



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura**  
**Take home Dvar Torah**

5786 Parshat Vayechi

December 30, 2025

*By: Rabbi Avi Cohen*

***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.**

## תשפ"ו Parshat Vayechi

I heard this lesson from my Rebbe, Harav Moshe Shapiro זצ"ל, who heard it from his Rebbe, Rav Elyahu Dessler זצ"ל. Today is Rav Shapiro's ninth *yahrtzeit*.

This week's portion, Vayechi, is the last chapter in the book of Bereshit – Genesis. It concludes with Yaakov's death, his burial in Israel, and the death of his son Yosef.

In his last comment to the book of Bereshit, Nachmanides writes (49:23):

רמב"ן על בראשית פרק מט פסוק לג

השלים הכתוב ספר בראשית שהוא ספר היצירה בחדוש העולם ויצירת כל נוצר, ובמקרי האבות כולם שהם כעין יצירה לזרעם, מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז להודיע כל העתיד לבא להם

*This concludes the book of Bereshit, which is the book of Creation of the world and everything in it, and **the events** that occurred to the forefathers, which **are like a creation** for their children. This is because all of the events that happened to them (the forefathers) create a template that hints to what will occur to their progeny in the future.*

This is the concept known as מעשה אבות סימן לבנים “*The deeds of our forefathers are a sign for their children.*” Throughout his commentary on Bereshit, Nachmanides points out several examples of this phenomenon, revealing to us that this final chapter of Bereshit corresponds to the last chapter in Jewish history, the chapter that we are now writing – the end of days. When Nachmanides' commentary to the Torah was first printed, the following quote (on Genesis 47:28) was censored by the gentiles and has only been recently restored.

(כח) ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה. כבר הזכרתי (לעיל מג יד) כי רדת יעקב למצרים הוא גלותינו היום ביד החיה הרביעית (דניאל ז ז) רומי הרשעה, כי בני יעקב הם עצמם סבבו רדתם שם במכירת יוסף אחיהם, ויעקב ירד שם מפני הרעב, וחשב להנצל עם בנו בבית אוהב לו, כי פרעה אוהב את יוסף וכבן לו, והיו סבורים לעלות משם ככלות הרעב מארץ כנען, כמו שאמרו (לעיל מז ד) לגור בארץ באנו כי אין מרעה לצאן אשר לעבדיך כי כבד הרעב בארץ כנען והנה לא עלו, אבל ארך עליהם הגלות, ומת שם ועלו עצמותיו, וזקני פרעה ושריו העלוהו, ועשו עמו אבל כבד

*28) I have already mentioned that Yaakov's going down to Egypt set the precedent for our current exile in the hands of the "fourth beast" (a reference to Daniel 7:7), viz, Rome –because (1) Yaakov's sons were the ones who caused Yaakov to go to Egypt by selling Yosef their brother; (2) Yaakov went down because of a famine and thought to save himself with his son Yosef who was beloved to Pharaoh like a son; (3) They also thought to leave Egypt as soon as the famine in Israel ended, as it says in the verse (47:4), "We came to sojourn in the land (Egypt), for there is no grazing for our cattle because of the famine in Israel." But, in the end, they never left; rather, the exile continued on and on; (4) Yaakov died there; (5) Pharaoh's elders and officers took him for his burial to Israel; and (6) they mourned heavily for him.*

וכן אנחנו עם רומי ואדום - אחינו הסיבובו ביאתינו בידם, כי כרתו ברית עם הרומיים ואגריפס המלך האחרון לבית שני ברח אליהם לעזרה, ומפני הרעב נלכדו אנשי ירושלים, והגלות ארך עלינו מאד, לא נודע קצו כשאר הגליות ואנחנו בו כמתים אומרים יבשו עצמותינו נגזרנו לנו, ויעלו אותנו מכל העמים מנחה לה', ויהיה להם אבל כבד בראותם כבודנו ואנחנו נראה בנקמת ה', יקימנו ונחיה לפניו

