

8 – Vayechi – Shemot Outline

1. Review

2. Summary of Vayechi and Shemot

3. The Month of Tevet

- a. The word “Tevet” is thought to mean in the original Akkadian something like “to submerge,”
 - i. a description of being in the body, being submerged in the physical world
- b. the Hebrew letters evoke “tov,” “good”
- c. putting these two definitions together, we draw out the idea of “the goodness of being submerged in the body.”
- d. Rabbis: it’s a time to appreciate and enjoy the body in all of its different parts. In the month of Tevet, we are given a special ability to recognize the value of the various parts of the body, how they each express a facet of God’s mind, how they fit together, how they complement each other.
 - i. we can’t unsee that which we have already seen which is not kosher in the world around us. We’re adding in another perspective to go with the negative side, the positive side. Seeing the flesh is what’s natural for us. In the month of Tevet, we are given a special ability to ADD to the left eye the right eye. It’s about bringing balance to our vision.
 1. it can entirely change the world that you live in
 - ii. rabbis: it’s a time to appreciate all the different voices within the body of Israel
- e. We’re trying to see the spark of God within everyone and everything now.
 - i. not just religious people – everyone
 - ii. A somewhat strange-seeming verse from parsha Shemot, Exodus 2:25: “And God saw the sons of Israel, and God knew them.”
 1. This is a verse about God seeing the children of Israel, and this seeing leads to Him knowing them.
 - iii. Story of being in a store one day...
 1. people can sense it when we are seeing them with only the left eye or when we are seeing them more fully, with both eyes?
- f. Seeing good in the body and speaking that out are keys to our identity
 - i. if we speak out the good we see, we help others discover *their* identity
 - ii. we are designed to help others in the body see themselves, so we are also becoming *who we are meant to be* when we help others see themselves
 - iii. We are being like God when we see and speak out the good in others because that’s what He does for us
 - iv. God steps nearer to us when we step nearer to others in this way

4. Haftarah Connection

- a. A mysterious verse; Isaiah 27 is describing the redemption of Israel. Isaiah 27:7 reads: “Like the striking of Him who has struck them, has He struck them? Or like the slaughter of His slain, have they been slain?”
 - i. it’s like they will look back and ask, “Were we even struck? Did He even slay us?” It wasn’t evil but good. We needed it.
 - ii. adds this dimension: be in the habit of looking back over the events of your life with “the good eye”

5. The 10th of Tevet

- a. The 10th of Tevet fits right into the emphasis of the month, as it must. At its heart is the opportunity to see the goodness in other people.
 - i. each of the fast days in the year is both an opportunity to mourn the destruction of the Temples, BUT ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO CORRECT THE EVIL THAT LED TO THEIR DESTRUCTION. 2nd Temple: Sinat Chinam, baseless hatred. The antidote to baseless hatred is baseless love – what Christians call “extending grace” to people, seeing them with the good eye

6. Vayechi

- a. How can Vayechi take this Tevet calendar discussion deeper?
- b. The Blessings of the 12 Tribes
 - i. We can see a clear connection to this idea of seeing the body with both eyes in Jacob’s blessings of the 12 tribes. Obviously, since the tribes are receiving a kind of evaluation here from their father Jacob, we can easily see the connection to seeing the body with both eyes. We can see that Jacob is seeing his sons in a clear, open-eyed way, as some of the blessings are very positive and some are negative. Jacob is seeing them with both eyes. And Jacob shows us the further step we’re looking for. He takes action based on what he sees. What is his action? I think we have to describe the action Jacob takes with the word “pruning.” Rather than go into detail for each blessing, we only have time now to take a 30,000 foot overview.
 - ii. As we begin thinking about Jacob’s blessings, let’s keep a few points in mind:
 1. The name of this portion, “Vayechi,” means “and he lived,” “and Jacob lived;” therefore, though this portion records Jacob’s death, we have to assume that what we’re seeing here is the key to life for his family
 2. Jacob is a father, and these are his sons who he loves
 - a. these are not just sons, they are expressions of Jacob, himself; when he sees Reuben, he’s seeing an aspect of himself
 3. Jacob can see his sons clearly, in a balanced way, with both eyes
 - a. he includes something positive about each of them

- i. even Simeon and Levi are called “brothers,”
 - 4. Jacob understands the power of the father’s blessing to effect the future
 - 5. Jacob is going to do what it takes to help ensure Israel’s flourishing, no matter how difficult
- iii. What do these points add up to? They add up to this: Jacob is not just predicting the future; HE’S USING THE POWER OF HIS BLESSING TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL. Jacob’s blessings are a pruning of the branches of Israel; the 12 tribes are the branches. Pruning is difficult, but it is what is necessary for fruitfulness. Jacob is pruning his family.

How is he doing that? Jacob can see which branches need to be encouraged to grow big and strong within Israel, which tribes need to become leaders, which will produce good fruit, which are situated to receive the best light, and which branches need to be limited, reduced so that they don’t take up too much space and energy within the body. Limitation is the essence of curse. So what we’re seeing here is really the effecting of blessings and curses effected by Jacob’s spoken words in his last moments of life. It’s not an easy thing for a father to do, especially in one’s dying moments. Your inclination would be to just say nice things and give blessings that all of them would grow equally and prosper. What Jacob does, instead, is to risk hurting and even humiliating some of them for the sake of the survival and prosperity of the whole body. It’s a gripping and fraught and beautiful thing that he’s doing, a brave act, a powerful act, and ultimately a very selfless act. He puts his enduring reputation among the tribes aside, and he does what he needs to do. This is such an amazing passage that speaks to the greatness of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

