

וַיְחִי

Va-Yechi

Genesis 47:28–50: end
Haftarah: 1 Kings 2:1-12

Yaakov lived *vayechi* וַיְחִי in the land of Egypt seventeen years; thus
Yaakov lived to be 147 years old. Genesis 47:28

Our *Parasha* begins with *Yaakov's* death and ends with *Yoshef's*. With their death, ends the glorious era of the Patriarchs, the *Avot* and the Book of Genesis, *Bereshit*, בְּרֵאשִׁית, the beginnings. The foundations of the Jewish nation and the basis of G-d's plan are established.

Knowing his death is near, *Yaakov* calls to *Yoshef* and makes him swear that he will bury him in the Land of Israel. He will be the first Jew of the Diaspora to be buried in Israel, having been the first to wander. He is showing his descendants the way back; the exile in Egypt being only a step, not finality.

After all those years of suffering and separation, *Yaakov* is happy to be able to bless his grandsons as being part of the twelve tribes. These two grandsons, *Ephraim* and *Menashe*, are the first brothers within the family not to fight. *Yoshef*, their father, though alone in Egypt has kept his Jewish identity intact and taught his children to do the same.

Rashi, in his commentaries, tells us that *Ephraim* was studying with his grandfather *Yaakov*, and that from *Ephraim* will come *Yehoshua* (Joshua), who will study with *Moshe*. *Ephraim* is the spiritual heir, and we have seen many times in the Word of G-d, the birthright being given to the one on whom rests the calling.

Still today, Jewish people bless their children on *Shabbat's* eve with the same blessing *Yaakov* prophesized to *Ephraim* and *Menashe*:

Then he added this blessing on them that day: "Israel will speak of you in their own blessings by saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.'" Genesis 48:20

By blessing our children in this way, we wish them to be strong enough to keep their Jewish identity wherever they may live, even if it is within a hostile and pagan environment, so that the Name of G-d may be sanctified.

Then Yaakov said to Yossef:

Israel then said to Yossef, "You see that I am dying, but God will be with you and will bring you back to the land of your ancestors.

Moreover, **I am giving to you a shechem achad, שְׁכֶם אֶחָד** more than to your brothers; I captured it from the Emori with my sword and bow." Genesis 48:21-22

We will look here at the very interesting word *shechem*, the significance of which unveils partly the Jewish history and G-d's plan of Redemption.

The word *Shechem* שְׁכֶם has several meanings:

- First of all this is *Shechem*, a city of Canaan.
- It was the first stop of *Avraham* in the Holy Land:
Avram passed through the land to the place called *Shechem*, to the oak of *Moreh*. The *Kena'ani* were then in the land. Genesis 12:6
- There G-d will give him and to his descendants the Land and *Avraham* builds the first altar:
Adonai appeared to *Avram* and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to Adonai, who had appeared to him. Genesis 12:7
- It is also *Yaakov's* first stop at his coming back to the Land from his exile at *Lavan's*. He also builds an altar:

Having traveled from *Paddan-Aram*, *Yaakov* arrived safely at the city of *Shechem*, in *Kena'an*, and set up camp near the city. From the sons of

Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of silver the parcel of land where he had pitched his tent. There he put up an altar, which he called El-Elohei-Yisra-El. (God, the God of Israel)
Genesis 33:18-20

This is the place where *Dinah, Yaakov's daughter* was captured and raped and where *Yossef* was thrown in a pit by his brothers:

...and *Shechem* the son of *Hamor* the *Hivi*, the local ruler, saw her, grabbed her, raped her and humiliated her. Genesis 34:2

He said to him, "Go now, see whether things are going well with your brothers and with the sheep, and bring word back to me." So he sent him away from the Hevron Valley, and he went to *Shechem*. Genesis 37:14

It is the city located between Mount *Eival* and Mount *Garizim*, the place where the blessings and the curses were proclaimed, in front of *Gilgal*:

When Adonai your God brings you into the land you are entering in order to take possession of it, you are to put the blessing on Mount *G'rizim* and the curse on Mount *'Eival*. Both are west of the *Yarden*, in the direction of the sunset, in the land of the *Kena'ani* living in the *'Aravah*, across from *Gilgal*, near the pistachio trees of *Moreh*.

