

Parsha Q&A



Parshas Vayechi

For the week ending 14 Teves 5759
1 & 2 January 1999

Parsha Questions

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called "*chesed shel emes*" — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a "fox in his time" (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. "When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...." Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does "Shechem" mean as used in this week's Parsha? (two answers)
8. What individual is called "the Emori?" Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a "strong-boned donkey?"
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. To whom was Yaakov referring in Yosef's blessing when he said "They embittered him...?"
17. Which descendants of Binyamin "will divide the spoils in the evening"?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

Sherlox & The Vision Mystery

Watstein held the white handkerchief up to the light and squinted. "Do you see that tiny puff of yellow thread caught in the fabric?" asked world famous detective Sherlock Holmes. "A sample from Mr. Burnshire's yellow cardigan will match it, no doubt."

"I still can't see it," said Watstein.

"Hold the kerchief out of the direct light," said Sherlock. "Too much light impedes vision."

"Speaking of vision," said Watstein, "I'm perplexed by the following verse: 'Yaakov saw Yosef's sons and said: Who are these?' (Genesis 48:8) On the words 'Yaakov saw Yosef's sons' Rashi explains that Yaakov wanted to bless Yosef's sons, Efraim and Menashe, but the Divine Presence left him due to their future wicked offspring."

"Now that's what I call vision," said Sherlock.

"But why does Rashi resort to this midrashic explanation, instead of the simple explanation that Yaakov saw Yosef's sons?"

"Well, isn't it odd that Yaakov would ask 'Who are these?' about his own grandchildren? Perhaps that's what's bothering Rashi?"

"But Rashi is commenting on the words 'Yaakov saw,' not on the words 'Who are these.' Besides, it seems it was standard to ask for formal identification before a blessing. The angel who blesses Yaakov first asks 'What is your name?' although he certainly knew it (Genesis 32:38). And Yitzchak does the same, even after identifying Esav (Genesis 27:24). So I ask again, why does Rashi depart from the simple meaning of the words: 'Yaakov saw?'"

"Sometimes," said Sherlock, "too much light impedes vision."

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Answer

“What kind of vision did Yaakov have?” asked Sherlock.

“What do you mean?”

“Read two more verses: ‘Israel’s eyes had become heavy from age; he was unable to see...’ (Genesis 48:10) The text says that Yaakov saw Yosef’s sons, and then goes on to say Yaakov was unable to see.”

“Of course! The answer is right before my eyes: Yaakov was unable to see! So how could he ‘see’ Yosef’s sons? Therefore, Rashi explains that Yaakov ‘saw’ their future offspring through the lens of Divine intuition.”

(Based on Sifsei Chachamim; Sherlock” is by Reuven Subar, inspired by Dr. Avigdor Bonchek’s “What’s Bothering Rashi”)

I Did Not Know That!

“His smaller brother will be greater than him....”
(Bereishis 48:19)

Efraim was chosen above his older brother Menashe because of his greater humility. Thus, the verse emphasizes that he was the “smaller,” i.e., the more humble, brother.

Based on Kli Yakar

Recommended Reading List

Ramban

47:28	Egypt and Rome
47:31	Necessity for the Oath
48:1	The Division of <i>Eretz Yisrael</i>
48:7	Rachel’s Tomb
48:15	(first part) Yosef’s other children
49:10	(first part) Kings of Israel
49:17	Shimshon
49:31	Burial in the <i>Ma’aras HaMachpela</i>
49:33	The Death of Yaakov

Sforno

47:31	Yosef’s Oath
48:18	The Laying of Hands
49:7	The Humility of Dispersion
49:11	Signs of <i>Mashiach</i>

Answers to this Week’s Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated

- 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
- 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
- 47:31 - Bow to him.
- 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’aras HaMachpela*.
- 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
- 48:11 - “I thought.”
- 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
- 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
- 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
- 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
- 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
- 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
- 49:12 - It makes them white.
- 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
- 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
- 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
- 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
- 50:5 - From Esav.
- 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew.
- 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.