

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Vayechi  
January 11, 2025 \*\*\* 10 Tevet, 5785

Vayechi in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3228/jewish/Vayechi-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3228/jewish/Vayechi-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Vayechi," means "And he lived" and it is found in Genesis 47:28.

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Simeon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive-growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon and Levi, for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Kings 2:1-12

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/611890/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/611890/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

In this week's haftarah, King David delivers his deathbed message to his son and successor, Solomon, echoing this week's Torah reading that discusses at length Jacob's parting words and instructions to his sons.

King David encourages Solomon to be strong and to remain steadfast in his belief in G-d. This will ensure his success in all his endeavors as well as the continuation of the Davidic Dynasty. David then goes on to give his son some tactical instructions pertaining to various people who deserved punishment or reward for their actions during his reign.

The haftorah concludes with David's death and his burial in the City of David. King Solomon takes his father's place and his sovereignty is firmly established.

## Food For Thought

### The Last Tears: Vayechi by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5772)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayechi/the-last-tears/>

At almost every stage of fraught encounter between Joseph and his family in Egypt, Joseph weeps. There are seven scenes of tears:

1. When the brothers came before him in Egypt for the first time, they said to one another:

“Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us” ... They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. Gen. 42:21-24

2. On the second occasion, when they brought Benjamin with them and, deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep:

He went into his private room and wept there. Gen. 43:29-30

3. When, after Judah’s impassioned speech, Joseph is about to disclose his identity:

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. Gen. 45:1-2

4. Immediately after he discloses his identity:

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Gen. 45:14-15

5. When he meets his father again after their long separation:

Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father, Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Gen. 46:29

6. On the death of his father:

Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him. Gen. 50:1

7. Some time after his father's death:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. Gen. 50:15-17

No one weeps as much as Joseph. Esau wept when he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing (Gen. 27:38). Jacob wept when he saw the love of his life, Rachel, for the first time (Gen. 29:11). Both brothers, Jacob and Esau, wept when they met again after their long estrangement (Gen. 33:4). Jacob wept when told that his beloved son Joseph was dead (Gen. 37:35).

But the seven acts of Joseph's weeping have no parallel. They span the full spectrum of emotion, from painful memory to the joy of being reunited, first with his brother Benjamin, then with his father Jacob. There are the complex tears immediately before and after he discloses his identity to his brothers, and there are the tears of bereavement at Jacob's deathbed. But the most intriguing are the last, the tears he sheds when he hears that his brothers fear that he will take revenge on them now that their father is no longer alive.

In a fine essay, "Joseph's tears"[1] Rav Aharon Lichtenstein suggests that this last act of weeping is an expression of the price Joseph pays for the realisation of his dreams and his elevation to a position of power. Joseph has done everything he could for his brothers. He has sustained them at a time of famine. He has given them not just refuge but a place of honour in Egyptian society. And he has made it as clear as he possibly can that he does not harbour a grudge against them for what they did to him all those many years before. As he said when he disclosed his identity to them:

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for

selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you . . . God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” Gen. 45:5-8

What more could he say? Yet still, all these years later, his brothers do not trust him and fear that he may still seek their harm.

This is Rav Lichtenstein’s comment:

“At this moment, Yosef discovers the limits of raw power. He discovers the extent to which the human connection, the personal connection, the family connection, hold far more value and importance than power does – both for the person himself and for all those around him.” Joseph “weeps over the weakness inherent in power, over the terrible price that he has paid for it. His dreams have indeed been realised, on some level, but the tragedy remains just as real. The torn shreds of the family have not been made completely whole.”

On the surface, Joseph holds all the power. His family are entirely dependent on him. But at a deeper level it is the other way round. He still yearns for their acceptance, their recognition, their closeness. And ultimately he has to depend on them to bring his bones up from Egypt when the time comes for redemption and return (Gen. 50:25).

