

Parashas Va-Yichi

Parsha Summary

Yaakov made Yosef swear that he wouldn't bury him in Egypt, and he agreed. Yosef came to visit Yaakov when he was sick, and Yaakov retold how God blessed him and of his burying Rachel on the road to Efras, also saying that Efraim and Menashe would be like his own children and that he would give Yosef the city of Shechem. Yosef brought them to Yaakov with Menashe on Yaakov's right, but when blessing them, Yaakov crossed his hands to put his right hand on the younger Efraim, saying that Efraim would be greater than his older brother.

Yaakov blessed all of his children, but also criticized Reuvain for defiling his bed, and cursed the temper of Shimon and Levi. The other sons were blessed with prosperity and often compared to animals. Yaakov reminded his sons to bring his body to the cave in which his father and grandfather are buried, and then passed. Yosef had the Egyptians embalm Yaakov, and Pharaoh gave the family permission to bring the body to Canaan for burial. Yosef and Egyptians escorted Yaakov's body with great fanfare until reaching the burial site and returning to Egypt. Yosef's brothers feared that he would then take revenge on them, and begged Yosef for mercy, but Yosef cried and insisted that he does not bear a grudge, because God had orchestrated the events for the good. Yosef died at an old age, even seeing his great-grandchildren.

Classic Questions

Why did Yaakov tell Yosef about God appearing and blessing him and his burial of Rivkah here?

Why did Yaakov review his whole personal history to Yosef at this point?

- **Rashi:** Yaakov mentioned God's promise to him that he would have more children, which Yaakov understood as having Efraim and Menashe be considered as his own
 - **Rashi:** he discusses Rachel's burial to explain that she had to be buried there even though he was asking Yosef to bury him elsewhere
 - **Seforno:** he mentions Rachel's death to say he wouldn't have more sons himself
 - **Abarbanel:** Rachel's burial place Efras is reminiscent of the name Efraim, which Yaakov saw as indicating that Yosef's sons should be the recipients of this gift
 - **R. Hirsch:** Rachel is remembered as Yaakov's beloved wife in explanation for why he would give this double-portion to her son (instead of Leah's firstborn)
- **Rashbam, Ibn Ezra:** Yaakov was explaining how God promised him the land personally to apportion it however he may see fit, explaining how he can give Shechem to Yosef
 - **Bechor Shor:** Rachel's burial spot would be in Yosef's future portion

What was Yaakov's intent in criticizing 'the wrath' of Shimon and Levi regarding Shechem?

- **Radak, Ramban, R. Hirsch:** Yaakov gets the final word, that the brothers were wrong
 - **Ramban:** Yaakov's words were thus a criticism of Shimon and Levi themselves
 - **R. Hirsch:** as Yaakov's final testament, he insisted that the violence of Shimon and Levi should not be representative of the future of Jewish history
- **Rashi, Ohr Hachayim:** Yaakov was (also) critical of the brothers' selling of Yosef
 - **Ramban:** according to *peshat*, Yaakov never knew that his sons sold Yosef
- **Bechor Shor:** this was an explanation why Shimon and Levi could not be kings

Selected “Chazal” and “Rashi”

- [Yaakov said] it was by divine decree that he buried Rachel in Beit Lechem (instead of Hevron), so that her descendents would pass by her grave when being exiled (Rashi)
- Yaakov conquered Shechem with his “sword and bow,” meaning prayer (Targum, Bava Basra 123)
- Yaakov sought to reveal when the end of days would be, but he was prevented from doing so [despite all of his sons being faithful to God] (Rashi, Pesachim 56a)
- Zevulun was on the shores, because they would do business to allow the members of Yisaschar to study Torah, as Moshe indicated in his blessing as well (Rashi)
- “Yaakov our father did not die,” even though he was embalmed and buried, because just as his progeny are alive, he too is alive (Taanis 5b)
- Pharaoh told Yosef that even though he swore an oath to his father to bring his body to Canaan, he should just annul his oath. But Yosef responded that if so, he would annul the oath he swore to Pharaoh that he would not reveal that Pharaoh did not know all *lashon ha-kodesh* [since a king was supposed to speak all languages] (Sotah 36b)
- A person is allowed to lie for the sake of peace, as we see that Yosef’s brothers [falsely] told him that their father commanded Yosef not to take revenge on them (Yevamos 65b)

Short Vort

At the end of Yaakov’s life and Sefer Bereshis, we see how he transitions from becoming the head of a family to the head of a nation - the nation of Israel who will be the subject of the entire Tanakh. At this juncture, Yaakov blesses his sons, “according to each man did he bless them,” providing them with words of blessing that are uniquely suited to each one as individuals. This is what is needed to become a nation, to recognize that different people will be needed to fill different societal roles, and to appreciate all of them for their own unique strengths and personalities.