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Vayechi | Persevering Through Trials Reveals Hidden Powers





MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ויחי | אנגלית

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Publisher and Distributer of the Teachings o Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt'l

- 500 Frank W Burr Blvd Suite 47 Teaneck, NJ 07666
- en@h-l.org.il
- www.hameir-laarets.org.il/en
- HaKatzir 666, Netivot, Israel
- (954) 800-6526
- HameirLaaretsEN
- HameirLaaretsEN
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Parshat Vayechi - Heaven Down Below



Heaven Down Below

A ger tzedek (*righteous convert*) once approached Rabbi Yaakov Edelstein *ZY"A* and recounted:

"I was born a gentile. I never lacked money, and with the commodity called *time* I didn't know what to do... So, I decided to explore religion.

"I sent an email to a very famous sheikh: 'Arrange a suitable hostel for me for a long stay. I want to invest in studying Islam.'

"I arrived there, and they began teaching me, investing effort in me...

"After two weeks, my instructor told me, 'Next week, the sheikh is going up to heaven for seven days.' I asked, 'What is up there?'

"They said, 'Prophecies, mystical insights, great revelations!'

"Can I join?' I asked. 'Are you crazy?! What are you talking about?! It's impossible

to ascend with him to heaven to receive prophecies...'

"I went to the sheikh's personal secretary and said, 'I have a checkbook. How much will it cost me to go up together with him to heaven?'

"'It's possible for a modest sum. Write a single digit and append as many zeros as you can... and you'll even get fifty percent off!' he replied.

"They took me through deep tunnels, pressed me up against a window, and said, 'Here you can see the sheikh's revelations...'

"I looked and discovered the sheikh drinking alcohol—which is forbidden—going about... and vomiting on himself. I returned to the United States.

"Five months passed, and I sent an email to the Vatican: 'I want to come to Rome to study

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Christianity'... I arrived at a five-star hotel, and they taught me with devotion.

"After a month, the same tune: 'Next week, the bishop is going up to heaven.'

"I already knew the drill. I approached the personal secretary and told him it would be a shame to return to America with an empty checkbook... How much will it cost for the experience?

"Of course, I added in many zeros, and they took me through deep tunnels to a window... Now, it's well known that the heads of the Church live in celibacy, yet here I saw the bishop and all his cronies indulging collectively in the worst debauchery...

"I was broken. I fled back to the U.S. 'I am an atheist! I don't believe!' I declared.

"Half a year later, I boarded a plane without sending any emails in advance and traveled to the Land of Israel.

"I wandered around the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem and saw a dignified-looking man.

"Maybe you could teach me Judaism?' I asked.

"The rabbi said to me, 'I have a yeshiva here—most gladly!'

"He assigned me a *chavruta* (study partner), and we studied together... a month, two months...

"I asked the *chavruta*, 'When does the rabbi go up to heaven?'

"The *chavruta* was appalled: 'Why do you want the rabbi to pass away?!'

"'No, I mean, when does he receive mystical insights and revelations?'

"He said to me, 'Go ask the rabbi himself.'

"I approached the rabbi and explained to him what goes on in Islam and Christianity—the mystical ascents and revelations...

"I wanted to know, when does the rabbi go up to heaven?

"The rabbi said to me: 'In our Jewish faith, we do not ascend to heaven. A Jew–365 days a

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year, 24 hours a day—brings heaven down to earth!
"'He eats with heaven, he sleeps with heaven—he lives heaven!'"

In this week's discourse, we will add another important detail. And as is our custom, we will begin with questions...

Between Egypt and Tzippori

As is known, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince) was the Tanna (Mishnaic sage) who compiled the Mishnah. It is also known that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi merited three titles: "Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi," "Rabbenu HaKadosh" ("our Holy Teacher," see Tractate *Shabbat* 118b), and simply "Rebbi."

We find that the eminent kabbalist Rabbi Natan Neta Shapira of Kraków, *ZY"A*, explained the reason for this multiplicity of titles. Thus, he wrote in *Megaleh Amukot* on Parashat Toldot:

"Know that the soul of our forefather Jacob sparked again in

the soul of the holy Tanna, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Therefore, he was given the title 'HaNasi' (The Prince) since this title is an acronym for 'Hu Nitzutz shel Yaakov Avinu,' meaning 'he is a spark of our forefather Jacob.' Likewise, he was called 'Rabbenu HaKadosh' corresponding to the fact that Jacob, our forefather, instituted the blessing of 'Ha'El

HaKadosh' ('the Holy G-d')."¹

In fact, Rabbi Yehuda himself hinted at this connection! It is brought in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Yerushalmi*), at the end of Kilayim (chap. 9, halacha 3), as follows:

1. The *Shibbolei HaLeket* (Laws of Prayer, §18, cited in Beit Yosef Orach Chaim §112) quotes a Midrash that the eighteen blessings of the *Amidah* prayer had been established since antiquity, and the Men of the Great Assembly only arranged their order.

When Abraham was saved from the fiery furnace, the ministering angels said:
"Shield of Abraham."

When Isaac was bound upon the altar, they said: "Who revives the dead."

When Jacob reached the gates of mercy and sanctified the Name of the

Parshat Vayechi - Between Egypt and Tzippori

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi lived in the city of Tzippori for seventeen years, and at the end of his tenure in Tzippori, he summed up the entire period with the verse: "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years" (Genesis 47:28).

