



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
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PARSHAT VAYECHI

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.

Parshat Vayechi is a foil to the previous parsha, Vayigash.

Parshat Vayigash is about Egypt. Parshat Vayechi is about the Land of Israel.

In Vayigash, the brothers united with Yosef. But more germane, Yosef demanded that Yaakov and the family all move to Egypt. Yosef's motives were honest; he wanted to save his family from the 5 years of famine yet to come. The family all moved to Egypt. And with the

5 years of famine, Yosef acquired all money, livestock and land for Paro.

The theme of that parsha is Egypt; the family moving to Egypt and Paro becoming massively wealthy, in possession of all of Egypt.

The theme of our parsha is the Land of Israel. Yaakov finds himself ensconced in Egypt. And he is not happy about that. The entire parsha is about Yaakov. And he perseverates 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 belong there.

The first thing he insists on is to be buried in the Land of Israel. It is now 17 years later. The famine is over for more than 12 years. It is clear to Yaakov that they are far too settled in the land of Egypt to return to Israel. And he is not happy. He makes Yosef swear to bury him in the Land of Israel.

When Yaakov is ill, Yosef jumps to visit him with Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov is not aware that the children are there. Yaakov initiates a sort of first born benefit to Yosef. He tells Yosef that he had a Divine promise that his descendants would be a "k'hal amim", multiple peoples. He takes that to mean that even after he, Yaakov ceases to have children, more children will be added to his people.

So, he tells Yosef that Ephraim and Menashe are to be tribes in the Land of Israel. There will be no tribe of Yosef. Instead, his 2 sons will

each be tribes.

What is on Yaakov's mind? The future settlement of the Land of Israel.



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. He blesses Yosef: G-d before whom my forefathers walked and Who protected me, bless these. And may they increase in the Land.

The blessing to Yosef is that these two children receive the same protection that he, Yaakov received. He doesn't bless Yosef at all; he blesses his children.

And the clincher; may they increase in the Land. Which land? Egypt? No. The Land of Israel.



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." And to Yosef, G-d will be with you and bring you back to the land of your forefathers.

Yosef is uncomfortable with switching the order of his sons. Yosef himself suffered from being designated over his brothers.

But Yaakov insists. Because he is not thinking of the moment. He is thinking of the distant future history of the Jewish people. Not petty family dynamics, but the great national project of settling the Land. And in nation building merit will be more important than position in the family.



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. Zvulun 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 Your salvation.

Yaakov wants to tell his sons what will be with them in the future.

He describes their various roles in the Land of Israel. When we build our nation, we will need various talents. 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.

Each of the 12 sons is described briefly, in one or two verses. Except 2. Both Yehuda and Yosef have 5 verses each.

Leadership has been removed from the first 3 sons, Reuven, Shimon and Levi and given to Yehuda and to Yosef. While King David will come from Yehuda, unfortunately, the kingdom of Israel, the rebellious 10 tribes, are known as Ephraim, son of Yosef.



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.

This parsha has more dialogue from our Avot than any other Parsha. Avraham speaks sparingly. Yitzchak even more so. Here, Yaakov speaks a lot.

And it is all one theme. 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 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 wish to be buried in the Land of Israel is realized.

The brothers are fearful now. Perhaps Yosef's generosity was all due to his respect for our father. After all, he kept asking if our father was alive. What will he do to us now?



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. Well,

partially.

Yosef was not the pawn in the Divine Hand to save the people. He was the pawn in the Divine Hand to move the entire Jewish people to Egypt. So they can be enslaved. By the very man, Paro, that he made fabulously powerful, owning all of Egypt and enslaving the people. And then to be redeemed amidst signs and wonders.

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. And he was right in thinking it was G-d's plan to save the family. But it is far bigger than that. 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. So that G-d can orchestrate that the entire Jewish people of a few million can be at one place at one time, Mt. Sinai, to receive the Torah. That is the plan.

Yosef didn't know what was to come. So, he can be forgiven for thinking he was the pawn to save the people from famine. But we know better.

When it comes to understanding the ways of the Divine, human beings suffer from severe myopia. Even one as great as Yosef. He is certain that his descent, and then his family's descent to Egypt is designed from Above to save his family. But he too suffers from myopia. Not because he lacks expansive vision. Rather, because we humans by nature can only see what lies in front of us. As paltry as that vision is.

Oh, what caution we need to exercise when pronouncing with certainty our understanding of His Ways. At best we are myopic muddlers.

HAFTORAH: 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. ■

STATS

12th of 54 sedras; 12 of 12 in Bereshit.

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 pesukim - 44th.

1158 words - 44th.

4448 letters - 43rd.

Shortest sedra in Bereshit.

MITZVOT

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



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