Deuteronomy 11:29-30

There again, at the end of the conquest of Israel with *Yehoshua*, *Yossef's* bones will be buried.

The bones of *Yossef*, which the people of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried in *Shechem*, in the parcel of ground which *Yaakov* had bought from the sons of *Hamor*, the father of *Shechem*, for a hundred pieces of silver; and they became a possession of the descendants of *Yossef*. Joshua 24:32

Shechem שָׁכֶם, is a first step and a decisive place for both a commitment to G-d and for tests meant to purify the people of G-d. It is the next step after *Gilgal*.

The other meaning of this word is: "shoulder", as mentioned in the following verse:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, **עַל-שָׁכְמוֹ**, and he will be given the name *Pele-Yo'etz El Gibbor Avi-'Ad Sar-Shalom* (Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace). Isaiah 9:6

To *Yossef* has been given a portion in addition and this portion **שָׁכְמוֹ** is that of the *Mashiach*! We have seen in our previous *Parashot* that *Yossef* was the image of the suffering Messiah from Isaiah 53. *Shechem* is a main stop and a necessary one, a stop of sufferings to finally reach deliverance and divine authority. *Yossef*, sold at *Shechem*, will be exiled to Egypt where he will end as the Vice-Roy and he will glorify G-d's name by his faithfulness to the Covenant of the circumcision. *Yossef* receives this city as a token for his victory from the tests G-d sent him, and he will be buried there at the end, when Israel will inherit his land; he will then peacefully rest in the Land of Israel!

Dear friends, don't regard as strange the fiery ordeal occurring among you to test you, as if something extraordinary were happening to you.

Rather, to the extent that you share the fellowship of the Messiah's sufferings, rejoice; so that you will rejoice even more when his *Shechina* is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13

The prophecies given by *Yaakov* to *Yossef* confirm then the prophetic impart of this last part of the first book of the Torah. We have previously seen that Jewish tradition believes there will be two Messiah, the Messiah *Ben Yossef*, the suffering Messiah and the Messiah *Ben Yehuda*, the glorious Messiah Who will establish His reign on earth.

Assemble yourselves and listen, sons of *Yaakov*; pay attention to Israel your father. Genesis 49:2

Yaakov reveals the end time to his sons, the coming of the *Mashiach*. The numerical value of "listen (to your father) Israel" is the same as the one for "this is the messianic era":

**וּשְׁמַעוּ אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל
זֶה קִצּוֹ שֶׁל מְשִׁיחַ**

Yossef is called *nazir* נָזִיר the distinguished one or consecrated one; the model of purity and integrity who kept the seal of circumcision by resisting the seduction attempts of Potiphar's wife, thereby imaging the One Who is the real Nazir:

"The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of *Yossef*, And on the crown of the head of the one

distinguished, *nazir*, נָזִיר among his brothers. Genesis 49:26 (NAS)

...because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers... Romans 8:29

This image of the *Mashiach* through *Yossef* is even more evident as we read the following verse quoted from different Jewish translations: But his bow remained taut; and his arms were made nimble by the hands of the Mighty One of *Yaakov*, from there, he is the shepherd, the stone of Israel... Genesis 49:24

The stone of Israel, אֶבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל, can be split in two different words, אב (Father) and בן (Son).¹

The stone, the corner stone Who sustains and nourishes Israel and all those who believe in Him!

So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being *Yeshua* the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!
Ephesians 2:19-22

Yossef is the image of the suffering Messiah and as we have seen in the previous *Parashot*, there is a non-dissociable link between the

¹ Rashi Genesis 49:24

Patriarch's destinies, the story of Israel and *Yeshua* Himself. The value of *Yossef* is the same as that of *Tzion* (Zion):156.