*The same applies to our exile in the hands of Rome - Edom: (1) Our very own brothers caused us to fall into their hands by making a treaty with the Romans (Yehuda the Maccabee and his brother Yonatan who renewed it) and Agrippa II, the last king of Israel, who ran to the Romans*

*for help; (2) Jerusalem was captured because of a famine; and (3) the exile continues unabated with no end in sight, unlike the other exiles, which had a limited length. (4) In this exile, we are **like dead**, saying that our bones are dry, we are cut off, (Ezekiel 37:11). (5) But they (the other nations of the world) will eventually exalt us above all the other nations – an offering to Hashem, and at that time, when the nations of the world see our honor, they will mourn greatly, and we will see Hashem’s revenge against them, may Hashem keep us alive.*

Based on the concept that *the deeds of our forefathers are a sign for their children*, Nachmanides reveals that the final events that transpired with Yaakov in Egypt would model the events that will transpire when Mashiach comes and this exile comes to its end.

The similarities shared by the exile to Egypt and the exile in which we now find ourselves are striking. Yaakov embodied the entire Jewish nation; hence, his body’s return to Israel represents our return to Israel at the end of the exile. The return of his holy body to Israel and his burial by the “elders and officers of Pharaoh” is predictive of the return of the Jewish nation to the land of Israel after our long exile. Indeed, we were also returned to the Land of Israel by the “dignitaries” of other nations when United Nations miraculously voted to give the Land of Israel to the Jewish people.

The process has not completed for Mashiach has not yet come. yet the prerequisite to his coming is the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. Mashiach’s arrival will restore Hashem’s kingdom to the world and bring great honor to Hashem’s nation and cause the nations of the world great mourning.

Although we have not merited to see the fulfillment of the entire prophetic passage of Nachmanides, the complete redemption by the Mashiach, and Hashem’s revenge against our enemies, we are struck by

how much of it *has* so far come true, some of which we have ourselves witnessed.

Yaakov being “dead” is a metaphor for what the Jewish nation will look when returning to Israel - a body without a soul. They will appear to be dead, dry bones.

Who could have thought that the Jewish people would ever return to the land of Israel after so many years of exile? It seemed so impossible that the New Testament’s sole prophecy is that the Jewish Nation is destined to wander the face of the earth and never return to their land. So unlikely it was, that they made it a prophecy! How could a fractured dispersed nation ever return to Israel? But Hashem runs the world and He proved it false. This is why for 45 years the Vatican did not recognize the State of Israel until 1993. This was an absolute contradiction to their bible and still causes problems for their theologians.

The Jewish nation received permission to return to Israel right after the Holocaust. After losing 6,000,000 of its members in such a horrific, sadistic, and dehumanizing way, what did the Jewish nation look like? Emaciated, crippled, and seemingly broken; the Jewish nation looked and felt like it was dead - dry bones - down and out, with no hope for a future. Like Yaakov, it was then a soulless body.

There seems, however, to be an obvious contradiction here. When Yaakov was taken to Israel to be buried, he was indeed dead; whereas when we returned to Israel, we were only *like dead*. Why the discrepancy? The Talmud offers the answer in the form of an intriguing discussion (Taanit 5b):

אמר רבי יוחנן יעקב אבינו לא מת. אמר ליה, וכי בכדי ספדו ספדנייא  
וחנטו חנטייא וקברו קברייא אמר ליה מקרא אני דורש שנאמר ואתה אל תירא

עבדי יעקב נאם ה' ואל תחת ישראל כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק ואת זרעך מארץ  
שבים מקיש הוא לזרעו מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים

*Rabbi Yitzchak quoted Rabbi Yochanan who said, "Yaakov our forefather never died!" Rabbi Nachman responded. "Was it then for naught that the eulogizers eulogized him, the embalmers embalmed him, and the buriers buried him?" [The Torah reports that Yaakov was eulogized, embalmed, and buried.] Rabbi Yitzchak said, "There is a clear verse in scripture that teaches this (Jeremiah 30:10).*