Rav Lichtenstein’s analysis reminds us of Rashi and Ibn Ezra’s commentary to the last verse in the book of Esther. It says that “Mordechai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by most of his brethren” (Est. 10:3) – “most” but not all. Rashi (quoting Megillah 16b) says that some members of the Sanhedrin were critical of him because his political involvement (his “closeness to the king”) distracted from the time he spent studying Torah. Ibn Ezra says, simply:

“It is impossible to satisfy everyone, because people are envious [of other people’s success].”

Joseph and Mordechai/Esther are supreme examples of Jews who reached positions of influence and power in non-Jewish circles. In modern times they were called Hofjuden, “court Jews,” and other Jews often held deeply ambivalent feelings about them.

But at a deeper level, Rav Lichtenstein’s remarks recall Hegel’s famous master-slave dialectic, an idea that had huge influence on nineteenth century - especially Marxist - thought. Hegel argued that the early history of humanity was marked by a struggle for power in which some became masters, and others became slaves. On

the face of it, masters rule while slaves obey. But in fact the master is dependent on his slaves – he has leisure only because they do the work, and he is the master only because he is recognised as such by his slaves.

Meanwhile the slave, through his work, acquires his own dignity as a producer. Thus the slave has “inner freedom” while the master has “inner bondage.” This tension creates a dialectic – a conflict worked out through history – reaching equilibrium only when there are neither masters nor slaves, but merely human beings who treat one another not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. Thus understood, Joseph’s tears are a prelude to the master-slave drama about to be enacted in the book of Exodus between Pharaoh and the Israelites.

Rav Lichtenstein’s profound insight into the text reminds us of the extent to which Torah, Tanach, and Judaism as a whole are a sustained critique of power. Prior to the Messianic age we cannot do without it. (Consider the tragedies Jews suffered in the centuries in which they lacked it.) But power alienates. It breeds suspicion and distrust. It diminishes those it is used against, and thus diminishes those who use it.

Even Joseph, called “Yosef HaTzaddik: Joseph the Righteous” weeps when he sees the extent to which power sets him apart from his brothers. Judaism is about an alternative social order which depends not on power but on love, loyalty and the mutual responsibility created by covenant. That is why Nietzsche, who based his philosophy on “the will to power,” correctly saw Judaism as the antithesis of all he believed in.

Power may be a necessary evil, but it is an evil, and the less we have need of it, the better. [1] In *Alei Tziyon* (Vol. 16, Iyar 5769): Special edition in honour of HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, 109-128. Also available online: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-vayigash/josephs-tears-part-2-2>

### [Angel or Avatar: Vayehi by Benjamin D. Sommer](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/angel-or-avatar/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/angel-or-avatar/>

When Jacob blesses his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh shortly before his death, he begins with these words:

The God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, were steadfast,  
The God who guided me from the beginning of my life until today,  
The malakh who saved me from all misfortune—  
He should bless these lads. (Gen. 48.15b–16)

The second of these verses is often sung aloud in a beautiful melody by Abie Rotenberg when children have their aliyah on Simhat Torah and by some parents at bedtime each night. That melody has made these words familiar to many, but their meaning is not clear. Who, exactly, does Jacob call upon to bless the lads?

The four lines that begin Jacob's blessing form a single sentence. The first three lines consist of noun phrases ("the God before whom . . . , "the God who . . . , " and "the malakh who . . . "), and the fourth finally provides a verb ("bless"), which, in Hebrew, contains its own pronoun ("he"). To whom does this pronoun refer? Two nouns precede the verb: "God" and then "malakh," which literally means "messenger, someone on a mission." Almost always, the malakh is a heavenly messenger—in other words, an angel, a semidivine being on a mission from God. So we might follow most translations by rendering this word in verse 16 as "angel" and regarding it as the subject of the verb "bless." But in that case, what is the noun "God" doing in the first two lines? (Grammatically, the verb is singular, so God and God's messenger cannot both serve as its subject.) And why does Jacob hope the angel will do the work of blessing the lads rather than God?

