

Parshas Vayechi

This week's Parsha, Vayechi, marks the end of the first Chumash, Bereishis, and includes Yaakov's send-off and blessings to his sons, his burial, and the death of Yosef. I heard a vort from Rabbi Zalman Lipsker, who told me that the numerical value of the word Vayechi is 34, which is the sum of the years Yakov lived with Yosef before he was sent to Egypt and the 17 years he dwelt in Yosef's company before passing away. In other words, the years he "lived" were in the presence of Yosef.

But there is more to this. Yosef, who prepared the land for Yakov and family, and who was the key figure in the realization of the Bris Bein Habisarim, that resulted in the exile, exodus, and the eventual giving of the Torah, realizing and manifesting in actuality the purpose of creation. That is to make a dwelling place for Hashem in the mundane, and accomplished through the Torah, the giving of which happened after the exile. The need for exile and the need for all the trials can be argued amongst Mepharshim, but in hindsight, it's the model of our time, that we will be in Golus, but come out "B'rchush Gadol" with Mashiach. Yosef, through preparing the land physically, and as mentioned, Yehuda, bringing learning, are the two parts of our existence that we can manifest and enact. Yakov specifically gave his sons stern words, based on what

will happen "B'Acharis Hayamim," i.e., the end of days, i.e., when Mashiach will come. His references and foresight into the trials that may befall the sons and their offspring are words of warning from Yakov to the future: don't take the outcome of Mashiach for granted; instead, know that it will require work and tests, and even slips and falls, toward attaining the goal. Meaning that we have an Avoda and cannot sit back; we must be proactive, and in doing so, we create the foundation for the Mashiach to come. It is an active role.

The life of Yakov during the era of Yosef is a lesson to us that to live is to prepare and be active in changing our surroundings. The Rebbe states in various places that Golus is not our stasis; this is not where our soul belongs; it is bound to Hashem in a spiritually revealed world.

Further evidence of Mashiach and the theme that the older will serve the younger, is seen in Yakov's blessings to Yosef's sons, where Yakov was cognizant of the switch between the older and the younger (48:19) "his younger brother will become greater than he and his descendants will be famous among the multitude of nations..." This is messianic in nature, in that it aligns with the prophecy Rivka received about Yakov and Esav, and that the older will serve the younger, which is especially applicable regarding the end of days, when "V'alu Moshiim Behar Tzion Lishpot Es Har Esav..."

The reflection to Gad 49:19, “Gad Gedud Yegudenu, Vehu Yagud Okev,” “Troops will sally forth from Gad, and they will return on their tracks...” In my mind, this phrase concerns an active war we are fighting in the darkness of Golus, and Yakov (Eikev b’lashon Yakov) is that we will find our way on our track: that track is Torah. Yakov reflects on the greatness of keeping the Torah, even in secret, when he says, “Vateishev B’Eisan Kashto” (49:24); see Rashi, because Yosef’s dream prophecies were fulfilled by his keeping the Torah even in secret. This also supports the view that Yosef’s dreams were prophetic and thematically connected to the idea that the older will serve the younger, i.e., messianic in nature.

Further support is in Rashi 49:26, where Rashi comments on “Birchos Avicha Gavru” (The blessings bestowed upon your father have surpassed the blessings of my parents...). Rashi explains that Avraham and Yitzchak were only shown the land of Israel, whereas Yakov was given an abundance of blessings to reach the far ends of the hills of the world. This aligns with the Mashiach message that Yakov will ‘rule over’ Esav, meaning the reach of Yakov and his progeny will be known to the world; hence, another reason we are named Bnei Yisrael.

All the words of Yakov were lined with blessings underlying his commentary, because he was imbuing strength into each son, and with that their offspring, us

today, to be able to accomplish the ultimate goal, that is, ushering in Mashiach. One final point of Yosef to his brothers, 50:21: “He spoke on their hearts...” He says that he cannot retaliate with harm to his brothers, for they were not able to cause damage to Yosef ultimately. If you read it in another way, Yosef is saying the 12 tribes who are divinely appointed as the 12 tribes of the Jews cannot not be extinguished, These are words of support, that we may know, the Jewish people, the Bnei Yisrael, will never be obliterated, instead, we will succeed and shine, and especially if we follow the Torah (like Yosef references a couple pesukim later, that he raised Ephraim’s and Menashe’s grandchildren, i.e. in the way of Torah...which is our antidote of success).

Good Shabbos