



## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS  
RCA ISRAEL REGION

### PARSHAT VAYIGASH

The parsha begins in the middle of the story. Yosef has just told Yehuda and all the brothers that Binyamin, the thief, will become a slave to Yosef. All the others are free to leave. Our parsha begins with Yehuda's long and impassioned plea to Yosef to allow Binyamin to return home, while Yehuda will assume his place as a slave. Yosef is overcome. He orders all to leave. And tells his brothers, "I am Yosef". He instructs them to bring Yaakov. Paro sends the brothers home with wagons to bring Yaakov and the rest of the family. Yaakov reunites with Yosef. The entire family settles in Goshen. Yaakov meets Paro. The famine gets worse. Yosef acquires all of Egypt for Paro.



#### 1ST ALIYA (44:18-30)

Yehuda pleads with Yosef: this is our father's dear child. While you asked us to bring him here, we told you that leaving his father would break our father's heart. When we needed to buy food, our father told us that if anything happened to Binyamin, he would descend to the depths. And now, if I return to my father without the boy, and his soul is bound to his....

The aliya ends suspended in the air. Yaakov and Binyamin, their souls are bound... There could be no better way to convey the drama, ending the aliya with their bound souls.

Yehuda earns leadership by this dramatic moment. He is assuming responsibility. He hasn't said it yet, but he will in the next aliya – he will do anything to ensure Binyamin's return home. His entire argument is one of concern

for his father. His father will die of a broken heart, losing the only 2 sons from his dear wife.

Now, while Yehuda is the only actor in this aliya and while his actions are heroic and of powerful substance, there is a silent actor; Yosef. Let's place ourselves in Yosef's shoes. Yehuda's words are familiar to **us**, because **we** know the whole story until here. **We** were there when the brothers returned home, **we** heard the interactions with Yaakov, his anguish at the thought of Binyamin leaving.

**Yosef** knows nothing of this. Everything that happened after he was thrown in the pit is a blank to **him**. Is my father alive? What did he know about what happened to me? Why didn't he come seeking me? What happened when I never returned home? Was my father pained? Did he miss me? **We** know Yaakov was inconsolable when the brothers brought the bloody coat. But **Yosef** doesn't know.

Yehuda's speech to Yosef is like drawing open the curtain – Yosef is now privy to what his father thought happened to him, how much his father loves Binyamin, who is like a replacement of Yosef to Yaakov. Dramatic is the moment when Yosef tells the brothers who he is; but this moment for Yosef is equally so. It is a glimpse into the home of his father, a home he has known nothing of for 22 years. This is the first time he hears that his father was heartbroken at what he thought was Yosef's death. He didn't seek me because he thought I was dead.

While we all like to ask why Yosef didn't call home, Yosef wonders why Yaakov never called him. How could a father not try everything to find his son? Well, Yosef now finds out why; because

Yaakov thought Yosef was dead. For Yosef, this changes everything. What relief and joy to now hear that he was not abandoned by his father, after all.



#### **2ND ALIYA (44:31-45:7)**

Yehuda continues: I guaranteed Binyamin's return. I will not be able to bear seeing Yaakov's pain. I will stay in his stead as a slave. Yosef cannot bear this any longer. He orders all the others out. Alone with his brothers he states: I am Yosef your brother. Is our father still alive? The brothers are dumbstruck. He reassures them that his sale to Egypt was G-d's plan in order to save the family through this famine.

What did Yehuda say that Yosef could no longer bear? The commentators read this in the context of Yosef's intent throughout this story. Why did he accuse the brothers of being spies? And demand they bring Binyamin? And plant his goblet in Binyamin's bag? It would seem he is trying to recreate the scene of the crime. They sold Yosef as a slave. Would they sell Binyamin as a slave again; or have they repented? Yehuda's offer to stay in Binyamin's stead is a victory, teshuva.

It could be understood entirely differently. We know that Yaakov loved Yosef. With Yosef's disappearance, that love for Yosef is now transferred to his brother, Binyanim. Binyamin is Yosef's replacement in the family. With Yosef gone, Binyamin assumes his place. When Yehuda relates how much Yaakov loves Binyamin, Yosef is not hearing Binyamin, he is hearing Yosef. Binyamin is a substitute Yosef to Yaakov. Yaakov's love of Binyamin is really his love of Yosef in Yosef's absence. Yosef, hearing of his father's love for him is overcome. He needs to not only hear, but to see his father. And that is what he tells his brothers.



#### **3RD ALIYA (45:8-18)**

Yosef continues: G-d has sent me

to be a master in Egypt. Quick, go tell our father that Yosef is a ruler in Egypt. And to come. You will settle in Goshen. Tell our father, bring our father. He hugs and kisses Binyamin, hugs and kisses the brothers. Paro hears and is pleased. He helps facilitate Yaakov's journey.

Yosef is called Yosef Hatzadik not just because he withstood the advances of Potiphar's wife. He mentions G-d 4 times. He speaks of G-d and he believes all his travails are G-d's plan. He overlooks his personal travails by peering into the Divine. His ascent to rule in Egypt is not him; it is G-d's plan. He does not deny his powerful position, but views himself as but a pawn in the Divine Hand to help his family survive.



#### **4TH ALIYA (45:19-27)**

Paro gives wagons to bring Yaakov. Yosef gives his brothers food and clothing; to his father, animals laden with provisions. The brothers tell Yaakov that Yosef is alive, ruler in Egypt. His heart skips a beat. Yaakov's spirit revives.

