



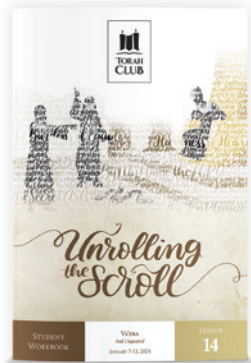
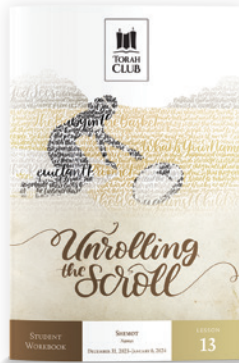
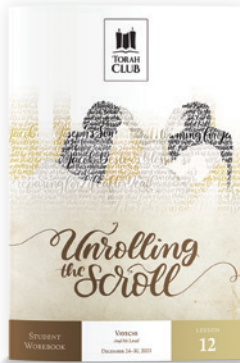
Unrolling the Scroll

STUDENT WORK BOOK

DECEMBER 17-23, 2023

11

TORAH CLUB



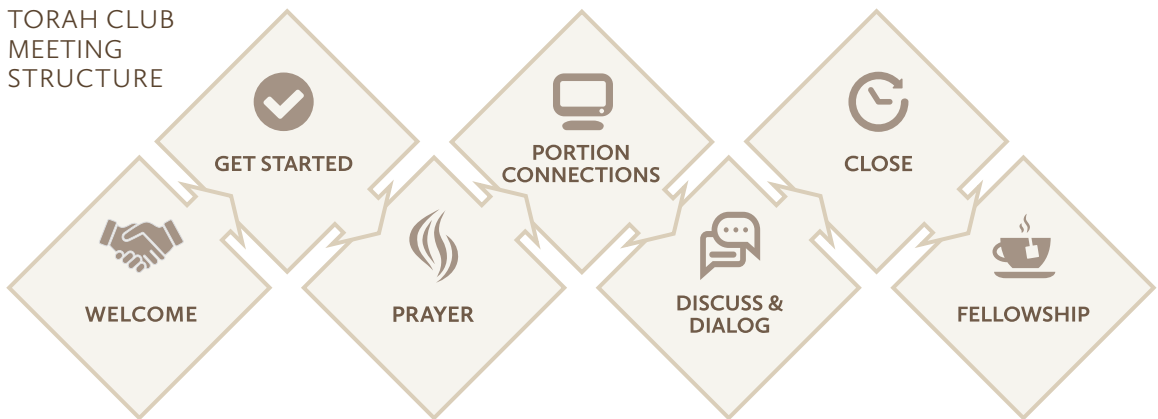
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VAYECHI
DECEMBER 24–30

SHEMOT
DECEMBER 31–JANUARY 6

VA'ERA
JANUARY 7–13

TORAH CLUB MEETING STRUCTURE



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LESSON 11: VAYIGASH

GENESIS 44:18–47:27 ■ FOCUS ON GENESIS 44–45

TORAH PORTION SUMMARY

THE TORAH portion this week begins with Judah’s response to the Egyptian governor’s demand that the brothers abandon Benjamin in Egypt, leaving him as a slave. Judah and his brothers still do not realize that the governor is their brother Joseph.

Rather than abandon Benjamin, Judah offers himself as a slave to the governor. He pleads for Benjamin’s release on the basis of his father Jacob’s love for the boy. Joseph sees that the brothers are loyal to Benjamin. He realizes that their hearts have changed and the ruse is no longer necessary. Clearing the room of his servants, Joseph weeps as he says to the brothers, “I am Joseph,” and then asks about the welfare of his father.

The brothers are terrified, filled with shame, remorse, and fear, but Joseph gently beckons them near and embraces them. He says, “Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.” Joseph sends the brothers back to Canaan with the good news. At first, Jacob is dubious, but when he saw the evidence that Joseph was alive and in Egypt, his spirit revived. Jacob remains uncertain about leaving the land of promise until God appears to him at Beersheba and assures him, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again.”

As the family of Jacob enters Egypt, they are seventy people in all. The Torah recounts all of their names. Jacob appears before Pharaoh and Pharaoh gives him the land of Goshen to settle.

As the famine continues, Joseph continues to centralize the authority of the Egyptian government.

THIS WEEK ON PORTION CONNECTIONS

JOSEPH’S REVELATION to his brothers creates a divine reversal that turns everything they thought they knew completely upside down. We can anticipate similar divine reversals when God reveals the truth to us in the last day, when the first will be last and the last will be first. Those future divine reversals should have implications for our interpersonal relationships now in this current age.

FOCUS SECTIONS

FOCUS SECTIONS combine mechanical, text derived questions ensuring familiarity with the lesson content and more in-depth group discussion topics.

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VAYIGASH

The eleventh reading from the book of Genesis is named Vayigash (ויגש), which means “and he came near.” The title comes from the first verse of the reading, which says, “Then Judah [came near] him” (Genesis 44:18). The portion begins with the dramatic unveiling of Joseph’s true identity and his reconciliation with his brothers. It then proceeds to tell the story of the migration of Jacob’s family to Egypt and the rest of the famine years. This Torah portion begins to set the stage for the Egyptian captivity of the sons of Jacob.