(ו) וְאַתָּה אֵל תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב נְאֻם יְדֹד וְאֵל תַּחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הִנְנִי  
מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ מֵרְחוֹק וְאֶת זְרַעְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ שְׂבִיִּים

*10) 'But as for you, do not fear, My servant Jacob,' says Hashem, 'and do not be afraid, Israel; for behold, I am saving you from distant places, and your descendants from the land of their captivity,'*

*The verse equates Yaakov to his descendants, just as his descendants are alive, so, too, Yaakov is alive."*

Because the verse in Jeremiah refers to Yaakov/Yisroel and his descendants in one breath, we see that Yaakov is equated to his children and that he lives-on through their existence. Avraham and Yitzchak did not comprise the entire Jewish nation, for Avraham had Yishmael and Yitzchak had Esav, both of whom broke away to start other nations. Only Yaakov encompassed the entire Jewish nation because all of his children were completely righteous and carried his legacy into the Jewish nation that issued from them. Together, they embodied the essence of Yaakov their father.

So what is the essence of Yaakov? For what did he stand? Yaakov's quality was אמת - *truth*. He was the one who spent his life studying

Hashem's truth, the Torah. The love of Torah and Hashem burned intensely within his soul. This is embodied in Yitzchak's statement about Yaakov, הקול קול יעקב - "*The voice is the voice of Yaakov*" – Yaakov's voice studying the Torah and praying to Hashem are his forté and the essence of his life. Yaakov's strong voice in Torah and prayer is the product of the fire of Torah that burns strongly within his soul.

All of Yaakov's children shared this love of Torah and dedication to Hashem. Thus, through his children, Yaakov's legacy continues. Although when Yaakov was taken to Israel for burial in מערת המכפלה (the Cave of Machpelah) to be placed with Leah, Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, and Yitzchak and Rivka, it *looked* like he was dead; in reality, though, he was still very much alive. It requires quite a discerning eye; although for burial was just his body, Yaakov was very much alive then, and continues to live today, in the Jewish nation that carries his name.

Unfortunately, a cursory look at the current Jewish nation reveals that so, so many Jews carry the name "Jew" in body only but not in soul. This is also what Nachmanides referred to when he observed that the final redemption will come to Yaakov's body, which will be missing its soul. The Jews who represent Yaakov today are those who have the fire of Torah burning in their souls, as did Yaakov's.

Our task at this time is, in a sense, to restore Yaakov's soul to him, to give life to Yaakov's seemingly dead body. How do we accomplish that?

There is but one way: To ignite the fire of Torah in the souls of our brothers and sisters. To teach and study Torah with them so Yaakov's voice becomes stronger as we infuse him with life. As long as his voice is strong, he is alive and well.

We saw this in action after the Holocaust. There were many holy learned rabbis who miraculously survived the Holocaust, with the fire of Torah burning in their souls, who went on to establish yeshivot, high level academies, to teach Torah. These yeshivot were established primarily in Israel as well as in our wonderful country, the United States of America, and groomed the next generation of Torah teachers and rabbis. The rest is history. Today, Yaakov is very much alive, and Judaism thrives in great part because of the proliferation of Torah study. These teachers have succeeded in igniting the fire of Torah in their students who have carried the torch forward and are doing the same.

As we await the conclusion of Nachmanides' prophetic commentary, the coming of Mashiach, and the complete redemption, restoring Hashem's honor through the Jewish nation, we now know what will hasten his coming: We must restore the soul to the body of Yaakov by teaching Torah to every Jew.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Today was the fast of Asara BeTevet, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet. Based on a verse in Yechezkel (24:2) this day was designated as a fast day.

