



PARSHAT VAYECHI - Hallmarks of Hope: Yaakov's Eternal Final Words

THE SEALED PARSHAH: HOPE AMID EXILE

Two fascinating points characterise the beginning of *Parshat Vayechi*. Firstly, the name of the *parshah*, which means life, is paradoxical for a *parshah* that revolves around the death of a revered forefather. Secondly, unique among all the parshiyot of the Torah, *Parshat Vayechi* is characterised as a *parashah stumah*, a sealed parshah, because of the absence of the customary spacing in the Torah scroll between the end of Parshat Vayigash and the beginning of Parshat Vayechi.

Rashi, in his first explanation, interprets the closed nature of the *parshah* to reflect the emotional state of the Jewish people after Yaakov Avinu's passing: 'The eyes and hearts of the Jewish people were sealed' from the pain of the enslavement that began at that juncture. It was at this point, when Yaakov asked his sons to make an oath that they would bury him in Eretz Yisrael, that they realised that it would be their generation through whom the prophecy of exile would be fulfilled.

The Be'er Basadeh (Rabbi Meir Danon, Rav of Sarajevo, d. 1854) expands on this idea, looking at the reason that gaps are given in the Torah altogether. Elsewhere (Vayikra 1:1), Rashi explains that the gaps represent the time that Hashem gave to Moshe to reflect and pause between one subject and the next. This is a key component of the learning process; one cannot simply rush forward but must contemplate what has been taught.

Preceding this *parshah*, however, there is no gap, reflecting their inability to consider the previous era and the lessons that they could carry over to the coming period. Without

room to pause and reflect, they were left confused and in a sense of pain.

A second, very different explanation given by Rashi is that this *parshah* is closed because although Yaakov had wanted to reveal the *keitz*, the time of the final redemption, Heaven momentarily concealed this knowledge from him.

Possibly, with these two interpretations, Rashi is opening the door to the fact that this *parshah* is not depressive, but quite the opposite. From the advent of the first exile, the Torah conveys to us that there will always be a redemption, a possibility of hope. Indeed, the Kli Yakar explains that the reason that Yaakov was Divinely prevented from disclosing the *keitz* was to allow hope for every generation that they could merit the coming of Mashiach. The concealment of redemption ensures that every generation lives with the possibility of imminent deliverance, preserving the dynamic of yearning and striving for continued spiritual elevation.

SHIMSHON'S PRAYER

Yaakov's blessing to Dan underscores the tribe of Dan's self-perception as the lowest of the tribes. Dan is compared to a serpent lying on the path, attacking the enemy by stealth and their role in the desert was to bring up the rear of the Camp of Israel. Surprisingly, though, his blessing also describes him as equivalent to the 'foremost of the tribes of Israel', and in Moshe Rabbeinu's blessings at the very end of the Torah he is even compared to a lion, the symbol of the tribe of Yehudah, from whom the Davidic kings would descend. Similarly, in the building of the Mishkan, Dan is once again placed with Yehudah: the

two overseers for the project were Betzalel, from the tribe of Yehudah, and Ohaliav, from the tribe of Dan.

According to the commentaries, the image of the serpent in this blessing is a direct reference to Shimshon, one of the most famous heroes of the Book of Judges, a member of the tribe of Dan. Shimshon's final act, pulling down the pillars of the Philistine temple after his tragic capture, was a moment of both destruction and spiritual elevation. Rashi explains that Shimshon, blinded and bound, called out to Hashem with the plea, 'Remember me and strengthen me just this once', and he was indeed granted that temporary redemption.

The final verse of this blessing emphasises Dan's prayer for eternal salvation: '*lishuatcha kiviti Hashem*—To Your salvation I hope, O Lord'. Rav Moshe Shapira observes that this is the first time that the four-letter name of Hashem (*Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei*) appears in the Torah since the middle of *Parshat Vayeishev*. This represents the fact that Hashem's intimate involvement in the Jewish people was somewhat lacking during their time in exile. Now, however, in his allusion to Shimshon's prayer at the end of his tormented life, Yaakov encapsulated the idea that salvation emerges from faith in Hashem even in the depths of despair. Throughout the echoes and the pain of exile, the only thing that keeps our hope alive is the understanding that we have no one to turn to for salvation other than Hashem.

LEGACY AND CONTINUITY

Yaakov's final words to his children do not seem to be words of hope and encouragement, as we might have expected, but are a stern warning to his sons to

bury him in *Me'arat Hamachpelah*. Yaakov reiterates that their family had purchased this burial-plot at a high price from Ephron the Hittite and that their ancestors are buried there. What is the significance of this insistence of clearly reiterating where he should be buried and how the cave came into the family's original possession? Rav Elie Munk (d. 1981) interprets this emphasis on the burial site as a directive to the future wandering of the Jewish people: despite their sojourn in Egypt and elsewhere during subsequent exiles, they must always remember their true homeland. Their connection to Eretz Yisrael serves as a beacon, reminding future generations of their ultimate destiny and spiritual anchor.

A related idea can be found in our Sages' enigmatic statement that 'Yaakov Avinu did not die' (Talmud Bavli Taanit 5b). While Yaakov's physical death is undeniable, Rav Shimon Schwab (d.1995), citing the great Portuguese Jewish scholar and statesmen, Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (d.1508), explains that Yaakov still lives on inasmuch as we call ourselves Bnei Yisrael after him. Yaakov's *chiyut*, life spirit, never leaves his children, and it is handed down generation after generation, so that within each of us is a part of Yaakov Avinu's essence. This eternal bond between the Jewish people and Yaakov encapsulates the dual themes of this *parshah*: the reality of exile and the enduring hope for redemption.

Next week: Parshat Shemot -
The Origins of Great Leadership