- iv. Parshah Vayechi has something to add here: we aren’t just seeing the parts of the body with both eyes; we’re also being empowered now to cut away that which is not fruitful in our lives, that which is sapping time and energy. Again, Jacob is literally pruning the branches of his own body, the 12 sons who will make up the nation of Israel moving forward.
 - 1. the counterpart to this deep winter pruning in the year, by the way, is the pruning of the grapevines in the deep summer
 - 2. keep this idea that Jacob is here pruning the family in mind because we’re coming close already to the month of Shevat, and “Shevat” means both “tribe” and “branch;” it’s the month that contains the new year for trees, Tu B’Shevat.
- c. A final word here about life and death
 - i. This portion named for life contains two deaths, and not just two deaths but the deaths of two of the greatest figures in the whole of the Torah, Jacob and Joseph. In truth, the parsha seems much more focused on death than life. And guess what the focus of the haftarah is: the death of

none other than King David. In other words, during the week of the portion named “and he lived,” we’re reading about the deaths of three of the most important figures in the entire Bible – Jacob, Joseph, and David.

1. There is a paradox here that is another mark of the season. It’s a paradox that will increase in this part of the year. Paradox is a primary feature of Purim, the next mile marker for us in the year.
2. The sages say that as we draw closer and closer to God, we draw closer to paradox, because there’s something very paradoxical at the heart of God. This is why when we see God represented, we often see fire mixed with water, these two opposite elements combined in a strangely supernatural kind of echad.
3. What is at the root of this paradox? It is this: you don’t get new life until you surrender the old life; you’re not really alive unless you’re constantly dying. Dying is the key to growing with Him, growing near to Him and doing that which we are made to do here on this planet. Dying is the key to being a living sacrifice.
 - a. rather than constantly resisting death, we should be waking up each morning and saying to God, “Bring it on. Bring it! Lead us into the right ways to die for You today.” We need to embrace death and not fear it because it’s the key to true life.
 - i. I’m not talking about actual death, here, though if I’m called to that for some extreme reason, I pray that I will be strong and submit to it. I’m mostly talking about the life of self-sacrificial service.
 - b. the foundation of the universe is one act: Yeshua’s death and resurrection; this foundational act doesn’t just echo through time and space – it is the very shape of time and space. It is the air we breathe and the water we drink.
 - c. death and life are so closely linked together in this universe that they are inseparable
 - d. it’s one of the enemies greatest lies that death is to be feared; the right kind of death – death for the sake of God and others—is to be embraced as the root of all life

7. Shemot

- a. Main question here: what does Shemot have to do with this quadrant of the year? Why are we reading the story of the exodus and the first year in the wilderness now?
- b. “Shemot”
 - i. Shemot” means “Names.” The book begins with the names of the children of Israel who descend to Egypt in final years of Jacob’s life.
 - ii. What does “names” have to do with anything?
 1. name is essence

2. Hear this point: what does it mean that we are reading the book of our essence in the last 3 months of the year? It means that we are making that final drive to expressing our true essence
 - a. the end of Exodus, building the Tabernacle, is a picture of the shalom we are headed toward
- c. So, what *is* our name? What is our essence?
 - i. **individual names**
 1. we're being empowered to express our individuality for the sake of the kingdom in the deep winter season.
 - ii. Beyond that individual name, though, are names that we have in common that describe a common essence
 1. for the genetic descendants of Jacob, one of these names is "**Jew**"
 - a. where does this name come from? Yehudah, Judah
 - i. And to this day I hear the Orthodox rabbis call a Jewish person a "Yid"
 - b. the breathtaking poetry that only God can design: the Torah portion that begins the winter season, Vayigash, begins with the moment when Judah, one of the twelve, steps up to fulfill his essence as he draws near to Joseph. This is a kind of seed for the season of the winter. The winter begins with the expression of Jewish essence.
 - iii. Even broader name that includes more than just the genetic descendants of Jacob, the name "**Israel**."
 1. this is the name that we Gentiles are grafted into
 2. It seems to be a strange description of essence
 - a. "Israel" means "one who struggles with God."
 - b. The context of the giving of this name adds two more important ideas: the angel says to Jacob: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Genesis 32:28)
 - i. So it's not just a struggling with God, but also with MAN, and it is not just a struggle, but it is also PREVAILING. It's a struggling and prevailing with both God and man.
 - c. What is encouraging about this name, "Israel"? Rabbi Aron Moss:

Here is the essence of Judaism: We do believe that goodness prevails, but the happy ending is not our focus. OUR FOCUS IS THE STRUGGLE TO GET THERE. Regardless of the result, the struggle itself is holy. If you strive for goodness, you're in, even before you get there. If you're trying to be better, even if you fall

sometimes, you're on the path. It's all about the struggle.

That's why the Torah doesn't speak about heaven. We believe in the afterlife, but we aren't preoccupied with it. We focus our energy on the effort to be a good person, the struggle to do the right thing, the battle against our adversaries, both internal and external.

Some religions seek serenity. Some spiritual paths promise peace. Others offer a place in heaven. Judaism embraces the struggle of the here and now. The victory will come. But for the time being, we are here to grapple with G-d, debate with our fellow humans, and struggle with ourselves, never accepting that the world can't change, starting with me. That's Israel.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5752241/jewish/What-Does-Israel-Mean.htm

- iv. We should expect that the book of Exodus is going to help us this year learn to express even better our essence, both our essence as Israel and our personal name as well.