One attempt to answer this question appears in the commentary of Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi, 1160–1236). Radak explains that Jacob first mentions God, the ultimate source of redemption, in verse 15 and then proceeds to the angel who actually delivers God's blessing:

He [Jacob] said about himself that God had assisted him from the beginning of his life. Then he mentions the angel, because an action of God is carried out by intermediaries. The angels are messengers sent by God to His servants to guard them and to make them successful . . . Therefore he says, "The angel who saved me from all misfortune," meaning, "He sent him to me to redeem me from all misfortune and to bless me. So, too, he should bless these lads."

Another answer is found in the commentary of Ovadiah Seforno (c. 1475–1549): Jacob expresses the hope that the angel would bless his grandsons in the event that they were unworthy of receiving blessings directly from God. Like Radak, Seforno attempts to link the blessing to God while regarding the angel as the actual subject of the verb in line 4.

The commentary of Ramban (Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–c. 1270) moves in a completely different direction. His interpretation will seem surprising, perhaps even shocking, to some readers, but he does the best job of accounting for the grammar and poetic structure of our biblical passage. The first two lines in Jacob's statement parallel each other: they contain the same subject, "God," followed by a description of the personal relationship between God and Jacob's family. The third line continues the parallel structure: "The malakh who saved me" matches "The God who guided me." What we find here, then, are three parallel lines couched in a deliberately repetitive style common in biblical poetry. The repetition suggests that "God" in the first line, "God" in the second line, and "malakh" in the third line refer to the same individual. "God" and "malakh" are two terms for a single subject who

blesses the lads in the fourth line. This parallelism seems to underlie Ramban's explanation of the term malakh:

“The malakh who saved me from all misfortune” refers to the one who answered Jacob at the time of his misfortune, saying to him, ‘I am the God Bethel’ (Gen. 31.13). Concerning Him it was said, “[I shall send a malakh in front of you to guard you on the journey . . . Obey Him . . . ] For My identity is within Him” (Exod. 23.20–21).

The first of the two verses Ramban quotes refers to an earlier passage in Genesis where God answered Jacob at a place called Bethel, which is both a geographic name and a divine name in ancient Hebrew and related languages (Gen. 28.10–19). In other words, the malakh Jacob mentions in our parashah is not a messenger of God. He is God! The same is true of the malakh in the passage from Exodus that Ramban cites. The reason the Israelites should obey the malakh there is because the malakh shares God's identity or name.

These are not the only verses where malakh denotes God rather than an angel. The term refers to a small-scale manifestation of God's presence elsewhere in the Torah[1], as well as in some passages from Nevi'im and Ketuvim. In these texts, the malakh is God, but not all of God—an approachable, user-friendly side of God. Narratives that use the term malakh this way, typically tell us that a malakh appeared to a human character.[2] As they describe the dialogue between them, however, they simply state, “God said” or “the LORD said,” not “the malakh said,” because all these terms refer to the same being. The word malakh used in this sense resembles the word avatara in Sanskrit: both designate a phenomenon that makes a transcendent, heavenly deity perceptible within our world. In the passages I've discussed, “avatar” would be a much better translation of malakh than “angel.” To be sure, in most biblical texts the term does mean “angel, heavenly messenger.” Texts that use malakh to mean “avatar” are the exception, but they do crop up throughout the Bible.

Another name some Israelites used for this small-scale manifestation was “Bethel.” We already saw this term in Genesis 31.13, which Ramban quoted in his commentary to Genesis 48.16. This name also appears in Hosea 12.5:[3]

In the womb [Jacob] cheated his brother,  
And as a grown man he wrestled with God.  
He wrestled with a malakh and endured,  
He cried and pleaded with Him,  
It was Bethel who met him.  
There He spoke with us—  
It was Yhwh, the God hosts! Yhwh is His name. (Hos. 12.4–6)

These verses present a series of identifications: First, the malakh with whom Jacob wrestled when he returned to Canaan (Gen. 32.25–33) is identical with Bethel, the deity who appeared to Jacob when he fled Canaan years earlier (Gen. 28.10–19; cf. 31.13). Second, Bethel (i.e., the malakh) is none other than Yhwh, the God of Israel.

