

| PORTION | DATE | HEB DATE | TORAH | NEVIIM | KETUVIM |
|---------|-------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Vayechi | 30 Dec 2017 | 12 Tevet 5778 | Gen. 47:28-50:26 | 1King 2:1-12 | John 13:1-19 |

This week's parashat concludes the Book of Genesis with 2200 years of history. As we conclude the Book of Genesis, we are filled with joy when Joseph finally meets his beloved father, Jacob and brings his family to Egypt, and places them in Goshen. We are also saddened by the death of Jacob after blessing his children.

Similar to the parashat Chayei Sarah (the Life of Sarah), this week's parashat focuses on the events that occurred after Jacob's death. The Sages explain that "we attain true life when our ideals live on in those who come after us."¹ That the test of true life comes only after death. Thus, as long as "we are physically alive, it is not at all clear if we are truly "alive"; the test of true life comes only after death. If our descendants remain true to the ideals we have imparted to them, it then becomes retroactively clear that we were also "alive" during our lifetimes. If not, then it follows that even while alive, we were not really "alive."² The parashat starts with "And Jacob lived," which indicates that he enjoyed a full and happy life for 17 (2238-2255 AC) years in Egypt as his children followed his ideals. Thus, the Torah teaches that Jacob was truly "alive" during his lifetime. Hence, the Talmud asserts that "Jacob did not die!"³

Why did the Scripture mention "17 years?" The Torah explains that Joseph was sold to slavery at the age of 17. He then stood in front of Pharaoh when he was 30 years old. There was 7 years of plenty and 2 years of famine. Thus when Joseph met his father, he was 39 years old. If we subtract 17 years (from Joseph as he was with his father for 17 years) from 39, we get 22. This was the same number that Jacob was gone from his father.

Another question arises, why did not Joseph contact his father to let him know that he was alive while he lived in Egypt? He could have sent a messenger to his father when he came to power, yet he didn't. The Midrash teaches that the brothers and Joseph made covenant that they will not reveal the incident that led to selling of Joseph to their father. The Sages teach that Isaac knew what happened to Joseph, but he did not reveal such revelation to Jacob. Because Hashem chose not to reveal to Jacob. The Torah does not say if Joseph spent times often with his beloved father. Instead, it seems to say Joseph avoided being alone with his father and he did not spend too much time with him. The Sages says Joseph was afraid that his father would ask him in detail when he went to Dothan to look for his brother and subsequently disappeared.

Jacob is sometimes called as Israel or vice versa. When the Torah says, "Jacob" that means he was doing the worldly things, not the will of Hashem. When Jacob is called "Israel", he was doing the will of Hashem. As we read in Chapter 47:29, "Draw near did the days for Israel to die," indicates Jacob recognized this as the will of Hashem, therefore he was righteous here and called as "Israel." Thus, he knew he was getting closer to death.

¹ The Book of Genesis, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, p. 312

² Ibid, p. 312

³ BT, Ta'anit 5b

Similar verse is also found in chapter 48:1, "Then called Jacob to his sons...and I will tell you that which will happen to you in the End of Days." Then in verse 2, "Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob and listen to Israel." The Sages teach that Jacob who was a prophet and *tzadik* (righteous) were given knowledge for the End of Days and wanted to pass on the knowledge to his sons which was not the way of Hashem. For this reason, he is known here as Jacob. Furthermore, Hashem made Jacob forget "the End of Days." In verse 2, he is called as "Israel" as he blessed his sons for the blessing channel was open from the father to his children as then as is now.

Now, back to chapter 47:29, Jacob says to Joseph, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes," means Jacob is asking in a very nice manner. He then, asks Joseph to bury him at the cave of Machpelah where Abraham and Isaac along with their wives were buried. Jacob's family lived in Goshen, away from Egyptians. Wouldn't it have been better if he is buried next to his kinsman rather than traveling a long distance to Machpelah during the summer? He could have asked to be buried in Goshen and his body carried out during the Exodus. Joseph agrees by saying, "I my will do as you have said." Jacob then says, "Swear to me." And Joseph swore. Jacob then bows down to him.

The Sages teach that it was second year of famine when Jacob and his family came to Egypt. When Jacob entered Egypt, the famine stopped immediately and the Pharaoh would have him buried in Egypt for the merit of his presence would continue to bring blessings to the country. Therefore, he was afraid that upon his death, they would bury him in Egypt and worship him as their god. Second, Jacob, being a prophet, knew that the soil beneath his body would swarm with lice when Hashem punishes Egypt and he did not want to feel them. Lastly, he knew that the *tzadik* who died outside the Land of Israel "have to undergo the painful experience of rolling through underground channels until reaching the Land of Israel, where the Resurrection will occur."⁴

Now, why did Jacob say, "Swear to me" to Joseph? Jacob realized Joseph, as a viceroy of Egypt could not leave the country without Pharaoh's permission. The Talmud describes encounters between Joseph and Pharaoh. Pharaoh wanted Joseph to be the viceroy of Egypt for his wisdom. However, the ministers of the court asserted that a slave who did not know the languages of men could not lead them. Then the Pharaoh said that Joseph will be tested for languages the following day.

That night, an angel, Gabriel came to Joseph to teach him the languages of man. When he could not understand, the angel added (י) to his name becoming Yohoseph. The following day, he was tested and went up 70 stairs leading to the Pharaoh. Joseph, once close to the Pharaoh, he began to speak in Hebrew which the Pharaoh could not understand. Pharaoh who could not understand Hebrew, made him swear not to reveal such information. For this reason, the Pharaoh declared that there was no one who is wiser than Joseph.

