

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וַיְחִי

1. Yaakov lives a further seventeen years after he comes down to Egypt with all his family. When he feels that his life on this world is drawing to an end, he calls for Yosef his son, the Viceroy of Egypt, and he asks him to swear that he will bury him in the land of Kenaan, and not in Egypt. Later, Yosef is informed that Yaakov has become ill, and he goes quickly to attend him, taking his sons Menasheh and Ephrayyim with him so that Yaakov can bless them before he departs this world. Yaakov, reiterating his wish to be buried in the Cave of Machpayloh, explains to Yosef why he buried Rochel, Yosef's mother, at Beis Lechem, and not in the Cave of Machpayloh.
2. Yaakov tells Yosef that, as he is his firstborn son from Rochel, he wishes that Yosef's two sons shall be counted as two of the Tribes of the future Jewish Nation. Yaakov indicates that both, Ephrayyim and Menasheh, will be great, and he bestows his blessing upon them: — a blessing that is repeated by fathers for their sons to this day.
3. Yaakov then calls for all his other sons and gives each of them his blessing. Recognizing that the Jewish Nation will be made up of the descendants of his sons, with each Tribe inheriting the special characteristics of one of his sons, he rebukes and warns each to be careful of their weaker points and to utilize the particular great strengths that each has within him, so that collectively the Jewish Nation shall be perfect.
4. Prophetically glimpsing the distant future for only a short time before the vision is withheld from him, Yaakov understands that this should therefore not be told to his sons just yet, and he confines his prophetic speech to the relatively near future. Although Yaakov and all his family are heavy-hearted and mindful that they are in Exile, nevertheless Yaakov is reassured and grateful that all of his sons have grown up and brought up families of their own true to the ideals of Avrohom and Yitzchok. He offers up a prayer of thanks to HaShem for this. He then speaks to each of his sons individually, and perceiving their descendants settled in Eretz Yisroel, he sketches the future of the Tribes of Israel:
5. To Re'uven he ascribes a nobility that befits his eldest son, but he — and his descendants — must beware of acting impetuously. He rebukes Shim'on and Levi for their over-fierce anger which they displayed when they attacked the town of Shechem. Such action, says Yaakov, has no place within the Jewish People. They shall rather use their zeal to spread the teachings of the Torah amongst the People of Israel.
6. Yehuda is the regal leader of the Jewish people, with kings and princes destined to come from him.

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The people of the Tribe of Zevulun shall cause the influence of the Torah to permeate throughout the world as they prosper in their successful sea-faring and trading enterprises. They are deserving of prosperity, for they help to support —

the Tribe of Yissochor, who willingly shoulders the burdens of Torah study, producing great Torah scholars.

The people of the Tribe of Dan, too, have within them the greatness to govern the Jewish People. They possess the bravery to fight for their brethren, if the need should arise, calling upon HaShem for His help.

7. The people of the Tribe of Gad are faithful to their brother Tribes, courageous and protective.

The Tribe of Osher shall be blessed with a portion in the Land that brings forth good and wholesome produce fit for kings, and shall willingly provide these delicacies to the whole Jewish People.

The people of the Tribe of Naftoli are blessed with varied gifts, including great physical stamina and eloquent speech.

The people and descendants of the Tribe of Yosef shall inherit his special grace and charm, his particular inner strength and his forgiving nature. Yosef's steadfastness and loyalty to HaShem, despite the temptations he experienced, are proof of his noble character. This shall be the hallmark of Yosef's descendants, and he, this prince amongst his brothers, is deserving of the special blessings of HaShem in Whom he placed his trust.

8. The people of the Tribe of Binyomin are worthy of the Divine Presence resting among them (the Beis HaMikdash stood in the portion of Binyomin) for they shall inherit the humility of Binyomin the son of Yaakov.
9. Yaakov then blesses his sons collectively, expressing the wish that the particular strengths of each of them should influence the others, together to form a Nation that shall be perfect and complete.
10. Once again, Yaakov reiterates his wish to be buried in the Cave of Machpayloh in the Land of Kanaan, thus stressing to his sons that they should remember that the land of Egypt is not their place, and he then departs this world.
11. After the period of mourning for Yaakov (observed also by the Egyptians for they too had benefited from Yaakov's coming into their land because the famine then ended) Yosef obtains the permission of Par'o, the king of Egypt, to fulfil his promise to Yaakov, and there goes up to Kanaan a great procession of the notables of Egypt together with

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the sons of Yaakov, with the local kings and chieftains of the surrounding peoples paying homage, too — to bury him in the Cave of Machpayloh.

12. When they return to Egypt, the brothers are afraid that with their father no more, Yosef might now take revenge upon them for what they had done to him so long ago. They send a delegation to Yosef saying that their father had asked that Yosef should forgive them. When Yosef hears their words, he weeps. He explains to them that he holds nothing against them, for it was all HaShem's plan, and he assures his brothers that he will continue to look after them and provide for their every need.
13. Yosef is blessed to see the children of Mochir the son of Menasheh his son, and even a further generation from his son Ephrayim, all growing up according to the ideals of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Before his death, at the age of one hundred and ten years, he speaks to his brothers and makes them promise that when HaShem takes out the Children of Israel from Egypt, they shall take his body with them to the land that HaShem promised to Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and that his brothers, too, shall ask this for themselves from their children. Father to son, they shall pass on their traditions and keep alive the hopes and aspirations of their ancestors. Whatever happens, they must keep their trust in HaShem for He will deliver them from their exile in Egypt at the right time.

חזק

WITH THIS SIDRA IS COMPLETED

ספר בראשית

THE FIRST OF THE

FIVE BOOKS OF THE TORAH

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra ויחי please go to HAFTORAHS.