

QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT VAYECHI

Q-1. (a) Why is *Vayechi* “setuma” (“closed”, with no open space in the *Sefer Torah* after *Vayigash*) (3 views)? (b) How does the word “*vayechi*” tell us the number of good years, without suffering, that *Ya’akov* lived? (c) Chronologically, in what order did 3 *avot* and 4 *imahot* die? (d) Why did *Ya’akov* (1) insist on not being buried in *Mitzrayim* (8 views)? (2) make *Yosef* swear to not bury him there, since *Hashem* had promised *Ya’akov* that He would bring him back to *Cana’an* for burial (46:4) (3 views)? (*Bereishit* 47:28-31)

A-1. (a) (1) At *Ya’akov*’s death, *Bnei Yisrael*’s hearts “closed” as their road to slavery began; (2) *Ya’akov* wanted to reveal ultimate redemption – *Hashem* “sealed” his access to prophecy (*Rashi*). (3) While *Ya’akov*’s peaceful years in *Mitzrayim* appear separate from his anxiety-filled years described in the previous *parshi’ot*, they are actually connected of his lifetime struggle to forge and maintain his status of “*Yisrael*” who will bring about *Yemot ha-Mashi’ach* (*Hirsch*). (b) *Vayechi*’s *gematria* is 34 – *Ya’akov* lived 34 trouble-free years – 17 from *Yosef*’s birth till his sale, and 17 from his reuniting with *Yosef* till he died (*Ba’al haTurim*). (c) (1) *Sarah*; (2) *Avraham*; (3) *Rivka*; (4) *Rachel*; (5) *Leah*; (6) *Yitzchak*; (7) *Ya’akov* (*Seder Olam*). (d) (1) He (i) foresaw the plague of lice, that would swarm under his body; (ii) did not want to suffer rolling underground to *Eretz Yisrael* before *techiyat ha-maytim*; (iii) did not want the *Mitzrim* to worship his tomb (*Rashi*). (iv) feared that his burial in *Mitzrayim* would make *Bnei Yisrael* consider *Mitzrayim* their homeland, not a temporary residence (*Kli Yakar*). (v) wanted his merit to protect *Bnei Yisrael* when they returned to *Cana’an*; (vi) feared his burial in *Mitzrayim* would spare the *Mitzrim*, through his merit, from the 10 plagues (*Midrash haGadol*). (vii) wanted to be together with the other *avot* in *Me’orat haMachpeila* and arise together with them (*R. Bechaya*). (viii) knew that *Eretz Yisrael*’s soil would atone for his sins (*Torah Temima*). (2) (i) *Ya’akov* foresaw that *Yosef* would be buried in *Mitzrayim* and his bones later brought to *Cana’an* – he wanted to assure he would initially not be buried in *Mitzrayim* (*Tiferet Yonatan*). (ii) The oath fortified *Yosef*’s hand with *Pharaoh* – if *Pharaoh* refused to let *Yosef* go to *Chevron*, *Yosef* could argue that he could not violate his oath to his father (*Ramban*). (iii) *Ya’akov* thought that *Yosef* might be upset that *Rachel* was not buried in *Me’orat haMachpeila* and would not follow through on *Ya’akov*’s request (*Bereishit Raba*).

Q-2. (a) What was the “*kehal amim*” (congregation of nations) that *Hashem* promised *Ya’akov*? (b) Why did *Ya’akov* say about *Efrayim* and *Menashe*, “*li heim*” ([they] shall be mine) (2 views)? (c) Did dividing *Yosef* into 2 *shevatim* affect *Eretz Yisrael*’s division by *sheivet* (2 views)? (d) Why did *Ya’akov* cross his hands to bless *Efrayim* and *Menashe* (2 views)? (*Bereishit* 48:4-6,14)

