



## VAYECHI

DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE

*Exile Is Never Home*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Vayechi*

Jacob lives the final seventeen years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators, and kings; priests will come from Levi; scholars from Issachar; seafarers from Zebulun; schoolteachers from Simeon;

soldiers from Gad; judges from Dan; olive growers from Asher; and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon and Levi, for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naftali is granted the swiftness of a deer; Benjamin, the ferociousness of a wolf; and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession, consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt, and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpelah

Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G d will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the Land that He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Why do we keep begging for Redemption? Aren't we overdoing it just a little? Doesn't this demonstrate ingratitude for our many blessings?





Before his death, Jacob made Joseph take an oath to bury him in Israel, not in Egypt.

# TEXT 1

*Genesis 47:29–31*

כט. וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שָׂיִם נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֶמֶת אֵל נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם.  
ל. וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם אֲבֹתַי וְנִשְׂאָתְנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וְקִבַּרְתָּנִי בְּקִבְרֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדָבָרְךָ.

לא. וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁבָעָה לִּי וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל רֹאשׁ הַמֶּטֶה.

29. As Israel's [Jacob's] days neared his passing, he summoned his son, Joseph, and said, "If I found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh, treat me with lovingkindness and truth, do not bury me in Egypt.

30. "I will lie with my forefathers, and you will carry me from Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And [Joseph] replied, "I will do as you ask."

31. And he said, "Swear to me." And Joseph swore to him, and Israel prostrated himself on the head of the bed.

## QUESTION

Why did Jacob insist on an oath and not accept Joseph's commitment alone?

## TEXT 2

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber  
Schneersohn, Kuntres  
Umaayan 14:1*

עֲנִין הַשְּׁבוּעָה עַל פִּי פְּשׁוּט, דְּכֹאֲשֶׁר אָדָם נִשְׁבַּע עַל אֵיזָה דָּבָר  
לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ, הֵינּוּ גַם אִם יִהְיוּ לוֹ מְנִיעוֹת וְעֹכֹבִים עַל זֶה, לֹא יוֹעִיל  
שׁוּם דָּבָר, וּמוֹכֶרֶח הוּא לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ. וְהֵינּוּ עַל יְדֵי הַתְּגַבְרוֹת כַּח  
מִהַכּוֹת הַנְּעֻלָּמִים וְכַחוֹת עֲצָמִים שְׁלוֹ. שְׁעַל כַּחוֹת עֲצָמִים אֵין  
שׁוּם מְנִיעָה וְעִיכּוּב, וְכִמְאָמָר אֵין לָךְ דָּבָר הָעוֹמֵד בְּפָנַי הָרְצוֹן.

When you take an oath, no obstacle can stop you, and you are compelled to get it done. An oath marshals our concealed, intrinsic powers, and once these are activated, nothing can stand in our way. As our sages said, "Nothing stands in the way of the will."

An oath awakens deep inner strength and unwavering resolve, driving us beyond our usual limits.



# TEXT 3

*Nachmanides,  
Genesis 47:30-31*

לא היה יעקב חושד בבנו הצדיק  
האהוב לו שימרה על מצות אביו ועל  
הדבר אשר הבטיחו, ואמר "אנכי  
אעשה כדברך".

אבל עשה כן לחזק הענין בעיני פרעה,  
אולי לא יתן לו רשות להפרד ממנו,  
ויאמר לו שלח את אחיך ואת עבדיך  
ויעלוהו שם, או שיחפוץ פרעה שיקבר  
הנביא בארצו לכבוד להם ולזכות.

ולכן השביעו כי לא יהיה נכון  
להעבירו על שבועתו, וגם יוסף יצטרך  
יותר להשתדל בענין מפני השבועה.

וכן היה הדבר.

Jacob did not suspect his righteous, beloved son would disobey his father's instruction and his own words, "I will do as you ask."

Jacob asked for an oath to make it difficult for Pharaoh to refuse. Pharaoh might want to keep Joseph in Egypt and tell him to send Jacob with his brothers and servants. Or Pharaoh might insist that the prophet Jacob be buried in Egypt, bringing honor and merit to Egypt.