After the death of Jacob, Joseph went to the Pharaoh and asked him for leave. Pharaoh refused. Joseph, then reminded him the promise made 17 years earlier. Angrily, the Pharaoh allowed him to leave Egypt to bury Jacob in the land of Canaan. Thus he said, "Go up, and bury your abba, even as he made you swear."⁵

⁴ The Book of Genesis, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, p. 312

⁵ Genesis 50:6

Jacob has already been living in Egypt for 17 years and he is watching Joseph's greatness. All of the other brothers are adjusting, and multiplying. Judah, who has arrived in Egypt first, opened up a place of study, so that they will have a place for their spiritual fulfillment – a Yeshiva. This is why the Scripture says, "And he sent Judah before him to Goshen."

Jacob knew the time of his death was approaching and called for Joseph who came with his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim. "Then Israel saw Joseph's sons and said, 'who are these?'"⁶ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age.⁷ He was able to recognize images but he did not know who they were. So Joseph brings his two sons before him, hugging them and kissing them, and he begins with a blessing. But before that, he crosses his hands, right hand over Ephraim and left hand over Menashe. He then began to bless them. Even though he was blessing Joseph's sons, he was indirectly blessing Joseph as well, because what greater blessing does a father have than when his sons are blessed.

"And when Joseph saw that his abba laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him and he held up his father's hand... And his *abba* refused, "I know, my son, I know."⁸ He is saying that he can see the future because he possessed divine inspiration, and tells him that the younger one will become greater. "So he blessed them that day saying, 'In you shall Israel bless.'"⁹ Meaning, throughout all of the coming generations, every father who blesses his son, as is customarily done on Erev Shabbat till this very day, "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe" shall the son be blessed.

Then he says that these two sons of yours are like sons to me, not like grandsons. He then claims Menashe and Ephraim as his children making 13 tribes rather than 12 tribes in front of all his children. As we see later, when they entered the Promised Land, they entered as two separate tribes along with their brothers. Why? What was so special about them? Joseph asks his father who said, "They are worthy of being leaders in the nation of Israel just like the rest of my sons." They were not just grandsons, as Jacob had many grandchildren from all of his other children, but says to him, "I am elevating them to an equal level among my sons."

Jacob was intimately familiar with the jealousy among brothers. He saw that when Joseph received the striped coat, something the other brothers did not have, the brothers became jealous of him, and could not speak of him in peace. And here, he sees Ephraim and Menashe standing before him, so he makes the younger precede the older ones; he elevates him and makes an official declaration, that the younger one is greater than the older one. Yet, Menashe was happy for him. He was not consumed with jealousy by asking, 'why is he greater than me? I am the oldest and deserve more' and so on. Instead, he says, 'He is my brother. I'm happy for him. If he is happy, then I am happy.'

The Midrash teaches that Jacob knew Menashe chose to oversee the work of his father whereas Ephraim studied at the Yeshiva. Thus Jacob says, "When such unity and brotherhood exist among brothers, they are worthy of being promoted to the level of the tribes. I want these to be among my sons, so that everyone will have a personal example to follow, that teaches the true meaning of unity and love among brothers."

⁶ Genesis 48:8

⁷ Genesis 48:10

⁸ Genesis 48:17, 19

⁹ Genesis 48:20

The Sages teach that for every generation in which the Temple has not been built, it's as though it has been destroyed. We know that the second Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred. And the first Temple was destroyed on account of: idol worship, improper relations, and murder. Hashem sent them out into a 70-year exile and then they returned. They corrected themselves, repented, and then returned.

But now, it has been about 2000 years of exile, and we have not yet resolved our problems of baseless hatred. Therefore, any generation that the Temple was not built in, it's as if it was destroyed in it. Because if we had corrected ourselves, it would have been rebuilt, the Messiah would have come.

So how can we truly attain pure love? Menashe could have said, "I am the firstborn! Why did they make Ephraim greater than me?" The answer is, true love. The Kabbalists explain that we, as Israel are responsible for one another, but they are also responsible one within another. We all have different parts, but they are one unit.

When we go through an inner, spiritual transformation through Yeshua, our Messiah, then our souls are interconnected. A person who reflects upon this principle, and sees his brother, not necessarily his biological brother, rather, anyone who belongs to *kol Yisrael*, knows that he is me, and I am him, as our souls are all interconnected; we are one body.

Just like our Sages teach that when a person takes a hammer and by mistake, hits his thumb instead of the nail, the other hand will never grab the hammer and begin to hit the other hand with it. After all, as every sound person understands that it is one body, they are both my hands.

So it's true that a mistake was made, but if I hit the other hand back, I would be hitting myself! Same goes for how every person should feel towards his fellow... a man towards his wife, a worker and his boss, neighbors, every person in every situation, knows that he is me, and I am him.

The idea of loving your neighbor like yourself is manifested practically, because just as I take care of myself and want to be happy, I want him to be happy as well. Once we attain such a level, we can be elevated and strive even higher, to the perfection of Menashe, who is happy in his brother's welfare, as though I received this honor myself. And when such brotherhood exists among siblings, the father is happy too. When Hashem sees the love between us, and the unity among us, there's no doubt that only through this, will we merit to attain a complete redemption.

For this reason, he promoted Ephraim over Menashe who was delighted and happy for Ephraim for such distinction. Joseph's brothers who saw this was ashamed for their hatred toward Joseph, and embarrassed. They realized and understood the meaning of true love by the display shown by Menashe to Ephraim, and they did not dispute their father. Jacob, knowing that his children finally understood the meaning of true love, he began to bless his children in the next chapter.