A-2. (a) *Hashem* promised in *Bereishit* 35:11, “a *goy* (nation) and a *kehal goyim* (congregation of nations)” would descend from *Ya’akov* – the “*goy*” refers to *Binyamin*, and the “*kehal goyim*” refers to *Efrayim* and *Menashe*, whom he was about to bless (*Rashi*). (b) (1) They, unlike *Ya’akov*’s other grandsons, will each have their own territory, like his sons (*Rashi*). (2) *Ya’akov* was supposed to father *Efrayim* and *Menashe* through *Rachel*’s servant *Bilhah*, but *Reuven*’s manipulating his bed prevented this – he considered them to be his, equal to his other sons (*Arizal*). (c) (1) No – since the size of each *sheivet*’s land depended on its population size that left *Mitzrayim*, splitting *Yosef*’s population into 2 *shevatim* did not affect the amount of land each *sheivet* got (*Rashi*). (2) Yes – the *shevatim* got equal portions of land, with *Yosef*’s *shevatim* getting 2 portions (*Ramban*). (d) (1) Since *Ya’akov* knew that *Efrayim* would rise to a higher leadership level, he placed his “superior” right hand on him; (2) *Ya’akov* wanted to honor both grandsons by having *Menashe* on his right side but placing his right hand on *Efrayim* (*Chizkuni*).

Q-3. (a) Why did *Ya’akov* (1) say that *Rachel* died “*a-lie*” (on me) (3 reasons)? (2) not bury her in *Me’orat haMachpeila* (4 reasons)? (3) say *Efrayim* and *Menashe* should multiply like fish (3 views)? (b) Why do we bless our sons saying that *Hashem* should make them like *Efrayim* and *Menashe* (2 reasons)? (*Bereishit* 48:7,16,20)

A-3. (a) (1) (i) It is the husband who primarily feels his wife’s loss (*Sanhedrin* 22b). (ii) Of all of his troubles, *Rachel*’s death hurt him most (*Midrash haGadol*). (iii) He felt his curse caused her death when *Lavan* confronted him about the *terafim* (*Medrash Lekach Tov*). (2) (i) He buried her on the road near *Beit Lechem* when he foresaw that *Bnei Yisrael* would walk on that road to *galut* after the 1st *churban*, and *Rachel*’s spirit would plead to *Hashem* (*Yirmiyahu* 31:15) for their quick return (*Rashi*). (ii) Since a woman dying in childbirth – covered with blood – must be buried immediately, he did not wait (*Shabbat* 23b). (iii) He was ashamed of burying 2 sisters in *Me’orat haMachpeila* since he foresaw that *Vayikra* 18:18 would ban marrying 2 sisters, permitting his 1st marriage to *Leah*, but not his 2nd to *Rachel* – he wanted to avoid shaming her; (iv) when he saw prophetically that *Beit Lechem* would be in *Yehuda*’s territory, he buried *Rachel* near *Efrat*, in her son *Binyamin*’s territory (*Ramban*). (3) (1) Fish, in the depths of water, are unaffected by an *ayin hara* (evil eye) – so should *Efrayim* and *Menashe* be protected (*Rashi*). (2) Unlike *Avraham* and *Yitzchak*, who were initially barren, may *Efrayim* and *Menashe* be as fruitful as fish (*Abarbanel*). (3) Just as fish enjoy a quiet and contented, cheerful life, *Efrayim* and *Menashe* should too (*Hirsch*). (b) (1) We ask *Hashem* that our sons be like *Efrayim* and *Menashe*, who got along without jealousy or hatred, unlike *Avraham*’s, *Yitzchak*’s and *Ya’akov*’s sons, who could not live together (*Rashi*). (2) While *Efrayim* and *Menashe* were raised in a rich, powerful family in *galut*, they remained loyal to *Hashem*, despite the prevailing culture’s foreign influences and daily temptations (*Hirsch*).