These texts show that God does not always appear to humanity as the overwhelming and commanding Presence that displayed itself on Mount Sinai. God sometimes appears on a scale more easily accessible to human beings, as the malakh or Bethel. This form of God is less dangerous to humans than the full-fledged divine manifestation known from Sinai. This does not mean the malakh causes no fear at all. The Torah tells us that when Moses first saw the malakh, he found its tremendous mystery fascinating yet frightening (Exod. 3.2–6). Still, this user-friendly manifestation results from divine grace. The great biblical scholar Moshe Greenberg taught that what allows for dialogue between God and humanity is “God’s willingness to adjust himself to the capacities of men, to take into consideration and make concessions to human frailty.”[4]

The idea that God enters the cosmos in diverse forms and to varying degrees without compromising God’s oneness is not limited to the biblical concept of malakh as avatar. It reappears much later in Jewish mysticism, most famously in the kabbalistic doctrine of the sefirot, ten manifestations of God within the universe (as opposed to ein sof, the unknowable essence of God outside the universe). Descriptions of the sefirot seem to imply they enjoy a degree of individual existence. Yet they never attain the level of independent beings, and kabbalistic texts warn against praying to them as if they were distinct deities. Many modern Jews have regarded kabbalah as a revisionary transformation of biblical and rabbinic monotheism proposed by religious radicals from the medieval era. Jacob’s brief blessing to his grandsons demonstrates the opposite is the case: the understanding of God’s unity as encompassing what appears to us as multiplicity has deep roots in Jewish tradition that go back to the Bible itself. This week’s parashah helps show that kabbalistic thinkers were the most authentic sort of religious innovators: as much as they created something new, they restored something ancient[5]. (*Benjamin D. Sommer is Professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at JTS*) [1] Notably, this is always in verses that we modern biblical scholars identify as coming from the J and E strands of the Torah according to the Documentary Hypothesis. The P and D strands, however, reject the concept of divine presence underlying the idea of an avatar. [2] See, for example, Genesis 18–19, Exodus 3, and Judges 6. [3] The haftarah containing this verse, Hosea 11.7–12.12, which some communities chant for Parashat Vayetzei, others for Vayishlah, is not employed by most Conservative synagogues. [4] Greenberg, a Hebrew University professor and recipient of the State of Israel’s highest civilian award, was a JTS graduate. See Greenberg’s *Understanding Exodus* [New York: JTS, 1969], 94; on the malakh, see also 70. [5] תְּדַשׁ יְמֵינוּ כְּקִדְּםָא (Lamentations 5:21b)

*Chazak, chazak v'nitchazek* — let us be strong, strong, and strengthen each other. This Hebrew phrase is chanted during the Shabbat morning Torah service each time we finish reading one of the five books of the Torah. This week, we conclude the book of Genesis with Parshat Vayechi. I am grateful for this opportunity to bless one another with strength at this season, as we begin 2025 and anticipate the new administration. We need to stay out of despair, continually renewing our courage and compassion; we will need one another's strength to do this.

The parallel between this moment in the history of the United States and the circumstances at the very end of our parshah is chilling. The final verse of the Book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph, “And Joseph died at the age of 110 years and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.” ([Genesis 50:26](#)) Jacob's family settles in Egypt due to a famine, with Joseph as their protector. Joseph provides for the family, and they live well in Goshen for many decades. Once Joseph dies, their future is uncertain. They are vulnerable to the whims of new leaders. Indeed, in [Exodus 1:8](#), a new king will arise who does not know Joseph and who will ultimately enslave the children of Israel for 400 years. Here we are in the United States, less than two weeks from Inauguration Day, and it feels as though the American Jewish community may be losing our protector, our “Joseph,” imperfect as this protector has been.