FOCUS
SECTION

1

JOSEPH’S TEST

Then Judah approached him, and said, “Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord’s ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh.” (Genesis 44:18)

Joseph’s trap had been sprung. His servants had planted his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. The eleven brothers had not even left the city before Joseph’s servants stopped them. The servants discovered the cup in Benjamin’s possession. Joseph told the brothers that they were free to go—all except the one who stole the cup. The ten older brothers—the same brothers who had betrayed Joseph and sold him to the Egyptians so long ago—were free to return to Canaan so long as they abandoned Benjamin. Would they do it? Would they return without Benjamin and willingly break their father’s heart again?

The brothers did not realize it, but they were being tested by Joseph. He needed to know if the brothers had repented of their folly or if they would commit the same crime again.

Judah approached Joseph as the spokesman for the group. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi were all Judah’s senior. It would have been more appropriate for one of these older brothers to speak on behalf of the family, but Judah took the responsibility and authority. His leadership foreshadows his tribe’s destiny. Out of the tribe of Judah the line of Davidic kings arose. The authority over Israel fell to the tribe of Judah.

Judah entreated the governor for mercy on Benjamin. He offered himself in place of Benjamin. He told the heart-rending story of his elderly father’s emotional attachment to the boy and begged for clemency on that basis. Judah requested that Joseph take himself as a slave instead of Benjamin.

What irony! The same brother who originally suggested selling Joseph into slavery requested the same fate himself. He concluded by standing firm with Benjamin. Judah and his brothers refused to return to their father without Benjamin. Thus they passed Joseph's test.

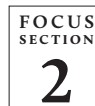
STUDY QUESTIONS ■ FOCUS SECTION 1

1. Which brother spoke on behalf of all the brothers?
2. Which brother originally suggested selling Joseph into slavery?
3. What did he offer in exchange for Benjamin's freedom?

GROUP DISCUSSION: How does Judah's offer to exchange his life for Benjamin's hint toward the Messiah from the tribe of Judah (1 Timothy 2:5-6)?

SPARING EMBARRASSMENT

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. (Genesis 45:1)



The brothers had passed his test, and Joseph knew it was time to end the ruse. He prepared to reveal his identity to his brothers by ordering all of his servants out of the room. The New American Standard translation makes it sound as if he ordered the servants out because he did not want them to see his emotional outburst. Rashi understands the verse a little differently. Rashi says the verse means that Joseph could no longer endure seeing his brothers embarrassed and ashamed in front of the Egyptians.¹ He knew they would be ashamed and fearful when they learned his true identity, and he did not want the Egyptian court to know how his brothers had betrayed him. So he sent the Egyptians out of the room.

We should never cause another person embarrassment or public humiliation. One the sages of the Talmud once said, “Publicly embarrassing one’s neighbor is like spilling his blood.” The saying is explained in that just as an embarrassed person first turns blood red and then pale, it is as if his blood has been shed.²

Once it happened that a young seminary student had just returned from school and was visiting the local rabbi on a Sabbath afternoon in the rabbi’s study. Several men of the community were gathered there, discussing some matters of Torah. The rabbi made a statement about a particular passage that is found on such-and-such a page of the Talmud. The young seminarian, eager to prove his prowess, realized with delight that the rabbi was mistaken about the reference. He rudely interrupted the rabbi and supplied the correct page number where the passage under discussion was to be found. The rabbi smiled apologetically and said, “I am getting old and forgetting my learning. Of course you are right.” Feeling triumphant at having one-upped the rabbi, the young seminary student later looked up the passage to confirm his victory. He was shocked to see that he had been wrong and the rabbi had been right all along. So why did the rabbi back down so quickly? The rabbi could have simply opened the tractate in question and proven the young man wrong on the spot, putting him in his place. The rabbi understood that being right is wrong if it requires embarrassing someone else.

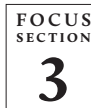
STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 2

1. Why did Joseph decide to end the ruse?
2. According to Rashi, why did Joseph send the Egyptians out of the room before revealing his identity to them?
3. When is being right wrong?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Contrast the sin of shaming another with the “spirit of gentleness” presented by the apostles (1 Corinthians 4:21; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:2; 2 Timothy 2:25; 1 Peter 3:15).

WEeping JOSEPH

He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. (Genesis 45:2)



Before Joseph could form the words to tell his brothers the truth, he broke down in a tumult of weeping. This is his third weeping incident.

The first incident occurred when the brothers originally appeared before him in Egypt. They did not know that Joseph could understand Hebrew as they discussed their regret over the misdeed of selling him into Egypt. When Joseph heard their discussion, “he turned away from them and wept” (Genesis 42:24).

The second weeping incident occurred when the brothers returned with Benjamin. Joseph’s heart was moved at the sight of his younger brother. The Torah says, “Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there” (Genesis 43:30).

The third weeping incident occurred when he revealed his identity to his brothers.

Deep in Uganda, a missionary friend of mine was teaching through the Torah with a group of orphans she cares for. The orphans came from homes devastated by the AIDS epidemic. They were growing up without ever knowing a sense of family connection. They did not know what it meant to be loved or what it meant to love. As they heard the story of Joseph’s weeping, one of the young boys asked my missionary friend, “Why did he do that?” It was a sincere question. The boy honestly did not comprehend the emotions in Joseph’s heart because he had never felt anything similar himself. Without a context of family, the story made no sense to him.

