בס"ד

3 JANUARY 2026 | 14 TEVET 5786

VOLUME 39 | #17

DAF HASHAVUA

וַיְחִי | VAYECHI

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 4.58pm
Birmingham: 4.06pm
Bournemouth: 5.12pm
Cardiff: 5.15pm
Dublin: 5.16pm
Edinburgh: 4.54pm
Glasgow: 5.00pm
Hull: 4.57pm
Leeds: 4.55pm
Liverpool: 5.07pm
Manchester: 5.01pm
Nottingham: 5.02pm
Sheffield: 5.02pm
Southend: 4.54pm
Southport: 5.07pm
Jerusalem: 5.28pm

"Israel extended his right hand and rested it on Ephraim's head, even though he was the younger son, and rested his left hand on Menashe's head. He crossed his hands, even though Menashe was the firstborn." ***(Bereishit 48:14)***

The United Synagogue

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

וַיְחִי
VAYECHI

12th Sidra in:
בְּרֵאשִׁית
BEREISHIT

By Numbers:
85 VERSES
1,158 WORDS
4,448 LETTERS

Headlines:
THE FINAL YEARS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH

VAYECHI:
Artscroll p.268
Hertz p.180
Koren Sacks p.323
Soncino p.296

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1145
Hertz p.191
Koren Sacks p.1451
Soncino p.315

SIDRA SUMMARY

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – BEREISHIT 47:28-48:9
Yaakov (Jacob) has been in Egypt for 17 years and is 147 years old. Knowing that he will soon die, he asks Yosef (Joseph) to take an oath to bury him in Cana'an (later Israel) in *Me'arat Hamachpela* (the Cave of the Patriarchs) where his forefathers are buried. Yosef promises. Yaakov becomes ill and Yosef visits him, together with sons Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov tells Yosef that these two grandsons will be like the other tribes and will receive their own portion of the Land.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 48:10-16
Yaakov's sight is failing. Yosef places his younger son Ephraim to Yaakov's left and his older son Menashe to Yaakov's right. However, Yaakov crosses his arms, putting his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head. He blesses them with his hands in this position.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 48:17-22
Yosef tries to switch Yaakov's hands back but Yaakov resists. He tells Yosef that Menashe will be great, but Ephraim will be greater still. Yaakov tells Yosef that God will eventually bring the people back to Cana'an.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 49:1-18
Yaakov gathers together his sons to deliver a final message to them. Following Rashi's commentary: Reuven is criticised for behaving impulsively; Shimon and Levi are criticised for aggression; Yehuda (Judah) is given a leadership role; Zevulun will be successful as a sea merchant; Yissachar will bear the 'yoke' of Torah learning and Dan will be as great as Yehuda.

Point to Consider: *Why did Yaakov pray for God's help whilst blessing Dan? (see Rashi to 49:18)*

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 49:19-27
The tribe of Gad's battalions will fight wars successfully. Asher will receive a fertile portion of land and prosper, as will Naftali. Yaakov praises Yosef for overcoming his many challenges.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 49:28-50:20
Yaakov hints that King Shaul (Saul), Mordechai and Esther will descend from Binyamin. Yaakov reiterates his burial instructions to his children and then dies. Yosef falls on his dead father in tears. Yosef instructs doctors to embalm Yaakov. This process takes 40 days, followed by 30 days of the Egyptians mourning Yaakov's death (Rashi). Yosef asks for permission from Pharaoh to bury his father in Cana'an. Pharaoh grants permission and sends a large entourage to accompany Yosef and his relatives. The brothers observe seven days of mourning (shiva). Yaakov's sons bury him in *Me'arat Hamachpela*. Yosef reassures his anxious brothers that he is still at peace with them.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 50:21-26
Yosef commits to providing food for his brothers and their families. He makes them take an oath to take his bones out of Egypt when the nation eventually leaves. Yosef dies, aged 110. He is embalmed and placed in a coffin. This concludes the Book of Bereishit.

HAFTARAH
King David, about to die, entreats his son and successor Shlomo (Solomon) to stay faithful to the ways of the Torah. His final request is for Shlomo to make sure to punish Yoav and Shimi Ben Gera for their rebellious behaviour.

