



Parshat HaShavuah

ויחי

VAYECHI

“א טבת תשע”ד
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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

5:12

S”Z Kriat Shema

9:38

Sunset

5:31

Motzei
Shabbat

6:08



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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Sponsored in memory of Lana (Leah) D. Goldberg

CLOSED MINDED RABBI ALLAN HOUBEN

One of the most notable and immediately recognizable aspects of Parshat Vayechi is perhaps its opening. Unlike most parshiyot in the Torah, Vayechi does not start after a paragraph break; there is no space between the end of Parshat Vayigash and the beginning of Vayechi, which often makes it hard to find for inexperienced *ba’alei kriya*. Many exegetes ask why Vayechi is *stuma*, or closed?

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, famously explains that as a result of the death of Yaakov, which takes place towards the end of the parsha, “*nistimu eineihem v’libam shel Yisrael mi’tzarot ha’shibud*”—“the eyes and hearts of B’nei Yisrael were closed as a result of the hardships of the oppression.”

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in *Drash Moshe*, asks what are seemingly obvious questions about this approach:

- Isn’t Yaakov still alive at the beginning of the parsha?
- Didn’t the oppression that predated and accompanied the Egyptian enslavement of B’nei Yisrael begin after the death of Yosef, and not after the death of Yaakov?

Rav Moshe, in classic fashion, answers these questions and explains Rashi’s interpretation of the *parsha stuma* by refocusing our eyes on the bigger picture. B’nei Yisrael had settled in Goshen, a relative paradise of their own within Egypt—not unlike many large Jewish communities we know of today like Montoya Circle, Teaneck, Monsey, or New Square.

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STRENGTH IN NUMBERS LEAH AVNI ('14)

In this week's parsha, "Yaakov calls to his sons, and he said, 'Gather together and I will tell you what will befall you in the end of days'" (49:1).

Why does Yaakov tell his sons to gather together?

When he asks them to gather together, Yaakov wants them to have *achdut*, unity, amongst themselves. The only way for there to be redemption for the descendants of Yaakov is if the brothers are unified.

Later on in the parsha, the brothers go to Yosef and tell him that their father told them to apologize to him. The Torah never records Yaakov telling his sons to apologize to Yosef. The Sh'la explains that what the brothers mean is that gathering together allows the brothers to have a deep love for each other that comes from unity. Having them ask for forgiveness comes from their love of each other.

We can apply this lesson nowadays. Even though people are different physically and fundamentally, we should learn from Yaakov and his sons to come together and show our *achdut* as Am Yisrael. With this *achdut*, we can have genuine love for one another that will create a peaceful society.

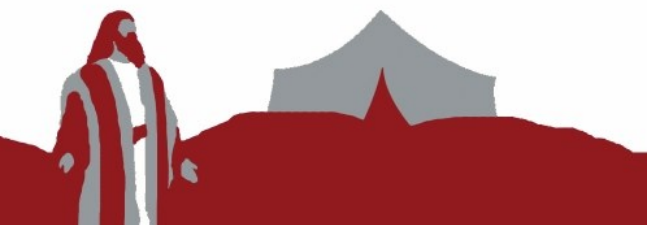
A FITTING CONCLUSION ILAN GRITZMAN ('16)


Sefer Bereishit opens with the creation of the world and ends with Yosef's last words to his brothers, followed by his subsequent death. While visiting the house of Potiphar, Yosef is described as "*Hashem ito*"—Hashem is with him (Bereishit 39:3). According to Rashi, Hashem's name is constantly resting on his lips, which Yosef demonstrates in many situations throughout this sefer.

For example, when trying to convince the wife of Potiphar that he cannot be pressured by her temptations, Yosef says that giving in would be a sin against Hashem. Also, prior to explaining and interpreting the dreams of the baker and cupbearer, Yosef tells them that Hashem gives the interpretations. Even standing before Pharaoh, Yosef says that only Hashem can answer Pharaoh's request.

These episodes explain how Yosef could continue through life, rising up the ranks in Egypt, despite being split apart from his family. Yosef's faith in Hashem illustrates how he is able to forgive his brothers, though they hated him and sold him to Egypt. When Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, he gives them a synopsis of the 22 years in which he had not seen them. In that synopsis, he mentions four events that Hashem enabled to happen.

In jail and before Pharaoh, Yosef views himself as a messenger of Hashem, and that belief allows him to forgive his brothers for their mistreatment towards him. He concludes by saying, "*Elokim chashva l'tova*"— "Hashem meant it for good" (50:20).