The lesson to be learned here is that relationships are painful. Love is not free; it is very costly. Heartbreak and sorrow is the price that must be paid for love. Unless we are willing to weep along with Joseph, we will not be able to properly love our spouses, our family members, or our brothers and sisters in the LORD.

Once it happened that a certain Jew paid a visit to a well-known, revered rabbi and scholar to conduct some matters of business. When their business

The gospel writers tell us again and again that Yeshua was moved with compassion: when He saw the sick, when He saw a widow who had lost her son, when He saw the people without leadership, when He saw people in need of healing on the Sabbath, when he saw Mary and Martha weeping for Lazarus. Again and again He was moved with compassion. The prophet Isaiah calls Him the “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3).

STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 3

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. (Genesis 45:3)

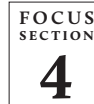
brothers about their father's health and well-being. Why did he ask again after revealing his identity? Some commentators see it as a veiled rebuke. He says "my father," not "our father." Perhaps he means to imply, "How could you have mistreated our father, bringing him such sorrow?" That may be so, but if Joseph wanted to rebuke his brothers, he could have done so in an open manner. He clearly had the upper hand at the moment. Instead, Joseph showed genuine concern for his father. He had already heard their assurances that Jacob still lived, but that was while the brothers thought they were speaking to the Egyptian governor. Joseph asks again without the disguise between them, brother to brother, "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers did not answer. They were too disconcerted to answer. And there was a sense in which Jacob was no longer alive. When Jacob saw Joseph's torn garment, he had declared, "Surely I will go down to Sheol [i.e., death] in mourning for my son" (Genesis 37:35).

When the brothers later returned to Canaan and told Jacob the glad news that Joseph was alive, "The spirit of their father Jacob revived" (Genesis 45:27).

JOSEPH ASSURES HIS BROTHERS

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. (Genesis 45:5)



The truth began to sink in. The Egyptian governor was actually their long-estranged brother, Joseph. The ten brothers who had betrayed him probably began to anticipate some sort of retaliation. There had been Cain and Abel. Isaac and Ishmael. Jacob and Esau. Now Joseph and the ten brothers. It seemed to be a continual cycle of sibling rivalry.

Joseph did not retaliate. Instead, he broke the cycle by offering complete forgiveness. He told his brothers not to be remorseful for selling him to Egypt.

How was Joseph able to offer his brothers such a gracious and total pardon? He did so on the basis of his confidence in God's goodness. He saw that, though the brothers had meant his sale into slavery for evil, God meant it for good. Everything had worked according to God's plan and wisdom. If the brothers had not sold Joseph to the Egyptians, he would never have been there to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, store up seven years of grain, and save Jacob's family in the process. Joseph adamantly insisted that it was not the brothers who had sent him into Egypt. Instead, it was God. He repeats this statement three times:

God sent me before you to preserve life ... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth ... It was not you who sent me here, but God. (Genesis 45:5–8)

Since he was able to see the greater good of the hand of God behind the malice of his brothers, Joseph was able to forgive them for their sins against him.

Can we do the same? When we are wronged or slighted, rather than seeking some sort of retaliation, we should remember the Joseph story. Remember that God ultimately works all things for the good. Yeshua commands us to forgive one another. He warns us that if we do not forgive others when they wrong us, God will not forgive our sins.⁴ Therefore, we must learn the art of forgiveness.

In a second-century-BCE pseudepigraphical book called *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the writer imagines Joseph's brother Zebulun retelling the story to his children. Read this beautiful and instructive passage about forgiveness and reconciliation. Although it is long quotation, I have included it here because of its close affinity to the teachings of Yeshua:

You also, my children, have compassion toward every person with mercy, in order that the Lord may be compassionate and merciful to you. In the last days God will send his compassion on the earth, and whenever he finds compassionate mercy, in that person he will dwell. To the extent that a man has compassion on his neighbor, to that extent the Lord has mercy on him. For when we went down into Egypt, Joseph did not hold a grudge against us. When he saw me, he was moved with compassion. Whomever you see, do not harbor resentment, my children; love one another, and do not calculate the wrong done by each to his brothers. This shatters unity, and scatters all kinship, and stirs up the soul. He who recalls evil receives neither compassion nor mercy. (*Testament of Zebulun 8*)

STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 4

1. When did the cycle of sibling rivalry begin?
2. How did Joseph break the cycle of sibling rivalry?

3. Why did Joseph emphasize that it was God who had sent him into Egypt and not the brothers?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Compare the passage from the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Zebulun* to the teaching of Yeshua (Luke 6:32–38).

WHAT PHARAOH HEARD

Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. (Genesis 45:16)



Pharaoh was delighted when he heard that Joseph's brothers had come to Egypt. He immediately made provision to bring the entire family to Egypt so they could survive the famine in safety and comfort. He provided wagons for the move. He promised them the best of the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh's warm welcome of Joseph's brothers reveals an important detail about Joseph's time in Egypt. Apparently, the entire time he had been in Egypt, he had never told anyone the story of what his brothers did to him. Pharaoh, at least, had never heard the tale of how Joseph's brothers abducted him and sold him. Had he known the story of the villainous deed, he would not have extended the warm welcome.