We American Jews, particularly those of us who have light skin and who have built some wealth, have experienced a “Golden Age of American Jewry.” We have elevated our status by becoming “white,” by becoming part of the privileged class in this deeply unjust culture. And now the reins of leadership, at the highest levels in this country, have been given to individuals with a track record for inventing new (and reviving old) forms of oppression in order to maintain and further entrench their power. Those of us who are not white, Christian, wealthy, straight, and male, are profoundly vulnerable to the whims of this leadership.

As we wait for what will unfold under the new administration, how do we cultivate our courage and compassion? How do we keep our spirits strong and strengthen our capacity to protect those in danger? Early in our parshah, Jacob/Israel blesses his grandsons by calling upon the “angel who redeems me from all harm.” ([Genesis 48:16](#)) We will need our protective angels and our spirit guides.

One of my spirit guides for these times is our biblical ancestor Miriam. She was born into a dark time in Egypt and she practiced prophetic leadership. We learn from a midrash that her father heard Pharaoh's decree that Israelite baby boys should be thrown into the Nile and thus encouraged husbands to separate from

their wives. Miriam helped him to understand that he was cutting off their future through this fear-based act, and the Israelites resumed intimate relations with their spouses. (**Exodus Rabbah 1:13**) Only through heeding Miriam's guidance was Moses born. Miriam then served as a protector for her baby brother and facilitated his return home for his early years. (**Exodus 2:9**) She could see what was possible, beyond the dire straits her family was in, and she acted with gentle strength. I also imagine that Miriam carried her timbrel at all times, and when there was a quiet moment and taskmasters were not around, she would sing to the children and tell them stories, teaching them about their humanity and instilling in them hope.

May we receive the blessing of Jacob's protective angel, and may we receive inspiration from Miriam to protect one another with whatever vision and creativity we can muster, to continue to teach hope and dignity to our children. Let us be strong, strong, and strengthen each other! (*Rabbi Malkah Binah Klein (thrivingspirit.org) is the founder of Merkava: Spiritual Transformation through Creative Ritual. She is a member of Sisters Waging Peace, a Philadelphia-based initiative focused on standing in solidarity with peacebuilding groups in Israel-Palestine, and she is newly certified as a Laughter Yoga leader.*)

### Vayechi: Holy Brothers – Dwelling in Peace by the Accidental Talmudist

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/words-of-torah/2023/12/26/vayechi-holy-brothers-2/>

Every Friday night, traditional Jewish parents bless their children at the beginning of the Shabbat meal. The Biblical Matriarchs are evoked in the blessing for daughters: "May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah." The blessing for sons is "May you be like Ephraim and Menashe."

Why aren't sons likened to the Biblical Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Who are Ephraim and Menashe and why do we want our sons to be like them?

Ephraim and Menashe are the sons of Joseph, born in Egypt, and two of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Menashe is the older brother, but when Jacob on his deathbed blesses his grandsons, he switches his hands so that Ephraim will receive the firstborn blessing (Gen. 48:14). This mysterious switching of the blessing evokes other Biblical brothers whose birth order is subverted (see: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers.) Will Joseph's sons also feud bitterly after the younger is favored over the elder?

The Torah does not record any reaction from Menashe at being passed over for the firstborn blessing. Righteous Menashe accepts the demotion not with angry complaint but quiet serenity. Menashe doesn't sulk and Ephraim doesn't gloat. They are the first Jewish brothers not to fight, and they are Jacob's only grandsons to become Tribes of Israel.

We bless our sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe because we want them to be men of peace who prioritize family harmony over ego. In the immortal words of King David, “How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together.” (Ps.133:1). May we all be blessed to live in peace and harmony, motivated not by envy but by love!

