

Session 31 – Vayechi

3 January 2021

The End of Genesis, the Beginning of Israel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1OcS2Qzxbw&feature=emb_logo

Shalom fellowship. It's so good to see you! So, happy to see you all today. Just setting this time and connecting directly to you all around the world. It's nothing less than life-giving for me. It's like the branches and the leaves are bringing me the power of the sunlight. And then I just hope to bring the living waters of the Torah from the roots here in Judea to you guys. And man, I think that's exactly the way it's meant to be. And we're just so lucky.

This last week was a reminder for me. Life is a gift. Every day is a blessing. You know my oldest son, Lavi, after volunteering as a medic, the last few months, he's just a hero in that way, tested positive for covid. My family has been in isolation. Lavi is locked behind two doors. And for a week now, we've just been at home. And it's been complicated, living life when you're in isolation, but thank God, we've all tested negative, including Lavi. There's no symptoms, everyone feels great baruch haShem...just like good. But it's just a reminder that life is a gift and every day is something we should cherish.

You never know when the flood is going to come. When times are good, enjoy them! Take the time. Digest them. Be satisfied in them. Bless the days that are a blessing. Days that we can connect to the Land of Israel. That we can learn together, that we can pray together. That we can go deeper into the Torah, get closer to God, feel closer to each other. Somehow, interconnect throughout all these countries in the world, in holiness and goodness. Those are great days. Listen, if we have time with our loved ones, we are blessed. Enjoy the day, because, right now is our entire world. This is the day, Hashem has made. Let us be happy and rejoice in it. Just, every day is a blessing. And every day if we have it, just really enjoy it.

Thank you all so much for your support, for your prayers, for your emails and WhatsApps. Baruch Hashem, everything is good in the Gimpel home.

Today we are reaching we are reaching another huge milestone, the end of the book of Genesis, the foundation of the entire Bible. The spirit of the Bible, the ideas and the values that precede the law, that precede the 10 commandments. We have completed the foundation together. This foundation will be laid now for new members that come to join us for years to come. In my whole life, I've never had such an amazing time learning Torah. Never have I had such deep revelations and insights given to me as I have learning together with our fellowship. I mean, blessings and gifts that have been given to us because of our gatherings. We've been empowered, encouraged, ennobled. We've just, we've been opened up to amazing, amazing, prayers and Torah. It's just like we're just getting started. The wheels are just starting to turn now. Ok, this is really happening now. We've finished Genesis and we're on to Exodus. Wow, we're doing something in the world now.

And so, I just want to start off with a prayer as the heart of this section is about prayer. And some ways, the heart of our lives is about prayer. So let's kick it off, all of us around the world, today.

Hashem, thank You for today, thank You for this life, thank You for our family, thank You for this fellowship. We come together from all over the place, geographically, culturally, religiously, we are all so different. But in You, we are one, one heart, one spirit, one prayer. Bless us and guide us in our lives as we have come here to this fellowship, now only to learn, but to grow. To invite You into our hearts and into our lives. The source of blessing is Israel and the gateway to heaven is Jerusalem. So from this land, bless this time together. Bless the members of this fellowship who are such a blessing to us in Israel. And the whole world says, "Amen."

So here's what we're going to do. We're going to kick off the fellowship with Ari. Just a pure dose of Torah from the Judean mountains. He's going to lay the groundwork and start us off today and get this celebration started. And so I'm just going to pass this off to Ari right away. Here you go.

Ari –

Shalom my friends. There are so many things happening in the world. Sometimes it's challenging to know what to focus on, how to frame it, how to connect the dots and to see it in a broader perspective. And as I struggle with these consequences and these questions as well, particularly during these confusing times, the parsha is always a compass, or even let's say a north star, keeping my eyes, keeping our eyes trained in the right direction and help keeping everything else in line and in perspective.

So this week we read about Ya'acov passing away, Jacob passing away. And this year I've been feeling a sense of mourning, as if it's happening in real time in my life. And as Jacob is on his death bed, before blessing his children, he does a curious thing. He asks Joseph to make a solemn vow. And the time drew near that Israel must die and he called his son, Joseph, and said to him, if now I've found favor in your eyes, put I beg you, your hand under my thigh and deal kindly and truly with me. Bury me not, I beg you, in Egypt, but I will lie with my fathers and you shall carry me out of Egypt. And bury me in their burying place. And Joseph said, I will do as you have said.

He was talking about Chevron, ma'arlot Machpelah, right over those mountains. So there's so many secrets and mysteries buried within this portion. But one thing I never understood was why Joseph made Jacob swear. Did he not trust him? If anyone is trustworthy, it's his son, Joseph. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch shares an interesting perspective. He said Jacob knew quite certainly that Joseph would bury his father with all possible splendor. But he says, with chesed, lovingkindness. He says, do not forget the emet. Do not forget the truth. I would rather not be buried at all, then be buried in Egypt. The whole stress is on the request not to be buried in Egypt.

We would have thought that carrying out this request would not entail such difficulties, that it should have required this ceremonious oath to carry it out. But as we can deduce from everything, Pharaoh and the Egyptians would by no means be pleased if Jacob and his family had moved back out of Egypt. So that the bringing of his body up to Canaan would by no means make a good impression on them. It would clearly show that Joseph's family still did not consider themselves naturalized and that their hearts were still in their homeland.