Q-4. (a) (1) When reciting the *Shema*, why do we say “*Baruch Shem Kevod...*” silently? (2) When else do we say *Baruch Shem Kevod* in *davening*? (b) Why did *Ya’akov* rebuke *Reuven*, *Shimon* and *Levi*? (c) Why did the *bechora* transfer from *Reuven* to *Yosef*, as stated in 1 *Divrei haYamim* 5:1 (2 views)? (d) (1) Since all his sons were full or half-brothers, why did *Ya’akov* say, “*Shimon* and *Levi* are brothers”? (2) When *Ya’akov* said, “into their [*Shimon* and *Levi*’s] conspiracies may my soul not enter”, to which (i) past and (ii) future conspiracies did he refer? (e) (1) Why was *Yehuda* selected for kingship (4 reasons)? (2) How was the prophecy “the kingship shall not depart from *Yehuda*” true when (i) *Shaul* from *Sheivet Binyamin* was king, and (ii) the *Chashmonayim* from *Sheivet Levi* were kings? (f) Where does *Ya’akov*’s prophesy concerning *Yehuda* refer to the *Mashi’ach*? (*Bereishit* 49:1-12)

A-4. (a) (1) When *Ya’akov* tried to reveal the “End of Days” to his sons (49:1), the *Shechina* left him – he thought It left because he had an unworthy son, like *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* did – his sons reassured their faith by reciting “*Shema Yisrael...*” and he responded “*Baruch Shem Kevod...*”. *Chazal* included it silently, since *Ya’akov* said it, but *Moshe* did not include it in *Devarim* (*Pesachim* 56a). (2) In *kaddish*, we say, “*Yehei Shemei Raba*”, an *Aramaic* translation (*Targum Yerushalmi*). (b) To establish that *Yehuda*’s offspring would be kings, *Ya’akov* rebuked *Yehuda*’s older brothers as unworthy of royalty (*Abarbanel*). (c) (1) When *Ya’akov* married *Leah*, he thought he had married *Rachel*, and *Rachel*’s firstborn (*Yosef*) should have been *Ya’akov*’s *bechor* – he gave *Yosef* the *bechora* destined for him (*Ralbag*). (2) *Ya’akov* himself would have fathered *Efrayim* and *Menashe* had *Reuven* not transposed his couch in the matter of *Bilha* – *Ya’akov* punished *Reuven* and gave *Yosef* the *bechor*’s double portion (*Arizal*). (d) (1) *Shimon* and *Levi* harbored the same thoughts in avenging *Dinah* and instigating *Yosef*’s kidnapping (*Rashi*). (2) (i) Speaking “cleverly” to *Shechem* and selling *Yosef*, (ii) *Zimri* and *Korach*, where *Ya’akov*’s name is not mentioned (*Rashi*). (e) (1) (i) His brothers saw his leadership qualities without the jealousy they had for *Yosef*; (ii) he was successful in all he undertook; (iii) he established peace among his brothers; (iv) he carried himself in a royal, dignified manner (*Abarbanel*). (2) (i) The prophecy regarding *Yehuda*’s kingship began with *David haMelech*, after *Shaul* died; (ii) while the *Chashmonayim* were kings, the *Sanhedrin* was always headed by an offspring of *David* (*Abarbanel*). (f) *Ya’akov* said that the kingship shall not depart from *Yehuda* “until *Shilo* arrives” – *Shilo* refers to the *Mashi’ach* (*Onkelos*).

Q-5. (a) Why did *Ya’akov* (1) bless *Zevulun* before *Yisachar*, who was born first? (2) compare *Yisachar* to a donkey (3 reasons)? (3) compare *Dan* to a serpent (4 views)? (4) call *Naftali* an “*ayala shelucha*” (a running deer) (3 views)? (b) To what do *Binyamin*’s blessings, (1) “in the morning, he will devour prey” and (2) “in the evening, he will distribute spoils”, refer? (*Bereishit* 49:13-27)

