

RED ALERT!

VAYCHI

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DIVREI TORAH

- Yaakov was nearing death and needed to take care of his final needs. Firstly, he needed to arrange his burial in Eretz Yisrael. This was a need for him personally and to extend a message to his growing tribe. The final verse of last week's reading stated that the Jewish people were growing in population and were purchasing property in Egypt. They were no longer planning to return to the Promised Land. By planning his funeral in Israel, he was telling his people that their future was not to be in Egypt. It was to be in Eretz Yisrael. Rashi quotes the Midrash that states three different reasons why Yaakov wanted to be buried back home and not in Egypt, but does not mention this necessary concept, and designing a future for this eventual nation. I think the link to the last verse places a different idea to what is in Yaakov's mind.
- The first of Yaakov's final blessings was to promote Efrayim and Menashe to equal tribal status with Yaakov's sons. The blessing included the fact that when we bless our sons, we say that they should be like Efrayim and

Menashe... and not like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Why was this necessary? I yield to the words of the Abravanel, who asks a different question, and in so doing, answers this question as well. The Abravanel wants to know why this Chumash ends here, well into the Egyptian experience for our people. He states that all the family stories in B'reishit involve cases where the younger brother is favored over the older brother, and the result is disastrous. Hevel is favored over Kayin, and the result was murder. Yitzchak is favored over Yishmael, and the result was expulsion. Yaakov is favored over Eisav, resulting in attempted murder. Yosef is favored over his brothers, and that led to an enslavement. Now Efrayim is favored over Menashe, and there was no resulting hatred, jealousy, or envy. The Abravanel concludes that now we can move on to building a nation. I add that now we see a major B'racha that we wish for our sons: Family Harmony.

- The question of national leadership is decided when Yaakov blesses Yehuda and tells us that the future kings of Israel will come from his family line. Yaakov states that the whole family will unite under his dynasty of leaders. A further insightful discovery is pointed out to us by Prof. Nechamah Leibowitz. Up until this portion of the blessings, every time the Torah uses the term

IVRIM, Hebrews, the Targum translates that term in the Aramaic form of IVRIM. But now, after stating Yehuda as the leader of the Jewish people, the Targum begins to refer to the IVRIM as YEHUDIM; our name as a people now and forever more reflects the linkage to Yehuda. We are Yehudim, and this change occurred here in Yaakov's words.

- There is no doubt that in Yaakov's life, his most peaceful and pleasurable years are the last seventeen years of his life, those he spent in Egypt. Gone are the most trying and painful years involving Eisav, Lavan, and Dina's abduction. The Torah does not go into any details of these final years, but it is obvious. There is Shalom Bayit, peaceful harmony in the family. They are all together. No more brotherly rivalry. They are financially doing well. And we can conclude with our comprehension of the extreme blessing of this Shalom Bayit. Furthermore, we see the relationship Yaakov has with his grandchildren. The Rambam refers to Yaakov as Saba Yaakov. Avraham and Yitzchak definitely had a pleasant relationship with their grandchildren, but no one ever refers to them as a Saba, a grandfather. Only Yaakov attained that title in our literature.

- Did Yosef ever really forgive his brothers for the terrible way they treated him in his younger days? In

the simplest way of reading the narrative, we would say: yes, he did. But in his commentary on 50:16, Rashi points out that the brothers ate frequently at Yosef's house, in respect to their aging father, Yaakov. But after Yaakov's death, they never ate at Yosef's house ever again. This comment definitely leads us to conclude that a total forgiveness never came about. Yosef could act civilly and pleasantly to them, and yet could never erase the pain and difficulties that he had to experience because of their treatment of him. I can't fault Yosef at all for this lingering ill will. I can compliment Yosef from keeping these feelings concealed and in check for the rest of his life.