But the real motive could lie much deeper. Jacob had still lived 17 years with his family in Egypt. Thus he could have noticed what a powerful influence...they were gripped by the land. He noticed this was beginning to have such an effect on his descendants. Have they already begun to see the Jordan and the Nile and to find their stay in Egypt not really to be in galut, to be in exile. And this was sufficient motive enough for him to press with such ceremonial solemnity that they should not bury him in Egypt, but that they should carry him to the Land of their own true homeland.

It was motive enough for him to say to him, You hope to wish to live in Egypt? I do not even wish to be buried there. That is also why he did not express this wish as Jacob, from his individual personal standpoint, but as Israel. By his name as bearer of the national mission, as a warning of the national future of his children. That was what Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch said. So building on this, Rabbi Foreman explains that he was ensuring Joseph's success. And shielding Joseph from the accusations, allowing Joseph to explain such a controversial move that he simply has to do it. It's out of his hands. He made a vow to his father after all.

But on a deeper level, I believe Ya'acov is trying to send one last critical message to his children. Egypt is not your home. Don't get too comfortable there. No matter how long you're there. How many generations. How much you may start to forget and identify as an Egyptian, Egypt is not your home. You are my children. You are the children of Israel. Not the children of Pharaoh not the children of Egypt, but the children of Israel. And as history has shown us, when we forget this truth, the nations in to whom we are seeking to assimilate, they will remind us. And what happened to the Israelites in Egypt, was the first perfect prototype for what has happened to the Jewish people time and time again throughout our long exile.

We move to a nation, usually due to the fleeing of the persecution of another. We bring success and blessing to that nation and we start to assimilate within. Then the nation looks on us differently. A new Pharaoh arises. And they begin to viciously persecute us and we flee for our lives. Having been viciously reminded again and again that we're not Persians, Spaniards, Poles, Germans, Yemenites, insert the name of the nation here. We're Jews. And our home is Judea. And this is the truth that Jacob is declaring with this vow. Israel is your home and never forget that.

Now this week as we read Jacob's reminder, two great events transpired here in Israel which I believe are rooted in this promise. The first is the arrival home of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew convicted of spying on the U.S. for Israel. He finally made it home. Now most

American Jews hate every moment that Pollard's in the headlines. They hate the subject. They hate the name. It brings up their deepest traumas and fears that they too will be accused of dual loyalties as Jews have been so many times in the past. If you have time, google the Dreyfuss Affair, as it was a false accusation of this type. And the Dreyfuss affair sparked the inspiration for Theodore Herzl to begin his battle to establish the modern state of Israel. But as opposed to the Dreyfuss accusation which were false. The charges against Pollard were true.

So what happened? I'll try to make it short. Jonathan was a Sanford graduate who went on to serve in the American naval intelligence. He became privy, he became aware of certain information that Iraq and Iran and Libya and Syria had nuclear and chemical and biological weapons that were being developed to be used against Israel. He found out about terrorist attacks that were being planned, about ballistic missiles that were being planned for use against civilians. Now there was and still is a memorandum of agreement, an agreement between the United States and Israel which as allies, logically, they are supposed to share this intelligence. But the U.S. was not sharing this critical life and death information with Israel.

So Pollard goes to his superiors and he says, "Please share this information with Israel. They need to know this." But the officers responded that he should mind his own business. Because, "Jews get paranoid when they hear about poison gas." Now the average prison sentence for spying on an ally was like two to four years which he thought was a small price to pay to prevent another holocaust. And he was caught. And he sought refuge in the Israeli embassy. And in one of the most painful chapters in Israel's history, they locked him out and turned him over to the U.S. authorities. They were just afraid of the embarrassment of the whole thing. He was tried and unbelievably and in inexplicable fashion, they gave him a full life sentence and recommended no parole. There's no precedent for this and his sentence was unbelievably cruel, particularly when we're talking about America – Israel's ally! The champion of civil rights. The first seven years they locked him in solitary confinement. Underground, without sunlight. Unimaginable. There were spy's spying against America for hostile foreign countries that got nowhere near a punishment like that.

And finally, after 35 years, he has finally arrived home. Those of us who advocated for him and prayed for him and fought for him had tears in our eyes as he stepped foot off the plane with his wife, Esther. The whole country watched as this great man who had sacrificed so much for all of us stepped off of the plane onto the holy Land. And I'll never forget what I saw. The first moment he stepped off the plane onto the Land for which he had sacrificed so much. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, was waiting for him there and put out his hand to greet him. The Prime Minister of Israel! And what does Jonathan Pollard do? He tells the Prime Minister, "wait one moment." And he falls to the ground, kissing it. Then, he greets the Prime Minister.

This is a Jew who remembered, when the moment of truth came, that he is the son of Israel. Yes, America's been a great country for the Jewish people. I love America, I'm proud of America and many Jews have fought and sacrificed their lives for America which is a beautiful

thing. But when it came to an immoral and lethal violation that could cause the death of countless Jewish lives, he acted with courage and with truth.

The second story I want to share with you and I'll have to make this brief because I'm going on beyond what I should due to time constraints. The aliyah that happened this week, the week of this Torah portion, of 303 Ethiopian Jews who have finally returned to the land of their fathers. Under tremendous persecution and pressure over thousands of years, they clung to their Jewish heritage and identity, even at the cost of their lives.