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COVENANT AND CONVERSATION

ON NOT PREDICTING THE FUTURE

This essay is an abridged version of Rabbi Sacks' 2010 Covenant & Conversation essay, marking the recent 5th yahrzeit of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l. Learn more from Rabbi Sacks at www.rabbisacks.org

Yaakov (Jacob) was on his deathbed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died. But the text begins with a strange verse:

Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Yaakov; listen to your father Yisrael. (Bereishit 49:1–2)

This seems to be saying the same thing twice, but with one difference. In the first sentence, there is a reference to "what will happen to you in the days to come" (literally, "at the end of days"). This is missing from the second sentence.

Rashi (1040-1105), following the Talmud, says that "Yaakov wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine Presence was removed from him." He tried to foresee the future but found he could not.

This is no minor detail. It is a key feature of Jewish spirituality. We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We make the future by our choices. The script has not yet been written. The future is radically open.

A prophet delivers not a prediction but a warning. They do not simply say, "This will happen," but rather, "This will happen unless you change." The prophet speaks to human freedom, not to the inevitability of fate.

Why? Because we are free. We choose, we make mistakes, we learn, we change, we grow. A failure at school can become the winner of a Nobel Prize. The leader who lacks ability can suddenly show courage and wisdom in a crisis. The businessperson who strives to make millions could decide to devote their life to helping the poor. Some of the most successful people I ever met were written off by their teachers at school and told they would never amount to anything. We constantly defy predictions. This is something science has not yet explained, and perhaps never will.

Some believe freedom is an illusion. But it isn't. It's what makes us human. We are free because we are not merely objects. We are subjects. We respond not just to physical events but to the way we perceive those events. We have minds, not just brains. We have thoughts, not just sensations. We react but we can also choose not to react. There is something about us that is irreducible to material, physical causes and effects.

Do not believe that the future is written. It isn't. There is no fate we cannot change, no prediction we cannot defy. We are not predestined to fail; neither are we pre-ordained to succeed. We do not predict the future, because we make the future – by our choices, our willpower, our persistence, and our determination to survive.

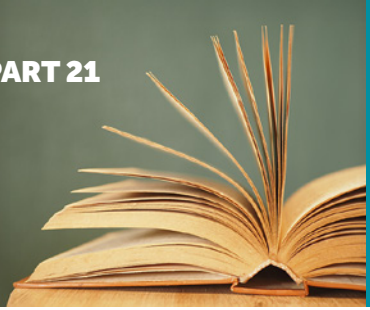
That is why, when Yaakov wanted to tell his children what would happen to them in the future, the Divine Spirit was taken away from him. Children continue to surprise their parents. We were each made in the image of God, and we are each free. With God's blessings, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

In loving memory of Yisrael Shmuel ben Yirmiya Yehoshua z"l

BRINGING GOD INTO THE ROOM: **PART 21**

"CAN YOU BLESS ME?"

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**
US Education



There's a scene in *Parashat Vayechi* that plays out in countless Jewish homes every Friday night. As Jacob nears the end of his life, he prepares to bless his children, but not without hesitation. He looks at Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Menashe, and asks, *"Who are these?"* (Bereishit 48:8). Rabbeinu Bachya (13th century) explains that Jacob wasn't simply asking for names—he was asking about their essence. Do they qualify for a *beracha* (blessing)? Are they part of the spiritual legacy he hopes to pass on?

Joseph's response is poignant: "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." Rashi (11th century) explains that Joseph even showed Jacob his *ketuba*, his marriage contract, affirming that his family, though raised in Egypt, remained rooted in Jewish faith and values.

Reassured, Jacob places his hands on their heads and offers them a blessing that echoes through generations; that all of Israel will bless their children to be like them:

"Yesimcha Elohim keEphraim v'chiMenashe."

"May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe"(48:20).

This phrase has become the cornerstone of parental blessings on Friday nights—a ritual that continues to shape Jewish identity in quiet, powerful ways.

In September, Barnaby Nemko, Director of Community Life at the United Synagogue, shared a story that brought this tradition to life. "When saying goodbye to our son who was off to study in Israel for the year, I was not really that choked up at losing my Xbox buddy. After all, there were so many parents also saying goodbye to their children at Heathrow and the atmosphere was one of excitement not reflection. And then...as his bag had been checked-in and the walk through Duty Free beckoned, he turned to my wife and me and said, "Can you bless me?"

Barnaby recalled, "We just about held back the tears, until we got to the car. Driving back to my house, I thought about what a deep moment that had been. We have always blessed our children on a Friday Night as part of our family ritual, but I never thought this had made such a deep impression on him or on us... but it had."