By choosing to use that very verse, we understand that there is a special connection between him and Jacob, our Patriarch. We also understand that Rabbi Yehuda was compelled to undergo in his

lifetime a path similar to that traversed by the root of his soul (Jacob, our forefather).

The *Yerushalmi* continues and relates:

Out of the seventeen years Rabbi Yehuda lived in Tzippori, he suffered for thirteen of them from terrible toothaches !² They were so terrible that the pain he felt was sufficient to protect all the pregnant women in the Land of Israel (from experiencing miscarriage due to pain).

Holy One, blessed be He, they said: "The Holy G-d." (See there the reasons the other blessings were instituted.)

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi had a spark from the soul of Jacob—who instituted the blessing of 'Ha'El HaKadosh' ("the Holy G-d")–therefore, they called him "Rabbenu HaKadosh" ("our Holy Teacher").

2. The reason for Rabbi Yehuda's toothaches is related in the *Yerushalmi* (*Kilayim* 9:3):

Once, a calf was being led to slaughter. On the way to slaughter, the calf noticed Rabbi Yehuda. The calf slipped away from the slaughterer, ran to Rabbi Yehuda, put its head under Rabbi Yehuda's garment, and began to cry—as if pleading, "Have mercy on me"... But

Rabbi Yehuda paid no attention and said to the calf, "Go to the slaughter, for it is for this you were created."

When Heaven saw that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi did not show compassion for the calf, they decreed that he would suffer harsh and bitter afflictions for thirteen years...

The Yerushalmi continues and says:

On the day the thirteen years ended, Rabbi Yehuda observed his maidservant cleaning the house. She found a nest of baby mice and, without a second thought, she took a broom and was about to sweep them away... Rabbi Yehuda said to her: "Leave them be, for it is said: 'and His mercies are on all His works' (Psalms 145:9)."

Parshat Vayechi - Physical and Spiritual Alike

These words of the *Yerushalmi* shed new light on the verse, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years." Do not think that our forefather Jacob lived in Egypt free of any suffering; rather, he certainly experienced suffering. Rabbi Yehuda equated the horrible years of pain he endured in

Tzippori with the years Jacob lived in Egypt!

This immediately raises a simple question: If those years were filled with suffering, why did the Torah choose to use the word "vayechi" ("and he lived") in describing them? Why call such years "life"?

We will sharpen this point further...

Physical and Spiritual Alike

In a discourse delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, *ZY"A* (Imrei Noam, Parashat Vayechi, Ma'amar 3), he said as follows:

When examining the years of our forefather Jacob's life, one sees that his first 130 years were saturated with suffering and anguish of the soul. It began with the great distress caused by the persecutions of his brother Esau, who sought to kill him. Then came the great suffering of the hard, grueling labor he endured in

the house of Laban the Aramean (his mother's brother) for so many years—during which Laban also deceived him endlessly.

After that came the great pain of what happened with his daughter Dinah, who was taken by Shechem, the son of Hamor, and violated; and following that, the grief that came because Shimon and Levi, his sons, acted on their own counsel and struck down all the inhabitants of the city of Shechem—consequently causing many enemies to rise up

Because he showed compassion to those mice, he rectified the earlier moment when

he did not show mercy to the calf—and so Heaven removed the afflictions from him.

Parshat Vayechi - Physical and Spiritual Alike

against Jacob. After that came the anguish of Rachel's death and then the distress caused by Reuben's deed when he "befouled his father's bed."

all that came After greatest suffering of all, when his beloved son Joseph was taken from him, and he was told, "A wild beast has devoured him" (Genesis 37:20). Jacob sat and mourned Joseph for twenty-two years-he did not lie on a bed, did not eat meat or drink wine, and never allowed a smile to cross his face. Even his spiritual stature, his prophetic spirit, departed from him.

Therefore. when Pharaoh asked Jacob, our forefather, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" (Genesis 47:8)-meaning "How old simply, vou?"-Jacob could not restrain himself from answering with a lengthy, painful response instead of a short, simple one: "The days of the years of my sojourns are one hundred and thirty years; few and bad have been the days of the years of my life" (ibid., v. 9). All his

sorrow overflowed its banks such that he could not contain it in his aching heart.

However, in the twilight of our forefather Jacob's life_those seventeen years that he lived in Egypt–G-d granted him opportunity to finally enjoy nachat (true satisfaction) and to live a good and happy life. As it is stated: "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years" 47:28). The Ba'al (Genesis HaTurim comments that only during those seventeen years can said that Jacob. our forefather, "lived"; all the years prior cannot be called "life," for a life full of such sorrow and suffering is not truly called "life."

Moreover, when we say that Jacob, our forefather, lived a good and happy life in Egypt for seventeen years, the intent is not only that his life was materially good and happy (in that he no longer suffered physical pain and distress as he had in the years before). The intent is that he lived a good and happy life spiritually—meaning that his spirituality during those years

Parshat Vayechi - Unanswered Questions

was at the height of perfection...
a life tranquil and complete,
virtually like life in the World to
Come! Hence, it says, "And
Jacob lived"—a life complete in
every way!

