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Parsha

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Vayechi

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Reflection For
The Week

When you feel triggered or overwhelmed, what helps you remember who you are before you react?

Gematria on the Parshah: Yehudah The Lion Who Rises

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshah Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu gives his final blessings to his children before his passing. When Yaakov blesses Yehudah, he compares him to a lion and declares that the scepter of kingship will never depart from his tribe. Why is Yehudah compared to a lion? What qualities does Hashem love so much in him that will merit Mashiah coming from his tribe? What can this teach us about what Hashem wants from us?

Rising Like a Lion

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that Yaakov likens Yehudah to a lion because of his unique strength, the ability to rise with power after falling.

The Vilna Gaon notes that a person's full strength is expressed through their name combined with both parents. The gematria of **יהודה בן יעקב ולא** (Yehudah the son of Yaakov and Leah) is 306, the same as **נפל וקם** (he fell and he rose). Remarkably, 306 is also **מלך אריה** (lion + king), the very words Yaakov uses for Yehudah. Yehudah's greatness and leadership are not measured by never failing, but by the gevurah to rise stronger after each fall.

This contrast is seen clearly when comparing the first king of Israel, Shaul HaMelech, with David HaMelech. After Shaul fails to eradicate Amalek, he falls into deep depression. That fall erodes his character, leading him to jealousy and to wrongfully pursue David's life. Shaul never fully rises again.

David also falls through conflict with his children and in the episode of Batsheva. But each time he openly admits his failure, does teshuvah, and emerges stronger. This is the power David inherits from his ancestor Yehudah, to fall and to rise even higher.

Leading Through Teshuvah

David HaMelech teaches that no matter how far a person falls, one can always return to serve Hashem by admitting failure and using it as fuel to bring more light into the world. This is why kingship was given to Yehudah, the tribe known for growing stronger after each failure, rather than to Yosef the tzaddik. Only a king that understands falling can help others to rise back up.

All of this reflects the source of David's strength: Yehudah himself. We see this theme again in

Moshe's blessing in Parshat Vezot HaBrachah: "May Hashem listen to the voice of Yehudah." The gematria of **קול יהודה** (the voice of Yehudah) is 166, the same as **נופל** (one who falls). Hashem listens with special closeness to Yehudah's voice when he falls, because he turns each fall into a step toward transformation.

Yehudah is like a crouching lion, strong in moments of trial. He shows his character when he admits, **צדקה ממני** (she is more righteous than I), acknowledging his failure with Tamar, and later when he stands courageously for Binyamin, offering himself as a substitute to protect his brother.

How, then, can we learn to rise like Yehudah and David HaMelech? How can our own falls become sources of light?

The Baal Shem Tov's Three Paths of Growth

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that when a person stumbles, the response is to grow in three areas: love of fellow Jews, love of Torah, and love of Hashem.

1) Increasing Ahavat Yisrael

Sefer HaChasidim tells a story of a man who struggled with anger. Each time he lost control he felt the weight of his failure, but he did not despair. Instead, he vowed to give charity whenever he stumbled, turning his moments of weakness into acts of kindness.

When we stumble, we must not fall into despair. Instead, we can use that fall as an opportunity to increase in goodness. Practically, we can ask ourselves: who is someone I can help today?

2) Increasing Ahavat Torah

The Ishbitzer Rebbe teaches that the very area in which a person struggles is precisely where Torah must be increased. He advises taking one weekly shiur related to that challenge and sharing its wisdom with others. In this way, a place of weakness can be transformed into a place of illumination.

3) Increasing Ahavat Hashem

The deepest response is to grow in love of Hashem. The name Yehudah comes from **הודאה** (gratitude). During Sefirat HaOmer, the middah (attribute) of Lag BaOmer is **הוד שבוהוד** (gratitude within gratitude). The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Lag BaOmer is the day when our mourning turns into joy, because this attribute is

the key to perfecting all other middot. By cultivating a daily song of gratitude, we recognize that everything comes from Hashem.