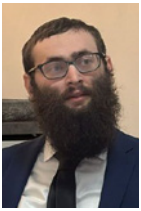
He then reflected:

"Friday Night Dinner is such an important part of our culture and identity, but can we find ways to bring more meaning to our chicken soup? It is clear to me that when our son phones us to be blessed every Friday, that a two-line blessing recited in Hebrew and English by both his parents is one such opportunity—a moment we can all grab hold of."

> **"It's a hope that our children will walk the path of tradition, remain strong in the face of adversity, and maintain their Jewish identity even when surrounded by outside influences, just as Ephraim and Menashe did.**

His story made me pause, not just to consider the impact on children, but also on parents. I bless my children each week, and I also visit my own parents every Friday. In recent months, my mother, unfortunately, speaks much less than she used to. But as I get up to leave and wish her *Good Shabbos*, she instinctively reaches out, places her hands on my head, and gives me the same blessing she's given me every week of my life.

That same hope that Jacob expressed has been repeated and handed down across generations. It's a hope that our children will walk the path of tradition, remain strong in the face of adversity, and maintain their Jewish identity even when surrounded by outside influences, just as Ephraim and Menashe did.



MAIMONIDES

BY: **RABBI MENDEL HURWITZ**
Enfield and Winchmore Hill Synagogue

On Friday 9 January, the 20th of Tevet, we mark the *yahrzeit* (anniversary of passing) of the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1138–1204), also known as Maimonides. A brilliant and wide-ranging scholar, Maimonides is admired in many different circles for many different reasons.

He believed that a person should live a balanced life: have an occupation, maintain good health, and study science, Torah and philosophy — including metaphysics, the branch of thought that explores fundamental questions such as what it means to exist and to know. Perhaps it was this sense of balance that made the Rambam so universally respected.

Being 'Complete'

In his writings, Maimonides often uses the term *shalem* — meaning 'complete' or 'perfect.' To be 'complete' is to have fully developed a quality or skill. For example, someone who paints well is not yet a 'complete' artist if they still have much to learn or improve. True completion means having reached a level of mastery where nothing essential is lacking.

In the final chapter of *Moreh Nevuchim* (The Guide for the Perplexed), Maimonides describes four areas of self-development:

1. Subjective materialism – personal needs such as attaining a livelihood.
2. Objective materialism – physical strength and health.
3. Subjective spiritualism – moral character and behaviour towards others.
4. Objective spiritualism – intellectual development and understanding.

Diversity

The fourth area — intellectual development and understanding — is, according to Maimonides, the highest form of completion. He even suggests that humanity's purpose is to discover the truths of this world for themselves.

Still, he considered the study of *Halacha* (Jewish law) essential and encouraged communities not to neglect it.

The Complete Man and His Legacy

Maimonides embodied this ideal of balance. He authored monumental halachic works — most famously the *Mishneh Torah* — as well as the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, responsa and a commentary on the *Mishnah*. He was also a renowned physician and philosopher, writing *Moreh Nevuchim* and numerous letters and essays.

Over time, different groups have focused on various aspects of his legacy. Some philosophers drew on his rationalist ideas but often overlooked his halachic scholarship, while later Talmudic scholars, such as Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918), focused on analysing his legal works in great depth.

Perhaps it is this richness across so many disciplines that makes Maimonides so widely admired — a figure quoted with equal enthusiasm by both philosophers and students of Jewish law.

A Possible Lesson

Today, specialists tend to remain within their own fields. A philosopher rarely teaches physics, and a physicist rarely teaches philosophy. Maimonides reminds us of the value of intellectual diversity — of striving to learn across disciplines.

Many of us develop strong, focused interests, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else. But perhaps, in honour of the Rambam's *yahrzeit*, taking even a small step towards a more rounded understanding of the world is a meaningful way to follow his example.

SEFER YESHAYAHU (ISAIAH) - PART 4

ACHAZ AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

BY: **PNINA SAVERY**
Ma'ayan and US Educator

After King Uzziah's death[1], his son Yotam becomes King of the southern kingdom of Yehuda (Judah). Not much is known about Yotam, although he is praised as a good king in many midrashic sources. Interestingly, Yeshayahu (Isaiah) remains silent during his reign. This implies that the prophet is pleased with the people.

