



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles

Study Guide

Take home Dvar Torah

Parshat Vayechi

תשפ

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of
wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until
now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

When thumbing through the pages of the Chumash, have you ever wondered what the פפפ or ססס at the end of almost every parsha in the Torah mean?

The פ stands for פתוחה, an *open* paragraph, and the ס stands for סתומה a *closed* paragraph, and constitute instructions to the scribe how to write the Torah. (In the Torah scroll itself these letters do not appear.) The following is an open chapter.

פֶּתַח לָהֶם יוֹסֵף וְלֹא זָכַר עֲשֵׂר הַמִּשְׁקִים אֶת יוֹסֵף
וַיִּשְׁכַּחְתֵּהוּ
וַיְהִי מוֹקֵץ עֲצָתִים יָמִים וּפָרְעֹה חָלַם וְהִלְזָה עֲבֹד־

Note that the end of the chapter, the second line, is “open” until the end of the line, the next line beginning at the start of the next line. The following is a closed chapter:

נִמְצָא הַגְּבִיעַ בְּיָדוֹ הוּא יִהְיֶה לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם עִלּוּ
לְשָׁלוֹם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וַיִּגַּע אֱלֹהֵי
יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדַע יִדְבַר נָא עֲבַדְךָ דָּבָר בְּאָזְנֵי

The break in the second line is *closed in* by text, indicating a closed chapter. These breaks, the rabbis tell us, represent a pause in Hashem’s dictation to Moshe to give him time to absorb the information. It is unclear why some sections are open and others are closed. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov in his *The Book of Jewish Knowledge* suggests that an open portion indicates a greater pause than a closed one based on the observation that most new topics begin with an open paragraph.

One Torah portion, however, does not have a break, and that is at the beginning of this week’s portion, Vayechi. This is what it looks like in the actual Torah:

גִּשְׁחָן וַיִּאֲחֲזֶהוּ בָהּ וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד וַיִּזְחַזְּחֵי יַעֲקֹב בְּאָרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יָמָיו יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חַיִּים

The portion begins at the arrow, but there is no break between it and the previous portion, Vayigash. This aberration is the topic of the first Rashi comment on this parsha (Rashi 49:28):

(כח) ויחי יעקב - למה פרשה זו סתומה? לפי שכיון שנפטר יעקב אבינו נסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל מצרת השעבוד שהתחילו לשעבדם. ד"א שבקש לגלות את הקץ לבניו ונסתם ממנו (בי"ר)

28) *Why is this portion closed? (To hint to us that) once Yaakov died, the Jewish people's eyes and hearts became **closed up** from the subjugation of the Egyptians who started to enslave them. A second reason is that Yaakov wanted to reveal when Mashiach would come (at the end of days, far into the future), and Hashem **closed it off** from him.*

With regard to Rashi's first answer, the commentaries observe that real slavery did not begin until many years later. It wasn't until the very last of Yaakov's sons, Levi, died, that the Egyptians actually enslaved the Jews. What is the meaning of "*the Jewish people's eyes and hearts became **closed up** from the subjugation of the Egyptians who started to enslave them?*"

In his commentary to the Torah, the Chatam Sofer (1762 - 1839) explains that while Yaakov was alive, his holiness and level of attachment to Hashem was so intense that it permeated the entire Jewish nation and they remained dedicated to Hashem with all their hearts and all their souls. They fully eschewed the Egyptian idolatrous way of life, and wanted no part of it. Their hearts were pure and completely faithful to Hashem with no desire to look outside of their camp. Once Yaakov died, the people's hearts were less pure and dedicated to Hashem, and they began to notice and covet the Egyptian ways. This is the meaning of "*the Jewish*

*people's eyes and hearts became **closed up** from the subjugation of the Egyptians who started to enslave them.*" At this point, the slavery was not a physical one, it was spiritual. Their eyes and hearts became closed to the Jewish ways with which they had always been contented, and now, they began observing and coveting the Egyptian way of life. Although after Yaakov's death the Egyptian way of life began to intrigue them, they would not partake of it because of the influence of the Elders. As long as any of Yaakov's sons was alive, no one had the nerve to stray from the Jewish way of life. Once Levi, the last remaining son of Yaakov died, however, the people began following their eyes and their hearts, and began adopting the Egyptian way of life. Once they lost their calling as the Jewish people, they became the perfect candidates for slavery.

This pattern has repeated itself many times in Jewish history. When the Jews are content and satisfied to follow the Torah with no desire to share in the gentile world around them, they remain strong and protected. As soon as they begin looking around to adopt the ways of the surrounding people and follow their gentile ways, they become the targets of antisemitism. The very people they worked so hard to impress, ironically, reject them outright.

The people's eyes and hearts were also closed because they recognized that the prophecy to Avraham, that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land, had commenced. They began to dread the future, wondering what would be the nature of this exile? How would it affect them as individuals and as a people? Would they even survive it?

This, possibly, was Yaakov's motivation for wanting to tell his children about the end of the exile, which comprises Rashi's second answer. Yaakov wanted to reassure them that they would be redeemed and that they would emerge from the ordeal better and stronger. Alas, Hashem *closed off* Yaakov's prophecy, aborting his intentions.