Gritzman continued

Another proof of Yosef's commitment towards Hashem is that he always identifies himself as someone from Eretz Yisrael. Whether in prison or in front of Pharaoh, he always shows his feelings of loyalty and patriotism towards his homeland. Chazal add that his final words constitute a request of his brothers to bury him in Eretz Yisrael, despite the fact that he had not returned home since he was seventeen years old. As someone who believed in the Creator of the Universe, he appreciated and treasured the land that Hashem promised to the Jewish people.

During his adolescence, Yosef learns about the early events in Sefer Bereishit, such as the creation of the world, from his father. This leads him to firmly believe in Hashem and to have a love for his homeland—an attachment that remains within him throughout his entire life. He also strongly believes that some day Hashem will return the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael. Yosef's strong belief in Hashem makes him a paragon of faith and a role model for future generations.

(adapted from torahweb.org)

NO EXCUSES

SHANEE MARKOVITZ ('17)

In this week's parsha, one of our most revered patriarchs, Yaakov, faces his death. As one of his last actions before his death, Yaakov makes a final request. Yaakov has an unflagging determination to be buried in Chevron and nowhere else. He hands this task to his second youngest son, Yosef. Yosef agrees to Yaakov's plea and promises to bury his father in Chevron. Yosef's words alone do not seem to quell Yaakov's worries. Therefore, not only does Yaakov ask Yosef but also the other eleven sons.

When looking at this part of the story on a superficial level, one can argue that Yaakov simply wants to be completely sure that his dying wish will be fulfilled.

However, if one looks beneath the surface, it is possible that there is a lack of trust between Yaakov and his sons. If Yaakov has chosen Yosef to fulfill his dying wish, then why would Yaakov feel the need to go out of his way to secure his wish by asking all of his sons?

This question can be answered in one word: excuses. Yaakov is scared that challenges will arise in his sons' lives that will push them to not follow their father's request. Even after Yaakov makes Yosef swear, Yaakov is still worried that he will make excuses because it will simply be too difficult.

This can easily apply to our day-to-day lives. Everyone makes excuses. Whether it is not doing homework because of an important activity, not sleeping over at a friend's house because the drive is a bit too far, or not going to shul on Shabbat because of our exhaustion from a busy week, we justify our shortcomings unabashedly.

Many times our excuses are even valid and acceptable! Nevertheless, an excuse is an excuse. If there is a will to do something, even the most reasonable excuses won't get in the way. For example, if one is dying to go to a concert, he will finish his homework in advance, put more gas in the car, and maybe even walk the extra mile. The same should be true with doing acts of kindness or our spiritual growth. If it means getting up to pray even when we are tired, or driving a little farther to visit someone in the hospital, everyone should strive to reach their capabilities and avoid any excuses that may threaten to get in the way.



While they were in Egypt, a foreign country, they still had the “comforts of home” and didn’t really feel like they were in *galut*, in exile. They didn’t realize that they were subject to foreign rule and everything they had was contingent on the benevolence of a foreign king, a fickle Pharaoh.

While their initial descent to Egypt had been to sustain their lives, in the end this would not turn out to be a pleasant trip down the Nile, but more of a torturous crucible. Being under foreign rule, even in the best of circumstances, is still exile and carries with it the wariness of being an outsider—a stranger in a strange land.

Unfortunately, Yaakov’s sons failed to realize or fully comprehend the dangers and realities of life in exile, so when the oppression and enslavement ultimately began they were shocked—how could this happen to us in such a land of freedom?

Therefore, our parsha begins *stuma*, closed, just as their eyes and hearts were closed to the harsh realities of life in exile. Had they understood where they were and what it meant before Yaakov died, perhaps the narrative might have been altered. Yaakov hesitated to leave the land to be known as Eretz Yisrael because he had extensive experience with exile and living under foreign control.

He feared what would happen to his family if they were to move to Egypt and only agreed to go because Hashem coaxed and reassured him that He would go into exile with Yaakov. No sooner had Yaakov died then the picture began to clear; after all, the brothers couldn’t even leave Egypt to bury their father without permission from Pharaoh.

We are in a similar situation—we too can fall prey to the potential blindness of our *parsha stuma*. Thank G-d, we have wonderful lives here in America. We have religious freedom. We live in relative peace. We have beautiful homes boasting manicured lawns, swimming pools, and tennis courts. We have wonderful schools, shuls, and communities. But, with all of this, we are still in exile, we are still subject to the whims and the rule of others.

We need to keep our eyes and our hearts open. We need to keep the desire for a return to our homeland always in our hearts and in our prayers so that we constantly remember where we belong. We should see in each day the potential for Mashiach’s arrival so that we and our brothers, B’nei Yisrael, may soon achieve the goal of our people, Am Yisrael, in our land, Eretz Yisrael, under our law, Torat Yisrael, *b’mheira b’yameinu!*

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