When we are wronged by someone, it is natural to tell others about it. We want to tell others about how it happened to garner their sympathy and support. Somehow it makes us feel better to know that others are aware of the injustice committed against us. We seek out sympathy and commit a small act of retaliation. By telling people about another person's misdeeds and unkindness, we turn opinions against that person. Although it feels good to do this, it is wrong. Even though every bit of the story is true, when we tell others about how we have been wronged, we are indulging in the sin of evil speech.

Joseph loved his brothers and his family so much that he could not bear the thought of having them defamed. He did not want Egyptians saying to one another, "Did you hear about the nasty thing that Joseph's lowlife brothers did to him?" Joseph kept the entire episode to himself. The only thing he ever said about his past was the vague explanation, "I was in fact

kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews” (Genesis 40:15). His love for his brothers compelled him to protect their reputation.

Instead of emulating Joseph, who was concerned about protecting the dignity of his loved ones, it seems we do just the opposite. A husband and wife are eating out at a restaurant when the husband drops his cup, spilling his beverage on the table. Embarrassed, the wife rolls her eyes and says to the stranger sitting at the next table, “He is such a klutz.” A man is out with his friends when they begin discussing the foils of marriage. All in good fun, the man complains to the guys about how his wife talks on the phone too much and routinely burns dinner because of her phone conversations. Everyone laughs. Why would we sell out the people we love like this? The wife shows more concern for the opinion of a stranger in a restaurant than the dignity of her husband. The husband has higher regard for a few laughs from his buddies than he does for the reputation of his wife.

Once there was a woman who was having a hard time at the Messianic synagogue she attended. She was involved in a heated conflict with some other members. This went on for some time. Frustrated with her congregation, she told her unbelieving friend about the problems she was having. Eventually the leadership got involved and arbitrated the situation. She made peace with the people. Some time later, she invited her unbelieving friend to attend a service. Her friend said, “Are you crazy? After the way you talked about those people and that place, I wouldn’t set foot in there.”

By keeping the incident with his brothers quiet, Joseph was protecting the name and reputation of God in Egypt. Had he told his sad story to everyone, the Egyptians would have had cause to say, “If that’s how the followers of your God behave, I want nothing to do with Him or your religion.”

STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 5

1. What did Pharaoh’s warm welcome reveal about Joseph?
2. Why do we like to tell others when we have been wronged?
3. Why didn’t Joseph tell anyone what his brothers had done to him?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Give examples in which it would be immoral not to publicize a problem or moral failing within the community of faith (Ephesians 5:11–13).

FIVE CHANGES OF CLOTHING



To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments.
(Genesis 45:22)

Joseph sent the brothers back to Canaan laden with gifts. Remember that his original conflict with his brothers had been exacerbated by the fancy coat of many colors. Now Joseph gave them each a princely garment from the royal cloth of Egypt. He gave each brother a change of clothing, but he gave Benjamin five changes of clothing. Why? Why would he do the same thing his father had done? The Talmud asks, “Is it possible that that righteous man [Joseph] should make the same mistake from which he himself had suffered? ... Jacob gave Joseph two ounces more of fine silk than what he gave his brothers and so set a ball rolling which eventually ended up with our ancestors enslaved in Egypt!”⁵

Perhaps Joseph wanted to give the brothers a chance to prove to themselves that they had indeed changed. As he sent them on their way to Canaan, he warned them, “Do not quarrel on the journey” (Genesis 45:24). They had to prove that they were no longer the petty, envious boys who so grievously sinned against Joseph. They had yet to prove that they had overcome their covetousness and jealousy. Would they be able to accept that Benjamin enjoyed Joseph’s special favor in a way that they did not? It’s a difficult test. Many believers fail that same test when confronted with the elect status of the Jewish people. Replacement theology, supersessionism, and theological anti-Semitism are examples of how the church has failed the Benjamin test.

God forbids covetousness. The prohibition against coveting is one of the Ten Commandments. It is the only commandment that legislates a feeling. Whereas the other commands prohibit specific behaviors and actions, the tenth commandment prohibits a thought of the heart. A person is forbidden from looking upon another person’s possessions with longing:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:17)

Covetousness lies at the root of a great deal of unhappiness and human suffering. To covet what is not ours is an affront to God, who provides us with all that we need according to our need. Covetousness is a complaint against Him.

Let us yield obedience to His excellent and glorious will; and imploring His mercy and loving-kindness, while we forsake all fruitless labors, and strife, and envy, which leads to death, let us turn and have recourse to His compassions. (*1 Clement* 9:1)

STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 6

1. What was the incident that started the conflict between Joseph and his brothers?
2. How did Joseph's gift to Benjamin give the brothers more opportunity to demonstrate their change of heart?
3. What is the only commandment in the Ten Commandments that prohibits an emotion?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Explain how replacement theology, supersessionism, and theological anti-Semitism indicate failures of "the Benjamin test."

VISION AT BEERSHEBA

Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. (Genesis 46:1)



Jacob was delighted to learn that his beloved son was still alive. He was less certain about moving to Egypt. All his life he had toiled and sacrificed for the Abrahamic promises. Through great struggle he had wrested the inheritance from his brother Esau. He had suffered exile from the promised land for more than two decades while he lived with Laban. Why would he leave now? Couldn't Joseph simply supply the family with enough food to sustain them in Canaan?

