

Parashas va-Yigash

Parsha Summary

Yehudah begged Yosef not to imprison Binyamin, saying that it would cause their father who was already anguished over the loss of his wife's first son Yosef to die in grief. Yosef responded by crying and revealing himself to his brothers, saying that he did not hold a grudge against them because God set it up so that he could provide for them during the famine. Pharaoh had the brothers send for Yaakov and the whole family to come and move to Egypt, and when the sons of Yaakov came and told him the news of Yosef's status, he revived and wanted to go see him. God came to Yaakov and told him not to fear moving to Egypt, for He will descend with him and raise him back up to the land. Yaakov's 70 children and grandchildren are all listed here as they moved to Egypt.

Yosef came to greet his father and Yaakov saw him; they embraced and cried. Yosef told his brothers to say that they are shepherds so that they could live in Goshen, separate from the Egyptians. Yosef brought five of his brothers and his father to Pharaoh. Upon being asked his age, Yaakov told Pharaoh that he lived a short and difficult life, but blessed Pharaoh. In order to buy food, the Egyptians eventually had to sell off all their possessions, their land, and even themselves as slaves to Yosef and Pharaoh, saying 'better slavery than dying of hunger.' Yosef relocated the cities and arranged that they would be given grain to plant and work the land, and they would give one fifth of the produce to Pharaoh. Only the priests remained free, as they had a stipend from Pharaoh. Yaakov and his family lived and thrived in the land of Goshen.

Classic Questions

What was Yehudah's strategy with this speech? What was he trying to convince Yosef to do?

- **Rashi/Midrash:** Yehudah was threatening to kill Yosef if he didn't release Binyamin
- **Ramban:** Yehudah summed up the previous events in hopes of arousing compassion
- **Bechor Shor:** the summation of past events was actually Yehudah's insinuation that Yosef must have been plotting from the beginning to have Binyamin come to be framed
- **Abarbanel:** Yehudah was hoping to negotiate privately because he was asking for him to take Binyamin's place, which would not have been a lawful punishment

Why did Yosef have his family live in Goshen?

- **Rashi:** Goshen had the best land for grazing
- **Ramban:** he knew Yosef would not want to live in the capital, the seat of government
 - **Abarbanel:** because royal ministers/servants are always engaged in wrongdoing
- **Ralbag:** separating his family from the Egyptians would protect them from persecution for being shepherds, a disgraceful career in their culture
- **R. Hirsch, Netziv:** to prevent assimilation, Yosef wanted his family to live separately from the general Egyptian populace

Who did the sons of Yaakov marry?

- **Gemara (Pesachim 50a):** Avraham warned Yitzhak, and Yitzhak warned Yaakov, not to take Canaanite wives - and so it cannot be that the sons of Yaakov married Canaanites

- **Gemara** (Sotah 10a): Tamar, daughter of the Canaanite named Shua, was actually a convert, or **Targum Yonasan**: “Canaanite” here means merchant
- **Rashi** (46:1), **Bereshis Rabbah**: the “Canaanite” mentioned as Shimon’s wife is actually Dinah, who was violated by the Canaanite [Shekhem]
- **Bereshis Rabbah** (82:8, 84:21): some say that each of Yaakov’s sons were born with a twin sister (Albeck ed. 84:35) and these were the women that they married
 - **Ramban** (38:2): this could have been permitted to them, because “bnei Noach” are allowed to marry their father’s children from another mother
- **Rashbam**: surely the brothers were careful not to marry Canaanite women
- **Bereshis Rabbah** (85:1-2), **Tanhuma**: Yehudah married a Canaanite, and that is why he was “lowered from among his brothers” and why two of his sons dyed
 - **Ibn Ezra** (38:2, 46:10): other sons of Yaakov were careful not to take Canaanite wives, and so later on the Torah points out that Er and Onan died for this reason
- **Bereshis Rabasi** (46:10): Shimon’s son, “Shaul son of the Canaanite,” teaches either
 - Shimon had a son with a Canaanite, but all of Yaakov’s other sons only did not marry women from among the Canaanites, but rather they married their sisters
 - Shimon married his sister Dinah, but all the other children were born from Yaakov’s sons marrying actual Canaanite women
 - **Rashi** (50:12, based on Bamidbar Rabbah 2:8): at least some of Yaakov’s grandsons were children of Canaanite women (see **Chizkuni** there)
- **Ibn Ezra, Radak (46:10)**: other than Yehudah and Shimon who married Canaanites, the wives of the brothers were from other nations such as Aram, Midyan, etc.

Why does the Torah detail how Yosef acquired the Egyptians lands and human labor?

- **Rashi**: Yosef was acting for the good of his brothers by displacing all the Egyptians to new locations so that his brothers would not be thought of as foreigners
 - **Kli Yakar**: the Egyptians would have sympathy and be kinder to the immigrants
 - **Or haHayim**: Yosef kept the populace poor so his family would seem wealthier
- **Radak**: we are taught Yosef’s honesty that everything he negotiated went to Pharaoh
- **Abarbanel**: we see how Yosef wisely allocated food for the benefit of the populace
 - **Ramban**: Yosef never forced the populace to give him their grain, merely bought it during the years of plenty, and he also never enslaved them, but hired them
 - **R. Hirsch, Netziv**: Yosef made sure that when relocating people, he moved city populations together, maintaining their social cohesion
- **Bechor Shor** (Shemos 1:11): these policies explain how B’nei Yisrael become enslaved: because all the people were farmers (and Pharaoh owned 1/5 of the country’s grain) it was only natural that they demanded that Yisrael also be forced to build storehouses
- **Netziv**: Yosef was able to arrange the population so that Yisrael lived in an isolated area

Important “Chazal”s and “Rashi”s

- “Do not get angry at your servant” shows that Yehudah spoke harshly to Yosef (Rashi)
 - **Maharal**: besides Midrashic interpretations of Yehuda’s statements as threats, Rashi means to say that even *al pi peshat* he spoke harshly
 - **R. Yaakov Kamenetsky**: people can speak in a way that has both *peshat* and another level of meaning; Yehudah’s literal words only thinly veiled his intents

- R. Elazar: Yosef cried on Binyamin's neck for the destruction of the two temples, and Binyamin cried on Yosef's neck for the destruction of Shiloh (Megilah 16b, Rashi)
- Yosef gave Binyamin five sets of clothes hinting to the clothes of Mordechai (ibid)
- Yaakov saw the wagons [*'agalot*] - Yosef gave a hint that the last topic they [Yosef and Yaakov] studied together was that of the decapitated calf [*'eglah 'arufah*] (Rashi)
 - **Maharal, others:** this mitzvah represents the responsibility to accompany someone traveling, which Yaakov had to fulfill when sending Yosef to his brothers
- Yosef cried on Yaakov, but Yaakov did not cry, because he was saying Shema (Rashi)
- "Yaakov's family was seventy" even though the count adds to 69. Said Rebi Chama bar Chanina, this is Yocheved who was born at the border to Egypt (Bava Basra 123)

A Short Vort

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes that the Torah describes the setting in which God appeared to Yaakov on his way down to Egypt, it says that God came to Yaakov "at night," something that is not found anywhere else in Tanakh. Yaakov is the forefather of nighttime, and is associated with the evening prayer, because Yaakov lived so much of his life and ultimately died in exile, outside of the land of Avraham and Yitzhak. The message that God sends to Yaakov "at night" is the message to the Jewish people in exile: that although it might be harder to see, God can still be found during the long history without prophecy and without the Temple, and we are to believe in His promise to Yaakov that He will ultimately return us to the land.