

THE WEISS EDITION

וַיְחִי

*Vayechi*



Insider Information

If You Can Beat Them

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# Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF  
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE  
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

# *Lightpoints*

לזכרון ולעלוי נשמה  
הרה"ח הרה"ת הרה"ג ישעיהו זושא  
ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם  
נלב"ע ביום ד' שבט התשפ"ב  
תנצב"ה

**וַיְחִי**

# Vayechi

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מ:א | 49:1

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וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָסֶפֶת נָגִידת לְכֶם  
אֵת אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיּוֹם

*Yaakov called for his sons and said,  
“Gather, and I will tell you what will happen  
to you at the end of days.”*

## *Insider Information*

The Talmud<sup>1</sup> explains that Yaakov wanted to reveal the end of the days (i.e., the time of the ultimate redemption) to his sons, but the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, withdrew from him, rendering him unable to do so.

What did Yaakov want to achieve by revealing this information to his children, and why did G-d disapprove? According to one explanation, Yaakov foresaw that the redemption from Egyptian bondage could potentially be the complete and ultimate redemption, after which the Jewish people would never

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1. Pesachim 56a.

again be exiled.<sup>2</sup> He desired to reveal this to Bnei Yisrael (who knew that the Egyptian exile would not be longer than 400 years<sup>3</sup>), in the hope that it would motivate them to maintain their righteousness and indeed merit the complete redemption at that time. Moreover, he hoped that their knowledge that the final redemption was potentially imminent would cause them to increase their good deeds and bring about that complete redemption even sooner.

G-d restrained Yaakov from revealing this information, however, for the highest form of Divine worship is to serve G-d of one's own initiative, when one's drive to be righteous comes from within. To some degree, this would be lost if Bnei Yisrael's motivation to increase their good deeds was based on prophetic information regarding the potential of their deeds to bring about the ultimate redemption by a given date. Their righteousness would not be regarded as "their own," as it had been motivated by outside sources of inspiration, and their merit would therefore not be complete.

Whereas Yaakov preferred to bring about the final redemption sooner, G-d preferred to give Bnei Yisrael the opportunity to merit the redemption of their own accord, making it the most perfect and complete redemption possible.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 20, pp. 228-232*

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2. See Zohar 3:221a.

3. As stated in Bereishis 15:13-14.

מִתְּוֹךְ | 49:6-7

בְּסֶדֶם אֶל קְבָא נַפְשִׁי בְּקָהָלָם אֶל פָּתָח קְבָדִי כִּי בְּאַפְתָּם  
הַרְגֵּנוּ אִישׁ... אָרוֹר אַפְתָּם כִּי עוֹז עֲבָרָתָם כִּי קָשְׁתָה

*Let my soul not enter their conspiracy, let my honor  
have no part in their assembly; for in their wrath  
they killed a man... Cursed be their rage, for it is fierce,  
and their fury, for it is harsh.*

## If You Can Beat Them

Before his passing, Yaakov rebuked Shimon and Levi and cursed their rage, “for in their wrath they killed a man...” The Midrash<sup>4</sup> explains that the “man” that Shimon and Levi are said to have killed actually refers to quite a few men: the entire adult male population of Shechem! Yaakov refers to all of them as “a man,” because to defeat all of Shechem was as simple for them as defeating one man.

Why, while rebuking them for their actions, did Yaakov pay tribute to the ease with which Shimon and Levi—endowed by G-d with extraordinary strength—decimated the population of Shechem?

Evidently, this unnatural strength was part of the reason Yaakov was so displeased with Shimon’s and Levi’s rage-driven actions.

In theory, Yaakov agreed with Shimon and Levi that punishment of the people of Shechem was justified.<sup>5</sup> He was critical only of their deceitful method. They promised the

4. Cited by Rashi ad loc.

5. See Ohr Hachaim, Bereishis 34:25; Ramban, Bereishis 34:13; Mishneh Torah, Hil. Melachim 9:14.

people of Shechem peace if the entire male population would circumcise themselves, but then they exploited their weakness and pain, and attacked them in violation of their agreement. Such deceitfulness disgraced Yaakov and the belief system for which he stood.

Yaakov therefore rebuked Shimon and Levi, pointing out that considering their ability to wipe out the entire city with the ease of killing one man, they had no need to resort to deception. They could have confronted the people of Shechem directly and made them suffer the consequences of their behavior. “Cursed be their rage!” said Yaakov, for it blinded them from recognizing their ability to carry out judgment without resorting to trickery.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 5, pp. 151-152*

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50:13 | נִשְׁאָו אֶתְהוּ בָנָיו

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*His sons carried him...*

## *Bearers of the Aron*

All of Yaakov's sons, with the exception of Yosef and Levi, who were represented by Ephraim and Menasheh, carried Yaakov's coffin from Egypt to Canaan. According to Rashi, Yaakov instructed them, "Levi shall not carry it, because he (i.e., his tribe) is destined to carry the *aron*. Yosef shall not carry it, because he is a king."