If so, how can we understand the words of the *Yerushalmi*? How can the words "And Jacob lived" encompass a life of pain? How can the Torah call those years "life," implying they were serene and whole, if the *Yerushalmi* indicates those years had much suffering, similar to the life of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi?

Let us pose another question, this time from the very beginning of it all...

Unanswered Questions

Our matriarch Rivka (Rebecca) was barren for twenty years... Then, one bright day, those years finally came to an end: Rebecca discovered she was pregnant.

An immense joy filled her heart–true happiness and elation...

But as the days went on, it became clear that this pregnancy was strange and alarming. Unusual and bizarre symptoms were observed...

Rebecca, a righteous woman, had an important role as the wife of the pillar of the world—Isaac, our forefather. She would go about her day according to the mission G-d had assigned her for that day. And behold, when she

would pass by houses of worship and study, the fetus would struggle to come out, and when she would pass by houses of idol worship, the fetus would also rush and convulse to come out...

Rebecca was terribly frightened. "Help! I have a child with a split personality of the highest order!" In her distress, she went to the study house of Shem and Eber to inquire what was happening inside her...

There, in the Beit Midrash, they calmed her and gave her the prophecy: "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the

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elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23)...

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach Shlita (Ma'ayan HaShavua, Bereishit, p. 309), he said the following:

Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz ZY"A once asked a wonderful question:

drove Rebecca, What matriarch, to go running to the academy of Shem and Eber to ask of *G-d* and seek a prophetic answer? True, whenever she passed by a house of study, one fetus would struggle to come out, and when she passed by a house of idol worship, the other would struggle to come out. She surely understood that she carrying twins in was womb-one good and one bad, one righteous and one wicked.

distressing, It was tragic, such things terrible-but happened before: Cain and Abel; Shem and Ham: Isaac and Ishmael; even Laban and Rebecca herself. All were siblings, and one was good and the other evil. What, then, did she hope to hear through prophecy? Why did she go to "inquire of G-d"?

Rather, this was no natural pregnancy. In such a case, could happen that one might resemble his son holy parents while the other would resemble the mother's (in this case. brother the Aramean)-as has occurred with many sons. But Rebecca was naturally barren, and she conceived only through prayer supplication. As and it is written: "And Isaac entreated G-d for his wife, because she was barren; and G-d accepted entreaties, and Rebecca his his wife conceived" (Genesis 25:21)...

Since prayer changed her very nature, like a pitchfork turning the grain, she was bewildered: If her pregnancy was the result of their prayer, she knew for certain that they had not prayed for a child who would rush to houses of idol worship, G-d forbid! How could it be that their prayer-for a holy child who would increase G-d's honor in the world and carry on the heritage of Abraham Isaac-had produced and

wicked son?

Parshat Vayechi - The Power of Moses

On this, she was given the answer: "Don't worry; you have twins—one righteous and one wicked!"

But the question remains; that does not answer her question!

Before we answer, let us preface with an insight...

The Power of Moses

In Parashat Shelach, the Torah relates events of the 14th month after the nation of Israel's exodus from Egypt. The 14th month was the most emotionally tumultuous month since the Exodus.

During the preceding 13 months, the people of Israel had already experienced ups and downs, both positive and negative; however, in the 14th month, all of the trials and tests converged into one continuous reality—a sustained emotional upheaval that enveloped and engulfed everything:³

The 11-month encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai came to an end. On the 20th of Iyar (the 13th

month following the Exodus), the cloud of glory lifted—a sign that it was time to move—and the children of Israel began their journey toward the Land of Israel.

G-d, who wished to bring them into the Land quickly, hastened their journey—they traveled a distance that should have taken three days in just one day!

Instead of thanking Him, the people of Israel complained! As it is said: "The people were as complainers, speaking evil in the ears of G-d; and when G-d heard, His anger was kindled, and a fire of G-d burned among them, consuming the outskirts of the camp" (Numbers 11:1).

- **3.** The following section is based on *Sefer HaParshiyot* (Bamidbar I, p. 323) by Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov *ZY"A*.
- **4.** Rashi explains (Numbers 10:33): "'A journey of three days' –

They traveled a distance of three days in one day, for the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to bring them into the Land immediately."

Parshat Vayechi - The Power of Moses

G-d was very angry at their complaint because His entire intention with this rapid progress had been for Israel's benefit—to shorten the journey so that within a few days, they would already merit entering the Land of Israel. But they failed to take to heart the great goodness G-d was doing for them and instead found in it a pretext and cause to complain.

The outcome of this complaint was very bitter, as it says: "and G-d heard and His anger flared, and a fire of G-d burned among them and consumed the edge of the camp."

Rashi writes (Exodus 24:10) that because the people of Israel complained, they were punished, and the elders of Israel died (in that fire).

The people of Israel had not yet recovered from the death of the elders, and a second

complaint already arose! ⁵ The mixed multitude complained that they were eating only manna all the time, and they craved to eat meat and other delicacies:

"The mixed multitude among them began to have strong cravings, and the children of Israel began once again to cry and said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our life is parched; we have nothing at all—nothing but this manna to look to!" (Numbers 11:4–6)

This complaint, too, brought punishment in its wake...

As a result of this complaint (and what it led to, as described in the verses), G-d commanded Moses:

"Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and its officers. Take

5. Rashi comments (Tractate *Shabbat* 116b): Within three days of their setting out, the mixed multitudes craved and

began to complain about the meat in order to rebel against the Holy One, blessed be He.

