

Parshas Vayechi

For the week ending 14 Teves 5756
5 & 6 January 1996

Summary

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 up 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.

Even when tragic events do occur, we do not, even for a second, question Who is running the world.

Commentaries

WITH OUR EYES OPEN

"And Yaakov lived..." (47:28)

The Parsha of *Vayechi* is unique in the whole Torah in that it is 'closed' - there is no extra space between the final word of last week's Parsha and the beginning of this week's Parsha. Similarly, the eyes of the children of Yisrael were 'closed' to the spiritual enslavement by the Egyptians, which started imperceptibly with Yaakov's death. Another reason that the Parsha is 'closed' is that Yaakov wanted to reveal to his children the end of the final exile of the Jewish People and the coming of the *Mashiach*, but his prophetic vision was

closed, and he was not able to reveal it.

We are living now in the time of "footsteps of the *Mashiach*." Our Sages teach us that this will be a time of immense confusion, when it will appear that events have gone haywire, and it will seem that Hashem does not, or cannot, run the world.

The entire reason for this total hiding of Providential guidance is to test our faithfulness to Hashem; that even when tragic events do occur, we do not, even for a second, question Who is running the world. We live in the final chapter of world history. The gods of materialism and self-centeredness never close their eyes, relentless in their media barrage - **Our eyes must never be closed to the vision that every day the Redeemer will come to Zion.**

Based on Rashi

It changes all the time...



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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-810-315

fax: 972-2-812-890

ohr@jer1.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

avram.rothman@canrem.com

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WARGAMES

"...with my sword and with my bow."

(48:22)

'...with mitzvos and good deeds' (Midrash)

The strategy of a regular war is to attack the enemy first with a long range weapon - like a **bow** - and if that fails and he gets close to you, to resort to the **sword**. From the order of the verse - the **sword** preceding the **bow** - it is clear that the Torah is not talking about an ordinary enemy, rather a person's life-long enemy - his own *yetzer hara* (negative drive). The nature of person tends towards self-centeredness. A baby starts life with no other thought than its own gratification and employs all available means to gain its desires. Only after many long years can a person eventually overcome his natural selfishness. In the constant battle with the *yetzer hara*, one starts off with hand-to-hand combat using the **sword** at close quarters to oust the natural impulse for selfishness from the heart, but even when the enemy is out of range of the **sword**, you still need to keep his head down by constantly firing salvos of mitzvos and positive actions from your **bow**.

(Based on Kehilas Yitzchak in Mayana shel Torah)

BRIDGING THE GAP

"...In you shall all Yisrael bless, saying 'May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.'"

(48:20)

The real '**generation gap**' is between the spiritual attainments of one generation and its predecessor. From that moment of supreme encounter at Sinai history has marched to lower and lower spiritual depths. On Friday nights throughout the world the first thing a father does on returning from *shul* is to bless the children with the word of this verse - "*May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.*" Why of all our towering spiritual giants, are Ephraim and Menashe singled out to be the paradigm of blessing? Why don't we say "*May G-d make you like Avraham or Moshe*"? The answer is to be found in what Yaakov says to Yosef - "*Ephraim and Menashe will be to me as Reuven and Shimon.*" (48:5) Ephraim and Menashe, although Yaakov's grandchildren, had reached the level of the previous generation, the level of their uncles Reuven and Shimon - **they had not descended the spiritual ladder**. Thus, on Friday nights, a father blesses his children that they should absorb all the spiritual attainments of the preceding generation and escape that downward spiritual spiral - **the generation gap**.

Adapted from Rabbi Michael Schoen - Prisms'

Haftorah: Melachim I, 2

THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

Just as in this week's Parsha the Torah records the death-bed scene of Yaakov Avinu, so too in the Haftorah David Hamelech takes leave of this world.

However, the difference is that Yaakov summons all 12 of his sons - for all of them were righteous, whereas David calls for only Shlomo, for he alone was a comfort to him and worthy to inherit the Davidic line.



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Baruch Hashem Yam Yam

oiboh'v Iurc

"Blessed is Hashem for each day..."

The two great Talmudic sages, Shammai and Hillel, had different approaches to preparing for the Sabbath. If Shammai found an animal fit for a feast he would purchase it for the Sabbath meals. If a more fitting animal appeared in the market he would purchase it for the Sabbath and consume the first one in the weekdays. Thus all of his meals were in honor of the Sabbath.

But Hillel had another approach, one based on a perfect faith that Heaven would provide him with his needs for the Sabbath without the strenuous efforts made by Shammai. His slogan was King David's praise (Tehillim 68:20) "Blessed is Hashem for each day by day," which expresses the need to thank Hashem each day as we enjoy what he has provided us and to trust that he will provide us with our Sabbath needs as well.

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