or rewarded for their actions.

Finally, the haftorah concludes with the death of King David. He is buried in the City of David. Shlomo takes his father's place and the kingdom of Israel remains firmly established. ■

A SHORT VORT | BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

וימת יוסף בן מאה ועשר שנים ויחנטו אותו ויישם בארון במצרים (נ:כו)

"Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; they embalmed him..." (50:26)

Why is there a need for the Torah to repeat the final age of Joseph when it was just stated in verse 23 "And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years"?

The Gaon, Rabbi Shmuel ben Chofni (993-1013, Sura, Babylon) answers that it is to emphasize the long reign of Joseph, which lasted an uninterrupted eighty years.

The Abarbanel (1437-1508, Spain, Portugal) felt that the earlier verse of 22 relates to the years of Joseph's life, while in the final verse it is repeated in the context of his death.

However, in his Sefer Shaar Bas Rabim (1911 Poland) Rabbi Aryeh Leib ascribes the repetition of the phrase as a homiletical praise...He died as Joseph. Although Joseph ruled for eighty years and was given an Egyptian name by Pharaoh (Tzafnat Paneach), Joseph still retained his Hebrew name.

By so doing, Joseph set an example to all of his brethren on retaining their Jewish identity. The Rabbis point out that one of the merits in deserving Redemption from Egyptian Exile was that the Israelites never dropped their Hebrew names all through the servitude, perhaps like Joseph. Shabbat Shalom