Parshat Vayechi - The Power of Moses

them to the Tent of Meeting and let them stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; they shall bear the burden of the people with you so that you need not bear it alone" (Numbers 11:16–17).

The original elders had died, and now G-d told Moses to gather seventy elders from all of the tribes of Israel, upon whom He would bestow Moses' spirit, and they would carry the burden of the people along with Moses.

That same day, the spirit of prophecy also rested upon two elders who had remained behind in the camp—Eldad and Medad—and they prophesied, "Moses will die, and Joshua will bring Israel into the Land!"

Moses heard this prophecy and did not refute it—meaning it was true!

Twenty-nine days passed, and on the 22nd of Sivan, Miriam spoke critically about

Moses, and as a consequence, she was stricken with leprosy and sent outside the camp.

The people of Israel waited for Miriam seven days until she could return to the camp.

Pressure was mounting in the Israelite camp. They were now very close to the border of the Land of Israel, yet everything was in turmoil: Eldad and Medad had announced that Moses would die before the entry into the Land—meaning that in very little time, Moses would die and we would have no one to speak with!

But they had sinned greatly against G-d in recent days—one sin after another. Were they even worthy at all to enter the Holy Land?

Darkness and panic penetrated the hearts...

This leads us to the following question:

"The Holy One, blessed be He, appointed Moses to be the redeemer and to enable him to

Parshat Vayechi - Processes of Condensation

fulfill his mission, He endowed him with very lofty and exalted powers—powers that would not be granted to any other person until the coming of the Moshiach! As it is said: 'Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face' (Deuteronomy 34:10).

If so, why is it that when the mixed multitude desired to eat meat, Moses was 'weakened'—to the point that G-d commanded him to appoint 70 elders to help him?

What is so threatening in a mere piece of meat?

Before we answer, let us further preface...

Processes of Condensation

In *Sichat Hashavua* (Issue 181), it is written as follows:

Countless times, the concept of "Seder Hishtalshelut" (the order of spiritual emanation) is mentioned in the teachings of Chassidut. This term refers to the structure of the upper worlds, which cascade one from another in a chain-like progression.

The Kabbalistic tradition details the entire course of the cascading of the upper worlds, from the most spiritual level down to the lowest world.

Knowledge of the Seder Hishtalshelut is a great and exalted commandment and brings one to wholehearted devotion.⁶

6. To quote the *Tanya* (Kuntres Acharon, s.v. "*Le'havin*"):

"Knowledge of the existence of the [order of] Hishtalshelut is... a great and exalted commandment... and surpasses them all, as it is written: 'And you shall know this day...' (Deuteronomy 4:39), 'Know the G-d of thy father...' (I

Chronicles 28:9), and it brings to a complete heart, etc., which is the primary thing...

"Only that this is, but one commandment out of 613, and a person must fulfill all 613... Therefore one must increase in the study of all 613 and in their actual fulfillment in thought, speech, and action."

Parshat Vayechi - Processes of Condensation

The Seder Hishtalshelut is meant to explain how reality came into being from a state of non-existence. And this refers not only to physical reality but also to spiritual reality.

Any reality—such as delight, will, wisdom, kindness, and so on—since it is defined in some way is exceedingly distant from G-d's simple and pure unity. In order for it to come into being and to exist, there had to be, in between, many intermediary evolutions and many contractions. This is the order of Hishtalshelut.

In broad terms, the Hishtalshelut is divided into four worlds: Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah (Emanation, Creation, Formation, Action).

The first world in which certain definitions begin to coalesce is the world of Atzilut, and therefore, it serves as a source from which a more concrete reality can later come into being. Nevertheless, the world of Atzilut is still subsumed within the Divine reality. The Divine light shines in it in great

revelation, and there is no independent existence and being.

Defined reality and a sense of selfhood begin to emerge in a lower world-the world of Beriah (Creation). This is the world where, for the first time, things that do not exist above it begin to appear. Here, the Divine light is no longer the sole reality; rather, the existence of an independent, separate reality becomes possible. However, this reality is still extremely subtle-a mere potential for existence. The proximity to the world of Atzilut prevents the formation of a more tangible selfhood.

third stage The in formation of reality is the world of Yetzirah (Formation). True to its name, it imposes form upon the amorphous potential that was brought into being in the world of Beriah. In the world of Yetzirah, find an already-defined reality. The Divine light there is further hidden, and consequently, there is more room for a sense of independent existence and self. However, the selfhood of the

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world of Yetzirah is expressed mainly in the distinct delineations that it introduces to reality; it is not yet a substantial selfhood.

The fourth and lowest stage in the chain of reality is the world of Asiyah (Action). There, reality is entirely solidified and defined, and the sense of independent self is manifested in its fullest expression...

Let us recap concisely:

As one progresses down the Seder Hishtalshelut, reality

becomes more *condensed* and *materialized*:

In the World of Atzilut – there is as yet no independent reality.

In the World of Beriah – the *possibility* of existence is created.

In the World of Yetzirah – that existence already takes on form.

And in the World of Asiyah – reality is fully formed and defined.

Now let us delve a bit deeper...