Why did Hashem close off Yaakov's prophesy? What was wrong with Yaakov revealing the future redemption to his children to give them support and hope throughout the bitter, difficult, and lengthy exile?

The Midrash (Tanchuma 8) gives us a hint.

יעקב בקש לגלות לבניו את הקץ שנא' ויקרא יעקב אל בניו וגו'. למה"ד לעבד שהאמינו המלך כל מה שבידו בא העבד למות קרא לבניו לעשותן בני חורין ולומר להם היכן דיתיקי שלהן והאוני שלהן ידע המלך הדבר עמד לו למעלה הימנו ראהו אותו המלך והפליג את הדבר שהיה מבקש לגלות להם התחיל מדבר העבד לבניו בבקשה מכם אתם עבדיו של מלך היו מכבדין אותו כמו שהייתי אני מכבדו כל ימי כך ויקרא יעקב אל בניו לגלות להן את הקץ נגלה עליו הקב"ה אמר ליה לבניך אתה קורא ולי לאו ... כיון שראה אותו יעקב התחיל אומר לבניו בבקשה מכם הוּו מכבדים להקב"ה כשם שכבדוהו אני ואבותי

Yaakov wanted to reveal the end of the exile to his children This is comparable to a slave who the king trusted with all of his secrets. Before the slave was about to die, he called his children to free them and tell them where to find their release papers. (The document to free a slave is written solely by the master and presented to the slave, at which time through the receipt of the document, he becomes free.) Realizing this, the king looked in on him. Once the slave saw the king, he began telling his children, "You are the king's servants, please respect him and serve him faithfully as I did." This is what Yaakov did. He called his sons in to reveal to them the end of the exile, but Hashem appeared to him and said, "You called your sons and not me?" Immediately, Yaakov started talking to them about honoring Hashem the way he and his fathers had done.

There is an obvious question on the Midrash. What good would it have done for the father slave to reveal the release documents' hiding place to his sons? Such a document is only valid when presented to the slave by his owner for the sake of freeing him! Stealing them would accomplish nothing for them, as they would have remained slaves anyway!

This is the hint presented in the Midrash. Their father wanted them to realize that the documents for their release were already written and that their release was guaranteed. When exactly it would happen, he could not tell them; but he wanted them to have the comfort of knowing that it would eventually happen.

There is a deep concept hidden here. Our sages refer to it as פת בסלו, which means “bread in his basket.”

The concept is that a poor person with a loaf of bread in his basket available to him any time he feels too hungry, experiences less hunger than the poor man with nothing in his basket. This obtains because the first poor person can see an end to his hunger via the loaf of bread in his basket, whereas the poor man with nothing in his basket sees no end to his hunger, and this makes his hunger so much more acute.

In the same sense, a slave who knows that his documents for freedom have already been written, has a much easier slavery than a slave with no end in sight.

In Yaakov’s case, the motivation was much deeper. His point was not to tell them the date that Mashiach would come and when the exile would finally end. Being so far into the future, and surely not in their lifetimes, such a disclosure would only serve to cause them to give up hope on the redemption. His goal was to explain to his children the process that Hashem would use to bring forth the redemption, including the methodology and understanding behind why things happen the way that they do. With this information, they could understand the purpose behind a difficult judgment that Hashem may mete out and its specific impact on the redemption process. Yaakov’s thinking was that if his children would understand the vital role that each occurrence played in the redemption, it would be easier for them to endure. Seeing how each step influenced

the process would allow them to accept it more easily and give them the strength to withstand it.

Having this information would also increase their level of אמונה (trust in Hashem) in that knowing Hashem's methodology would reveal that everything is part of Hashem's Master plan with an understandable goal and purpose behind every tribulation. This would remove any doubt about Hashem from their minds, allowing them to serve Him with all their hearts and souls.

What was Hashem's objection to Yaakov's idea? Why did He close off Yaakov's prophesy to prevent him from preparing his children for what lay ahead?

Once again, the parable provides us with the answer. The father servant served the king faithfully for life, with no hope for freedom. Yet he was the king's most faithful servant for the sole sake of serving the king, with no desire for personal benefit. Thus, the king trusted him even with his most secret matters. The king wanted the same type of service from his up-and-coming slaves, the servant's sons. He did not want them to serve him knowing that they were going to be freed because that degree of service would not compare to their service when they would not know that they were going to be freed. Then, they would be doing it strictly because of their dedication and commitment to the king, with no personal interest.

This is why Hashem doesn't want us to understand the method to His actions. He wants us to have complete trust in Him despite the fact that we do not understand the reasoning and benefit behind what He is doing to us. This is the ultimate in service to Hashem, and nothing less will do.