An Ethiopian Jewish woman from a prior Aliyah shared her testimony. She said, up until the age of nine when she moved to Israel, she lived in a world where the temple still stood in all of its glory, because keep in mind that the Ethiopians were exiled with the northern tribes and they didn't know that the temple was destroyed. In her mind and that of her whole community in Ethiopia, the second temple stood in its place in Jerusalem. And she said, it was literally made in her mind of pure gold. She explained that she grew up hearing about the kohanim, the holy priests and how they worked in the temple. She fell asleep listening to stories about the halo hovering over Jerusalem, and about Jews who merited to dwell in the holy city. People with pure hearts, cloaked in white garments, righteous people with clean thoughts and devoid of sin. She explained that she would see the Shekinah, the Divine Presence overhead and she would picture pure angels.

She then described in inspiring detail, the devastation her family felt when they arrived to find out that the temple was destroyed. It's such a beautiful testimony. Send me a WhatsApp or an email and I will send you a link to the entire article. You should really read it. Anyways, the point is, that Jacob's message has penetrated deep into the heart of the nation of Israel throughout our exile. A message that has remained for thousands of years, that Israel is the promised Land, the Land of our fathers. The Land of our destiny.

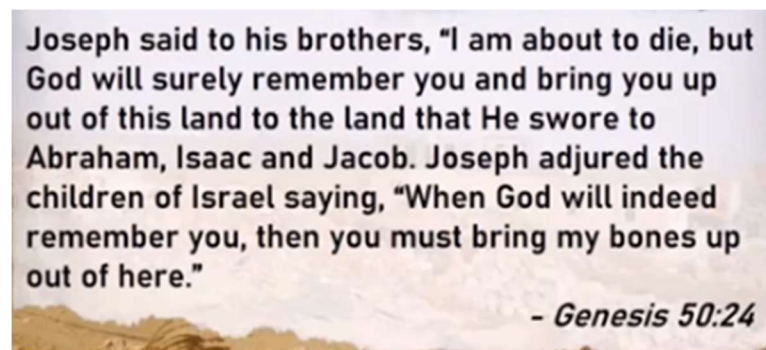
And so my beloved friends, as this is the parsha of blessings, allow me to bless all of you. All of us to remember that Israel is the beating heart of our nation. I bless us that this truth burns strong in our hearts, in our souls, in our prayers, and in our actions. And that we, all of us, by clinging to this truth, cleave with our very lives to the God of Israel, who brings us together here on this very day. May He continue to ingather the exiles from the nations and elevate these holy sparks of light who have attached themselves to the Jewish people and to the Jewish mission. Amen.

Please, my friends, stay in touch. Stay connected. Reach out. I don't always respond immediately and for that I'm sorry. But I will. We need to stay connected and hold onto each other tight for the challenging times that lay ahead. Love you all very much. Back to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

Thank you, Ari. Thank you. You are just too good. You're too good. It's like Jacob's final message. Don't get lost in the exile. California's nice, but it's not Israel. Don't get lost in the good times. Don't get lost in the bad times. Keep your eyes toward our destiny. Our destiny. The destiny of Israel. The destiny of all believers is going to unfold in the land of Israel. That's like the final message. The foundation of Genesis is a covenant that God is going to restore the world through the Land of Israel.

And so when you read this portion, you come to the end of the book and Joseph does something really unexpected. It doesn't make any sense. Jacob makes Joseph swear, bury me in the Land of Israel in the tomb of the patriarchs. Where Abraham and Isaac are buried. That makes sense. But Joseph requests that his bones remain in Egypt. And only when the Jewish people leave Egypt, he says, they should they take his bones with them. Like what is that all about? Look at Genesis 50:24:



It's like, ok, what is that about? Why does he keep his bones in Egypt? He could have easily had his bones taken to Israel. I mean, that's what his father did. You could emulate your father. It's like listen to what's happening here. Joseph knows that the next generation is going to endure hard times. Slavery. There's going to be pain, there's going to be suffering that's going to forge them into the nation that they're meant to be. And in those times, Joseph is giving them a gift. He's giving them himself. Know, as long as you are here, I, Joseph, I'm here with you and I promise you, you won't be in this hard time forever. And you're going to make it home to Israel, and when you do, you're going to take me with you. We're all going to get to Israel together. It's like his last message is a gift of hope that he's giving the people of Israel by staying in Egypt.

Joseph, he saw himself as the captain of the ship and he was the lead star that all the other brothers and stars were bowing down to. It's like, ok, well if I'm the captain here then I am responsible and as captain of the ship, I'm not getting off board until all of the passengers here have made it safely to ground. He is the promise and the guarantee that the slavery will end.

The hard times are fleeting and that God's promise is eternal. That God's loving kindness is eternal, is forever. We're going to get to that in just a little bit.

So, you know in these challenging times, when you don't know what's real, you don't know what's fake, what's news, what's spin, what are lies, what's truth. When you begin to lose hope, look toward the Bible and the Land of Israel and you're going to see signs. Just like Joseph left a sign for the nation of Israel to be guided. A guiding light through the darkness. We're given prophecy to witness. Signs for our times. And we're on our way to salvation and the visions of our prophets are manifesting before our eyes.

And so many people have asked me from our fellowship – they want more videos from the land of Israel, more from Judea more from the Arugot farm. And in this time, I know it's so hard. People can't visit the Land of Israel. It's already been so long. But at least they can connect directly to the Land, right now through our fellowship. So I just want to share this amazing, marvelous, wondrous thing that we discovered here on the Arugot Farm. As we quite literally, stumbled into this prophecy by accident. So check this out, straight from the heart of Judea:

Video

Alright my friends, we are here now on the Arugot farm, right at the center of the property in what is the largest ecological pool in all of Israel. Now let me explain to you a little about this pool, how it works. It's Israeli technology developed by marine biologists, and scientists in Ashdod, right on the coast of Israel. And the way it works is, this is about a ten foot deep pool, pristine clear swimming water, if you can see that, – you can see all the way to the bottom. And on both sides of the pool here, there are specific water plants and rocks that purify the water better than any other plant that their research has come up with.