Atzilut – Resembling the One Above

Rabbi Shneur Zalman Gopin *Shlita* writes (ibid., p. 19):⁷

"The world of Atzilut is not a new world created yesh me'ayin (something from nothing); rather, it is comparable to the Infinite Light that is ahove Atzilut-which in itself is hidden and concealed—and in the world these lights of Atzilut revealed and drawn forth. That is, the world of Atzilut reveals and draws forth those exalted levels that are above it (this type of relationship is called 'he'elem ve-gilui'—concealment and revelation.)

To explain further:

In the world of Atzilut, there is a novelty that does not exist in the worlds higher than it: all of the "essential" qualities that are hidden and concealed above the world of Atzilut are drawn forth in a state of revelation and awareness

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within the vessels of Atzilut. Through this, the Infinite Light of G-d is later able to descend and be revealed even in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

Since the function of the world of Atzilut is to reveal the light, it is understood why it is called "Atzilut" – from the language of "etzel" (nearness) and "ha'atzalah" (projection/revelation)...

However, the revelation that revealed in the world is of Atzilut is. fact. in descent from the concealment that preceded it–for that concealment is so exalted and hidden that it cannot be revealed, and only after the descent into the world of Atzilut can it come to revelation.

Yet, even so, the revelation in Atzilut is not a creation of a new entity in the manner of *yesh me'ayin* (something from nothing) but rather a revelation of what existed previously.

If so, we understand that the world of Atzilut has two facets: on the one hand, it is a descent from the higher levels that precede it, but on the other hand, it is not novel or new relative to them, but merely a revelation of them ..."⁸

Now let us return again to Parashat Shelach...

8. The Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitch *ZY"A* told the following story (*Sefer HaSichot* – 5701 (1941), p. 44):

"In the city of Polotsk, there lived a chasid named Reb Yisrael. He was a shopkeeper and a simple man, and he used to travel to the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek. Once, when he visited Lubavitch, it was Shabbat Parashat Vayera.

That Shabbat, Reb Yisrael heard a ma'amar (Chassidic discourse) from the Rebbe, in which it was stated that Abraham, our

forefather, was generous with his body, with his money, and with his soul.

The Rebbe mentioned in the ma'amar the saying of the Pardes, quoting *Sefer HaBahir* (§191): 'The attribute of Chesed (Kindness) said before the Holy One: "All the days that Abraham was in the world, I had no need to perform my task—for Abraham stood in my place and guarded my charge."

Then he added: 'Abraham our forefather, in this world, through his service of

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performing acts of kindness, replaced the Sefirah of *Chesed* of *Atzilut*. It is understood, then, that Abraham our forefather was higher even than the attribute of Chesed of Atzilut–for Chesed of Atzilut, even if it were down here below, could not clothe itself in physical action, whereas Abraham our forefather drew it down into physical action also. This was done by the power of the soul, which has the virtue of refining the [fallen] sparks...'

Reb Yisrael heard and reviewed these words well. He did not grasp the discourse in its entirety, except for those few sentences that penetrated his mind and heart and those he kept repeating to himself again and again.

In those days, it was customary that when a chasid returned from Lubavitch to his hometown, the local chasidim would arrange a welcome gathering. They would all assemble to hear what he had seen and heard in Lubavitch.

When Reb Yisrael returned to his town, they asked him if he could review for them the ma'amar that the Rebbe had said on Shabbat. He replied that he could not repeat the entire discourse, only a few words which he had firmly memorized. Reb Yisrael repeated those aforementioned words before them and then returned to his business as usual.

Present in the marketplace were two of his friends, Nachman, the shopkeeper, and Yosef, the shopkeeper. Reb Yisrael decided to approach Nachman to request a loan. Although he did not actually need money at that time, upon hearing from the Rebbe the great virtue of acts of kindness, he wanted to enable his friend to earn this mitzvah. Nachman and Yosef, his friends who had heard the Rebbe's words from Reb Yisrael, did likewise, and they would lend to each other and borrow from each other every day...

When Reb Yisrael next traveled to Lubavitch, the Tzemach Tzedek came out to the Beit Midrash and asked one of the attendants, 'Where is Reb Yisrael the shopkeeper?'

The attendant did not know how to answer because Reb Yisrael was not among the famous chasidim... Only after some searching did he find him and bring him to the Rebbe.

When he entered, the Rebbe received him with a shining face and asked him to describe his daily schedule.

Reb Yisrael said:

I rise from my bed at five in the morning, I say Tehillim, drink tea, chop firewood for the stove—and I go to the synagogue to pray. After prayer, I study a chapter of Mishnah, then I return home, eat breakfast, and go to the marketplace.

'At the time for Mincha, I go to the synagogue for the Mincha prayer, I study Ein Yaakov, I pray Ma'ariv, and I return home.

The Tzemach Tzedek continued and asked: 'Nu, and what about tzedakah?'

Reb Yisrael replied: 'I am poor, and I cannot give.'

Parshat Vayechi - Where Shall I Get Meat?

Where Shall I Get Meat?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman Gopin *Shlita* continues (ibid., p. 91):

"After the children of Israel asked Moses: 'Who will feed us meat?' (Numbers 11:4), Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'From where should I get meat to give to all this nation?' (ibid., v.13). G-d told him to gather seventy elders—'and I will draw from the spirit that is on you and place it upon them' (ibid., v.17)—and through them, the provision of meat would pass.

The Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch, *ZY"A*, explained:⁹

All sustenance to the people of Israel–both spiritual sustenance and material sustenance–must pass through Moses, the "all-encompassing soul" of the generation.

When the children of Israel asked for bread, i.e., manna—food that is subtle and refined—Moses was able to provide it for them. But when they demanded meat, which is a coarser type of food, Moses felt that he could not lower himself to so coarse a level and was unable to provide them meat. Thus, he said, 'Where should I get meat?' 10

The Rebbe conversed with him until he heard from him about his manner of practicing gemilut chasadim (acts of kindness) and sent him away with many blessings.

Afterward, the Tzemach Tzedek's son, the Rebbe Maharash, asked him: 'What special quality did you perceive in Reb Yisrael that you conversed with him so?'

The Tzemach Tzedek answered: 'I saw a pillar of the light of "Chesed of Atzilut" hovering over him!'"

- **9.** Sefer HaMa'amarim 5660 (1900), p. 111.
- **10.** As the Rebbe Rashab *ZY"A* writes (*Hemshech 5660*, p. 111):

"The reason He bestowed of the spirit from Moses upon the seventy elders is well-known:

Since the mixed multitude asked for meat to satisfy their lust, Moses was unable to lower himself to such a degree of lowness and descent to provide such a material influence; the root of his soul Parshat Vayechi - The Power of The Soul

Therefore, G-d told him to bestow some of his holy spirit upon seventy elders. Since the elders would receive only a lower level of Moses' sanctity, they would be able to provide meat to the children of Israel even though it is a coarse and material food.

However, since all beneficence to the children of Israel must pass specifically through Moses, the provision of the meat, too, needed to pass through him. It is understood, then, that even in the bestowal of the spirit, Moses' level of holiness remained—it was only revealed at a lower level.

Thus, this bestowal itself has two sides:

On the one hand, it is a descent from Moses' own level–Moses

could not himself bring down the physical meat. On the other hand, it is a revelation of the concealed dimension of Moses' lofty and holy level, not entirely a new innovation. It was possible for the seventy elders to provide meat to the people of Israel precisely because they received their sanctity and vitality from Moses..."

The reason the elders were able to provide the meat is that they were relatively close to Moses' level, and thus, they served as an intermediary between Moses' lofty level—which could not directly provide meat—and the people of Israel who craved meat. In this way, the influence could be drawn down gradually.

Let us delve even deeper...

The Power of The Soul

The Rebbe Rayatz (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn) *ZY"A* wrote as follows:¹¹ "Behold, the ultimate purpose of the creation and bringing into being of the worlds is that

was of the level of Atzilut—even when he was below, he was on the lofty level of Atzilut... He could not enclothe himself in such a coarse garment.

"Therefore Moses' claim was: 'From where should I get meat?' for he could not lower himself so greatly..."

11. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* – *Bati L'Gani* (the beginning).

Parshat Vayechi - The Power of The Soul

HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, blessed is He) desired to have a dwelling place in the lower realms-meaning that Divinity be revealed below, in our lowly world, through man's service... that a soul should descend below and be enclothed in a body and animal soul, which will conceal and obscure the light of the soul. Nevertheless, the soul will refine and purify the body, the animal soul, and also its portion in the world. This is the meaning of 'Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them' (Exodus 25:8) - within each and every one (of the people of Israel)...

In other words, it arose in G-d's will to create a

world in which His Kingship would be revealed openly. To that end, He created a world full of concealments and coverings, and He created His agents—the souls of Israel—to descend to the world and reveal His Kingship from within the darkness.

G-d, who beholds and surveys all generations, grants each and every soul its unique mission and purpose in revealing the Kingdom of Heaven. To each soul, He granted the particular revelation that only it could reveal. And according to its mission, He arranged its life, family, and environment and gave it the powers, abilities, and tools it needs. 12

12. The Lubavitcher Rebbe writes (Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 7, p. 81):

"The Torah begins with Parashat Bereishit, where the order of the creation of the world is told. It is self-understood that the Torah does not come to tell stories for their own sake; rather, its purpose—true to the meaning of the word '*Torah*' (from the term *hora*'ah, instruction)—is to provide guidance, to be

a guide in our day-to-day lives, to show us the path for our own good, both physically and spiritually.

In the order of the works of Creation, as described in the Torah, aside from all the hints and secrets of the Torah, there is also a practical instruction for carrying out various matters in the personal world of each and every individual, especially in general matters:

Parshat Vayechi - The Power of The Soul

And this is an important part of a Jew's role in the world: to bring out and reveal the soul's 'hidden' potential from the ko'ach (potential) into the po'al (actual)."

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe *ZY*"*A* expressed it in these words:¹³

"The game most loved by children is 'hide-and-seek': someone hides, and the child searches for him—and how great is the child's delight when he finds him.

In this game, there is revealed a fundamental power in man. Many things are hidden from our eyes, whether in matters of the world or in the Torah, and we long to uncover them. The Talmudic scholar devotes himself to revealing these hidden things in the revealed Torah, the kabbalist in the hidden [mystical] Torah, and the scientist, too, does so with science.