Forcing Joseph to take an oath would make Pharaoh hesitate because asking someone to betray their oath is wrong. Being bound by an oath would also force Joseph to try harder.

And this is precisely how it played out.

## ANSWER

Jacob knew Joseph would face many obstacles, and the oath gave Joseph the transcendental power needed to overcome all opposition.

## QUESTION

Why does the text suggest Jacob had Joseph take a second oath?

## QUESTION

Why did Jacob choose to be buried in the Holy Land, leaving his children behind in Egypt as slaves?

## TEXT 4

*Zohar, vol. 1, p. 222a*

רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אָמַר, כִּיּוֹן דִּי־עֵקֶב הָוָה יָדַע דְּבְנוֹי יִשְׁתַּעֲבְדוּן  
בְּגִלוּתָא תַּמָּן בְּמִצְרַיִם, אַמַּאי לָא אֶתְקַבֵּר תַּמָּן בְּגִין דִּי־גִין  
זְכוּתִיהָ עַל בְּנוֹי? אַמַּאי בְּעָא לְאַסְתַּלְקָא מִתַּמָּן? וְהָא כְּתִיב  
"כִּרְחֵם אָב עַל בְּנָיִם" (תְּהִלִּים קג, יג), אָן הוּא  
רְחֻמָּנוּתָא?

Rabbi Yosei said, "Given that Jacob knew that his children would be subject to exile in Egypt, why was he not buried there so his merit could shield his children? Why did he want to escape Egypt? Is it not written, 'As a father has compassion for his children' (Psalms 103:13)? Where was the compassion?"

# TEXT 5

*Rashi, Genesis 47:29*

"אל נא תקברני במצרים".

סופה להיות עפורה כנים, ומרחשין תחת גופי.

ושאין מתי חוצה לארץ חיים אלא בצער גלגול מחלות.

ושלא יעשוני מצרים עבודה זרה.

"Do not bury me in Egypt":

Its soil will become infested with lice, swarming under my body.

When the dead come back to life during the Resurrection of the Dead, those buried outside of Israel will endure the pain of rolling through subterranean tunnels to Israel.

I don't want the Egyptians to turn me into a deity.



The answers focus on Jacob, but what about what was best for his children?

# TEXT 6

*Genesis 50:24–25*

כד. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת, וְאֱלֹקִים פִּקְדוּ יִפְקְדוּ אֶתְכֶם  
וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם  
לֵיצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב.

כה. וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר, פִּקְדוּ יִפְקְדוּ אֱלֹקִים אֶתְכֶם  
וְהֶעֱלֵתֶם אֹת עֵצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה.

24. Joseph told his brothers, "I will die, and G-d will surely remember you and raise you from this land to the Land He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

25. And Joseph insisted [on an oath] from the Children of Israel, saying, "G-d will surely remember you, and you shall take up my bones out of here."

Joseph chose to be buried in Egypt but instructed that his remains be taken to Israel during the Exodus.



## TEXT 7

*Rashi, Exodus 13:19*

אָמַר יוֹסֵף: אֲנִי שָׁלִיט הָיִיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה סִפְק  
בְּיָדֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֲבָל בְּנֵי לֹא יִנְיָחוּם מִצְרַיִם לַעֲשׂוֹת,  
לְכֹךְ הִשְׁבִּיעָם לְכַשְׁיִגְּאֵלוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִנָּשָׁם שִׁשָּׂאוֹהוּ.

Joseph said, "I was ruler over Egypt and had the authority to bury my father in Israel. However, the Egyptians will prevent my children from doing the same for me." Therefore, he made them promise they would take him along when they left.

## QUESTION

If Jacob insisted on being buried in Israel, why didn't Joseph do the same?

## A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

When Joseph died, no one had the power to arrange his burial in Israel, so he had no choice but to be buried in Egypt and reinterred later.