8. Yeshua

- a. On Paradox
 - i. We've already talked about how paradox grows in this season and how Yeshua is the ultimate example of the kind of paradox we're talking about: lay down your life for God's sake, and He will give it back to you, only better.
- b. On Yeshua's balanced vision + action
 - i. who is better at this than Yeshua? He knew how to praise and comfort when that was needed, and He knew how to discipline and rebuke when that was necessary.
 - 1. little children, Zacchaeus, those with faith for healing, corruption
 - ii. Yeshua's ability to see the 12 and act on that balanced vision by investing heavily in them
- c. On pruning
 - i. Yeshua was fond of gardening and farming metaphors, including pruning
 - 1. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." (John 15:1-4)

9. Joshua 6

- a. the shofar
 - i. a vessel for breath and wind; in Hebrew, the words “breath, wind, and SPIRIT” are all the same, “ruach”
 - 1. the trumpet is a vessel for the flowing of the spirit. What God is telling Israel to do is to bring down the vast walls of this ancient city with their breath, by the power of the Spirit.
 - 2. Zec. 4:6 – “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts.”
 - ii. This first battle sets the stage for all the battles to come
 - 1. they won’t defeat the Canaanites by their own might, but by His Spirit working through them
 - iii. Takeaway:
 - 1. the encouragement that as we enter into these last days, we WILL BE VICTORIOUS because His Spirit is in us. The challenge to see in balance and then act bravely like Jacob did, like Yeshua did, in such an egoless way – that’s no small thing. Learning to express our name, our essence, is not an easy process. Snipping off our own branches that are not producing fruit is tough. But we have His Spirit in us, and by the power of His Spirit, those walls will come down, just as they did at Jericho.
 - iv. Horn as source of pride that must be surrendered through death before it can become useful
 - 1. The horn is a symbol of strength, not shed, growing throughout the animal’s lifetime.
 - a. source of pride
 - i. at the Akeidah, the ram is caught in a thicket by its horns – caught up in the curse by one’s pride.
 - 2. Lesson: whatever we take great pride in is a kind of snare for us in life, but if we submit to death, God can take that source of pride, hollow it out, and blow His Spirit through it, using it as a vessel.
 - a. The choice to place the shofar here at the center of the action in Joshua 6 says to Israel, “Death is the doorway to the flow of the Spirit of God through you, and in that flow is the real power to defeat your enemies, regardless of how solid and high their walls are.
- b. “Jericho” comes from “ruach”
 - i. It’s thought that the name “Jericho” actually comes from the word “ruach,” the same word for “spirit”
 - 1. Israel is attacking a spiritual enemy with a spiritual weapon, a reminder to us that our battle, in the end, is a spiritual battle.
 - 2. The physical will follow along with the spiritual progress.

Transcript (not exact)

As we have been journeying through the Torah portions, we have been tracking a development process throughout the year. It is the story of salvation. Our main handle for the year so far has been human development. Spring is a time for rebirth. Shavuot in the late spring marks a point of adolescence. The fall marks a point of adulthood and marriage. We see that marriage consummation playing out throughout the 7th month in the appointed times of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

Marriage is a kind of new beginning in the year, a second beginning point. God accomplishes the finalizing of the marriage through His Son, Yeshua the Messiah, Who is our Groom. It is Yeshua Who we are raising up as King at Rosh Hashanah, and it is Yeshua Who eventually is born among us at Sukkot, becoming our Groom. We marry the King. And so Yeshua has a special leadership role in this dark half of the year, the Groom walking alongside us in a special but hidden way throughout the long, dark winter – hidden inasmuch as Yeshua takes on a human form, and even a very humble human form, looking just like one of us.

In contrast to Yeshua's leadership in this way in the fall, what we see in the spring is a special leading of God as the Father, the God Who shows Himself to be big and powerful, the Father Who rescues by bringing forth from the womb, the Father Who protects and provides. In the summer, we see an emphasis on the leadership of THE HOLY SPIRIT, Who guides us into the truth of how to walk in God's ways and brings the conviction that leads to repentance, teshuvah. So, again, we find a special leadership of the Father in the spring, the Spirit in the summer, and Yeshua our Groom in the fall.

And I suspect that what marks this deep winter period is again a time when the leadership of the Spirit is brought forward with the purpose of enabling Yeshua to dwell in our hearts through faith, which is a kind of second and more mature work of the Spirit. Let me note here by way of a quick connection to Joshua that Joshua ends up settling and retiring right in the heart of Israel, in the territory of Ephraim. This is a picture of the end in which Yeshua dwells in the heart through faith, and this is facilitated by the Spirit, as we are told in Ephesians 3.

Maybe we can explore these ideas further sometime, but my point here for today is just to say that we have a progression of different faces of God coming forward at different points in our development process and different points in the year as He leads us to grow. As we are being saved, God puts on different faces to lead us.

Now, to be clear, all of these faces of God are always present at all stages of our development, and God is indivisible. He cannot be divided into separate pieces. God is One, period. And yet He has chosen to show Himself to us in this fractured world through different faces, and we relate to Him in differing ways through these various aspects of God's character. God is not changing as we grow, but He's presenting different faces to us that we can relate to easily at

each stage. We need to relate to God in a complex, layered way. And God presents Himself to us in such a way that we can easily do that in our development process.

Getting back to our review now, another idea we have spent some time with is the role of the New Covenant particularly starting in the 7th month, the Torah written in the gut and heart, the beginning of an inner flame, an inner passion that is a great source of strength for us moving forward and is connected also with the opening of our eyes to see God in the hidden places.

Our discussions so far have brought us through one mo'ed, the manmade mo'ed of Hanukkah, where we emphasized the completion of an inner work and our light beginning to shine on the outside, the movement to a more outward focus.

