PARSHA, PARSHA: SNAPSHOT

Vayechi: Snapshot

March 9, 2026

"Jacob lived in the Land of Egypt for seventeen years." In these last years, Jacob finally *lived* – free from the suffering that plagued him throughout his life: the wrath of Esau, the treachery of Laban, the untimely passing of Rachel and the tribulations of Dinah and Joseph.

An aging Jacob summons Joseph and asks him swear that he will see to Jacob's burial in the Holy Land. When Jacob subsequently takes ill, Joseph again comes to visit, this time with his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Born before Joseph's reunion with his family and raised in the depraved Egypt, Ephraim and Manasseh have nevertheless proven to be worthy descendants of Jacob's spiritual family.

Jacob announces that one of his twelve sons is destined to be the father of not one but two tribes; he bequeaths that gift to Joseph, pronouncing Manasseh and Ephraim each the father of a tribe, on equal footing with Jacob's own sons. [Nevertheless, the number of tribes remains twelve, since the descendants of Jacob's son Levi are not counted as a regular tribe, having a special status as priests and servants in the Holy Temple.]

Jacob tells Manasseh and Ephraim, "Israel shall bless (their children) through you, saying 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" [This traditional blessing is still recited today.] By mentioning Ephraim before Manasseh, Jacob has reversed the birth order; Jacob

also crosses his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh's. A surprised Joseph tries to correct his father, but Jacob insists that his prophetic insight shows that Ephraim's destiny will surpass Manasseh's: he will be the ancestor of Joshua, teacher of Israel and the one who will lead them into the Promised Land.

Jacob gathers his twelve sons and says he will foretell what will befall them at the End of Days. But he never does – his gift of prophecy departs, since G-d does not wish these secrets to be revealed at this time. Instead, Jacob blesses his sons, offering a unique message to each. The first three sons actually receive a harsh rebuke for personal shortcomings; nevertheless, tradition teaches that all were men of unsurpassed righteousness, and each received a blessing in the end.

Jacob passes away. Keeping his promise, Joseph, together with all his brothers, bears the body to Canaan, accompanied by an impressive retinue of Egyptian dignitaries paying their respects. Years later, Joseph himself passes away; he, however, is buried in Egypt. It will be many, many years before his bones return to the Holy Land.

This concludes the Book of Berieshis – Genesis, first of the Five Books of Moses.

Chazak Chazak VeNischazeik!