## THE FLAW

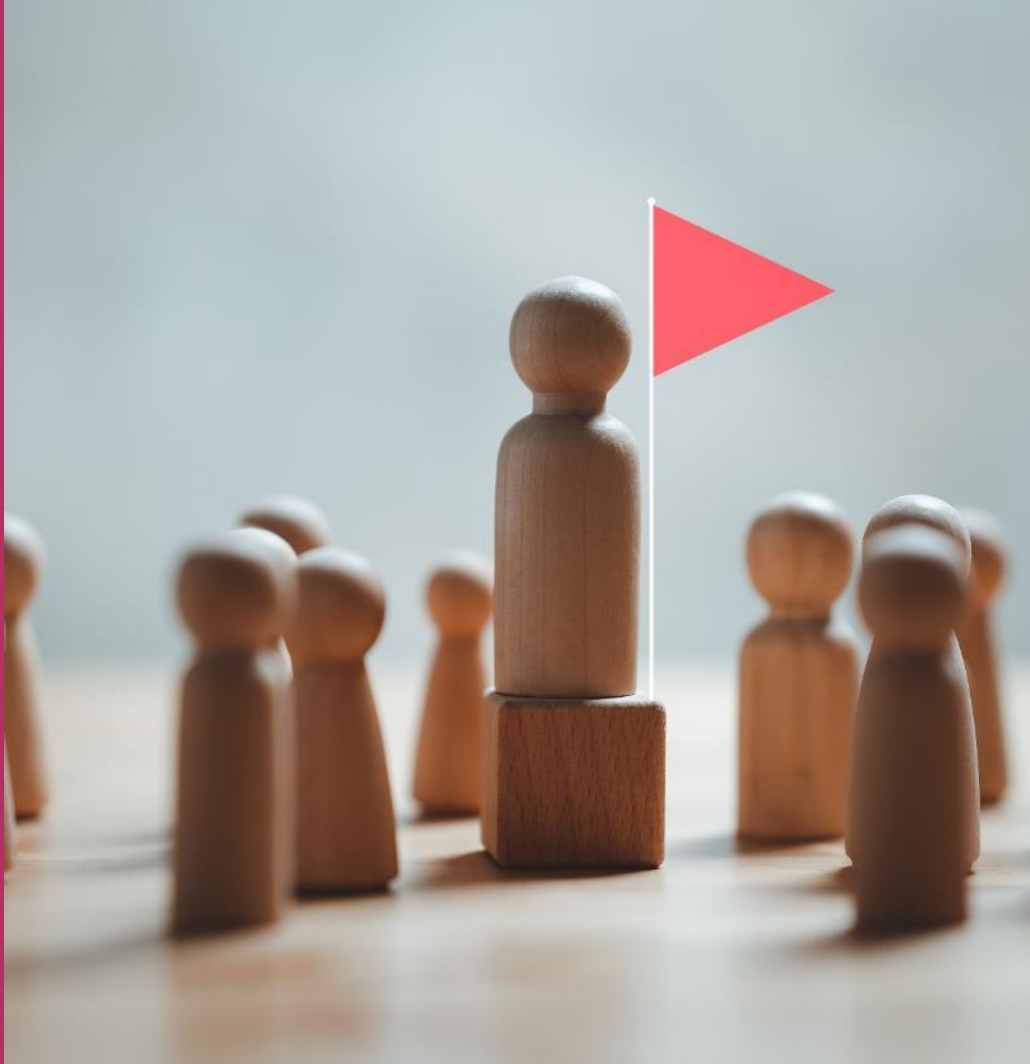
This assumes Joseph shared Jacob's desire but yielded to circumstance. Yet as a *tzadik*, Joseph acted intentionally—choosing to remain in Egypt. Why?

## TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 30, p. 255*

שזהו גם הטעם לכך שיוסף נקבר במצרים, "ויישם בארון במצרים", דלא כיעקב שנקבר בארץ ישראל דוקא, "ונשאתני ממצרים". כי על ידי זה ניתן הכח לבני ישראל בהיותם במצרים שיתעלו למעלה מן הגלות וישלטו עליו, עד שעל ידי זה עלו ממצרים.