On both sides, there are four layers of rocks. The top layer is a black rock called baselet, a red rock and then two white stones. The water then falls over this infinity pool right here into another filtering system. And then underneath the rocks there are pipes that shoot the water through three different rocks and the water comes out of rocks creating a natural circulation. There's tiny little red fish in the pool and this system creates pristine clear swimming water which is the opposite of conventional pools. Most pools have chlorine and chemicals, you know they just kill everything inside the pool and you have red eyes and you have to shower afterwards because it is so unhealthy. This is the exact opposite technology. Instead of dead water, this is living water in the middle of the desert.

Now, I want to tell you about prophecy. We don't exactly understand how prophecy works. But somehow these giant men, thousands of years ago, got access to information of the future. And somehow, they downloaded this information and it came to them for the most part in visions, pictures. And they would write the pictures down of what they saw in the future and

then for thousands of years, the Jewish people and commentators are saying, is that a real vision, is that true, is that an analogy for something else? Because some of the visions are so outrageous that maybe they couldn't possibly be real, they must be some sort of parable.

So I want to take the example of Isaiah 35 in particular. A vision of the end of days and I want you to see this. Alright, Isaiah 35, I have it right here in my Artscroll Tenach. And here's what it says – A vision of the end of days. The wilderness and the dry places will rejoice over them. And the desert will be glad and blossom like a lily.

Now in the King James Version, there's a mistranslation there. It says that the desert will blossom like a rose. But that's not what the Hebrew says. The Hebrew clearly says, like a lily. Now if you see this technology, it's winter time, so the lily pads here are just a little bit kind of fallen asleep, but if you look right here at the edge of both sides are lilies. And what happens in the spring time is that there are pink, yellow, and white lily flowers that come out of these lily pads which is kind of remarkable because Isaiah says, it's going to blossom like a lily.

But let's continue in Isaiah 35. Here's what it says. For waters will break out in the wilderness and streams in the desert. Waters breaking out in the wilderness is mabu'e mayim, which literally means water will be coming out, springing out of rocks and it's kind of interesting that you see this technology has water that is, through these pipes on the bottom, literally through these pipes on the bottom, literally bursting out of rocks. Hamabu'e mayim.

Isaiah 35:7 And the dry land shall become a pool and the thirsty lands springs of water, in the place where lizards lay there will be grass with reeds and rushes.

Now grass, reeds and rushes, that doesn't mean anything to me, because those are just words. But in Hebrew those are very specific plants and you wouldn't believe it, but the word grass in Hebrew is chatzir. That's this plant right here. Reeds, that's this plant right here. Papyrus. That's this plant right here. Reeds and rushes. Reeds are this plant right here. This is chame. So you have chatzir, chame and gome right behind us. So now look at what happened here.

Isaiah the prophet had a vision over 3,000 years ago that the Jewish people would come back to the Land of Israel and somehow that the dry land overlooking the desert is going to become a pool with water, springing out of rocks, with lily flowers and this plant and that plant and this plant. Now, imagine that. These marine biologists in Ashdod, according to their research, selected the plants that purify the water better than any other plant. And the marvel and wonder of it all is that they actually to the exact detail of the plant and flower nailed Isaiah's vision to the t.

Now Isaiah just received this information in a vision. He just saw the Jewish people returning to the Land of Israel and all of a sudden there's a pool of water with this plant and that flower.

Little did Isaiah know, that it was going to be a new Israeli technology developed by marine biologists in Ashdod that would facilitate the dry lands becoming a pool in the desert. And so if you want a spice cart, you want to see a sign for our times, you want to know that Hashem is with the Jewish people and the restoration of the Land of Israel? The mystery and the wonder, because these marine biologists weren't trying to fulfill prophecy. They were just building their technology that we would have a new way of swimming in natural water. And here we are, though, stumbling into the destiny of Israel. So the next time you come to Israel, come on, and check out the largest ecological pool in Israel. It is prophecy manifest. Imagine, to swim in prophecy. Alright guys, shalom. (end of video)

What can we do? It's just the coolest pool in the world. It's like another of the marvels of Israel. The Jewish return to the Land of Israel is a banner, a global sign for every believer to see. Is God on the move? Look at what's happening. The Bible is coming to life in ways that have never seen before. It's like a flag raised on high. The people who are looking for God's move in the world can say, wow, we have a direction. If God is with Israel, we're with Israel. And Israel is a witness on a global international level. Because every Jew, every Christian, every Catholic every Muslim, every Buddhist, every atheist, needs to read this book written thousands of years ago. And every single promise is coming to pass in our generation.

But here's the deal. Spiritually, the same thing happens to every person on a personal level. We are constantly sent messages, angels, miracles, spice carts, all of the time and I want to share something really personal with the fellowship. And I don't exactly know how to frame this. But I made a promise to God that if He would answer our joint prayers together, I would share the good news with our fellowship as a testimony to His faithfulness. And we are a fellowship of people from all over the world, from different backgrounds, and from what I can tell, the members of this fellowship have been hand-selected, as some of the best and most wonderful people on the planet, we have all come together and we are so fortunate to be bound together in this way. There's some sort of spiritual magnetic power that called us to the mountains of Judea and brought us all together.

