

## Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

### פרשת ויחי

**ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה ויהי ימי יעקב שני חייו שבע שנים וארבעים ומאת שנה**  
**“Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov - the years of his life - were one hundred and forty-seven years” (47:28)**

There is no break in the Sefer Torah between Parshas Vayigash and Parshas Vayeichi. This is the only such instance in the entire Torah. What is the usual break between parshiyos closed off? Rashi explains that the eyes and hearts of the Bnei Yisrael were closed because of the hardships of living in Mitzrayim. Another explanation offered by Rashi is that Yaakov wished to reveal the time when Moshiach would come but it was closed off from him and he was prevented from doing so. A third explanation, given by R' Michel Berenbaum, is that the Torah is signifying the close of the era of the Avos. There were only three Avos and they were on a level of their own. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were on a level that has never been matched. With the death of Yaakov, people the likes of the Avos ceased to walk the earth.

**ויקראו ימי ישראל למות ויקרא לבנו ליוסף ויאמר לו אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך שים נא ידך תחת ירכי ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת אל נא תקברני במצרים**  
**“The time approached for Yisrael to die, so he called for his son, for Yosef, and said to him: Please - if I have found favor in your eye, please place your hand under my thigh and do kindness and truth with me - please do not bury me in Egypt” (47:29)**

Targum Onkelos translates Yaakov's request as "do not bury me in Egypt now." The Or HaChayim translates his request as "do not bury me in Egypt for a short time." He goes on to explain that Yaakov meant to say that he should not be buried in Egypt at all, not even for a short period of time, or even for a brief stopover. We can learn an important lesson from Yaakov's request. Many times in life, people put themselves in a position that will make things difficult in the future. Yaakov knew that once he was buried in Mitzrayim, it would not be so easy for his sons to gain permission from Pharaoh to remove him to Eretz Yisrael. He therefore urged them to take his body directly to Eretz Yisrael in an expeditious manner. We should not put ourselves in a position where our short-term decisions harm our long-term future. We should act now in a way that we will not be challenged later on. One should try to avoid making a temporary move that will only forestall the problem for a little while.

**ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך חלה ויקח את שני בניו עמו את מנשה ואת אפרים**  
**“And it came to pass after these matters that he said to Yosef: Behold, your father is ill. And he took his two sons with him, Menashe and Ephraim” (48:1)**

Rashi explains that it was Ephraim who came and informed Yosef of Yaakov's illness because he was the one who was constantly with Yaakov learning Torah. Later on, when Yaakov wanted to put his right hand on Ephraim, the posuk uses the unique word שְׁכַל, which is related to the word שֵׁכַל, which means "intelligence." The Sifsei Chachamim writes that this alludes to the fact that Ephraim earned the right to receive the primary blessing because he had developed his mind in Torah more. The fact that Ephraim chose to spend his time learning Torah with his grandfather changed his entire future. One must be sure to use his time properly and wisely. It can change a person's future, just as it did for Ephraim.

**ואני בבאי מפדן מתה עלי רחל בארץ כנען בדרך בעוד כברת ארץ לבא אפרתה ואקברה שם בדרך אפרתה הוא בית לחם**  
**“But as for me - when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still some way to go to Efratas; and I buried her there on the road to Efratas, which is Bais Lechem” (48:7)**

Rashi comments that Yaakov told Yosef not to be upset that Rachel was buried outside "the land"

[which would seem to refer to Eretz Yisrael] because the Bnei Yisrael would need to daven as they passed by her gravesite when they were exiled after the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash. He was commanded to do so by Hashem. The Ramban asks: Isn't Rachel actually buried in Eretz Yisrael? The Sifsei Chachamim explains Rashi by explaining that "the land" does not refer to Eretz Yisrael as Rachel is indeed in Eretz Yisrael. What Yaakov was explaining to Yosef was why he buried Rachel on the side of the road rather than in an inhabited area. This was necessary so that her children should have the opportunity to daven hundreds of years later. Based on this explanation, we can truly see the great power of tefilla. Yaakov made a decision to bury Rachel in a specific place in order to facilitate prayers in the future. We must be sure to harness the potential that our prayers have and use them properly.

Rashi writes in Sefer Yirmeyah that Hashem listened to the cries of Rachel because she was willing to sacrifice her entire future when she gave the signs to her sister Leah. This is because when she helped Leah, she took away the tears of Leah that had made her eyes tender, as the posuk tells us. As a commensurate reward, Hashem took away Rachel's tears when she cried over the exile of her children by answering her prayers.

**המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ**

**“May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they reproduce abundantly like fish within the land” (48:16)**

Rashi comments that Yaakov blessed them that they should be like fish who are not subject to the evil eye. R' Dovid Feinstein points out that the blessing was that they should be like fish "within the land." Even though they would be in the land and out among people, unlike the fish who stay underwater, the evil eye will still not affect them. They should be able to be fruitful and multiply in the midst of the land, among other people. Unlike the fish, who remain secluded and separate, Efraim and Menashe would have to work among the people and they would be seen and noticed. Yaakov blessed them that they should succeed even among the people.

Why was this special protection against the evil eye given only to the sons of Yosef? The answer is that Yosef's family merited the blessing of protection against the evil eye because Yosef had suffered greatly from the evil eye of his brothers who looked at him with jealousy. As a repayment of sorts for his suffering, his children were blessed that they should never have to go through the tribulations that their father underwent.

**פחז כמים אל תותר כי עלית משכבי אביך אז חללת יצועי עלה**

**“Haste like water - do not take more, because you mounted your father's bed; then you desecrated [Him] Who ascended my couch” (49:4)**

Chazal tell us that Reuven was supposed to receive the firstborn privileges, sovereignty and the priesthood. However, he lost all three because of his anger. This character trait cost him his leadership positions. One bad character trait ruined everything for him. We also see this in the case of David HaMelech's brother, Eliav, who also lost the right to be king because of his anger, as Chazal tell us. Some people have great capabilities and are destined for greatness in life but they can lose it because of their negative character traits. Many blessings can be lost because one does not have the right middos. It is important that we constantly work to refine our character so that we can receive all the blessings that we are supposed to get.

**יהודה אתה יודוך אחיך ידך בערף איביך ישתחוו לך בני אביך**

**“Yehuda - you, your brothers shall acknowledge; your hand will be at your enemies' nape; your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you” (49:8)**

R' Dovid Feinstein comments that not only was Yehuda blessed that he would be the king but also that his brothers would recognize him as their ruler and understand that he was acting as king in order to do good for the rest of Klal Yisrael. The king is meant to serve the people, not his own wishes. When the king acts properly, the people will recognize it. The name Yehuda comes from the same root as the word "to thank." When the king does his job properly, the people will not only acknowledge him but thank him as well. Similarly, people in all leadership positions must analyze the reasons behind their decisions. They must be sure that they are doing things that will benefit those who look up to them and not just things that they think are good and that benefit themselves.

Similarly, in the blessing of Yissachar, the tribe of talmidei chachamim, Yaakov says that he is like a laborer. The talmidei chachamim are almost like servants of the people. Their task is to help people and that is the tax that they give to society. The talmidei chachamim were exempt from a monetary tax because the tax that they gave was their leadership and their service to the people.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur  
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman  
Written by Michael Gutmann