Joseph was buried in Egypt, unlike Jacob, who was buried in Israel, to empower the Jews while still in Egypt to overcome the exile and control it [rather than be controlled by it]. This made it possible for them to leave Egypt.



Joseph remained in Egypt to support and uplift his people.

## A. JACOB'S INCOMPATIBILITY WITH EXILE

Jacob couldn't truly live in exile. While in Egypt, he stayed in Goshen, a Jewish enclave protected by Joseph, but after Joseph's death, he needed to return to Israel.

## JACOB



- So spiritually refined that he couldn't bear the impurity of exile
- Could only live in Egypt within the holy enclave of Goshen
- Asked Joseph for an oath to ensure his burial in the Holy Land

## JOSEPH



- Spiritually strong enough to transform exile from within
- Found meaning and purpose in making Egypt a place of holiness
- Chose to remain in Egypt, even in death, to inspire the exiled nation

## ANSWER

Jacob made Joseph take a second oath because, unlike Jacob who could not endure exile, Joseph thrived in Egypt and was committed to transforming it. The first oath addressed external challenges, while the second overcame his internal resistance to leaving.

## TEXT 9A

*Talmud, Nidah 30b*

ומה היא השבועה שמשביעין אותו?  
תהי צדיק ואל תהי רשע.

What is the oath that the angels administer to the fetus?

Be righteous and do not be wicked.

## TEXT 9B

Rabbi Shalom Dovber  
Schneersohn, Kuntres  
Umaayan 14:1

דְּשִׁבוּעָה הוּא לְשׁוֹן שׁוֹבֵעַ. דְּהַשׁוֹבֵעַ עֲנִינּוּ הַנְּתִינָת כֹּחַ, מֵה שְׁנוֹתָנִים מְלַמְעָלָה  
לְהֶאָדָם, שְׁיוּכַל לְעֵבוֹד אֶת עֲבוֹדָתוֹ בְּלִימוֹד הַתּוֹרָה וְקִיּוּם הַמִּצְוֹת.  
כְּמוֹ בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת, כְּשֶׁהֶאָדָם שׁוֹבֵעַ, הֵינָה לְבַד שֶׁהוּא חֲזָק בְּכַחוֹ, הֵינָה רוּחוֹ טוֹבָה עָלָיו .  
. . . כֵּן הוּא בְּרוּחָנִיּוֹת, שֶׁהַשׁוֹבֵעַ הוּא הַנְּתִינָת כֹּחַ מְלַמְעָלָה. וְזֶהוּ מֵה שְׁמִשְׁבִּיעֵין  
אוֹתוֹ, מְעַן מֵאֲכָט אִיהֶם זֵאֵט, בְּמֵה שְׁנוֹתָנִין לוֹ כֹּחַ מְשֻׁרְשׁוֹ וּמְקוֹרוֹ הַקָּדוּם שְׁיוּכַל  
לְהַתְגַּבֵּר עַל הַנְּפֹשׁ הַבְּהֵמִית וְלֹא יִהְיֶה רָשָׁע.

The Hebrew words *shevu'a* (oath) and *sova* (full/satisfied) are similar. [This indicates that an oath “satiates” or “fills us” with strength.] We are satiated by the empowerment we receive from G-d [through our oath] to study the Torah and practice the *mitzvot*.

When we eat and are full, we are physically stronger and happier. . . . The same applies in a spiritual sense. When we take an oath, G-d fills us with power, and we are satiated: empowered from above to overcome the wiles of our animal soul and its sinful temptations.



The oath our soul takes before birth empowers it to overcome the desires of the animal soul.

# TEXT 10

*Talmud, Berachot 5B*

רבי חייא בר אבא חלש. על לגביה רבי יוחנן. אָמַר לִיה: תְּבִיבִין עָלֶיךָ יְסוּרִין?

אָמַר לִיה: לֹא הֵן וְלֹא שְׂכָרָן.

