

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vayechi	22 Dec 2018	14 Tevet 5779	Gen. 47:28-50:26	1King 2:1-12	John 13:1-19

Our parashat starts with “*va.ye.chi* Ya’akov” (וַיַּחֲיוּ יַעֲקֹב) which means “And Ya’akov lived.” The word *va.ye.chi* has a numerical value of 34 (10+8+10+6). It means Ya’akov had the best of his life for 34 years. We can deduce 34 years from 17 years (Gen. 37:2) when Yosef was with him before he was sold to Mitzrayim, and the 17 years with Yosef in Mytzrayim before he died. (Gen. 47:28) Therefore, Ya’akov said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my *chayim* (life) been, and I have not attained to the days of the years of the *chayim* of my *avot* (fathers) in the days of their pilgrimage.” (Gen. 47:9)

The Torah explains that Yosef 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 Yosef met his father, he was 39 years old. If we subtract 17 years (from Yosef as he was with his father for 17 years) from 39, we get 22. This was the same number that Ya’akov was gone from his father, Yitzchak.

Many believe Ya’akov means ‘deceiver’ because he took his brother Esav of his birthrights and blessings. We have discussed Ya’akov’s name in detail previously. However, let us again refresh our minds the meaning of Ya’akov. When he was born, “his hand took hold on Esav’s heel,” thus he was named Ya’akov (Gen. 25:26) which means “heel”. Ya’akov purchased birthright for the red pottages, said Esav “See, I am at the point of death: so what profit shall this *bechora* (birthright) be to me?” (Gen 25:32) Ya’akov also did not lie to his father Yitzchak during the blessing. The translation of Hebrew into English is difficult as the Hebrew language does not use grammatical syntaxes, i.e. comma, period, etc... Therefore, when Yitzchak asked, “Who are you, my son?” (Gen. 27:18) Ya’akov replied, “It is I. Esav your firstborn.” As we can see, depending where we place ‘period’, the sentence structure changes. Therefore, when Ya’akov said, “It is I”, he meant he is Ya’akov. “Esav your firstborn” is your first son.

Then Yitzchak said, “The voice is Ya’akov’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav.” The sages teach that Ya’akov and Esav had same voice. Therefore, Yitzchak was not questioning the voice, rather he was pointing out the difference of their treatment to him. However, Yitzchak did not question Ya’akov further as if he was satisfied. He drew his own conclusion based on physical examinations, smell of the clothes and the textures of the skin. (Gen. 27:18-27)

The Zohar explains that Ya’akov means “smallness”, whereas Yisrael means “greatness.” In the Book of Amos 7:2 says, “How shall Ya’akov stand? For he is small.” However, the selling of birthright by Esav to his younger brother has caused Ya’akov the greatness. Thus, our verse “And Ya’akov lived” instead of “And Yisrael lived.” Paul said in his letter in the Book of Romans, “Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24) Paul continues in verse 25, “Thanks to Elohim, Yehushua our Master! So then, with the mind I myself truly serve the Torah of Elohim, but with the flesh the torah of sin.” The Zohar, as we have learned that Hashem wants us to have “strong mind and weak body”, meaning spiritually we are to be stronger by performing the Will of Hashem and not following the evil inclination which is the physical desires of our body.

“The time drew near that Yisrael must die.” (Gen. 47:29) The Talmud<sup>1</sup> says, “The righteous in their deaths are called living.” We are all sojourners on this world, thus “our days are like a shadow, and there is no hope,” (1Chr. 29:15) meaning our days here on this earth are fleeting and without substance. That being said, similar to the parashat Chayei Sarah, this week’s parashat focuses on the events that occurred after Ya’akov’s death. The sages explain that we attain true life when our ideals live on to the generations after us. When they do so, then we were also “alive” during our life time.

We are to ask another question: why did Yosef not contact his father to let him know that he was alive while he lived in Egypt? The Midrash explains that they made a covenant amongst the brothers including Yosef that they were not to reveal the selling of Yosef. The Midrash goes further by saying that Yitzchak knew what transpired, but he did not say anything to Ya’akov because Hashem did not reveal the sale of Yosef to Ya’akov. That being said, the Torah hints that Ya’akov knew or at least suspect what transpired in Dothan. Such hint can be found in this week’s parashat as it says, “Yahudah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, you have gone up.” (Gen. 49:9) Again, syntax is everything. Here is another way of understanding, “Yahudah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey [of] my son you have gone up.”

“And the time drew near that Yisrael must die: and he called his son Yosef.” (Gen. 47:29) Why did he call for Yosef and made him swear that his body be buried in the cave of Machpelah? Ya’akov saw prophetically the difficulty of Yosef to leave Mitzrayim for burial. The Pharaoh knew that the favor of Hashem was with Ya’akov for the famine stopped when he entered Mitzrayim as well as that Hashem was with Yosef for his country to grow and become the strongest nation in the world. As such, Ya’akov knew that the Mitzrim (Egyptians) would worship him as their god and keep him in their land. Therefore, Ya’akov prevented that by having Yosef swear in a covenant.

In chapter 48 of Genesis, we read Ya’akov taking Efrayim and Menashsheh, two sons of Yosef and makes them to two tribes. The sages explain that Hashem came to Ya’akov “at Luz in the land of Canaan.” (v. 3) “And I will make you into a congregation of nations.” (v. 4) The sages continue, “Hashem told me that there would be two sons after the birth of Benjamin. And my children will inherit the land. But in reality, I did not have other children after Benjamin. Therefore, I understood from Hashem that one of my children will split to two tribes. And this gift I am giving it to you. And your children will become their own tribe.”

Now, we come to a very difficult subject of burial. In this week’s parashat, there are two burials, one for Ya’akov and the other is Yosef. In both instances, they were both buried. Ya’akov calls for Yosef and said, “Do not bury me in Mitzrayim” under oath. (Gen. 47:29) As that was not enough Ya’akov made Yosef, “Swear to me.” (Gen. 47:31) We learn from here that there are two levels of promise, one for oath (promise) and the other for swear (covenant).

On February 2003, the space shuttle Columbia exploded during re-entry killing all six astronauts. One of the astronauts who was killed was Ilan Ramon. His son Assaf Ramon, an Israeli fighter pilot was killed during a routine training flight in 2009. Rona Ramon, the widow of Ilan died of pancreatic cancer in 2018. In an attempt to prevent another funeral, she decided to have her body cremated.<sup>2</sup> She did not want another burial her children to go through. The surviving children wanted her ashes to be buried. However, the chief Rabbi of Ashkenzi in Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) refused for the burial of ashes.

<sup>1</sup> BT, Berachos 18a

<sup>2</sup> [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

When the body is cremated and doesn't get buried, the *ruach* will never have a rest. The Kabbalah explains that the only time the *ruach* can have a rest is when the body returns to the ground as said in the Book of Ecclesiastes<sup>3</sup> says, "Then shall the dust [body] return to the earth as it was: and the *ruach* shall return to Elohim who gave it." Also, in the Book of Genesis<sup>4</sup> says, "for dust you are, and to dust shall you return." Therefore, burying the dead is an obligation, not a recommendation. Not only that, the only time a soul starting to have rest is from the grave. Because the body has a separate *nefesh* (bodily soul) that also receives judgment. That is why Yosef hung onto his mother's grave on the way to Mitzrayim. King Shaul went to the grave of Eliyahu for advice, and their journey to Babylon. Because a part of the *ruach* remains in the body until the Redemption.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:19