Yotam's son, Achaz, inherits the great kingdom of his grandfather Uzziah. However, things quickly unravel. Assyria – a mighty enemy - is threatening all the nations in the area. The northern kingdom of Yisrael and Aram create an alliance to combat the Assyrian empire. They do not respond well when Achaz refuses to bring the kingdom of Yehuda into their alliance. They attack, killing many and capturing even more.[2] At the same time, Aram and Edom take over Eilat as well as other parts of the south. To make matters worse, the Philistines encroach into Yehuda's territory from the west. Achaz's nation has been struck with a massive blow.

It is in this context that Yeshayahu returns to his role as a national prophet. The king of Yehuda is terrified, severely weakened and may even be facing annihilation. Yeshayahu approaches the king with a strong message of comfort (see Chapter 7). He tells the king to "take care and be silent" (Yeshayahu 7:4). The king should not interfere at all with the turbulent political events surrounding him. In an attempt to reassure Achaz, Yeshayahu tells him that the kings of Aram and Yisrael, the biggest danger he was facing, were merely "two smoking stubs of firebrand" about to be extinguished (ibid).

Through the births of his own children, the prophet reinforces his prophetic message. The two brothers Emmanuel (meaning God is with us) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (meaning quick to plunder, swift to spoil) were born close together. Yeshayahu states that by the time the older one can distinguish between good and evil, and the younger one can say "mother" and "father", the kings of Yisrael and Aram will be overthrown (Yeshayahu 7:14:-16 and 8:3-4). The message is clear. Within a few years, the enemies will be defeated, and Yehuda will be safe. Therefore, Achaz should wait and do nothing.

The king is surrounded by opposing factions: those who want to join with Yisrael and Aram in their anti-Assyrian alliance and those who want to submit to Assyria for protection. The advice to do nothing while his kingdom is in grave danger is a very difficult message for a king to accept. Yeshayahu tries to encourage him with the message that the enemies will be gone within the same generation. The prophet is focusing on the future, but the king is stuck in the dismal present.

Unfortunately, Achaz is unable to withstand the pressures and submits to Assyria, inviting them in under the guise of protection.[3]

"The prophet is focusing on the future, but the king is stuck in the dismal present. Unfortunately, Achaz is unable to withstand the pressures and submits to Assyria, inviting them in under the guise of protection.[3]

[1] According to *Divrei HaYamim* (Chronicles), Uzziah is stricken with leprosy towards the end of his life. His son Yotam takes over as king, even while his father is still alive. See our article from *Sefer Melachim,* Chapter 15.

[2] According to the numbers in *Divrei HaYamim Bet* (Chronicles II), Chapter 28, 120,000 men are killed and 200,000 are captured.

[3] See *Melachim Bet* (Kings II), Chapter 16.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT VAYECHI 2-3 JANUARY | 14 TEVET

TESTING THE "TAP ON THE SHOULDER"

BY: **THE TRIBE TEAM**

Vayechi turns from drama to discernment. How do you test a moment that feels like a "tap on the shoulder"? Joseph's path offers three simple filters.

First, restraint. Joseph's early dreams were true, yet his early telling of them damaged relationships. Truth needs timing and tact. If your insight pushes you to show off, pause.

Second, results. Joseph's later interpretations serve the common good. They save lives and stabilise a region. A nudge that makes you kinder, more patient, more ready to shoulder responsibility is more likely to be from God. If it inflates status or diminishes others, treat it with scepticism.

Third, pattern. Vayechi invites a backward glance. Where do you see threads of Divine providence in your story: a setback that became a teacher, a closed door that redirected you to better work, a person who arrived at the right time? Gratitude and attention often reveal meaning without superstition. We are learners, not fortune-tellers.

Finally, bless the future. Jacob gathers his children and blesses them. We can do the same by mentoring, encouraging and standing up for others. Teen or adult, choose someone and be their blessing this week.

The book closes with a quiet confidence: "God will surely remember you." Live as if that is true. Listen carefully, test humbly, act generously.