We find, however, that although the tribe of Levi was precluded from carrying Yaakov's coffin, Moshe himself, who was of the tribe of Levi, carried Yosef's coffin out of Egypt. Evidently, carrying these two coffins represented two very different ideas, only one of which conflicted with the tribe of Levi's future as bearer of the *aron*.

Our Sages tell us that as long as Yaakov lived, his presence in Egypt prevented his family's enslavement.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Yaakov's passing and the transfer of his body from Egypt marked the early beginnings of Bnei Yisrael's slavery.

Levi and his tribe, however, were never subjected to the slave labor.<sup>7</sup> When Pharaoh originally came to recruit Bnei Yisrael to "join him" in his work effort, the tribe of Levi refused, reasoning that it was not appropriate to participate in building Pharaoh's cities when one day they would be the

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6. See Rashi, Bereishis 47:28.

7. See Rashi, Shemos 5:4.

ones carrying the holy *aron*. As a result, when Pharaoh later forced his original workers into slave labor, the tribe of Levi was not affected.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, it was unsuitable for Levi, who “transcended” the Egyptian bondage, to take part in carrying Yaakov’s coffin, which represented the beginning of their bondage.

Carrying Yosef’s coffin from Egypt, however, was a symbol of Bnei Yisrael’s redemption, for Yosef’s remains had been their greatest source of hope and belief in their redemption. As Yosef had assured them, “G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.”<sup>9</sup> The one most suitable to carry Yosef’s coffin was therefore Moshe, from the tribe of Levi, who led Bnei Yisrael to their long-anticipated redemption.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20, pp. 237–238

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8. See Baalei Hatosafos, Shemos 1:13.

9. Shemos 13:19.

50:26 | נ:כו

וַיָּמֵת יוֹסֵף בָּן מֵאָה וָשָׁנָה  
וַיִּתְּהִנֵּטֵו אֶתְוָן וַיִּשְׂמַח בְּאַרְון בְּמִצְרָיִם

*Yosef died at the age of one hundred  
and ten years, and he was embalmed and  
placed in a coffin in Egypt.*

## *A Local Source of Energy*

When we conclude the public reading of any of the five books of the Torah, it is customary for the entire community to call out, “*Chazak chazak v’nischazek!*”—“Be strong, be strong, and may we be strengthened!” to encourage one another in the continued study of the Torah. In particular, the proclamation “*Chazak chazak v’nischazek*” highlights the strength we draw from these concluding verses of the book we have read, as well as the strength that the message of these final verses imbues into the ensuing book of Torah that we will soon begin.

Yet the book of Bereishis concludes with what seems to be an unfavorable event—Yosef’s interment in Egypt. Whereas Yaakov’s body had been brought to the land of Canaan for immediate burial, Yosef’s body was embalmed and remained in Egypt, “the shame of the earth.”<sup>10</sup> How is Yosef’s burial in Egypt a source of strength and encouragement?

Upon careful consideration, however, Yosef’s burial is the ultimate embodiment of the theme of the book of Bereishis and its lead-up into the book of Shemos.

Throughout Bereishis we read about the deeds of our pa-

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<sup>10.</sup> Bereishis 42:9.

triarchs and matriarchs, which served to inspire and guide their descendants, the Jewish people, particularly during the dark times of *galus*, exile. Likewise, we learn of G-d's promise that Bnei Yisrael would not remain exiled in Egypt forever, and that they would return to their homeland even greater and richer than they were before. These accounts, as well as Yaakov's blessings to his children near the end of the book, assisted and empowered Bnei Yisrael to endure their exile in Egypt.

Ultimately, however, in order for Bnei Yisrael to survive and even thrive in the lengthy exile, they needed not only promises, blessings and a legacy to aspire to, but also the presence of an actual source of strength to help them overcome the darkness of *galus*.<sup>11</sup>

Yosef's burial in Egypt thus constitutes the most invigorating conclusion to the book of Bereishis. For the physical presence of the holy remains of Yosef, the one without whose permission "no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt,"<sup>12</sup> was what gave Bnei Yisrael the strength to overpower the difficult *galus* that lay ahead.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 25, pp. 476–479

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11. See Zohar 1:222b.

12. Bereishis 41:44.





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