King David would count one hundred blessings he was grateful for each day. When we fall, we can say twenty things we are grateful for to Hashem, or, as Rabbi Shalom Arush suggests, spend ten minutes in a quiet place thanking Hashem for all the blessings He bestows upon us.

The Moment You Forget Who You Are

By: Adam Klasner



Yaakov's final words to Yosef seem almost superficial. He speaks about Yosef being "graceful to the eye," about people climbing walls just to see him. On the surface it sounds like praise. But Yaakov was pointing to Yosef's deepest strength.

The brothers chose a quiet life for a reason. Shepherding kept them away from pressure, distraction, and emotional overwhelm. In that space, it was easier to stay connected to Hashem and to themselves. Yosef was thrown into the opposite reality. Egypt was loud, demanding, morally confusing, and emotionally intense. And Yosef did not disconnect. He cried, he felt pain, he was triggered, but he never lost his inner anchor.

This is why halacha teaches that in Shiloh, which was in Yosef's territory, korbanos could be eaten anywhere as long as you could still see the Mishkan. Spiritually, this is a map for real life. You do not need perfect conditions to stay connected. You need inner vision. As long as you can still "see" the center, you are still in it.

Yosef's greatness was not willpower. It was identity. When temptation and pressure came, he saw himself clearly. He knew who he was beneath the noise. That is why his thoughts did not hijack him. That is why he could pause instead of react. That is why he could forgive without losing himself.

Most of us live in Egypt. Emails, stress, family dynamics, money, responsibility, old wounds, unprocessed emotions. The work is not to escape it. The work is to stay present inside it without collapsing or hardening. Yosef teaches us that when we lose connection to our center, we react. When we stay connected, we respond.

This week, the question is not how to quiet the world. The question is where you need to rebuild your inner anchor.



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The Blessings of Yisrael

By: Rabbi Adam Law



This parsha is about brachos (blessings). Yaakov's time is coming to an end, and his blessings are his spiritual bequeathment to the children of Yisrael.

Yaakov's achievement of completeness (ויבא יעקב שלם (בראשית ל"ג)) and the reception of the name Yisrael, means that all his children are blessed and have spiritual privileges. Whereas in the previous generations some didn't make it, Yaakov has proven his wholeness and all of his descendants have this status.

His ascension started when Yaakov took the bechora, and then the blessing meant for Esav. He acquired power over the earth (משמני הארץ), in addition to a spiritual blessing (מטל השמים), confirming his native abilities in that realm. When he becomes Yisrael it confirms his mastery over both realms, and his ability to draw the spiritual from the physical that comes with this combination.

Yaakov, before he himself goes away, gives blessings to all his sons, each according to their ways within Yisrael. But before that, he gives blessings to two of his grandsons, the sons of Yosef, who Yaakov counts as sons.

A shocking thing happens when Yosef brings his sons to Yaakov. Yosef presents them in the proper order so that the older, Menashe should receive the blessing of Yaakov's right hand, and the younger, Ephraim will receive the lesser blessing of the left hand. However, Yaakov switches the two blessings around by crossing his hands. Yosef tries to get his father to switch back but Yaakov refuses. In the end Yaakov gives Ephraim the higher blessing even though he's the younger.

This is difficult to understand. Has Yaakov not learned from all the mishaps that happened because of favoritism that it would only bring trouble to elevate the younger!!? Hadn't Yaakov and the family suffered enough!

Yosef himself certainly didn't want it and tried to switch Yaakov's hands back. He knew what trouble his chosen status had caused. Here is an approach to consider in answering why Yaakov did it anyway:

We have to understand who Yaakov is and what he is trying to bring into this world. As the Navi says, Yaakov is the man of truth (אמת ליעקב). All of his struggles are to show the deeper truth of how Hashem's will acts in the world.

The biggest questions that are asked on him are about integrity. And Yaakov, the איש תם, his challenge is having to make difficult choices from a place of doubt and constriction (מי השלוח). Being able to move forward and do challenging actions in this world is Yaakov's struggle, as a pure and

moral soul. Despite the goat skins he had to wear, using the tools of his brother, he remains whole (הקל קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו).