Last time, we zoomed in on a specific turning point moment in both the year and the Torah, the end of parsha Mikeitz and the beginning of parsha Vayigash, when Judah draws near to Joseph and lowers himself down in service to Joseph for the sake of his elderly father. This is the point where Joseph, who is designed to give, finishes passing along to Judah this great inner spiritual growth that has been developing in this special family, and Judah is the key to actualizing that growth in the physical world.

Summary of Vayechi and Shemot

These are two momentous portions – the final portion of the first book of the Torah and the beginning of the second. Vayechi contains Jacob's blessing and adoption of Ephraim and Mansseh, his blessings of all the tribes, and the deaths of two of the most important figures in the Torah, Jacob and Joseph. It is Joseph's death that ends the book of Genesis. Shemot starts the pivotal story of the exodus from Egypt. Shemot begins with the enslavement of Israel in Egypt and Pharaoh's attempts to kill Jewish babies and reduce the size of Israel. Moses is born and raised in Pharaoh's home but ends up fleeing to the desert, where he eventually has an encounter with the God of the Universe, Who appears to him as a bush that burns but doesn't burn up. After some arguing back and forth, Moses returns to Egypt to deliver the people, in obedience to God. The initial results, however, are not so great, as Pharaoh is made angry by the request to simply take the people and go worship, and he greatly increases the work load of the people.

Before we delve into these portions, let's talk about the new month that we've entered, the month of Tevet. The word "Tevet" is thought to mean in the original Babylonian language something like "to submerge," which seems to me a description of being in the body, being submerged in the physical world. This is what the spirit experiences here, this submerging in a confining body.

Adding to this idea of submerging in the body, the Hebrew letters evoke another related idea to the month, as the first two letters in "Tevet" spell the word "tov," which means "good." Putting these two definitions together, we draw out the idea of "the goodness of being submerged in the body." Let's talk about that idea for a minute.

When the rabbis talk about this month of Tevet, they often end up speaking about how it's a time to appreciate and enjoy the body in all of its different parts. In the month of Tevet, we are given a special ability to recognize the value of the various parts of the body, how they each express a facet of God's mind, how they fit together, how they complement each other.

Now, we can't unsee that which we have already seen which is not kosher in the world around us. That's not what we're trying to do now. We're not trying to put on blinders. Rather, we're adding in another perspective to go with the negative side, the positive side. This is a time to see the good in everything around us while not ignoring what still is on the path to correction. We can say it like this: it comes natural for us to see with the left eye, the critical eye, the eye that sees how something or someone is falling short of the mark, the eye that sees mostly the flesh. Seeing the flesh is what's natural for us. In the month of Tevet, we are given a special ability to ADD to the left eye the right eye, the eye that looks deeper into that person in front of us to see the spark of God in them. It's about bringing balance to our vision. And it can entirely change the world that you live in because, in many ways, we inhabit the world that we choose to see. Make sure that you can always see what is good. You will be a much happier person.

One area of focus I hear the rabbis talking about specifically regarding the month of Tevet is how we need to actively appreciate all the different voices within the body of Israel – opinions and debates and unique perspectives that have stretched over the centuries and even millenia, even seemingly opposite voices like Hilel and Shammai. One of the things the modern Orthodox rabbis love to do is to take two opposite ideas from history and show how they are actually both right. Sage A says such and such, and two centuries later Sage B says the opposite, and now comes along a modern rabbi in the 21st century who says, "Let me explain how both of these views can be right at the same time." They LOVE doing this, and I think this generation of rabbis in particular has a special mandate to do just this type of reviewing of the long and beautiful conversation, bringing a kind of echad to the different perspectives. They are peacemakers. And this is because we are, indeed, drawing near to the end of days and the coming of the Messiah. At the end, we find the word "echad." And this kind of re-seeing of the historical conversation in our days is an expression of the energy of echad.

So this is a time of year where God is giving a special ability now to do just this, a time to look at all the different pieces that make up a body with the good eye to bring balance. Again, this is A MONTH TO BALANCE OUR VISION. [The counterpart opposite in the calendar is the 4th month, associated with the tribe of Reuben ("to see"), but the seeing there is mostly with the left eye, the seeing of our own failings regarding Torah, leading to repentance. The 4th month includes the Fast of Tammuz, which starts the 3 Weeks of mourning.] We're trying to see the spark of God within everyone and everything now.

This doesn't only apply to religious people. We need to be training ourselves to always be able to see anyone we encounter throughout the day on multiple levels. On the one hand, we can have our guard up and see what might be dangerous or just "off." We need to be able to see with this eye. But on the other hand, we need to be able to see that same person in front of us

with a more generous eye, one that sees their outward form and can intuit from that some clues to what is good and right and true within that person.

There's a somewhat strange-seeming verse from parsha Shemot in chapter 2. Exodus 2:25 reads like this: "And God saw the sons of Israel, and God knew them." This is a verse about God SEEING the children of Israel in their slavery in Egypt, and this seeing leads to Him KNOWING them. What did He see? Did He just look down and see an enslaved people neck deep in the impurity of Egypt, a stiff-necked people? Clearly He saw them in a different way. He looked past their bitterness and infighting and idolatry and saw a treasure. He looked past the Egyptian clothing and saw what they could be because of what they really are inside. He saw that Israel could be His treasured people.

Story of being in a store one day...