And so I just want to take time and rejoice in prayers that have been answered. I've asked our friends, the Brody's to summarize the situation to make sure that I got the details right. I don't want to exaggerate any of the details, and I want to make sure that you have the exact story cause this true story is remarkable and filled with hope. You know sometimes people send me prayer requests and I save it and I pray every day and I pray for our fellowship and every single member that needs it. But sometimes, people keep me updated. And they send me messages about their situation and what's going on. And since Jaxon was on his way to the hospital, I've been praying for this boy. And here is the WhatsApp that the Brody's just sent me to get us all up to date here.

It was July 19, 2020. Our fun loving, athletic 16-year-old grandson, Jaxon was with many of his friends at an outdoor gathering. The boys were jumping from a trampoline into a pond. Jaxon did a flip into the pond and no one noticed that he did not surface. When one of the boys jumped in, he said he thought he felt someone down there. Immediately, another boy jumped in to search and found Jaxon. He pulled him up and the father of one of the boys was called to do CPR as Jaxon was not breathing. The ambulance was called and he was taken to a local hospital. The boys all thought he was dead. Family was called and everyone rushed to the hospital. Jaxon regained consciousness and was fully alert, even though doctors estimated that he was underwater for three to five minutes. There was no water in his lungs. From the local hospital, he was airlifted to another hospital about an hour and a half away. Cal and I drove this distance with our son, Dave, Jaxon's dad and Jess. On the way to the hospital, Jeremy happened to be texting something to me and I told him what had happened. His exact words were, "I'm running out to the hills to pray."

Jaxon broke his C5 vertebrae in the neck area. Thankfully, there were no tears or bone fragments in the spinal cord, but a C5 break usually leaves a person paraplegic or quadriplegic. When he woke up in the hospital, he was able to move his hands a little bit, but nothing from the waist down. Surgeons placed a metal cage in to replace the vertebra. When he came home from the hospital on September 25th, he still needed 24/7 care from his mom and dad. His dad continued to take him to out-patient therapy and also water therapy. Jaxon worked hard, but he was frustrated. We watched as his dad would pick him up from bed to wheel chair, wheel chair to floor, legs hanging limply. In October, Jaxon told his parents that a nurse had told him that if he was not walking at three months, he would probably never walk again. (end)

His mom and dad, the most dedicated, from searching for the right physical therapy to the right facilities. I'm lucky enough to get updates and keep my prayers focused. It has been just a roller coaster ride for this family. And in my heart, you know, I'm told a broken back, there's not much to do there, but we kept on praying and more people are praying and more people are getting involved and there's just all of this energy being sent to this family. And the nurse said he would never be able to move his lower body again. And I just want to share this last video I got from them because videos are worth a thousand words. Check this out.

Jaxon video.

Listen. I grew up an athlete. I was always told like, Christopher Reeves, you can be superman, but if you break your spine, you can't move, and you won't ever be able to move. And months went by and Jaxon was just limp. And like people just kept on praying. And you look at those videos and you realize that there is so much more than meets the eye. And our prayers and blessings are a power to be reckoned with. So I want to send our prayers to Jaxon and to his parents that they stay strong and that we have your back and this fellowship, we are all praying for all of us here. And there's like 8 billion people in the world. How this one family made its way into my heart, into the mountains of Judea, I have no idea.

But I feel like something absolutely beautiful has happened. That people who are not connected geographically or culturally have been like woven together through prayer and Hashem has showed us a light in the distance, in the midst of the dark and scary time and I want you to know that more prayers have been answered in this fellowship that are just unbelievable. I don't have all the time. I just wanted to share that one. Maybe next session I'll share another one. But there's just like constantly good news. But we're not done yet. We have people in this fellowship that need our prayers and we're going to keep on praying for them. And every time we are just going to praise God, because who knows what salvation may arise.

And so I wanted to share this today because the book of Genesis, it all revolves around blessings. I mean, you think about it, Abraham is blessed by God, he's promised that everyone who blesses him will be blessed. Isaac and Ishmael are separated and blessed in their own ways. Jacob and Esau are battling over the blessings, over the birthright. Jacob blesses Joseph with a coat of many colors and at the end of the book, Jacob is blessing Joseph's children and raises their status to the tribes of Israel. The whole book is about blessings.

It's like, folks, do not take blessings for granted. There is a real power to prayers and blessings, like the modern world, it's like blessings, whatever, and at the end of every fellowship, I'm like from the heart of Israel, with all my heart, trying to bless the members of this fellowship. It is a real force in the world. And the whole book of Genesis is teaching on blessings and prayers. It's like, now the whole world just doesn't appreciate the power and the potency of blessings – the spiritual power of prayer and blessing is something worth fighting for. Something that actually changes reality as we know it. Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's children, they receive a geographic location, in the Land of Israel. Bigger than the other tribes of Israel. It's like their future was absolutely transformed through prayer and blessing.

And there's another theme that underlines the book of Genesis. The fathers and mothers of Israel are of the most influential people in human history. No one there had an easy life. They were selected for a great mission and their life struggles reflected just the uniqueness and importance of who they were. It's like their life, the struggle of their life is what made them so great. It's like that Marx says that religion is opiate for the masses, but I'm like, I'm sorry, but that's just not what the Bible says. There is no easy ride here. No one is like taking a pill and now we're happy. No, no, no. You're going to follow the calling, and you're going to end up in a famine, and your kids are going to fight and they're going to throw him into a pit. Chaos all over the place. What's the opiate, what's the masses here, that's just not... the Bible is too true, it's too real.