When Yaakov decided that it was time to reveal the secrets to his sons, he called them together, as the verse states (49:1):

(א) וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר, "הֲאֶסְפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים"

1) *And Yaakov called for his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days."*

The Talmud (Pesachim 56a) tells us the rest of the story:

דאמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש : ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם ביקש יעקב לגלות לבניו קץ הימין ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה אמר שמא חס ושלוש יש במטתי פסול כאברהם שיצא ממנו ישמעאל ואבי יצחק שיצא ממנו עשו אמרו לו בניו שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד אמרו כשם שאין בלבך אלא אחד כך אין בלבנו אלא אחד באותה שעה פתח יעקב אבינו ואמר ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said that Yaakov wanted to reveal the end of the exile to his sons, but Hashem's divine presence left him. Yaakov said, perhaps the reason for this is that one of my sons is not righteous (and not worthy of knowing it), just like Avraham had Ishmael and Yitzchak had Esav. His sons responded, Hear, our father Yisroel, Hashem our G-d is one, and just as in your heart there is only one G-d, so, too, in our hearts there is only one G-d. (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְדוּד אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְדוּד אֶחָד)

This response from his sons reassured Yaakov that his children would always be able to endure the exile's hardships even without understanding the reason and benefit behind it. This statement is the ultimate statement of belief in Hashem even in the worst times. How is that?

Of Hashem's ten names holy names, the two main names that we see in our prayers and in the Torah are י-ה-ו-ה and אלקים. The first is Hashem's name of lovingkindness, and the second, strict judgment. We can know what to expect from Hashem based on the name via which He presents Himself. In the Shema, we have Hashem's name of strict judgment

surrounded by two names of lovingkindness. According to one meaning of the words of the Shema, this is what we are saying:

י-ה-ו-ה, Hashem, the G-d of lovingkindness, and אלקינו the G-d of strict judgment, are really the same one and only י-ה-ו-ה.

Yaakov's sons' response comforted him to know that his children understood that whatever comes forth from Hashem, no matter how bitter and difficult, comes from His love and mercy on His children. When a child is sick and is running a very high fever but will not open his mouth to take his medicine, what does his parent do? He restrains the child, pinches his nose closed, waits for him to open his mouth to breathe, and then forces the medicine down. The child receives his medicine, but for having treated him so cruelly, the half-choking child thinks that his parent hates him. At this moment, the child is upset at his parent, but when he grows up, marries and has children of his own, it is probable that when his child does not take his medicine, he will do the exact same thing to him. It is out of love for the child that the parent must give him his medicine at all cost, even at the risk of being accused of hating him.

In the same regard, Hashem must sometimes, so-to-speak, force the medicine down our throats because we need to take our medicine, and this is the only way Hashem can give it to us. Rest assured that it is only out of Hashem's absolute love for us that He does this.

And just as a parent would never resort to forcing the medicine down his child's throat if the child would take it willingly, Hashem, who has all options available to Him, would never do it in a difficult way if a kinder, gentler way were possible.

This perspective is truly how the Jewish people have always dealt with tragedy and hardship throughout the ages. It is difficult to endure,

but we understand that ה' אחד - *Hashem is one*, a loving and strict judge, all in one. We have absolute trust in Hashem, and have no questions about His judgments.

The verse in Zechariah (14:9) tells us that when Mashiach comes,

(ט) וְהָיָה יְדֻד לְמַלְכּוֹ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהָיָה יְדֻד אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד

9) *And Hashem will be the king over the entire world, **on that day**, Hashem will be One and His name will be one.*

The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) asks the obvious question.

אטו האידנא לאו אחד הוא? אמר רבי אחא בר חנינא, לא כעולם הזה העולם הבא העולם הזה על בשורות טובות אומר ברוך הטוב והמטיב ועל בשורות רעות אומר ברוך דיין האמת לעולם הבא כולו הטוב והמטיב

***On that day** Hashem will be one? Hashem isn't one today? Rav Acha bar Chanina answered. This world is not like the world to come (when Mashiach comes). In this world when something good happens we recite the blessing, "Blessed are you Hashem who is good and bestows good on others." When something bad happens we recite the blessing, "Blessed are You Hashem, the True Judge." In the world to come, the only blessing we will ever make is the blessing of "who is good and bestows good on others," because we will see how everything is really good. There is no such thing as bad.*

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato explains that it is not just that we will see why the bad was necessary. Rather, we will see how the bad was not bad at all: it was actually good! The attribute of judgment flows forth from Hashem's kindness.

It could be compared to surgery to remove a cancerous growth. The surgery is not “bad” with a “good” outcome; it is good through and through. How sad it is when the doctors must tell their patient that a tumor is inoperable. *That* is bad news. But when the doctor says, “We can operate to remove it, and with Hashem’s help, you’ll soon be as good as new!” that is the best news to the patient. After the surgery, he will thank the doctor profusely for a job well done and pay him (or the insurance company will do so) a lot of money.

Is it comfortable to be in a hospital for two weeks? No. Is there pain after the surgery? Yes. Is a person back to normal two weeks after surgery? Not quite. Nevertheless, these are all *good* things, considering the alternative.

Similarly, in the future, we will see how all the difficult and trying times were actually good. Hashem is one, and only good comes forth from Him.

When this concept is a reality, there is no difficulty one cannot deal with. Hashem loves us and that’s a fact. I am incapable of understanding Hashem’s ways, but one day I will thank Hashem for it, just like I thanked the doctor. May we all merit this level of trust in Hashem.