There are multitudes of hidden things within man himself and in his service to the Creator. Man is created with endless *potential* virtues, and his life's work is to bring these capacities into actuality. Not only his own capacities. The Torah, too, was

In any undertaking or action that one is about to carry out—whether spiritual or physical—the beginning, that is, the foundation and the principal thing, is to know that G-d created the heavens (spirituality) and the earth (physicality), meaning, G-d is the Creator and the One who forms and makes all spiritual and physical matters.

G-d desires that these matters come into actuality through such-and-such individuals, and whoever has merited any position of power should see himself as an agent of the Omnipresent to bring G-d's will from the potential into the actual.

At the beginning of Creation—'the earth was unformed and void, and darkness, etc.' (Genesis 1:2) —at the beginning of any effort in holy matters, it may appear that tohu va'vohu (chaos and void) and darkness prevail all around, with many hindrances and obstacles to bringing holy matters to fruition...

Therefore, the Torah hints immediately after the start of Creation: 'And G-d said: Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3)—G-d assists man and turns the darkness into light, and the light drives away the darkness…"

13. Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 49, 629.

Parshat Vayechi - The Strength of Struggle

given to us so that we may bring forth into reality the treasures hidden within it—issuing halachic rulings, plumbing its secrets, and actively observing it.

Furthermore, there are many worlds beyond our own. In all of those worlds, immeasurable powers and potentials are concealed, and all of them stand above the world of Action, waiting for man, who, through his deeds, will bring all that is hidden into actuality!

Man was given a lofty soul. Who knows how much holiness and how many virtues lie hidden within it—all still in potential. Our task is to actualize all these latent powers, to reveal all of these virtues, and to acquire them...

The more a person brings things from the potential into actuality, the more he becomes himself a 'creator' of new things. He becomes a creator of Torah and, in the process, renews and recreates himself..."

Now we have only to clarify: How? How does one reveal and bring the latent powers of the soul from potential into the actual?

The Strength of Struggle

The answer is simple: struggle!

When a person is confronted with а situation he does not wish for, he is forced exert himself and through that effort, hidden new and powers within him become revealed-powers whose existence he had not been aware of (analogous to the divine concealment and revelation discussed above).

As explained in *Ma'ayan HaShavua* (Bereishit, p. 310):

With this, we can understand the answer that the Divine spirit gave to Rebecca, our matriarch: "And G-d said to her: Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people Parshat Vayechi - The Strength of Struggle

shall be mightier than the other, And the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23)...

"And G-d said to her: Two nations are in your womb." You are correct in saying that two cultures are struggling here.

"Two separate peoples shall issue from your body," multitudes will take shelter under the shadow of each culture—each against the other.

"And as to your question,"—for you and Isaac prayed only for a righteous and holy child who would be "a wholesome man," the choicest of the Patriarchs, the crown of creation—indeed, so it shall be. And precisely because of that, his absolute opposite—Esau the wicked—was born along with him! For—

"One people shall be mightier than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger." Only because Esau stands opposite him, lying in wait for every point of weakness and potential fault, Jacob will be forced to become perfect and resist Esau's influence. Only then will Jacob be able to reach his peak and fully realize his talents and abilities! The knowledge that Esau lurks in the field will compel him to remain entrenched in the tent, to bury himself in the Yeshiva of Eber until he emerges completely whole and is called by the exalted name of Israel!

Jacob, our forefather's struggle, did not end with Esau; it extended over his entire life—and primarily concentrated in the seventeen years he lived in Egypt.

The struggle that he would face was revealed to Jacob even before he went down to Egypt as it says: "Jacob saw that there was *shever* (grain, also *breakage*) in Egypt" (Genesis 42:1)—that in Egypt lay the secret of the breaking and the descent!

In Egypt, there were many holy sparks buried (this is the secret of the "grain/shever in Egypt"), whose elevation required a long, hard, and very bitter struggle!

That struggle revealed within him new and hidden powers and

Parshat Vayechi - The Strength of Struggle

lifted him to unknown heights—so that he attained what he attained. This wondrous spiritual sweetness and exquisite pleasantness that resulted imparted to him such a special taste of life that the Torah testifies about him: "And Jacob lived."

The same occurred with Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. For thirteen difficult years, he grappled with dreadful tooth pains—and precisely in that period, he merited that Antoninus, the Roman emperor, became his close friend and disciple and assisted his efforts in the redaction of the Mishnah with funding and by creating peace and prosperity!¹⁴

That wondrous spiritual sweetness, so exquisite, imparted to him such a special

14. The Tosafot Rid writes (Avodah Zarah 10b):

"Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi) used to live in Tzippori, and Antoninus had his palace at the top of Tiberias on a certain hill; there was a cave running from Tiberias to Tzippori–a distance of twelve mil."

Additionally, Rashi writes (Bava Metzia 33b):

"When the disciples of Shammai and Hillel increased (before the time of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, three generations prior), disputes multiplied in the Torah, and it became as if there were two Torahs—due to the oppression of foreign governments and the decrees they issued against them. As a result, they could not focus on clarifying the words of the disputants until the days of Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi), whom the Holy One, blessed be He, caused to find favor in the eyes of Antoninus the Roman Emperor (as it says in Avodah Zarah 10b). They had relief

from trouble, and he sent and gathered all the students of the Land of Israel.

