



Parshas Vayechi

For the week ending 12 Teves 5758
9 & 10 January 1998

Overview

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 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.

Insights

LIVING IT UP!

"And Yaakov lived..."

How would you define "living it up?"

Going to all night bashes? Being driven around town in a chauffeur-driven limo while you sip champagne, gazing from the windows into the envious eyes of those poor pedestrians marching to their 9 to 5 jobs?

Life at "the top" looks glamorous from the outside, but you only have to look at the number of drug addictions, nervous breakdowns and broken marriages amongst the "glitterati" to realize that "living it up" has its downside.

What's the Jewish concept of "living it up?"

Last summer, on our yearly pilgrimage to Marks & Spencer, my wife and I were wheeling our two year-old down those hallowed aisles. We were struck by how many people would come over, coo and say "Look! A baby!" When we walk through the streets of Jerusalem we spend most of our time avoiding collisions with all the *other* strollers and prams.

One of the most striking facets of a Jewish lifestyle is how one's daily life is defined by the momentous moments of man's brief walk on this planet. The cycle of life literally blooms and blossoms all around you: A *kiddush*, a *bris mila*, redeeming a first-born, an engagement party, a bar mitzvah, a wedding and the week-long celebration afterwards, accompanying a deceased to his place of rest, visiting the mourners.

The daily life-cycle of the Jew is replete with the cycle of life itself. From the cradle to the grave. Sharing joy and sharing sadness.

The first words of this week's Parsha are "And Yaakov lived." From the time Yaakov came down to Egypt there was literally a population explosion in the numbers of the Jewish People. Within a mere 17 years, Yaakov saw their numbers swell from a mere 70 souls to many thousands. As Yaakov was the "zeide" of all these offspring, his entire day must have been filled with the celebrations — a birth, a *bris mila*, a *kiddush*, a wedding — of this teeming multitude.

Now that's really living it up!

"AH, BUT I WAS SO MUCH OLDER THEN..."

Yosef saw that his father (Yaakov) was placing his right hand on Ephraim's (his younger son's) head ... And Yosef said to his father, 'Not so father, for this is the firstborn ... But his father refused saying 'I know, my son, I know.'" (48:17-19)

A famous writer once wrote: "When I was sixteen, my parents didn't know much about the world, but when I got to twenty I was amazed at how much they had learned in those four years."

The Midrash says that the seeming redundancy of "I know, my son, I know" was Yaakov's way of telling Yosef that there were many hidden things of which Yosef was unaware. If it was Yaakov's wish that Ephraim receive the primary blessing, then this was sufficient reason in itself.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

☎ 972-2-581-0315

☎ 972-2-581-2890

✉ ohr@virtual.co.il

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

☎ 1-212-213-3100

☎ 1-212-213-8717

✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

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

☎ 1-905-886-5730

☎ 1-905-886-6065

✉ Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for Torah Weekly — Please contact us for details.

Parshas Vayechi — 12 Teves 5758, 9 & 10 January 1998

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

WARGAMES 1

“...With my sword and with my bow.” (48:22)

“...With mitzvos and good deeds.” (Midrash)

The strategy of a conventional war is to attack the enemy first with a long range weapon — like a bow. If that fails and he gets close, then you resort to the sword.

This is true only in conventional warfare. But if you're talking about a spiritual enemy, then things are different.

From the order of the verse — the *sword* preceding the *bow* — it is clear that the Torah is not talking about any enemy, rather a person's life-long enemy — his own selfishness.

The nature of person is to be self-centered. A baby starts with no other thought than his own gratification and employs all available means to gain his desires. Only after many long years can a person eventually overcome his natural selfishness.

In the constant battle with his self-centeredness, a person starts off with hand-to-hand combat, using the *sword* at close quarters to oust the natural impulse for selfishness. However, even when one has beaten back the enemy till he is out of range of the *sword*, one still needs to keep the enemy's head down by constantly firing salvos of mitzvos and positive actions from the *bow*.

WARGAMES 2

“...With my sword and with my bow.” (48:22)

Why is it so important to pray with a *minyan* (quorum of ten)? Doesn't G-d hear prayer anyway?

The difference between praying with a *minyan* and praying alone can be explained as follows:

Praying with a *minyan* is like using a sword in battle. Even if you are not particularly accurate, the sword used in close combat can be a very effective weapon. Similarly in prayer, even if one's prayer is not 100% precise, it will be effective.

A bow, on the other hand, is only effective if it hits the bull's eye or close to it. Otherwise, the arrow merely falls to the ground uselessly. When someone prays by himself he is like an archer. If he is able to aim every word and thought with total accuracy, his prayer will be effective, but if he takes his mind off the target for an instant, his prayer will fall by the wayside like a misspent arrow.

GENERATION GAP

“...In you shall all Yisrael bless, saying ‘May G-d make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.’” (48:20)

On Friday nights throughout the Jewish world, parents bless their children with the words of this verse — “May G-d make you like Ephraim and 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 and Moshe?”

If there is a “generation gap,” that gap is the discrepancy between the spiritual attainments of one generation and its predecessor.

From that moment of supreme encounter with the Divine at Sinai, the march of history *spiritually* has been relentlessly and consistently downward.

The reason that we bless our children to be like Ephraim and Menashe can be found in what Yaakov says to Yosef a few verses earlier — “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 their uncles Reuven and Shimon — the level of the previous generation. They hadn't descended the spiritual ladder in any way.

Thus, on Friday nights, parents bless their children that they should absorb all the spiritual attainments of the preceding generation and escape that downward spiritual spiral — *the generation gap*.

Haftorah: Kings I 2:1-12

THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

As in the Parsha where we read the final will and testament of Yaakov, so the Haftorah deals with the final words of King David.

David commands his 12 year-old son, Shlomo, to act as a man of wisdom and piety despite his tender years, and to guard and uphold the Torah. David promises Shlomo that if he serves Hashem in truth with all his heart and soul, he will merit that all the kings of Israel will descend from him. In the same way that Yaakov illuminated the path to make his children into a people, King

David illuminates the path that will make Shlomo the father of Kings.

However, there is a striking difference between the death-bed scene of Yaakov and that of David. When Yaakov took leave of this world, he summoned all 12 of his sons, whereas David calls for only Shlomo, for he alone was a comfort to him and worthy to inherit the Davidic line.

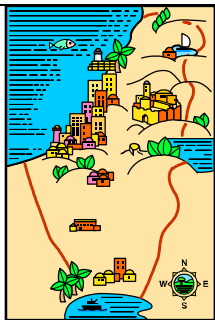
Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

Sources:

Living It Up! Baal HaTurim, Rabbi Reuven Subar
WarGames 1 - Kehilas Yitzhak in Mayana shel Torah
WarGames 2 - Meshech Chochma
Generation Gap - Rabbi Michael Schoen in Prisms

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



MADE FOR EACH OTHER

The unique relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel is expressed in two Biblical passages:

“This inheritance is suited to me” (*Tehillim* 16:6)

“I clothed myself in righteousness and it clothed me.” (*Iyov* 29:14)

Sometimes there is a person who is of pleasant appearance but his garments are unsightly, and sometimes there is a person who is unsightly but his garments are of a pleasant appearance. The People of Israel and the Land of Israel, however, are both pleasant and suited to each other.

Midrash Rabba Bamidbar 23:6

Parshas Vayechi

Torah Weekly is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America . Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message “sub weekly {your full name}” to listproc@virtual.co.il

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.

For the week ending 12 Teves 5758, 9 & 10 January 1998