On the journey to Egypt, Jacob stopped at Beersheba, his childhood home. He found the ancient altar of his father, Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham, and he offered sacrifices to God. The LORD appeared to him in night visions, just as he had done at Bethel so many years before. It was the last time God appeared to Jacob. He told Jacob, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes" (Genesis 46:3-4).

Reassured that the journey to Egypt was part of God's plan to bestow the Abrahamic blessing, Jacob went with confidence.

STUDY QUESTIONS | FOCUS SECTION 7

1. Why was Jacob reluctant to leave Canaan and move to Egypt?
2. Where did Jacob stop to pray before leaving Canaan?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Compare God's first appearance and message to Jacob (Genesis 28:12-15) with His final appearance and message to Jacob (Genesis 46:1-4).

ADDITION PROBLEMS

Jacob and all his descendants with him: his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt. (Genesis 46:6-7)

Do you like math games? The Torah has a good one in this portion. The Torah says that seventy people went down to Egypt with Jacob: “All the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy” (Genesis 46:27). This raises a few questions.

The previous verse (46:26) states that there were sixty-six. But then verse 27 adds Joseph’s two sons who were born in Egypt and declares the total number to be seventy. This is a problem. Sixty-six plus two does not equal seventy. Perhaps the Torah assumes that we should add Joseph, who was also already living in Egypt. But even so, we are still short one person. The problem is in the number of sons credited to Leah. Genesis 46:15 says that Leah’s sons and grandsons numbered thirty-three, including her daughter, Dinah. However, Judah’s sons Er and Onan were already dead. (We learn about their deaths in Genesis 38.) The absence of Er and Onan leaves us one short. If you count up the names including Dinah but excluding Er and Onan, you will arrive at thirty-two names. Added to the others, this leaves the final reckoning of seventy entering Egypt one short as well. What’s the solution? Some opinions include Jacob himself in the number, but this cannot be. Jacob does not qualify as a son or daughter of Leah. One opinion has it that the Divine Presence of God is the missing number, but again, the Presence of God could hardly be reckoned a son or daughter of Leah. It’s a real stumper.

Rashi comes to the rescue with a solution from Jewish tradition. He claims that Levi’s wife was pregnant and gave birth to a daughter as she entered Egypt:

“These are the sons of Leah; ... all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three” (Genesis 46:15). But when they are counted you find only thirty-two. The missing one is Yocheved, who was born in the gates upon their entering the city, as it says [in Numbers 26:59] “Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt.” She was born in Egypt, but not conceived in Egypt. (Rashi on Genesis 46:15)

Yocheved is the mother of Moses. Her birth accounts for all seventy who entered Egypt. But wait. There’s another problem. In the book of Acts, the Apostle Stephen makes a famous speech before the Sanhedrin. He defends himself from the false accusations lodged against him by conducting an

on-the-spot Bible study. As he retells the story of Jacob going into Egypt, he says the number of his family was seventy-five!

Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. (Acts 7:14)

After all that work we just did to come up with seventy, where does this number come from? Who are these extra five? The answer is in the Greek. Stephen was a Greek-speaking Hellenist Jew. He attended a Greek-speaking synagogue in Jerusalem. He knew the Torah only in the Greek version, which is called the Septuagint (LXX). (By the way, Septuagint means “seventy.”) The Septuagint Greek version of Genesis 46:27 reads differently from the Hebrew. According to the Greek version, Joseph had nine children. Compare the two versions below:

And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in the land of Egypt, were nine souls; all the souls of the house of Jacob who came with Joseph into Egypt, were seventy-five souls. (Genesis 46:27 LXX)

And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy. (Genesis 46:27 MT)

The sons of Joseph born to him in Egypt may include his daughters. The word sons is often used in a gender-neutral sense for children. The Hebrew tells us only about the two sons of Joseph, but he also had seven daughters. If we add Joseph’s nine children to the sixty-six children from Genesis 46:26, we arrive at seventy-five.⁶

JOSEPH’S FIVES

He took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. (Genesis 47:2)

Jacob’s family had arrived in Egypt. Joseph hitched his chariot and came out to meet them. When Jacob and Joseph were finally reunited, their joy was overwhelming. No words could express it. Joseph embraced his father, and they wept.

Now that his father and brothers had come, Joseph had to present them before Pharaoh. Rather than traipsing all his brothers in before Pharaoh, Joseph took five of them to represent the group.

Why did Joseph choose only five of his brothers to bring before Pharaoh? It seems that Joseph had a propensity for the number five. He advised

Pharaoh to prepare for the famine years by taking a fifth of the produce in the years of plenty. When he served Benjamin in Genesis 43, he gave him a portion five times that of his brothers. When he sent them back to Canaan, he gave Benjamin five changes of clothing. He summoned his family to Egypt when there were five years of famine left. He chose five of his brothers to present before Pharaoh. When the famine reduced the people of Egypt to serfdom, he required only a fifth of their harvest for Pharaoh. What's with all the fives? There are five books of Torah. Joseph's repeated gifts and gestures in quantities of five hint that we should look to his example if we want to learn Torah.