Why does Yosef give his brothers clothes? And why, if Yaakov is to come quickly to Egypt, why send him animals laden with food?

The brothers took Yosef's coat; Yosef gives the brothers clothes, a form of forgiveness.

And the dreams. Yosef dreamt of sheaves of wheat bowing to him. And of the stars bowing to him. Agriculture and power. Yosef sends word to Yaakov; I am the ruler. And look at the agricultural bounty. The dreams came true. But not in the land of Israel. In the land of Egypt.



#### **5TH ALIYA (45:28-46:27)**

Yaakov offers offerings in Beer Sheva. G-d calls to him; Yaakov, Yaakov. He responds, Hineni. Don't be afraid. I will go down with you and I will bring you back up. The entire family descends. The Torah lists the genealogy of the family; the 70 souls who came to Egypt.

In this simple aliya everything changes. The twists and turns of the story of the brothers are now seen in wide angle; the camera moves from close up, to a wide lens. Yaakov is thinking Jewish history. Avraham was told his children will be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. Yaakov, while anxious to see Yosef, is nervous about moving his entire family to Egypt. Will they ever return? Is he complicit in abandoning the promise that the Jews will live in the Land of Israel?

G-d calls him with that phrase that rings of drama: Yaakov, Yaakov. Hineni. G-d reassures him; I will bring you back.

And the next paragraph, the genealogy begins and ends with the same phrase: these are the Bnei Yisrael that came to Egypt. Jewish history now leaves the Land of Israel. And will not return for the entire rest of the Torah. Yaakov was justified in his fear. This is the moment of exile of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel. The entire rest of the Torah is the story of exile; journeying to the Land, but falling short of entering it.



#### 6TH ALIYA (46:28-47:10)

Yaakov and Yosef reunite, with hugs and tears. Yosef plans carefully with the brothers. They are to tell Paro they are shepherds. They will settle in Goshen. Paro agrees to what Yosef has planned. Yaakov blesses Paro.

The dramatic reunion is 2 verses. Somewhat anti-climactic. Yosef successfully arranges for his family to be preserved; both materially and by remaining together and away from the Egyptians.

Oh, what a bitter irony. Because we know what comes next. The Torah has moved on from the story of Yosef and his brothers and his father. The Torah is now describing the story of the Exodus from Egypt. You know how the Exodus story began? Yosef moved his whole

family to Egypt. He settled them successfully; perhaps too successfully?



#### 7TH ALIYA (47:11-27)

Yosef supports his family. The food in Egypt becomes scarce; all is precarious. Yosef acquires gold, livestock and land for Paro. Save the land of the priests. The people become slaves to Paro. Yaakov and the family dwell in Goshen, take root there and prosper.

The irony continues. Yosef creates a hugely powerful Paro; money, livestock, food stores, slaves. Control over all of Egypt. What irony; Yosef has created the two ingredients for the first chapter of the Egypt story; a hugely powerful Paro. And the entire Jewish people in Egypt.

Remember Yosef Hatzadik, so called because he saw G-d's plan. As he told his brothers, "G-d has placed me here to save you in the time of famine." Well, Yosef was wrong. He only saw what happened to him, but could not see the impending slavery of the people in Egypt.

The real story is that G-d has placed me here to bring you all to Egypt, to solidify the power of Paro. Which will result in the entire Jewish people being enslaved. And leaving Egypt amidst signs and wonders. Yosef **is** a pawn. But in a much bigger story; the story of enslavement and ultimately, the Exodus from Egypt.

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## HAFTORAH VAYIGASH YEHEZKEL 37:15-28

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This week's haftorah highlights the unification of the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yosef that will ultimately transpire in the Messianic Era.

This theme clearly echoes the beginning of this week's parsha: "And Yehuda approached Yosef."

The great prophet Yechezkel shares a communication he received from God in which he was instructed to take two sticks and write on one, "For Yehuda and the children of Israel his

companions” and on the other, “For Yosef, the stick of Ephraim and all the house, his companions.” After doing so he was then told to put the two sticks near one another - and the Almighty fused them together into a single stick.

God explains the meaning of the symbolic gesture. These sticks represent the warring kingdoms within the House of Israel. The fusing of the sticks represent the merging of the kingdoms that will transpire during the Messianic Era. The Mashiach, a descendant of David, will arrive and lead the unified people of Israel.

The haftorah ends with a promise from Hashem that “they shall dwell on the Land that I have given to My servant, to Yaakov, wherein your father lives; and they shall dwell upon it, they and their children and their children's children, forever and My servant David shall be their prince forever.” ■



## STATS

11th of 54 sedras; 11th of 12 in Bereshit.  
Written on 178.07 lines (ranks 34th).  
Vayigash is composed of 3 parshiyot, all closed, one VERY closed. Actually, Vayigash has only 2.89 parshiyot; it ends after 34 pesukim of a 38-pasuk parsha; Vayigash is the only sedra that does not end with a parsha break. (This shows up in a printed Chumash by there not being a PEI-PEI-PEI or SAMACH- SAMACH-SAMACH between Vayigash and Vayechi.)  
106 pesukim - ranks 28th; tied with Toldot and Bo. It is much smaller than Bo, a bit larger than Toldot.  
1480 words (30th); 5680 letters (29th).  
9th (of 12) in Bereshit in all 3 categories.



## MITZVOT

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



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