Parasha Wordsearch

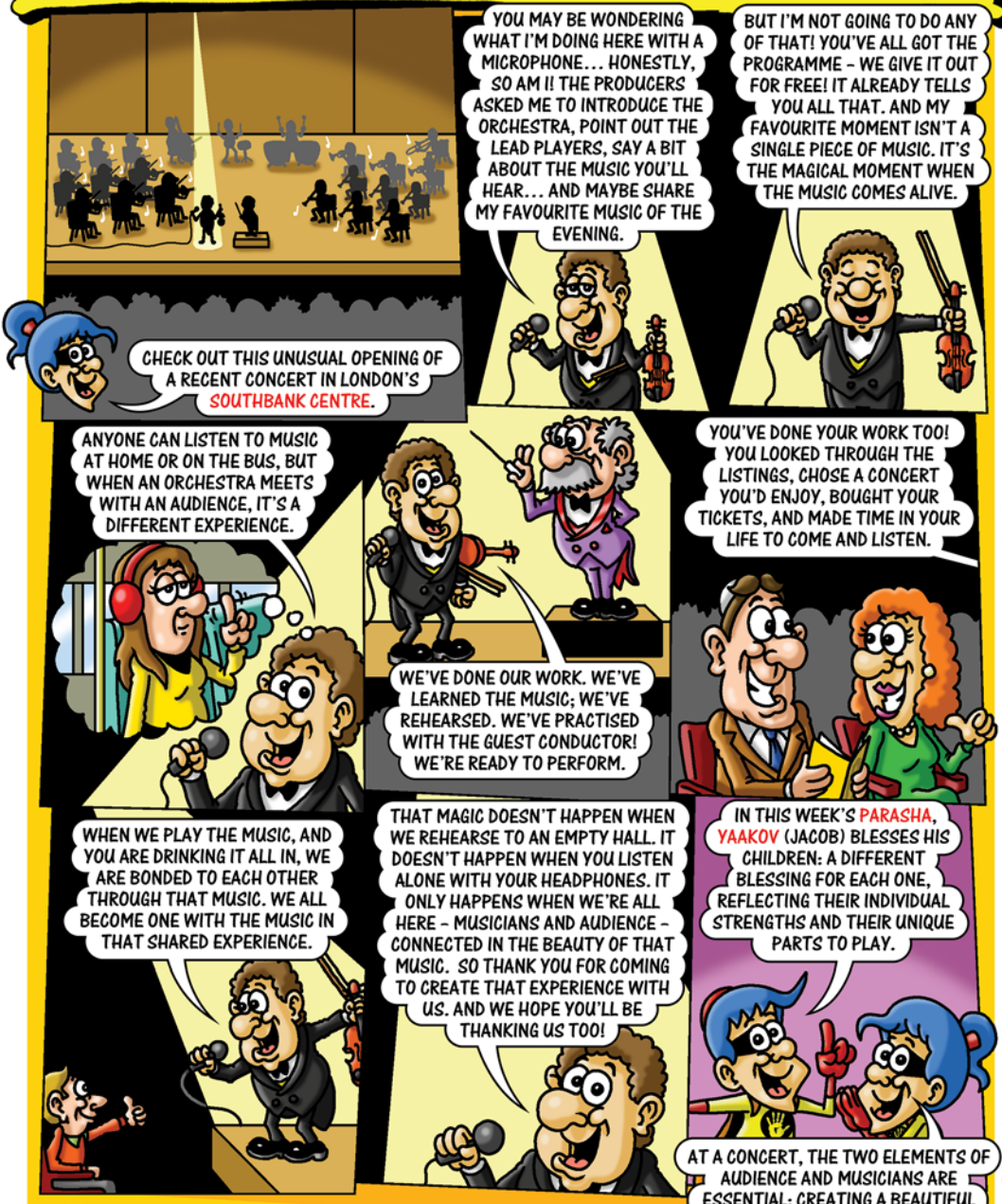
Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

M	C	G	P	F	N	A	D	E	Y	R	D	C
J	G	E	D	R	E	A	D	X	M	N	C	L
H	T	P	G	Y	E	S	A	Z	E	X	T	R
S	M	I	Q	P	N	O	O	N	N	D	R	S
H	A	K	P	I	H	C	E	Y	A	V	I	X
I	L	E	V	I	K	K	I	Y	S	C	B	D
M	F	M	I	A	R	H	P	E	H	G	E	N
O	J	C	S	H	A	D	U	H	E	Y	S	N
N	O	I	H	M	V	Q	G	B	Y	Z	T	E
G	C	O	V	E	N	A	N	T	X	Y	S	H
W	Y	P	J	N	D	T	D	F	K	A	U	R
H	D	P	S	D	I	M	T	A	E	A	W	H
T	C	E	P	S	E	R	F	O	L	P	H	R

VAYECHI
EYGPT
EPHRAIM
MENASHE
YEHUDAH
SHIMON
COVENANT
DAN
YOSEF
CANAAN
TRIBES
LEVI

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

VAYECHI: PLAY YOUR PART!



Page Editor: Rabbi Nicky Goldmeier Writer: Shira Chalk Cartoonist: Paul Solomons

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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.