



## Parshat Vayechi: Living Life

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Parshat Vayechi begins, "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, and Yaakov's days, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty seven years." Yaakov's primary place of living was *Eretz Yisrael*. Why does the Torah say he lived in Egypt? Instead, it should say he sojourned or settled. In addition, why does it say, "*Vayehi yemei Yaakov*" in the singular? The singular expression, "*Vayehihu yemei Yaakov*," (They were the days of Yaakov) would be more grammatically correct.

Rav Gifter explains that although a *tzaddik* may live many days, they are all for one purpose. Yaakov's single mission in life was *kirvat Elokim*, to come closer to Hashem. He lived the concept of *Vayehi*. All his days were singular and equal in that whatever circumstances he found himself in, he served Hashem with perfect faith throughout his life. And although his life was fraught with unending difficulties, he utilized each day to the fullest.

We must believe that the exact measure of tests that come upon a person is precisely ordained. Nothing happens by chance. The more challenging the circumstances, the greater the opportunity, as the Mishna says, "*Lifum tzara agra*." According to the pain is the reward. The beauty of Yaakov's days was that they were *kulam shavim*, they were all equally productive. He understood that his whole life was one of potential and growth.

Rav Nachman Breslover said, "If you see a great person, know that he struggled." Although we may learn and become wiser through our challenges, during the ordeal we don't have the perspective that we gain when looking back. If we don't see the benefit, it is hard to feel how it is good. Part of the test is believing that there is purpose and meaning in our suffering. Rav Schwab notes that Yaakov's greatest years were in Egypt. The challenges that once chased after Yaakov ended. In Egypt he lived *shenei chayav*, days of goodness. He recognized that the difficulties he had faced had served to actualize his potential. We too must believe that there is ultimate mercy hidden in suffering even though we may not understand.

In the Torah, water is described as living water only if it flows constantly. When something is unchanging it lasts forever. Yaakov overcame the impurities of Egypt by immersing himself in the eternal world of Torah and truth. The Tzemech Tzedek once asked the Alter Rebbe, "How can it be that Yaakov spent the best years of his life in Egypt?" He answered that Yaakov sent Yehuda ahead to set up a house of learning. When one has Torah one can live with Hashem, even in Egypt. Transforming darkness to light reveals an even higher dimension. Yaakov's connection to Hashem transcended material settings.

The first verse in Vayechi hints to the soul coming down to the body to a world full of physical pursuits and desires. Yaakov

descended to Mitzrayim with the mission to turn evil to good. He accomplished his purpose by making Torah his essence. We too can transcend our own narrow straits by allowing Torah to dictate our every step.

The Siftei Chaim explains that when Yaakov wanted to reveal the *ketz*, he didn't intend to reveal the actual redemption. He desired to tell his sons how Hashem is with us both in times of darkness and light so that Yaakov's descendants would not falter in their *emunah*. He wanted to impart the lessons he learned and to explain how life has a system and a purpose. But Hashem said no. Parshat Vayechi is a *parsha stuma*, a closed *parsha*. Life is about strengthening oneself in *emunah* precisely when the reasons are unclear. It is about passing the *nisayon* and holding on even when it's almost too difficult to bear. Yaakov wanted to explain how the salvation is hidden within the challenges. Then we would have lived exile in a different realm. But Hashem prevented him. He allowed Yaakov to tell his children that there was a plan, but he could not reveal what it was. In *Shema* we say, "*Shema yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*." The name Hashem symbolizes mercy, while the name *Elokim* represents strict judgment. Even though we perceive Hashem as acting with different *midot*, we know that He is one. In essence Hashem's *midat hadin* stems from his *midat harachamim*. Amid the suffering and pain, hope and redemption will sprout anew.

## Meaningful Prayer Preparation for the Amida Part 2: G-d's Love of Israel

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The second blessing of *Shema, Ahava Rabbah*, expresses the unique love between Hashem and the Jewish people. We ask the One above to give us understanding to study the Torah and to fulfill its commandments. We ask for a heart full of love and fear so that we may not feel inner shame before Him for not fulfilling our potential. The very fact that the Jewish people were chosen by the Almighty out of all the nations, to receive the Torah and

bring its message to the world is an indication of Hashem's profound love for us.

We connect to the Creator by studying the Torah, which expresses His essence. The verse in *Shema* says, "Love Hashem with all your soul and might. These words of Torah that I command you should be on your heart at all times." A Jew's entire day should be an all-consuming experience of Torah.

Before we begin *Shemone Esrei*, the core section of *tefilah*, we affirm Hashem's absolute love for us. We recognize His special commitment and concern for us above the natural love of a parent to a child. As we stand in silent communion before our loving Father, we can express our deepest wishes and hopes with full confidence that all our prayers will be heard and answered.



## Rav Pam-Lessons on Character Refinement of Speech #4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

We know that the Torah measures every word it uses, yet we find that two extra words were used to describe the non-kosher animals that entered Noach's ark. The Torah says, "*U'min habeheima asher lo tehora*" (from the animals that are not kosher) instead of *temeiah* (non-kosher), to emphasize how far one must go to speak in a refined way. Yet we find *temeiah* mentioned many times in Parshat Shemini where the Torah discusses the laws of *kashrut*. The Dubno Maggid explains this seeming contradiction with a parable.

A person once had to deliver a package to an unfamiliar town. He stopped a passerby and asked him, "Where does Mordechai Goldstein live?" The man began yelling, "Mottel the thief? Why would you want anything to do with him?" He tried more people and got the same response. Finally, he spotted a distinguished looking man approaching, who turned out to be the Rav of the community. "Would you know where Mottel the thief lives?" The Rav began berating him, "What

right do you have to defame an upstanding citizen? His name is Mordechai Goldstein." He then gave him directions to the house.

A few weeks later, the Rav approached the fellow, who happened to be a matchmaker, to find a match for his daughter. The shadchan suggested Mottel's son. "Mottel the thief's son, how could you," sputtered the Rav. Whereupon the fellow countered, "What happened, now you're talking different?" "When you're talking about directions, what right do you have to defame a person? then he is Mordechai Goldstein. But when we are talking about a match for my daughter, that's a different story," explained the Rav.

Parshat Noach discusses history, which animals were allowed in the ark and how many of each of the species were to be saved. There the Torah is careful to use the most refined expressions. But Parshat Shemini, which explains the laws of *kashrut*, had to be written explicitly, so the message of the Torah is clear.

Rav Pam would adjure his students to always be careful to speak in a refined way. Telling a child that he's clumsy or calling someone a fool, moron, or beast does not befit a Torah Jew. He quoted the Chazon Ish as saying that one can say that someone is speaking an untruth, but calling someone a liar is crude. Rav Pam maintained that couples who speak to each other in an unrefined way jeopardize their family harmony. He disapproved of using the word, 'whatchamacallit,' which shows an absence of thought. The Torah tell us to be careful with our tongues, not to engage in lashon hara, not to tarnish someone's reputation, bear false witness, lie, or allow *nivul peh* (inappropriate or coarse words) to exit our lips. *Nivul* comes from the root word *nevelah*, a carcass. Speech is meant to be used with sanctity. Speaking in an impure way is like a dead body, devoid of soul. May we merit to elevate our speech to inspire others and to sanctify the name of Hashem.