You know, as I've been praying for Jaxon and his family from the Land of Israel, and I've never met him or his parents, but I've had so many thoughts about his challenge and so many

challenges that are in the lives of our friends in this fellowship. And it's like the only theme that I can sort of pull down from this, is that this accident has already radically changed Jaxon's life. His life experiences are not on the same path as every other teenager his age. This process that he's going through right now will probably be the most profound life building process in his young adult life. And he is going to emerge from this stronger and greater and different than he ever would have otherwise.

And you know, elite commando soldiers in the IDF, they have an entirely different training than regular infantry soldiers. And all of the people, they are sent on a different path. Their life is so different than everyone else around them. Hey, you just need to know, you are being sent on elite training. Of the elite, you're being separated because you're meant to live a special life, different from the rest. And in that way, Jaxon's parents, they are becoming commando elite parents. They're handling this situation with courage and faith and love and perseverance. It's not only going to help Jaxon emerge from this crisis a better young man, but that's going to have an intergenerational impact on their children, and their children's children...all will remember this story. What a family is, and how a family should be in the world. And they've already immobilized their community and people around the world to pray and get involved. Already, so much light has been brought into the world. And hopefully, more and more light will come.

There is an ancient Judean tradition, and this is one of the cornerstones of Jewish belief, that God will never give someone a test that they cannot pass. Every hardship we encounter is something that we can overcome, something that will ultimately build us. Every test in our lives is set to enhance us, to empower us. The more out of the ordinary, the more difficult the challenge, the more you know that you are an elite soldier of light, called to emerge even greater and become a greater source of light. And I don't know why growth has to come through pain and struggle, but that seems to be the design in creation. But perhaps people who are in the middle of a test, to know that you and your family are being grown, they're rising up, they're emerging, becoming greater than they ever would have been otherwise.

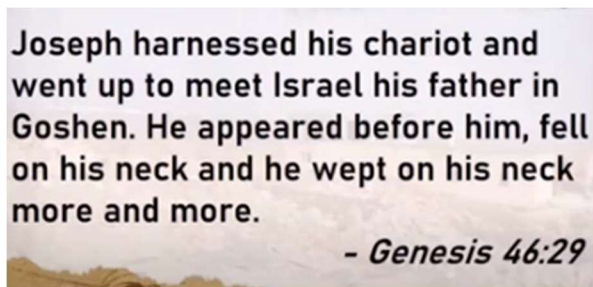
I mean Joseph had a rough ride. Sold into slavery, wrongly accused, thrown into prison for years, sold off by his own brothers...and Joseph emerged as one of the most marvelous individuals every to walk the face of earth. It's like, everyone that met him, loved him. Everyone trusted him. His challenges forged his character into something that was just a masterpiece, a true work of art. Thousands of years later, people from all over the world are just studying the life of this man, Joseph, because of the hardships that he went through. And the final message of Joseph's life – is that the world is designed in a way that things don't happen to you, they happen for you. Every one of Joseph's challenges helped him become the man that he was meant to be.

At the beginning of the book of Genesis, we learn about the story of creation. Here we are now at the end of the story of creation. Israel is now being created. The purpose of Creation. And

something so marvelous. We just take it for granted, because we learn it as kids. But the way that the Torah describes God's creating process – He spoke existence into being. The existence is His spoken word. Just think about that. Joseph left his bones in Egypt as a perpetual sign. A message for the nation. As long as he is still there, God's work is not done. God is watching over the Jewish people throughout history is a testimony for every believer. But it's not just the Jewish people. On the deepest level, the world around us is constantly communicating with us. That's the right way to look at creation.

You look outside, that tree was spoken into being. That person over there is a *dibur*, he is an utterance. What the Torah is conveying to us, is that the whole world is a *dibur*, it's a word, it's a word to us. It's nothing less than a communication. In our prayers, we speak to God and in our life reality itself speaks back to us because reality was spoken from God to us. It is literally a communication, all of it, all of it. And that's what is meant. That God's creation is His Word. His creation is speaking from Him to us. And to live as a believer is to live in that relationship. Knowing that nothing is by chance and that God is everywhere that we let Him in.

And we see this message lived out powerfully. Jacob and Joseph, you know they finally meet after 22 years. It's like the climax of the story, but you read the sentence and like something is missing. But if you just read the verse and you move on, you might miss it. So look at this verse carefully:



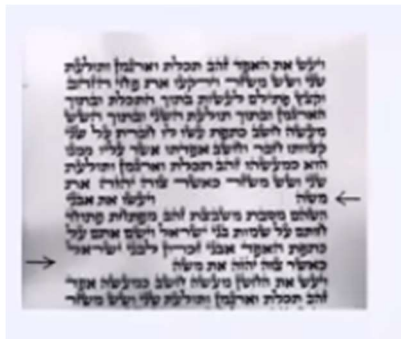
Joseph harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck and he wept on his neck more and more.
- Genesis 46:29

It's like, Joseph is experiencing just an emotional overload. He's thrown himself onto his father's arms, his head is on his shoulder. He's not crying, in Hebrew, he's bawling. And there's like one question, it stands out, like why isn't Jacob doing anything? Joseph is having this emotional breakdown and Jacob is seemingly not really responding. He's not hugging, he's not crying, he's being portrayed as being pretty passive in this meeting.