Can I just say that people can sense it when we are seeing them with only the left eye or when we are seeing them more fully, with both eyes? You don't even have to say anything. We just enter a room, and our spirit is effecting the room immediately. Grant would often remind us that it's easy to see where one body ends and another begins, but it's not so easy when it comes to the spirit. What if our spirits are extending beyond these bodies? And what if our spirits can actually overlap in the room? And what if our spirits can communicate with each other as they overlap? We might be a little dull in understanding what other spirits are saying, but would it be surprising if a little communication gets through?

When we interact with someone from a place of negativity people can feel it, and they will react to us, and when we interact with someone really seeing them, seeing their faults but not letting the faults stop you from seeing something deeper in them, they can sense that too. And people are drawn to those who can really see the good in them.

Let me give now one of the most important points related to this idea of seeing with the good even over the bad eye: when you see someone's pure inner spark, and when you tell them what you see, when you put it into words, you help that person know his or her deeper identity. We can't always see our gifts ourselves. We need the body to help us recognize and become who we truly are. Your eye helps me to know who I am made to be. By God's design, we're a little blind to ourselves.

And a connected point here: since we are designed to help each other see ourselves, when we do that, we are becoming WHO WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE. We are acting according to our design when we see and speak this way. We are all designed to be flashlights that see into other souls and help to bring out the good there. Being a torch is part of the identity of all people.

And another thing that is also extremely important in this discussion: when we are gracious enough to see past someone's faults and help to bring their good qualities to the surface, we are being like God, acting according to the image of God. How is that? Does not God look down

on us and see our faults and every misstep, yet He sees the good He put in us, He sees His own image in us, and He speaks that to us? And how does He speak that to us? He does so in many ways, the most important being the Torah. But His design is also to use other people. And there are also many people who can look into nature and see qualities in themselves there, good qualities. This seeing ourselves through nature is a growing aspect of our modern age that can be easily corrupted, but the root is actually good.

So, not only are we being like God when we extend this kind of grace to others, but God draws near to us when we see and speak with the good eye. God draws near to us. You want to walk closer with God? Be that person with a ready smile and a keen and mature eye that is able to look past the coarse outer shell of the flesh and be used as a vessel to uncover and unmask the goodness in others. It's not easy. It's a constant challenge because it takes more effort to see past the surface. But this is the way of maturity. It is the way.

Of course there is always a balance, and we need to be wise to not put ourselves in danger or our families or our communities in danger. So, this requires wisdom.

Haftarah Connection

Let me quickly make a connection to the haftarah, here, which is from Isaiah 27 and 28. There are a couple of mysterious verses here that bring in another dimension to the idea of seeing with the good eye. The passage is describing the redemption of Israel. God is going to smash their enemies and bring them back from the four corners of the earth. And in Isaiah 27:6-7, the NASB reads: "In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and sprout, And they will fill the whole world with fruit. Like the striking of Him who has struck them, has He struck them? Or like the slaughter of His slain, have they been slain?" (Isaiah 27:6-7)

Verse 7 is odd, to say the least, and the translations vary. But I think what's important is to recognize that God is promising to bring them through, and when it's all over, there will be these questions in their mind: did He strike us at all? Were we even slain at all?" In other words, they're going to look back at their captivity and see it through different eyes, with the good eye, and they're going to say, "Was that God striking us? Or was that God saving us? Was that God slaying us? Or was that God bringing us back to life?" In other words, Isaiah is saying, "You're going to look back into the past and see that God was working everything for good.

Can I challenge us to do this even today? Look back at the strikings and slayings and captivities in your life, and try to see them with the good eye. There is much healing in this.

10th of Tevet

The 10th of Tevet fits right into the emphasis of the month, as it must. [Explain the 10th of Tevet.] At its heart is the opportunity to see the goodness in other people. Let me explain how that works: each of the fast days in the year is both an opportunity to mourn the destruction of the Temples, BUT ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO CORRECT THE EVIL THAT LED TO THEIR DESTRUCTION. So, on the one hand, we can mourn the loss of this connection to God. On the other hand, we can work on bringing correction to those areas that caused the destruction. The

rabbis I have heard talk about this bring both Temples into the picture here. And where they seem to end up focusing is on what caused the destruction of the second Temple. So, what do they say caused the Second Temple's destruction? Sinat Chinam, baseless hatred. Of course, we know that this baseless hatred was directed against Yeshua, and Yeshua says exactly this in John 15. But it wasn't limited to Yeshua. The Israel of Yeshua's time was filled with factional infighting between such groups as the Sadducees and the Pharisees. So here's the point, if baseless hatred is what caused the destruction of the Second Temple, and if we focus on rectifying that on these fast days related to the Temples' destruction, then we are to focus on baseless love, which is basically the Christian definition of grace. In other words, these fast days, including the 10th of Tevet, are seen as days to extend grace to each other. And isn't grace at the heart of seeing the good in others?

Vayechi

We have been pointing out that our focus has now shifted from the inside to the outside, from the primarily soulish work to a work that is more focused on the body and on the vast world beyond the body; and in our discussion of the month of Tevet, we made that body focus a bit more specific in explaining how it is that we are now learning to see the body with both a critical eye and a generous eye. as we turn to parshah Vayechi, let's see if we can go even a step further.

We can see a clear connection to this idea of seeing the body with both eyes in Jacob's blessings of the 12 tribes. Obviously, since the tribes are receiving a kind of evaluation here from their father Jacob, we can easily see the connection to seeing the body with both eyes. We can see that Jacob is seeing his sons in a clear, open-eyed way, as some of the blessings are very positive and some are negative. Jacob is seeing them with both eyes. And Jacob shows us the further step we're looking for. He takes action based on what he sees. What is his action? I think we have to describe the action Jacob takes with the word "pruning." Rather than go into detail for each blessing, we only have time now to take a 30,000 foot overview.