Joseph coached the five brothers ahead of time to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds with herds and flocks. This had two advantages. It would assure that Jacob's family would be allowed to settle in the rich pasture lands of Goshen. Second, it would help keep Jacob's family separated from the rest of Egyptian society. The Egyptians detested shepherds. Joseph wanted his family to be able to live in relative privacy, apart from the immoral and idolatrous Egyptian people.

JACOB AND PHARAOH

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh;
and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. (Genesis 47:7)

When Pharaoh saw Jacob, he was amazed at how old the man looked. He dispensed with any pleasantries and immediately asked him, "How many years have you lived?" (Genesis 47:8).

The years had worn heavily on Jacob. For twenty years he had served Laban. "By day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes," he had complained to Laban (Genesis 31:40). He was harried by four wives, and he had lost the only wife he had ever wanted to an early grave. He had spent more than twenty years inconsolably mourning the death of his beloved son Joseph. No wonder he looked old. Add to all that, he was 130 years old when appeared before Pharaoh.

Jacob replied, saying, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty" (Genesis 47:9). Notice that Pharaoh asked about the years of his life. Jacob replied speaking of the years of his "sojourning" instead of the years of his life. Rashi explains that all his life, Jacob had lived as a stranger and sojourner in other people's lands. Born in Canaan, the land of the Canaanites, he lived as a stranger in hope of the Abrahamic inheritance. In Aram he lived as a stranger awaiting his opportunity to return to Canaan. Finally he had come to Egypt, where he planned to live out his days as a stranger in a foreign land. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us

that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). They were “seeking a country of their own ... a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:14–16). The writer of the book of Hebrews does not mean just the land of Canaan. He is speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem. He says, “[God] has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:16).

This explains why Jacob referred not to the years of his life but to the years of his “sojourning.” Though he spent 130 years as a stranger on earth, he still anticipated a homecoming when he would enter the City of God and be rejoined to his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Though the years of his sojourning were soon to end, the years of his life had just begun.

Jacob continued by complaining to Pharaoh about his life. “Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning” (Genesis 47:9). To us, it seems strange to imagine a man 130 years old bemoaning a short life. But his grandfather, Abraham, had lived to 175. His father, Isaac, had lived to 180. Pharaoh was astounded at these amazing ages. Jacob was the oldest man he had ever met.

The sages criticize Jacob for complaining to Pharaoh and calling his years few and unpleasant. They imagined a humorous story whereby God transforms Jacob’s complaint into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the story (which is called a midrash), God was listening to this complaint. He replied as follows:

So you call your years few and unpleasant? I gave you the covenant blessings, saved you from Esau and Laban, returned Dinah, Joseph, Simeon, and Benjamin to you, prospered you, and saved your family from famine, yet you complain about your life! I will take the thirty-three words spoken in those two verses and deduct them from your years. Then your years will indeed not reach those of your fathers.⁷

What does this mean? Another math game. There are thirty-three Hebrew words in Genesis 47:8–9. Jacob lived to the age of 147, which is thirty-three years short of his father’s lifespan of 180. God deducted one year from his life for each of the Hebrew words in those two verses of Genesis. Obviously, this story is not meant to be taken literally. Its whimsical style is characteristic of the sages and the Midrash.⁸ While teachings like this are not literally true, they always teach some deeper truth. In this case the midrash has recognized that it was inappropriate for Jacob to complain about his life. In reality, he had received great blessings. He did not know how many years he had left to live. For all he knew, he might have yet outlived his forefathers. To a certain extent, our words create our own reality. At the very least, our words and attitudes color the reality in which we must live.

How we respond to life's hardships determines how much of a toll those hardships will take on us.

When my oldest brother died tragically in an automobile accident, my father said, "David was everything I could have ever wanted in a firstborn son. I am so grateful to the LORD for him." When my mother died, my father said, "I am so grateful to the LORD for the many years we had together. She was the perfect wife." In both cases his grief was deep and heart-rending, but in both cases he chose to see the goodness of God rather than complain about his loss.

BLESSING THE NATIONS

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.
(Genesis 47:10)

When Jacob first appeared before Pharaoh, he blessed him. After their brief conversation he blessed him again and left his presence. Rashi maintains that this was nothing unusual, simply the courtesies and salutations one would ordinarily pay a king or a nobleman. He suggests that Jacob's blessing might have been along the lines of "May the Nile rise to your feet."⁹ On the other hand, the blessings of Jacob may have been more substantial. Surely Jacob blessed his new benefactor in the name of the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Jacob's blessing over Pharaoh reminds us of the Abrahamic promise reiterated to Jacob at Bethel: "In you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14). Through Jacob and his seed, all the families of the earth have been blessed. The children of Israel would have remained a source of blessing for the Egyptians if a later Pharaoh had not turned his hand against them.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Rashi on Genesis 45:1.
- 2 b.*Bava Metzia* 58b.
- 3 The story is told of Reb Meir Yisrael, the Chofetz Chaim.
- 4 Matthew 6:14–15.
- 5 b.*Megillah* 16b.
- 6 Counting Joseph, not counting Dinah. Requires counting Er and Onan in Leah's thirty-three (Genesis 46:15) but not in the final count of those seventy-five entering Egypt.
- 7 Based on *Genesis Rabbah* 95.
- 8 To learn more about midrash and the sages, see the "Primary Sources" and "Vocabulary" sections at the end of this booklet.
- 9 Rashi on Genesis 47:10.