And the Midrash picks up on this and tells us something so beautiful. When Joseph was crying on his neck, Jacob was reciting the Shema. Hear oh Israel the Lord is God, the Lord is one. Hear oh Israel, Jacob is Israel. Listen man, he's having a revelation moment. He finally saw everything is one. Everything was for the good. Everything was a part of the one, everything was exact, everything that seemed like absolute chaos and tragedy was in fact a perfect orchestration of Divine providence. So as Joseph is crying, Jacob is saying the Shema. God is

one. Oh my Lord! It's like in our times, that mirror, the chaos, the tragedy of Jacob, we're given this image. That in time, we're going to have our own Shema Israel revelation. And the last 17 years of Jacob's life, well, they are by far the best of his life. He's just having the best time. He's got his children together, they're quasi royalty in Egypt. Jacob had the hardest life of all the patriarchs. A pure hearted man who lives in tents, that's how he's described in the beginning. And finally, he can just rest in his tent with his children, and his grandchildren, and enjoy the simple, good life.

And the Midrash points out that in the Torah scroll, the parsha itself starts off closed. A parashat stumah. Can we get that up on the screen? Just for a moment?

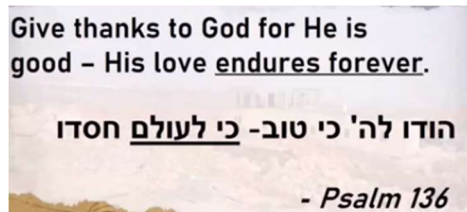


There's like two ways that the Torah is written. Sometimes there's like an open, all the way to the end, like the end of a paragraph. And sometimes, there's like a window of opening like you see there at the top and that's called a closed parasha. Parashat Stumah. And this parsha, Parashat Vayechi starts with it being closed. And, you know, usually the new parasha will start off with a new paragraph, new line, opening. And Midrash says that the style of the writing there, of satum, closed off, is to teach us that all of Jacob's troubles were satum. They were closed off. The years in Egypt were the best years of his life.

But, how could they be the best years of his life? He's in Egypt? Egypt represents the worst of spiritual depravity in the Bible. And he's in Egypt. His kids are in exile. His children are about to be enslaved in Egypt, he knows that promise from Abraham and he's walking down the plank, like disaster is lying ahead. Walking off the cliff, how on earth is he so happy when he knows that very soon, the cliff is going to end, a new Pharaoh's going to arise and it's going to be a disaster. And I think the answer is that he finally had his shema Israel moment. Jacob finally internalized that everything that he had been through in all of his life, it was all part of a great plan that's going to unfold and it will unfold. And the way it's going to unfold is going to be in ways that are just beyond human comprehension. And he knows that the children of Israel may be enslaved.

And at this stage in his life, he just is able to live in confidence that everything will unfold for the good. That God is the One true Master of the Universe. And if today is a blessing with my grandchildren and my children, then I'm going to live today as a blessing. And those were the

best days of Jacob's life. When he really realized everything is one. Everything is a part of the whole. And sometimes, we just need time for things to unfold. And that is so key. One of the most famous verses in the book of Psalms, written by King David has such a deep meaning that is so often overlooked. In Psalm 136, everyone in the world knows this verse:



And that's pretty much how it's translated in almost every English Bible. Ki la'olam chasdo – His love is eternal, His love endures forever. So, ki la'olam chasdo is usually translated in that way. But I learned a powerful understanding from one of Tehila's best friends from High School. She was diagnosed with a very aggressive breast cancer. And she had to go through chemo therapy, leaving her husband and her young children in a very hard state of limbo. And I mean, just talk about a prayer machine that was established around this girl. And they extracted her eggs and told her that she was never possibly ever going to be able to have children after chemo. And it was just a really rough ride.

And it was more than two years after that, at their child's circumcision, that her husband got up and said this verse. Hodu l'Hashem ki tov. Ki la'olam chasdo. And he explained it in a way that I had never heard before. He said, give thanks to God for He is good, because His chesed, His lovingkindness can only be seen la'olam, in an expanse of time. In eternity, you actually see his loving kindness. Peering through the keyhole of the present our vision is just too limited, but la'olam, over time, in expanse, in eternity, in the context of the whole. Only with the eyes of la'olam, of expanse of eternity can we see His loving kindness.

And wow, that message is so, so real! And that's the message right in time before the book of Exodus when the Jewish people are going to be enslaved for a couple of hundred years with no end in sight. Two hundred years of slavery – that's intergenerational slavery, where the great, great, great grandchildren, they lost the idea of freedom. They are so lost, and it's like wait...ki la'olam chasdo, you're going to need a lot of time to finally see how things unfold. You just need time in your life. You don't always get the answer immediately. You need the la'olam.