As we begin thinking about Jacob's blessings, let's keep a few points in mind:

1. The name of this portion, "Vayechi," means "and he lived," "and Jacob lived;" therefore, though this portion records Jacob's death, we have to assume that what we're seeing here is the key to life for his family
2. Jacob is a father, and these are his sons who he loves. These are not just sons, they are expressions of Jacob, himself; when he sees Reuben, he's seeing an aspect of himself.
3. Jacob can see his sons clearly, in a balanced way, with both eyes. He has much praise to give, but he also rebukes some of his sons.
4. Jacob understands the power of the father's blessing to effect the future. He is going to do what it takes to help ensure Israel's flourishing, no matter how difficult

What do these points add up to? They add up to this: Jacob is not just predicting the future; HE'S USING THE POWER OF HIS BLESSING TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL. Jacob's blessings

are a pruning of the branches of Israel; the 12 tribes are the branches. Pruning is difficult, but it is what is necessary for fruitfulness. Jacob is pruning his family.

How is he doing that? Jacob can see which branches need to be encouraged to grow big and strong within Israel, which tribes need to become leaders, which will produce good fruit, which are situated to receive the best light, and which branches need to be limited, reduced so that they don't take up too much space and energy within the body. Limitation is the essence of curse. So what we're seeing here is really the effecting of blessings and curses effected by Jacob's spoken words in his last moments of life. It's not an easy thing for a father to do, especially in one's dying moments. Your inclination would be to just say nice things and give blessings that all of them would grow equally and prosper. What Jacob does, instead, is to risk hurting and even humiliating some of them for the sake of the survival and prosperity of the whole body. It's a gripping and fraught and beautiful thing that he's doing, a brave act, a powerful act, and ultimately a very selfless act. He puts his enduring reputation among the tribes aside, and he does what he needs to do. This is such an amazing passage that speaks to the greatness of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

Parshah Vayechi has something to add here to the discussion about the month of Tevet: we aren't just seeing the parts of the body with both eyes; WE'RE ALSO BEING EMPOWERED NOW ACT BASED UPON THAT VISION, TO CUT AWAY THAT WHICH IS NOT FRUITFUL IN OUR LIVES, that which is sapping time and energy. Again, Jacob is literally pruning the branches of his own body, the 12 sons who will make up the nation of Israel moving forward.

The counterpart to this deep winter pruning in the year, by the way, is the pruning of the grapevines in the deep summer

Keep this idea that Jacob is here pruning the family in mind because we're coming close already to the month of Shevat, and "Shevat" means both "tribe" and "branch;" it's the month that contains the new year for trees, Tu B'Shevat.

A final word here about life and death: this portion named for life contains two deaths, and not just two deaths but the deaths of two of the greatest figures in the whole of the Torah, Jacob and Joseph. In truth, the parsha seems much more focused on death than life. And guess what the focus of the haftarah is: the death of none other than King David. In other words, during the week of the portion named "and he lived," we're reading about the deaths of three of the most important figures in the entire Bible – Jacob, Joseph, and David. There is a paradox here that is another mark of the season. It's a paradox that will increase in this part of the year. Paradox is a primary feature of Purim, the next mile marker for us in the year.

The sages say that as we draw closer and closer to God, we draw closer to paradox, because there's something very paradoxical at the heart of God. This is why when we see God represented, we often see fire mixed with water, these two opposite elements combined in a strangely supernatural kind of echad.

What is at the root of this paradox? Maybe it is this: you don't get new life until you surrender the old life; you're not really alive unless you're constantly dying. Dying is the key to growing with Him, growing near to Him and doing that which we are made to do here on this planet. Dying is the key to being a living sacrifice.

Rather than constantly resisting death, we should be waking up each morning and saying to God, "Bring it on. Bring it! Lead us into the right ways to die for You today." We need to embrace death and not fear it because it's the key to true life. I'm not talking about actual death, here, though if I'm called to that for some extreme reason, I pray that I will be strong and submit to it. I'm mostly talking about the life of self-sacrificial service. The foundation of the universe is one act: Yeshua's death and resurrection; this foundational act doesn't just echo throughout time and space – it is the very shape of time and space. Yeshua's death and resurrection is the air we breathe and the water we drink. Death and life are so closely linked together in this universe that they are inseparable. It's one of the enemies greatest lies that death is to be feared; the right kind of death – death for the sake of God and others—is to be embraced as the root of all life

Shemot

Let's turn now to parsha Shemot, the first in the book of Exodus and the parshah for which the whole book is named. The book of Shemot will be our companion from now to the end of Adar. When we come to end of Exodus, we come to the very last week of the year. The first portion of Leviticus, the next book, coincides with the first week of Nissan, in the spring. My main question here is this: what does the book of Shemot have to do with this quadrant of the year, these three months? Why are we reading the story of the exodus, the story of redemption, now?

To begin answering this question, let's start by looking at the meaning of the word "Shemot." "Shemot" means "Names." The book begins with the names of the children of Israel who descend to Egypt in final years of Jacob's life.

What does "names" have to do with anything? As we have learned many times, your name is a description of your essence. It is both your true self and your mission in this world. Hear this point: what does it mean that we are reading the book of essence in the last 3 months of the year? IT MEANS THAT WE ARE MAKING THAT FINAL DRIVE TO EXPRESSING OUR TRUE ESSENCE. We're in the home stretch, and the result will be the kind of shalom that is the vehicle for us to express exactly who we are created to be. We get a picture of that shalom at the end of the book of Shemot in those glorious chapters when the people of Israel are working with one heart to construct a beautiful home for God, the Tabernacle, a dwelling place for God on earth.