(ב) בֶּן אָדָם (כתוב) כְּתֹב לְךָ אֶת שֵׁם הַיּוֹם אֶת עֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה סָמַךְ מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל  
אֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

*Son of man, write for yourself the name of this day, this very day the king of Bavel has reached Yerushalayim on this very day.*

Maimonides adds a few words of explanation to the verse. He writes (Taanit 5:2):

ועשירי בטבת שבו סמך מלך בבל נבוכדנאצר הרשע על ירושלים והביאה  
במצור ובמצוק

*And the Tenth of Tevet on which Nebuchadnezzar the evil laid siege to Yerushalayim **and brought it to great pain and oppression.***

This siege caused immense pain and suffering to the inhabitants of Yerushalayim. The famine and hunger killed many people; there was simply no food to be had. It impossible to imagine the suffering that people experienced at that time.

The Zohar says that Esav was victorious over us in three months of the Hebrew year "ירחין דעשו." Obviously, the months of Tamuz in which the City of Yerushalayim was broken into, and Av, the month that both Holy Temples were destroyed, are two of the three, but what is the third? It is Tevet. The month in which Yerushalayim was put under siege.

The Vilna Gaon says that the worst of the three months was Tevet. Why would Tevet be the worst of the three?

Perhaps because in Tevet Esav had three major triumphs over the Torah that forever changed the future of the Jewish nation. It says in the book Megilat Taanit, which teaches us the fast days throughout the year.

בח' בטבת נכתבה התורה יונית בימי תלמי המלך והחושך בא לעולם שלשת ימים.  
בט' בו לא כתבו רבותינו על מה. בי' בו סמך מלך בבל את ידו על ירושלים להחריבה

*On the 8<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, the Torah was translated into Greek in the days of Ptolemy the king, and darkness came to the world for three days. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, our Sages did not reveal what happened. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the king of Bavel sieged the city of Yerushalayim to destroy it.*

### **The 8<sup>th</sup> of Tevet.**

In the Mishna in tractate Soferim (chapter 1) explains why the world was plunged into darkness for three days when the Torah was translated into Greek. What was so bad about that?

מעשה בה' זקנים שכתבו לתלמי המלך את התורה יונית והיה היום קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה העגל שלא היתה התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה

*Once King Ptolemy had five elders translate the Torah into Greek, and the day was as tragic for the Jewish people as the day the Jews worshipped the golden calf (the day the first set of tablets were broken) because the Torah could not be translated adequately.*

Tractate Soferim continues,

(ח) שוב מעשה בתלמי המלך שכנס ע"ב זקנים והושיבם בשבעים ושנים בתים ולא גלה להם על מה כנסם נכנס לכל אחד ואחד מהם אמר להם כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם. נתן המקום עצה בלב כל אחד ואחד והסכימה דעתן לדעת אחת וכתבו לו תורה בפני עצמה

*There was a second story with Ptolemy the king where he took 72 elder and put them into 72 different rooms without revealing to them his purpose. He then entered each room and told each Sage to "write for me (in Greek) the Torah of Moshe your Rebbe. Hashem put the exact same translations into the hearts of each Sage, and they came out with the exact same 72 translations.*

That they all translated the Torah identically would be astounding in and of itself, but the miracle was even greater. The next Mishna says.

(ט) וי"ג דבר שינו בה

*And they each made 13 changes to the translation.*

Where the Sages saw that the literal translation could be misunderstood, they changed it so that it could not be misunderstood.

**And they all changed the identical 13 things!**

Although the Torah's translation brought about a major sanctification of Hashem's name, the Sages still tell us that three days of

darkness descended upon the world, and the day in Jewish history is as tragic as the day the Tablets were broken.

There is a deep connection between these two events, which helps us understand the severity the Torah being translated into Greek.

The essential difference between the first and second tablets is that the stones of the first set of tablets were formed in heaven by Hashem and the second set were hewn from mountain by Moshe, before ascending the mountain to have Hashem write the ten commandments on them.

This is very symbolic. The first set of tablets created by Hashem had the entire Torah on them including the Torah that would be learned in the future. Of course this was a miracle, but Hashem did it. The Sages also tell us that once a person learned a word of Torah, he would never forget it.