אָמַר לִיה: הֵב לִי יָדְךָ. יָהֵב לִיה יָדֵיהּ וְאִזְקַמֶּיהּ.

רבי יוחנן חלש, על לגביה רבי חנינא. אָמַר לִיה: תְּבִיבִין עָלֶיךָ יְסוּרִין?

אָמַר לִיה: לֹא הֵן וְלֹא שְׂכָרָן.

אָמַר לִיה: הֵב לִי יָדְךָ. יָהֵב לִיה יָדֵיהּ וְאִזְקַמֶּיהּ.

אמאי? לוקים רבי יוחנן לנפשיה.

אָמַרִי, אֵין תְּבוּשׁ מִתִּיר עֲצָמוֹ מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים.

Rabbi Chiya fell ill. Rabbi Yochanan came to visit and asked, "Do you enjoy suffering?"

Rabbi Chiya replied, "I don't like suffering, and I don't like its reward."

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Give me your hand." He gave Rabbi Yochanan his hand and was miraculously cured.

Rabbi Yochanan fell ill. Rabbi Chanina came to visit and asked, "Do you enjoy suffering?"

Rabbi Yochanan replied, "I don't like suffering, and I don't like its reward."

Rabbi Chanina said, "Give me your hand." He gave Rabbi Chanina his hand and was miraculously cured.

Why didn't Rabbi Yochanan cure himself?

[Evidently, this is what people mean when] they say, "Prisoners can't free themselves."

The Jews needed someone outside of Egypt to lift them out of slavery and exile, a spiritual anchor beyond their confines.



## B. JACOB AS A SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

Jacob didn't abandon his children; he went to Israel to pray and empower their future redemption, while Joseph remained in Egypt to guide and inspire them during exile. He wasn't deserting them, he was enabling their future liberation.



Jacob's presence in Israel anchored his children to a higher identity, helping them access the part of their soul untouched by Egypt.

## TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 273*

און דערפאר האט יעקב געדארפט זיין העכער פון מצרים און נאך מער ער האט  
משביע געווען יוסף "ונשאתני ממצרים". ווייל דערמיט האט ער פארבונדן  
יוסף'ן מיט מדריגת יעקב ווי ער שטייט העכער פון מצרים, ונשאתני ממצרים.  
און על ידי זה האט געקענט דערנאך זיין בנוגע צו אלע בני ישראל, דער "ואנכי  
אעלך גם עלה" (בראשית מו, ד), די עליה פון גלות מצרים.

Jacob had to transcend Egypt's culture and power. He also needed to bind Joseph with an oath to carry him out of Egypt. This is how Jacob lifted and bound Joseph to his level, to be exalted above Egypt. This is implied by his instruction to Joseph to take him up from Egypt.

In turn, this enabled [Joseph to channel this transcendence over Egypt to all Jews so that] G-d's promise to Jacob, "And I will surely lift you" (Genesis 46:4), would come true for all Jews. The people would be lifted from their submission to Egypt.

Jacob's longing to leave Egypt, despite his comfort there, teaches us that no matter how prosperous we can be in exile, it can never be our true home.

Our continued prayers for Redemption reflect an awareness that only then can we fully live as who we are meant to be.



## KEY POINTS

1. Before his passing, Jacob asked Joseph to bury him in Israel, not Egypt. Joseph, in contrast, told his children to bury him in Egypt for the time being, with a promise to carry his remains to Israel upon their redemption.
2. Joseph chose to stay in Egypt throughout the years of slavery so his people wouldn't feel abandoned.
3. Jacob, however, could not stay in Egypt a moment longer, despite the comfort he had there. A Jew's home is in the Holy Land, and that's where he insisted on returning.
4. Jacob didn't abandon his children. From Israel, he prayed for them and sent strength. His departure sent a message: just as he refused to remain in Egypt, they too were not bound by it and would one day be free.
5. This teaches us that no matter how comfortable exile may seem, a Jew's true home is Israel. Until we return, we remain unsettled—and we turn to G-d each day, praying for Redemption.