A-5. (a) (1) *Yisachar*’s offspring would spend their time learning *Torah*, being supported by *Zevulun*’s offspring’s commerce – since one cannot study *Torah* unless his material needs are first met, *Sheivet Zevulun*, which supported *Sheivet Yisachar*, was blessed first (*Sforno*). (2) (i) A donkey, unlike other animals, does not rebel against its master’s placing a burden on it – it patiently bears the burden – *Yisachar* will produce *Torah* students who willingly will bear the yoke of *Torah*; (ii) just as a donkey sleeps outside so that it will be ready to carry merchandise when its master needs it, *Torah* students sacrifice life’s comforts to study *Torah* (*Rashi*). (iii) A donkey was instrumental in *Yisachar*’s conception – when *Ya’akov* came from the field, his donkey brayed, alerting *Leah* – due to her deal to give *Rachel* the *duda’im*, *Leah* brought him to her tent, resulting in *Yisachar*’s conception (*Nidah* 31a). (3) *Ya’akov* was referring to *Dan*’s offspring *Shimshon* – just as a snake (i) is vindictive, so will *Shimshon* take revenge on the *Pelishtim*; (ii) attacks individually, not in a swarm, so *Shimshon* singlehandedly will kill the *Pelishtim*; (iii) has power in the poisonous tongue in its head, so *Shimshon*’s strength will emanate from the hair on his head; (iv) has venom that is fatal even after its death, so *Shimshon* will kill the *Pelishtim* in his death (*Bereishit Raba*). (4) (i) *Naftali*’s crops will ripen swiftly, like a loose deer; (ii) *Naftali*’s soldiers will quickly defeat *Sisera*’s army in the war with *Devora* and *Barak*; (iii) when *Eisav* will claim at *Ya’akov*’s funeral the right to be buried in *Me’orat haMachpeila*, *Naftali* will run swiftly to *Mitzrayim* to retrieve the cave’s deed; (b) (1) *Shaul*, of *Sheivet Binyamin*, was *Bnei Yisrael*’s 1st king – the “morning” of the monarchy – who would “devour” and defeat *Moav*, *Edom* and the *Pelishtim*; (2) after the *churban* and the end of the monarchy, *Mordechai* and *Esther*, of *Sheivet Binyamin*, would give *Haman*’s property to the *Yehudim* (*Rashi*).

Q-6. (a) Since *Torah* law bans embalming, why did *Yosef* embalm *Ya’akov*’s body? (b) (1) Which 2 of *Ya’akov*’s sons did not carry his coffin to *Me’orat haMachpeila*? (2) Why? (c) How old was *Yosef* when *Ya’akov* died? (d) Why do we say “*chazak*” to end a *sefer*? (*Bereishit* 50:2,13)

A-6. (a) A *tzadik*’s body does not decay – *Yosef* did not want *Mitzrayim* to worship *Ya’akov*’s body, letting them think the embalming halted the decay (*Ohr haChaim*). (b) (1) (i) *Levi* and (ii) *Yosef*; (2) his sons carried his coffin in the positions that the *shevatim* would camp in the *midbar* around the *Mishkan* – (i) since *Sheivet Levi* would carry the *aron ha-kodesh*, *Levi* could not carry human remains; (ii) *Yosef*’s carrying the coffin would be demeaning for a ruler – *Efrayim* and *Menashe* were the only grandchildren carrying the coffin, as *shevatim* that would camp around the *Mishkan* (*Rashi*). (c) 56 – *Yosef* was 30 when he was appointed viceroy – *Ya’akov* went to *Mitzrayim* 9 years later (after the 7 good and 2 bad years) and died 17 years later (*Seder Olam*). (d) Before dying, *Moshe* told *Yehoshua* and *Bnei Yisrael* 3 times, “*chazak*” or “*chizku*” (be strong [in learning *Torah*] – *Devarim* 31:7, 23; *Yehoshua* 1:6) – we recall this by saying *chazak* 3 times – “*chazak, chazak ve-nitchazek*” (*Birchat Ya’avetz*).

Q-7. In the *haftara*, how did *David*’s final advice to *Shlomo* parallel *Ya’akov*’s blessing of *Yosef*? (*I Melachim* 2:3-4;10-12)

A-7. *David* told *Shlomo* to follow in his footsteps – *Shlomo* did, symbolized by both kings reigning 40 years – *Ya’akov* blessed *Yosef* to follow in his footsteps, and *Yosef*’s commitment to emulating *Ya’akov*’s sanctity was *Bnei Yisrael*’s standard in *Mitzrayim* (*Avraham ben haRambam*).