KEY WORDS AND TERMS



VOCABULARY

midrash	Commentary, sermon; something searched out.
parashah	A section or paragraph from the Torah.
the sages	We use the term sages to refer to the rabbis and great Torah scholars from the Apostolic Period through the completion of the Talmud (100 BCE–500 CE).
torah	Teaching; instruction.
Vayigash	And he came near; the eleventh parashah.



PEOPLE AND PLACES

Clement of Rome	According to church legend, Clement of Rome was a disciple of Peter. In some papal lists he is regarded as the second or fourth pope over the Roman church, but this is an anachronism.
Rashi	Acronym for Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac, a great rabbi who lived in late eleventh-century France. Rashi's commentary on the Bible is considered by Judaism to be essential to understanding the meaning of the text.
Reb Meir Yisrael Kagan	A very influential rabbi and ethicist known by the title of his first work, the <i>Chofetz Chayim</i> ("seeker of life"). His works emphasize the need to avoid evil speech and gossip.
Yeshua	Jesus.



PRIMARY SOURCES

1 Clement	A patristic letter to the congregation of Corinth written by Clement of Rome sometime between 60 CE and 140 CE. It is one of the earliest non-canonical Christian letters we have, if not the earliest.
Bava Metzia	The title for a tractate of both the Mishnah and the Talmud dealing primarily with the various laws of personal property and violations.
Genesis Rabbah	Section of the <i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , which is a compilation of homiletic teachings on the book of Genesis by the various sages of the Amoraic Era (220 CE–500 CE).
Midrash Rabbah	A compilation of homiletic and halachic teachings on scriptural expositions by various sages of the Amoraic and Medieval periods (220 CE–1100 CE). The <i>Midrash Rabbah</i> is arranged according to the weekly Torah readings based on the one-year cycle.

Mishnah	Also called the Oral Torah, this is a collection of legislation containing the traditional rulings, applications and legal disputes of the sages that were passed along orally until being redacted at the beginning of the third century CE by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.
Septuagint	Also known by the Roman numerals LXX (“70”). The standard Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which was compiled between 300 and 100 BCE.
Talmud	A voluminous record of rabbinic discussions about the Mishnah. Two different compendiums of Talmud exist. The Jerusalem Talmud contains the discussions of the sages in the land of Israel, and the Babylonian Talmud contains the discussions of the sages in Babylon. The Talmuds were completed in the fifth and sixth centuries but also contain material dating back to Ezra’s time.
Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs	A pseudonymous account of the last words of each of Jacob’s sons that were highly regarded in both ancient Judaism and Christianity. The present form of the text contains later Christian redactions, but the original document may have been composed during the Maccabean Era in the second century BCE.
Testament of Zebulun	A section of the <i>Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs</i> .

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TORAH

PORTIONS

“Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” DEUTERONOMY 8:3

#	NAME	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
GENESIS / B'REISHEET בראשית				

1	B'REISHEET	14 OCT. '23	GEN. 1:1–6:8	1 SAM. 20:18–42
2	NOACH	21 OCT. '23	GEN. 6:9–11:32	ISA. 54:1–55:5
3	LECH LECHA	28 OCT. '23	GEN. 12:1–17:27	ISA. 40:27–41:16
4	VAYERA	4 NOV. '23	GEN. 18:1–22:24	2 KGS. 4:1–37
5	CHAYEI SARAH	11 NOV. '23	GEN. 23:1–25:18	1 KGS. 1:1–31
6	TOLDOT	18 NOV. '23	GEN. 25:19–28:9	MAL. 1:1–2:7
7	VAYETZE	25 NOV. '23	GEN. 28:10–32:3[2]*	HOS. 12:13[12]–14:10[9]*
8	VAYISHLACH	2 DEC. '23	GEN. 32:4[3]–36:43*	OBA. 1–21
9	VAYESHEV	9 DEC. '23	GEN. 37:1–40:23	ZEC. 2:14[10]–4:7*
10	MIKETZ	16 DEC. '23	GEN. 41:1–44:17	1 KGS. 3: 15–4:1
11	VAYIGASH	23 DEC. '23	GEN. 44:18–47:27	EZE. 37:15–28
12	VAYECHI	30 DEC. '23	GEN. 47:28–50:26	1 KGS. 2:1–12

#	NAME	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
EXODUS / SHEMOT שמות				

13	SHEMOT	6 JAN. '24	EXO. 1:1–6:1	ISA. 27:6–28:13, 29:22–23
14	VA'ERA	13 JAN. '24	EXO. 6:2–9:35	EZE. 28:25–29:21
15	BO	20 JAN. '24	EXO. 10:1–13:16	JER. 46:13–28
16	BESHALACH	27 JAN. '24	EXO. 13:17–17:16	JDG. 4:4–5:31
17	YITRO	3 FEB. '24	EXO. 18:1–20:23	ISA. 6:1–7:6, 9:5–6[6–7]*
18	MISHPATIM	10 FEB. '24	EXO. 21:1–24:18	ISA. 66:1–24
19	TERUMAH	17 FEB. '24	EXO. 25:1–27:19	1 KGS. 5:26[12]–6:13*
20	TETZAVEH	24 FEB. '24	EXO. 27:20–30:10	EZE. 43:10–27
21	KI TISA	2 MAR. '24	EXO. 30:11–34:35	1 KGS. 18:1–39
22	VAYAK'HEL	9 MAR. '24	EXO. 35:1–38:20	2 KGS. 12:1–17[11:21–12:16]*
23	PEKUDEI	16 MAR. '24	EXO. 38:21–40:38	1 KGS. 7:51–8:21