[Jacob and Abraham \(Lincoln\) – Summoning Strength by The Accidental Talmudist](https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/featured-app/2025/01/06/jacob-and-abraham-lincoln/)  
<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/featured-app/2025/01/06/jacob-and-abraham-lincoln/>

When Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to see you,” Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. – Gen. 48:2

Shortly before Jacob’s passing, he blesses Joseph’s children and his own. Why does the Torah tell us that when Joseph walks in, his father Jacob makes an effort to sit up? It seems to be an insignificant detail, but we know that every word and even letter in the Torah has deep meaning.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky compares this verse to a story about Abraham Lincoln, as related by American historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. It was January 1, 1863 and President Lincoln had spent the morning glad-handing supporters because of what he was about to do: sign the Emancipation Proclamation. Now Lincoln was sitting at his desk with the document before him. He picked up his quill and was about to dip it into the ink when he paused and put his arm down. Again he picked up the quill, paused, and put it down. Then Lincoln turned to his Secretary of State, William Seward, and explained his hesitance. After spending hours shaking hands, Lincoln’s own right hand was numb and practically paralyzed. He told Seward, “If I am ever going to go down in history, it will be for this act. My whole self is in it. However, if my hand trembles when I sign this proclamation, whoever examines it will say hereafter, ‘he hesitated.’”

The President then gathered his strength, dipped his quill in the ink, and signed the proclamation very slowly and with careful control: Abraham Lincoln.

Both our Patriarch and our 16th U.S. President sent vitally important messages to their people and the world. These weren’t messages that could be delivered lying down, or with trembling hands. As Rabbi Kamenetsky says, “Execution of great actions needs great strength and fortitude.” May we all be inspired by these two exceptional men to summon our strength and change the world!

[Vayechi: Be Strong and We Will Be Strong – Joseph's Promise](https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/words-of-torah/2023/12/26/vayechi-be-strong-and-strengthen-others-2/)  
<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/words-of-torah/2023/12/26/vayechi-be-strong-and-strengthen-others-2/>

Torah portion Vayechi completes the Book of Genesis. When we finish one of the five Books of Moses in the yearly cycle of Torah reading in synagogue, the congregation rises and calls out together “Chazak, chazak, venitchazek!” (“Be

strong, be strong, and strengthen others!”)

Unlike the later four Books of Moses, Genesis ends on an apparent down note: “Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.” (Gen. 50:26) It seems incongruous for worshippers to make a passionate avowal of strength right after reading that Joseph’s bones are sitting unburied in a box in Egypt. Why not end the Book of Genesis with the more uplifting story of Jacob’s passing, his burial in Israel, and the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers?

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky provides a compelling explanation for why Genesis ends with Joseph in a state of limbo. Recall, Joseph himself tells his family not to bury him: “So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying ‘When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here.’” (Gen. 50:25) Possessing wisdom as well as prophecy, Joseph knows that the Egyptians will eventually forget the Hebrew viceroy who saved their empire from famine. They will no longer see the Jews as saviors but rather as visitors, then as strangers, later as intruders, and finally as slaves. Joseph’s descendants are destined to endure great suffering before their long exile finally ends – and he wants to be part of the jubilant caravan leaving Egypt.

Joseph’s request not to be buried until his people leave Egypt is a promise to future Jews that they will one day be free. Rabbi Kamenetzky says, “We must not see a box of bones – see the hope that lies therein.” Genesis ends on an unfinished note because the journey of the Jewish people is unfinished. It is appropriate for the congregation to shout “Be strong!” at this point in the story because Joseph’s box of bones is not a depressing detail but rather a promise of future salvation meant to strengthen his descendants. *(Salvador Litvak is the Accidental Talmudist. He is a Chilean-American filmmaker and social media influencer who was determined (after reading the entire Talmud) to share what he had learned... The Accidental Talmudist was born. See more about Salvador here: <https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/sal-litvak/> \*\*\*\*\*)*

### Yahrtzeits

Cornelia and Francesca Peckman remember their father Albert Abram Peckman on Sat. Jan. 11

Karen Brandis remembers her mother Pauline Grossel on Sunday Jan.12

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandmother Sadye Vernon Hammer on Wed. Jan. 15