So, the next logical question is, if we are making that final drive toward expressing our name, what is our name? What is our essence?

Obviously we each have **our individual names**, and so we are now in this winter season being empowered to better express our individuality for the sake of the kingdom.

Beyond that individual name, though, are names that we have in common that describe a COMMON essence. For the genetic descendants of Jacob, one of these names is “**Jew**.” Where does this name come from? I bring it up because it’s a direct connection to our last teaching about Joseph and Judah. The name “Jew” comes from “Yehudah,” “Judah;” the whole people end up being called by the name of the tribe of Judah. And to this day I hear Jews call each other a “Yid:” “When a Yid does this, when a Yid does that...”

The construction of the Torah portions here is one of those examples of the breathtaking poetry that only God can design: the Torah portion that begins the winter season, Vayigash, begins with the moment when Judah, one of the twelve, steps up to fulfill his essence as he draws near to Joseph and says, “Let Benjamin go; take me instead.” Judah fulfilling his essence is the first paragraph of the winter, the season in which we are all driving toward expressing our essence. Those words that Judah speaks to Joseph are a kind of seed for the season of the winter.

But whereas “Jew” refers specifically to the descendants of Jacob, there is an even broader name that includes even we who are grafted in, the name “**Israel**.” Gentiles are not called Jews. We who are grafted in are called by the name “Israel,” which is a description of a common essence for all of us in both of God’s flocks. It seems to be a strange description of essence, but there’s a profound truth here that should be encouraging and comforting to us.

As we have learned many times, “Israel” means “one who struggles with God.” The context of the giving of this name adds two more important ideas: the angel says to Jacob: “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28). So it’s not just a struggling with God, but also with MAN, and it is not just a struggle, but it is also a PREVAILING. It’s a struggling and prevailing with both God and man.

What is encouraging, though, about this name, “Israel”? To answer that, let me read from an article about the name “Israel” written by Rabbi Aron Moss.

“Here is the essence of Judaism: We do believe that goodness prevails, but the happy ending is not our focus. OUR FOCUS IS THE STRUGGLE TO GET THERE. Regardless of the result, the struggle itself is holy. If you strive for goodness, you’re in, even before you get there. If you’re trying to be better, even if you fall sometimes, you’re on the path. It’s all about the struggle.

“That’s why the Torah doesn’t speak about heaven. We believe in the afterlife, but we aren’t preoccupied with it. We focus our energy on the effort to be a good person, the struggle to do the right thing, the battle against our adversaries, both internal and external.

“Some religions seek serenity. Some spiritual paths promise peace. Others offer a place in heaven. Judaism embraces the struggle of the here and now. The victory will come. But for the

time being, we are here to grapple with G-d, debate with our fellow humans, and struggle with ourselves, never accepting that the world can't change, starting with me. That's Israel."

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5752241/jewish/What-Does-Israel-Mean.htm

Again, to repeat what R'Moss is saying, the name "Israel," which we can say is a description of both the Jew and the Gentile grafted in, means that our essence is not tied to reaching a certain point, a certain goal, which brings with it the pressure of, "What if I don't get there?" That kind of end goal is not our essence, at least for now. What is a better description of our essence is "anyone who gets into the game." We just have to keep walking with Him, contending with Him, and, by His grace, winning bit by bit. And this is why the Bible isn't particularly concerned with giving us a vivid description of heaven. A vivid description of heaven would only be a distraction from our essential mission here on earth, which is much more about the journey than anything else.

We should expect that the book of Exodus is going to help us this year learn to express even better our essence, both our essence as Israel and our personal name as well. In future lessons, we'll have more time to talk about these ideas and the fascinating pictures God is giving us through Egypt and the exodus process. For now, let's just take away from this introduction to the book of Exodus the idea that we are making a final movement toward expressing our core self now, at least for this cycle.

Yeshua

Let's apply some of today's discussion directly to Yeshua now. We've already talked about how paradox grows in this season and how Yeshua is the ultimate example of the kind of paradox we're talking about: lay down your life for God's sake, and He will give it back to you, only better. Lower yourself down, and He will raise you up, in the same way that Yeshua gave His life and then was raised up by God not only by means of resurrection, but also in being placed at God's right hand and by being given a Name that is above every other Name, that at the name of Yeshua, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let me speak to another idea, though, related to Yeshua. In terms of being able to see with both eyes in a balanced way, then act on that vision in a brave way, who is better at that than Yeshua? Yeshua certainly didn't see with rose-colored glasses, handing out praise and flattery wherever He went. Nor did He only rebuke. But He knew how to praise and comfort when that was needed, and He knew how to discipline and rebuke when that was necessary. He could look at the little children and see their great value and invite them to draw near to Him. He could look at Zacchaeus and see the good struggle happening inside of him and act on that vision to affirm him. He could see clearly when someone's faith was strong enough to open the doorway to healing and heal them. And He could see the corruption in the leadership of the time and speak against it.

And I think perhaps the biggest example of Yeshua's ability to see past the flesh and into the soul and spirit is His choice of apostles. What did others see in his apostles? Fishermen. A tax

collector. One called a Zealot, a political revolutionary. These were backwater bumpkins who were passed over by other rabbis, not chosen, not seen. But how did He call Nathaniel? He saw him standing under the fig tree, and He knew that he was an Israelite in whom there was no deceit. These were common men who mostly worked with their hands; so common that God doesn't even tell us what many of them did for a living. But Yeshua could see much more deeply, and He bravely acted on that balanced vision. He deeply invested in these men. He told them to leave their trades and follow Him. He spent hour after hour after hour with them. So, He not only saw, but He acted on what He saw, like Jacob does in giving his powerful but also painful blessings, the pruning of Israel.