- We see that in the mourning process, a seven day mourning period was enacted. Our Sages direct us to observe the Shiva period, but say that it is Rabbinic and not Torah law. The first day only is ordained in the Torah. Not the seven day period. (Ibn Ezra). The loss of Yaakov was felt by the Egyptians as well. The Ramban writes that when Yaakov arrived in Egypt, it was after two years of the famine. And the famine stopped when Yaakov came. But immediately after Yaakov died, the famine resumed and completed its seven years ordeal. I assume that the Ramban arrived at this statement because, after Yaakov's death, Yosef said to his

brothers that he will sustain them (50:21). If there was no famine and they were financially doing well, there was no need for Yosef to sustain them. Hence, the Ramban's conclusion.

- The Shulchan Aruch ruled that if a person served as the Sandek at a family Brit Mila, he should not repeat as the Sandek at future circumcisions in that family. Too much Kavod. Ayin HaRa. Yet, on that page in the Code of Law, a commentary by the Yad Shaul disagrees with the Code. He proves his case by citing the Torah at the very end of this Parsha. It says that Yosef was blessed with many grandchildren, and the Torah reads that the grandchildren "were raised on Yosef's knees" (50:23). From this verse, the Yad Shaul concludes from that expression that Yosef was the Sandek for all his grandsons. I favor this Yad Shaul and permit a multiple performance by a Sandek within the same family.

- MIDRASH. Sotah 13b. Ultimately, Yosef was buried in Shechem, either because Yaakov gave him that city as a personal gift, or because his brother tribes wanted to make amends for their mistreatment of him in that very place, for it was there that they sold him.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. How many years did Yaakov live in Egypt? (47:28)
2. What was Yaakov's blessings to his two grandsons Efrayim and Menashe? (48:5)
3. Why didn't Yaakov recognize Efrayim and Menashe?
4. Which son was chosen to be the royal line of his tribe? (49:8)
5. Whom did Yosef request to bury him eventually in Eretz Yisrael? (50:25)

From Rashi

6. Why did Yaakov ask Yosef (and only Yosef) to bury him in Eretz Yisrael? (47:29)
7. Why is the act of burying a person considered an act of "kindness and truth" - CHESED VE'EMET? (47:29)
8. Who told Yosef that Yaakov had become seriously ill? (48:1)
9. According to the Midrash, why didn't Yaakov recognize Efrayim and Menashe? (48:8)
10. What kind of financial relationship did the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun have? (49:13)

From the Rabbis

11. When Yaakov came to Egypt, he intended to return to Eretz Yisrael after the famine was over. Why did Yaakov remain in Egypt for the rest of his life? (Ramban)

12. Why did Yaakov insist that Yosef take an oath to bury him in Eretz Yisrael? (S'forno)

13. As the firstborn, Reuven was entitled to receive a double portion of his father's estate, the Kehuna, and the Kingship. He was denied all three things. Who received these privileges? (Chapter 49)

Midrash

14. When Yaakov was ready to bless all his children, the sons said: SH'MA YISRAEL... Listen, Yisrael, our father, HaShem is our God, HaShem is one. What was Yaakov's response?

Haftara - Melachim Alef

15. How long was King David king?

Relationships

a) King David - Yoav ben Tz'ruya

b) Yehuda - Sheila

c) Reuven - Yosef

d) Korach - Moshe

e) Yocheved - Yehuda

ANSWERS

1. Seventeen years.

2. That Efrayim and Menashe would be elevated in status and become the heads of their own tribes among Bnei Yisrael.

3. Because Yaakov had become blind.

4. Yehuda

5. All of Bnei Yisrael.

6. Because, as viceroy, Yosef was the only one who had the authority to do it.

7. Because the deceased could never return the favor.

8. Probably Efrayim who was with Yaakov a great deal of the time.

9. Because Yaakov saw with the divine spirit (RU'ACH HAKODESH) that evil kings would come from each tribe.

10. Zevulun was a tribe of successful businessmen and would support Yissachar and enable them to learn Torah.

11. Because Hashem told him to stay in Egypt.

12. Because that was the only way Par'o would agree to let Yosef go and bury his father.

13. Yosef received the double portion.
Levi received the Kehuna. Yehuda
received Kingship.

14. BARUCH SHEIM K'VOD
MALCHUTO L'OLAM VA'ED.

15. 40 years

Relationships

a) Uncle & Nephew

b) Father & Son

c) Half-brothers

d) First Cousins

e) Niece & Uncle