And the finality, the book of Genesis, it's like the book ends off with the Jewish people in Egypt. It's like, really? That's how we're going to end the book? We're laying the foundations of the whole Bible and we end up in Egypt? That's the end of the story of the patriarchs? The story ends off with all of their children lost in the exile, far away from the promise of the Land of Israel? On their way to slavery? What kind of ending is that? Abraham started the journey with

a promise to inherit the land and build the kingdom. And the book ends with the people of Israel fleeing the Promised Land in hunger and settling down in Egypt. I mean, like what an anti-climactic end. Why is that the end of the story? And this is so key and it's one of the most beautiful ideas and themes that you see throughout the whole Bible. Constantly, the Bible is taking us away from the endzone and the victory dance. No, that's not the way we live. They're always taking us away from the goal of the story. It's like the world is always so focused on results, on the bottom line, on the end zone, and the Torah is like a counter-pressure, teaching us, guiding us away from the goal, away from the final destination. It's like the destination and promise that Abraham was given was something beyond his lifetime, something beyond his son's lifetime. The destination is definitionally beyond them. So what do we focus on? We focus on life. Choose life that you may live because every day is a gift. Every day is an entire creation.

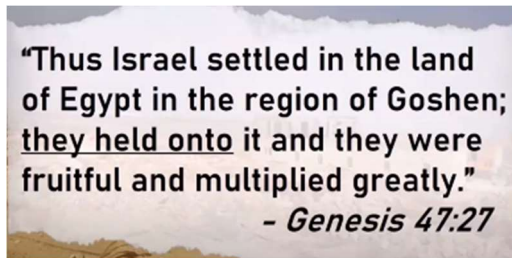
The journey of life is where value is. The journey of life is where happiness can be found. Meaning, it's happening right now. And it's like, don't just wait for the top of the mountain. There's a much longer journey to get there than a little celebration at the top of the mountain. It's like achieving our goal is in God's hands anyway, but it's on the way to achieving the goal that life happens. And the quality of our life is determined entirely on the days toward that goal. And the book ends before the finish line, making it to the Promised Land. Ends off in Egypt. Because crossing the finish line is not the point. The Torah is guiding us to focus on how we live our lives on the way to the destination. And that is the theme across all of the stories of the Bible. The end of the whole book of the Torah. It's like Moses and the children of Israel, they're like at the endzone. They're like on the one-yard line, overlooking into Israel, and they don't ever go in. The whole Torah, the covenant of the Land of Israel, finally fulfilling Abraham's vision...and the Torah ends. Sorry, you don't make it.

And only in the book of Joshua do they go in. And it's like, ok, even Joshua, he's told to conquer the Land and he doesn't fully conquer the Land. And David is called to build the Temple. Well, he buys the Temple mount and he gets everything prepared, but he doesn't build the Temple. None of our heroes cross the finish line. It's like wow, the heroes don't cross the finish line because life is not about the moment you reach the top of the mountain. That moment will come and go. Most of our lives are spent on the journey toward the destination. That's where life happens. That's where the living Torah comes to life. And that's where the Torah is telling us to live.

It's like on one hand, we have the story of Esav selling his birthright for the present. It's like obvious. Don't sell your future for the fleeting moment of now, but at the same time, don't sell your life now for some hope of the future that one day when that happens, then I'll be happy. And then on one day when this happens, then I can really live life. It's like every day is a gift.

Live it up. Breathe it in. Every day toward our target. Every day toward Zion. Every day toward Jerusalem. Living focused and aligned toward the ultimate good is a gift.

And so, I wanted to end this session with one critical message to all of our Jewish member that are still outside of the Land of Israel. And you know you see something really troubling in the last verse of last week's Torah portion. And Ari touched on it a little bit, but I really wanted to drive this point home. Look at Genesis 47:27:



And they held onto it. What does that mean, and they held onto the Land? What is that? So, there's a few interpretations. Vayechazu literally means they grasped the Land. So some people say that they purchased land in Goshen. So while the rest of Egypt had to sell their land to Pharaoh to get food, the Israelites were so fortunate and powerful that they were actually able to buy their own land. Imagine like that's like the strongest in society and what a flip it was when the reversal happened in the next generation, that the most powerful became the slaves of that society.

But some people say that they grasped onto the land, that they just sank their teeth into Egypt. They loved the land, they loved the lifestyle. They held onto Egypt and as they held onto Egypt, they let go of their connection with the Land of Israel. And for the Jewish people in diaspora, this is a critical, spiritual blueprint of the exile. Before troubles come, before the slavery of Egypt, Jews enjoyed an amazing life. They were wealthy, respected. When Jacob died, all of Egypt recognized his greatness. Life in Egypt couldn't have been any better.

There may be a generation in Germany that enjoys the privileges of freedoms and prosperity and there may be a generation in America that exists like no other generation in history. Integrated into politics into culture, into the media, into sciences. They may be comfortable and affluent financially, but be aware. That also may be a precursor for troubles to come. That is a prophetic blueprint that is in the Torah that has been true in almost every generation, in almost every country that the Jews have ever resided in.

You lose the focus of Jerusalem, the nation in which you reside will remind you where your home is. Cause we only have one homeland. We have one promise. We have one destiny. Jacob leaves us with his last message. Never lose sight of our target. Never lose sight of our

promise. Israel is our only refuge. And although the book of Genesis ends in Egypt, the hope and promise to make it home to Israel is the final message. And that's the blessing from the Land of Israel. That every single one of you find your way back to this Land. In the right way, in the right time, our whole fellowship should be celebrating together in the mountains of Judea.

But until then, remember, ki la'olam chasdo. Hashem is speaking to us all the time, but his lovingkindness can sometimes only be seen over an expanse of time. Ki la'olam chasdo. As His kingdom in Jerusalem is being built, there is no greater sign that the world is communicating to us. And know that from these holy mountains, that you here in this fellowship, are blessed.

Aaronic blessing

Shalom my dear friends, I can't wait to see you next week!