Lastly here, let's make the point that Yeshua was fond of gardening and farming metaphors, including the important idea of pruning. Let me close this section with several verses of Yeshua's own words from John 15, which we may be able to spend more time with later. It's a section where Yeshua mentions several times the sending the Holy Spirit. And He says this: "I am the True Vine, and my Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." (John 15:1-4)

Here, Yeshua is saying that life comes by pruning. Some branches have to be completely cut away, while others are kept but still require pruning. If we stay in Him by keeping His commandments, we won't be cut away completely, but we will be pruned, and that will be for our good so that we can be fruitful. We can't escape that pruning, nor should we want to. Death is the doorway to life.

Joshua 6

Joshua 6 is the story of the fall of Jericho.

Lastly, let's make a quick connection to Joshua 6, the battle of Jericho. I want to hone in on God's command to Israel to use shofars as they do, with these men of war marching around for days as escorts for the priests blowing shofars. God doesn't do anything without each detail being deeply meaningful. We need to ask why He is directing Israel's fighting men to play second fiddle, as it were, to the priests with ram's horns walking in front of the Ark. In the end, it is the people acting like trumpets, shouting, that brings the walls down, and they are undermined for days by the priests blowing trumpets. What's going on here?

The shofar is a vessel for breath and wind. In Hebrew, the words "breath, wind, and SPIRIT" are all the same, "ruach." We can easily say, then, that the trumpet is a vessel for the flowing of the spirit, ruach. What God is telling Israel to do is to bring down the vast walls of this ancient city not by the power of their arms and swords, but with their breath, by the power of the Spirit.

It brings to mind the famous passage from Zechariah: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts" (Zec. 4:6).

This first battle sets the stage for all the battles to come in taking the Land. What is God saying here? He's saying that they won't defeat the Canaanites by their own might but by His Spirit working through them.

Let's take from this today the encouragement that as we enter into these last days, we WILL BE VICTORIOUS because His Spirit is in us. The challenge to see in balance and then act bravely like Jacob did, like Yeshua did, in such an egoless way – that's no small thing. Learning to express our name, our essence, is not an easy process. It's like battle. Submitting to the snipping off our own branches that are not producing fruit is tough. But we have His Spirit in us, and by the power of His Spirit, those walls against fruitfulness will come down, just as they did at Jericho.

The shofar is really a remarkably rich symbol, and it's one that deserves some meditation. Let's remember that on both of the altars that God designs – the big altar in the outer court and the golden altar of incense – there are four horns at the four corners. Clearly this is a central image for us that is rich with meaning.

In that vein, I have one last point here about the shofar, a point that follows from the discussion of death as the doorway to life. Because I think this important biblical symbol, the shofar, has within it the message that our true usefulness and power in this world only comes after we are put to death. Let me repeat that in different words: in the shofar, we can see that it is in surrender and death that we achieve our highest purpose here.

The horn is a symbol of strength. It is tough – unlike antlers that are shed each year, the horn is made of living bone surrounded by a hard outer covering. Again, horns are living tissue inside, which is different from antlers, and horns continue growing throughout the animal's lifetime. If we could maybe transpose a bit of human sensibility onto the animals, an animal's horns are a great source of pride. They can be used to attract a mate or defend a harem.

Thinking about this idea of the horns being a source of one's own strength and pride, recall that at the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, the ram is caught in a thicket by its horns. Each of these details is important. It is the ram's horns, its source of self pride and self strength that impede its progress on the earth. It gets stuck because of its pride, and this becomes a greater and greater danger for the animal the larger those horns grow.

Now think about what has to happen for that horn to become a shofar, the instrument that announces great events in world history, the instrument that is also worthy to hold the oil with which priests and kings are anointed. It's an exalted vessel. But what does it have to go through in order to be used in these ways? The animal has to be put to death and the stony life that was in it, that living bone, has to be emptied out. It's only then that, in the hands of the shepherd, the shofar is capable of serving in these exalted ways. It's a breathtaking picture, really.

I think one lesson we can learn from the shofar is that whatever we take great pride in is a kind of snare for us in life, but if we submit to death, God can take that source of pride, hollow it

out, and blow His Spirit through it, or fill it with the oil of His Spirit, using it as a vessel. There is great power in the sound of the shofar – it travels far and pierces us and stirs up something deep within us. And again, it's there when the priests and the kings are elevated to their positions.

The choice to place the shofar here at the center of the action in Joshua 6 says to Israel, "Death is the doorway to the flow of the Spirit of God through you, and in that flow is the real power to defeat your enemies, regardless of how solid and high their walls are.

Yeshua has much to say about sending the Spirit to us. When He removes Himself from earth, He sends the Spirit. I suspect that we are heading now into a portion of the calendar where the voice of the Spirit is increasing for us. Let's be listening for the sound of the shofar in these days. We know that the shofar has a role at the end of days, and the end of the calendar each year teaches us about the end of days.

I'll make one last point here today. It's thought that the name "Jericho" actually comes from the word "ruach," the same word for "spirit" that we've been talking about. So, Israel is attacking a spiritual enemy with a spiritual weapon. So, this is a reminder to us that our battle, in the end, is a spiritual battle. Although there are times when it would seem everything is physical, including our enemies and our battles, don't be fooled. The physical will follow along with the spiritual progress.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you so much for listening. May we be people of balanced vision who are brave to act upon what we see. And may He make us into the people He wants us to be. Shalom.