ציון = יוסף

The prophecy concerning *Yehuda* speaks clearly of the reign of the *Mashiach*:

The scepter will not pass from *Yehuda*, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs, until he comes to (whom) obedience belongs; (or: until *Shiloh* comes) and it is He whom the peoples will obey. Tying his donkey to the vine, his donkey's colt to the choice grapevine, he washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. Genesis 49:10-11

The *Mashiach* already came riding a donkey as prophesized in Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice with all your heart, daughter of *Tziyon*! Shout out loud, daughter of *Yerushalayim*! Look! Your king is coming to you. He is righteous, and he is victorious. Yet he is humble--he's riding on a donkey, yes, on a lowly donkey's colt.

But in that day, the people didn't understand:

His *talmidim* did not understand this at first; but after *Yeshua* had been glorified, then they remembered that the *Tanach* said this about him, and that they had done this for him. John 12:16

When He comes back He will tie His donkey to His vine; to Israel, filled with His glory, washed in the blood and purified. The vine is Israel!

You brought a vine out of Egypt, you expelled the nations and planted it, Psalms 80:8

"Come now," says Adonai, let's talk this over together. Even if your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow; even if they are red as crimson, they will be like wool. Isaiah 1:18

Yaakov's funeral is held in a place called *Atad*, which means "thorns" and the mourning designed as "mourning for Egypt".

When the local inhabitants, the *Kena'ani*, saw the mourning on the floor of *Atad* they said, "How bitterly the Egyptians are mourning!" This is

why the place was given the name *Avel-Mitzrayim*, (mourning of Egypt) there beyond the *Yarden*. Genesis 50:11

Rashi gives the following interpretation: the Canaanites kings gathered with the princes of *Yishmael* to make war against *Yossef* but when they saw *Yossef*'s crown hanging on *Yaakov*'s coffin, they stood up and hung their own crowns; they surrounded the coffin with crowns imitating a barrier of thorns.

The Tradition gives us another interpretation by underlining the link between the value of the word *Atad* and that of *hand*, which is 14. The hand would represent the Mighty Hand of G-d taking the Jews out of Egypt and making indeed a day of mourning for the Egyptians.

Here, we need to read between the lines and realize the tremendous redemptive work of G-d accomplished by His Hand, and understand that before the glorious coming back of the *Mashiach Ben David* bringing peace and joy; that both Jews and Gentiles alike will have to acknowledge the *Mashiach Ben Yossef*. He was the sacrificed Lamb of G-d, symbolized though *Yitzchak* sacrifice. He was the sold Brother, symbolized by *Yossef*, covered with blood from the wounds He suffered and from the crown of thorns upon His head, and He is the One able to deliver us from « Egypt » through His sufferings. Through Him we have inherited the eternal life and we wait for His return as the glorious *Mashiach Ben David*.

Yossef, before dying, repeats the same words as his father before him and the ones Moshe will also say to the children of Israel:

Yossef said to his brothers, "I am dying. But God will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to *Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov*." Genesis 50:24

But his last words will be:

"And you are to carry my bones up from here."

Yossef won't be buried in *Shechem* before centuries later, after the conquest of the Land of Israel by *Yehoshua*, at the very place he had been sold by his brothers. *Yeshua* will also be acknowledged by His people in the Land of Israel. *Yossef* is the symbol of the divine Covenant made with

the sons of Israel. The name of the coffin he is put inside of is the same as that of the Arch of the Covenant in which are kept the stone tablets, *aron ארון*. The Jewish Tradition says that *Yossef* is an arch himself because of his purity in Egypt² but we know that it is the Body of the *Mashiach Ben Yossef* and the *Mashiach Ben David*, given for us Who is the seal of the Renewed Covenant prophesized in Jeremiah 31:31.

“For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says Adonai: “I will put my *Torah* within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know Adonai’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-33

Thus ends the first Book of the Torah; the foundations of the Jewish nation are established and the promise is alive. The *Haftarah* speaks of the death of King David. David, the great king of the tribe of *Yehuda* is dead but praise G-d, the Great King, the Lion of Judah rose from the dead and He lives forever!



חזק ! חזק ! ונתחזק !

Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!

² Elie Munk, The Voice of the Torah, Genesis

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