This is because of the second attribute of the heavenly-created stones, and that is that the stones of the tablet were symbolic of the hearts of the Jewish people, which at that point in time were completely pure. They were like they were given from heaven, such that the Torah that they learned adhered to their hearts and became one. Therefore, they could not forget anything they learned. It immediately became part of them.

In two places in Proverbs, King Solomon tells us, כתבם על לוח לבך, *“write them on the slate of your heart.”* The heart of a Jew is called a “slate” just like the tablets. Hence, the stones that the Ten Commandments were written on were symbolic of the hearts of the Jews receiving the Torah.

The second tablets were plain stones from a mountain. Now the Holy Torah has to be written on our hearts of stone, which are

incompatible with the Holy Torah and requires much toil and effort for it to stick.

The Torah took a great tumble when it was given in the second form.

This very difference is what happened when King Ptolemy had the Torah translated into Greek. No longer was the Torah the infinite wisdom of Hashem, which could be plumbed only by the holy seekers of Hashem's word. It was now a book like any other that could be put on your shelf for interesting reading. As the Mishna in Soferim said, *because the Torah could not be translated adequately*. The Torah is like an onion with an infinite number of layers - ways to understand it,- one layer deeper than the other, and now is was imprisoned in just one translation. As if to say, "Sure, this is the Jewish Torah, you can understand it fully!"

The Torah took a hit similar to what happened when the Tablets were broken.

### **The 9<sup>th</sup> of Tevet**

Although the Mishna does not reveal what happened on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, in the special prayers said on Asara Betevet, it says that Ezra the Scribe, the last prophet died on that day. The Talmud tells us that Malachi was Ezra.

Here again the Torah took a great hit.

Prophecy is a carryover from Har Sinai. At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish nation became prophets when they heard the first two commandments directly from Hashem. The Talmud tells us that the spiritual experience was so overwhelming that their souls actually left them after each encounter. At this point, the Jewish people asked Moshe if he could please convey the remaining eight commandments to them

instead of Hashem, and Moshe posed the request to Hashem who said (Deutoronomy 18:17,18):

(יז) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵי הַיְטִיבוּ אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ:  
(יח) נְבִיא אֲקִים לָהֶם מִקֶּרֶב אֲחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹךָ וְנִתְּנִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדַבַּר אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל  
אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנוּ

17) *Then Hashem said to me: They have done well in what they have said. 18) I will establish a prophet for them from among their brethren, like you, and I will place my words in his mouth.*

Prophets were Hashem's way of communicating with His people. When Hashem had something He wanted to tell us, He would use a prophet to relay that message. With the death of the last prophet, we lost our open line to Hashem. Hashem has ceased to speak directly to His people.

### **The 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet**

*On the 10<sup>th</sup> the king of Bavel sieged the city of Yerushalayim to destroy it.* It was not until three years later that the city was actually breached, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, and destroyed three weeks later, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, but this was the beginning of the end. Perhaps it was because Yerushalayim was placed in pain and suffering that the other events could happen. How is that?

Yerushalayim is the source of all Torah to the world, as it says – כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, from Zion will come Torah, and, therefore, when Hashem showers the world with His blessings, they come via Yerushalayim. The Sages call Yerushalayim the world's umbilical cord. Just as all the nutrition and vital elements necessary for life come to the fetus via the umbilical cord, so, too, Yerushalayim serves as the conduit for all blessing.

When Yerushalayim was put into pain and suffering, all of this was restricted and put into suffering mode, and the world did not receive blessings that it needed to get, and from there things deteriorated. This started the trend towards Esav's dominance over us during the month of Tevet and paved the way for the other tragic events to occur.

Tevet is the month that had three major events that changed the level of Torah in the world, the effects of which we are still suffering. Perhaps this why the month of Tevet is considered the month that Esav had the most powerful negative effect on the Jewish people.

As we stand in the shadow of Tevet and await the completion of Nachmanides' vision, we are reminded that redemption does not arrive through history alone, but through hearts reignited with Torah. May we merit to strengthen the kol Yaakov in our own lives and in the lives of others, and through that merit see Yaakov fully alive again with the coming of Mashiach.