Until Rebbi's days, the tractates were not arranged; rather, each student who heard a teaching from someone greater than himself memorized it, and he would set markers: 'such-and-such a law I heard in the name of so-and-so.'

When they all gathered together, each one said what he had heard. They then focused on clarifying the reasons behind the disputes—whose words appeared correct and proper to maintain. They organized the tractates—the laws of damages, the laws of levirate marriage, the laws of holy offerings... Rebbi also presented anonymously in the Mishnah the statements of certain individuals whose words he deemed correct, and he taught them without attribution, in order to establish the halachah according

Parshat Vayechi - The Strength of Struggle

taste of life that he testified about himself that he truly 'lived' in Tzippori, similar to Jacob who "lived" in Egypt seventeen years.

It was precisely the struggle that caused the latent powers within him to be revealed!

The *Ma'ayan HaShavua* (ibid.) concludes:

"As is known, the actions of the fathers are a sign for the children. When the entire Jewish nation held fast to its heritage, and there no fence-breachers or were covenant-betrayers, many of the common folk remained upright and proper Jews, bound for the World to Come—Jews who often did not even know how to pray properly, and a cantor would discharge their obligation for them. But once the number of those who broke away increased, everyone was forced to gird themselves against them by gaining broad knowledge of the Torah-for the Torah is the wall and the antidote against the evil inclination—it is what elevates a

person and broadens his horizons...

Thus, it is specifically the power of opposition that can bring a person to true excellence.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *ZY"A*, offered an apt parable (Likutei Moharan I, Torah 161): A person is compared to a tree of the field, and his opposition is compared to a torrent of water. The trunk of the tree lies in the ground and cannot lift itself up-until a flood of water comes and causes it to float upward. And the more the waters increase, the higher the tree rises. King David indeed refers to his troubles and likens his enemies to water: 'All day long they surround me like water; they encircle me together'

(Psalms 88:18).

In our times, when the Flood of heresy and licentiousness rises, every person is obligated to flee to the Ark. When the streets are flooded with permissiveness and abomination, we must strengthen ourselves sevenfold in Torah study and in observing the sweetness of Shabbat. When

Parshat Vayechi - The Strength of Struggle

violence spreads among the youth, and the casting off of all restraint becomes a banner that all are called to, we must save our

children through Torah education that inculcates good character and the honoring of parents, our heritage, and pure faith!"

Shabbat Shalom!



Parshat Vayechi - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Summary and Practical Conclusions

- 1. The ultimate purpose for which all the worlds were created is that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*the Holy One, blessed be He*) desired to have a dwelling place among the lowest beings. In other words, G-d willed that His Divinity and existence be revealed here below, in our lowly world, through the service of the Jew.
- 2. The way to reveal G-d's presence in the world is through challenge and struggle. When the Divine soul struggles with the body and the animal soul and succeeds in refining and purifying them, then it builds a dwelling place for G-d in the lower world and fulfills the charge: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them"—i.e., within each and every one of the people of Israel.
- 3. Each Jew has a unique mission and purpose in revealing G-d's sovereignty, and commensurate with one's mission, so are the "tools" the Creator provides him. Likewise, according to one's mission, so is the environment into which he is born and in which he grows up. In G-d's plan, nothing is accidental—each soul is given the precise family,

- surroundings, and abilities it needs to accomplish its particular task.
- 4. A person is created with tremendous latent virtues, and his life's work is to bring those potential strengths into actuality. It is not only one's own powers that must be actualized—the Torah itself was given to us so that we would bring forth into reality the treasures hidden within it: to derive halachic rulings, to discern its secrets, and to fulfill it in action
- 5. Furthermore, there are countless higher worlds above ours, all filled with immeasurable hidden energies and qualities, standing above the world of Action and waiting for man—through his deeds—to bring all that is concealed into actuality! Man was given a lofty soul; who knows how much holiness and how many virtues lie hidden within it—all still in potential. Our task is to actualize all these potentials, reveal all these virtues, and truly make them our own.
- 6. In our times, when the floodwaters of immorality rage, we must flee into the Ark. When the streets are overflowing with permissiveness and debauchery, heresy and depravity, we must strengthen ourselves even more in

Parshat Vayechi - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Torah study and the delight of Shabbat. When violence proliferates among youth and casting off all discipline becomes a badge of honor, we will

save our children through proper Torah education that inculcates good character and respect for parents, for our heritage, and for our timeless faith!

Shabbat Shalom!



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Shabbat Times Vavechi

14th of Tevet ,5786

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeint Tam
New York	4:22 pm	5:26 pm	5:53 pm
Miami	5:24 pm	6:20 pm	6:55 pm
Los Angeles	4:38 pm	5:38 pm	6:09 pm
Montreal	4:05 pm	5:13 pm	5:36 pm
Toronto	4:34 pm	5:41 pm	6:05 pm
London	3:45 pm	5:02 pm	5:16 pm
Jerusalem	4:32 pm	5:23 pm	5:54 pm
Tel Aviv	4:28pm	5:19 pm	5:50 pm
Haifa	4:25 pm	5:20 pm	5:50 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:30 pm	5:20 pm	5:50 pm

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HaRav Yoram Abarael zt"l Hashem's way of looking at things is not how much you know or how much you do, but how much you are prepared to bear with your friendwho, like you, was created in the Divine image.

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