#	NAME	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
LEVITICUS / VAYIKRA ויקרא				

24	VAYIKRA	23 MAR. '24	LEV. 1:1–5:26[6:7]*	1 SAM. 15:1–34
25	TZAV	30 MAR. '24	LEV. 6:1[8]–8:36*	EZE. 36:16–38
26	SH'MINI	6 APR. '24	LEV. 9:1–11:47	EZE. 45:16–46:18
27	TAZRIA	13 APR. '24	LEV. 12:1–13:59	2 KGS. 4:42–5:19
28	METZORA	20 APR. '24	LEV. 14:1–15:33	MAL. 3:4–24[4:6]*
PESACH I				
23 APR. '24				
EXO. 12:21–51				
JOSH. 5:2–6:1				
PESACH VIII				
30 APR. '24				
DEUT. 15:19–16:17				
ISA. 10:32–12:6				
29	ACHAREI MOT	4 MAY '24	LEV. 16:1–18:30	EZE. 22:1–16
30	KEDOSHIM	11 MAY '24	LEV. 19:1–20:27	AMOS 9:7–15
31	EMOR	18 MAY '24	LEV. 21:1–24:23	EZE. 44:15–31
32	BEHAR	25 MAY '24	LEV. 25:1–26:2	JER. 32:6–27
33	BECHUKOTAI	1 JUN. '24	LEV. 26:3–27:34	JER. 16:19–17:14

#	NAME	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
NUMBERS / BAMIDBAR במדבר				

34	BAMIDBAR	8 JUN. '24	NUM. 1:1–4:20	HOS. 2:1–22[1:10–2:20]*
SHAVU'OT I				
12 JUN. '24				
EXO. 19:1–20:23				
EZE. 1:1–28, 3:12				
SHAVU'OT II				
13 JUN. '24				
DEUT. 15:19–16:17				
HAB. 3:1–19				
35	NASSO	15 JUN. '24	NUM. 4:21–7:89	JDG. 13:2–25
36	BEHA'ALOTCHA	22 JUN. '24	NUM. 8:1–12:16	ZEC. 2:14[10]–4:7*
37	SHELACH	29 JUN. '24	NUM. 13:1–15:41	JOSH. 2:1–24
38	KORACH	6 JUL. '24	NUM. 16:1–18:32	ISA. 66:1–24
39	CHUKAT	13 JUL. '24	NUM. 19:1–22:1	JDG. 11:1–33
40	BALAK	20 JUL. '24	NUM. 22:2–25:9	MIC. 5:6[7]–6:8*
41	PINCHAS	27 JUL. '24	NUM. 25:10–30:1[29:40]*	JER. 1:1–2:3
42–43	MATTOT–MASSEI	3 AUG. '24	NUM. 30:2[1]–36:13*	JER. 2:4–28, 3:4

#	NAME	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
DEUTERONOMY / DEVARIM דברים				

44	DEVARIM	10 AUG. '24	DEUT. 1:1–3:22	ISA. 1:1–27
45	VA'ETCHANAN	17 AUG. '24	DEUT. 3:23–7:11	ISA. 40:1–26
46	EKEV	24 AUG. '24	DEUT. 7:12–11:25	ISA. 49:14–51:3
47	RE'EH	31 AUG. '24	DEUT. 11:26–16:17	ISA. 54:11–55:5
48	SHOFTIM	7 SEP. '24	DEUT. 16:18–21:9	ISA. 51:12–52:12
49	KI TETZE	14 SEP. '24	DEUT. 21:10–25:19	ISA. 54:1–10
50	KI TAVO	21 SEP. '24	DEUT. 26:1–29:8[9]*	ISA. 60:1–22
51–52	NITZAVIM–VAYELECH	28 SEP. '24	DEUT. 29:9[10]–31:30*	ISA. 61:10–63:9
ROSH HASHANAH I				
3 OCT. '24				
GEN. 21:1–34				
1 SAM. 1:1–2:10				
ROSH HASHANAH II				
4 OCT. '24				
GEN. 22:1–24				
JER. 31:1–19				
53	HA'AZINU	5 OCT. '24	DEUT. 32:1–52	HOS. 14:2[1]–10[9]; JL. 2:15–27
YOM KIPPUR				
12 OCT. '24				
LEV. 16:1–34				
ISA. 57:14–58:14				
SUKKOT I				
17 OCT. '24				
LEV. 22:26–23:44				
ZEC. 14:1–21				
SHMINI ATZERET				
24 OCT. '24				
DEUT. 14:22–16:17				
1 KGS. 8:54–66				
54	VEZOT HA'BRACHA	25 OCT. '24	DEUT. 33:1–34:12	JOSH. 1:1–18

* The Torah and haftarah chapter/verse numberings are taken from the Hebrew Bible (Christian published chapter/verse numberings are indicated within parentheses).

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