He must navigate an impossible moral world and make correct choices, according to G-d's will, even though he recognizes the severe cost for this truth.

Yaakov is willing to take the ultimate sacrifice, again and again, because of his truth. So now we can understand why he does that again here by the blessing of Yosef's sons. Yaakov's knew that Ephraim needed and was more worthy of the bigger blessing despite him being younger.

It would go completely against Yaakov's nature to not give the blessing where it belongs. If he had succumbed to Yosef's switching his hands back he would have failed.

He became whole and ready to move on. All of the struggles and doubts over his decisions and their results became revealed to him in his old age as being from G-d's will. And all his children, no matter how far they stray, would be tied into His will and would come back one day.

He realized what he had achieved when he became Yisrael- the one who struggles with the divine and men and overcomes (לב:כט).

Your Lasting Living Legacy

By: Rabbi Joshua Kaller



Parshas Vayechi opens with an irony that is impossible to ignore. It is the parsha that describes the passing of Ya'akov Avinu—and yet it is called Vayechi, “and he lived.” Not Vayamot. Not death. Life.

Chazal sharpen this paradox even further. The Gemara in Ta'anit makes a radical statement: “Ya'akov Avinu lo met” — Ya'akov never died. The Gemara itself immediately challenges this claim: What do you mean he never died? He was embalmed. He was eulogized. He was buried. Every external marker of death was there. How can you say he never died?

And the Gemara answers with a single line that reframes what “life” actually means: “Just as his offspring are alive, so too he is alive.”

Life, the Gemara is teaching us, is not only biological. Life is also continuity. Life is legacy.

This idea explains something deeply human that we all intuitively recognize. People are drawn to creating legacies. They put their names on buildings, programs, foundations, and institutions. Sometimes it's social proof. Sometimes it's validation. But often—whether consciously or not—it is the pursuit of life itself. It is an attempt to touch something eternal. To ensure that what

they stood for does not end when they do. The Torah does not dismiss this instinct. It refines it.

The Gemara in Yevamot teaches that when a person says Torah in the name of a Torah scholar who has passed away, “dovev siftei yeshanim”—the lips of that scholar move in the grave. On a literal level, this is startling. On a deeper level, it is transformative. It means that even in the place we imagine to be the most lifeless, there is still movement, vitality, and connection—when Torah is alive in the world.

If the lips below are moving, then the neshamah above, which is the source of that Torah, must certainly be illuminated. The impact of a life lived with meaning reverberates upward and downward, across all levels of existence. A person does not disappear when their body is buried if their values, teachings, and spiritual imprint are still active.

The Gemara in Berachot expresses this same truth in even starker terms: “Tzaddikim, even in their death, are called alive.” Why? Because they are attached to the Source of life itself. A life connected to Hashem does not expire; it transforms.

This is why the parsha is called Vayechi. Ya'akov's physical life is concluding, but the Torah is showing us something far more significant: Ya'akov is actively establishing eternity. He gathers his children. He transmits blessing, vision, and direction. He crystallizes a way of living that will define a people forever. He creates a pathway—through Torah, through attachment to Hashem, and through responsibility to future generations—that ensures his life will continue through them.

Ya'akov did not merely leave descendants. He left a methodology for living.

And that is the lesson for us.

Legacy is not about names on walls. It is not about being remembered in abstraction. Legacy is about what continues because you lived. The Torah you teach. The values you model. The people you influence. The homes, communities, and relationships you shape with intention and purpose.

Each of us is building something that will outlive us—whether we think about it or not. Parshas Vayechi challenges us to do so consciously. To invest in eternal acts. To align our lives with Torah, with connection to Hashem, and with transmission rather than consumption.

Ya'akov Avinu never died—not because he avoided death, but because he chose life in its deepest sense.

And that choice remains available to us, every single day.



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