



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Vayechi | Sichah 1

The Midrash and Rashi:

Tradition mandates that each *parshah* in the Torah scroll is to be separated from the preceding *parshah* with a blank space. *Parshas Vayechi*, however, has no blank space preceding it. This is called “a closed *parshah*.” Our Sages took note of this anomaly and explained it in the following manner:

“Of all the *parshiyos* in the Torah, why is this *parshah* closed? Because after Yaakov died, the Egyptians began to enslave Israel. Alternatively, it was because Yaakov sought to disclose when the End of the Exile would occur, but the matter was closed to him. Alternatively, it was because all the world’s misfortunes were closed off to him [i.e., after settling in Egypt, Yaakov enjoyed relative tranquility].”

In his commentary, however, Rashi only cites the first two explanations and omits the third.

The Question:

It is strange that Rashi intentionally omitted the one explanation that sees the closed *parshah* as alluding to a positive development. The “closed” space puts the first verse of the *parshah*, “Yaakov lived,” in direct proximity to the conclusion of *parshas Vayigash*, which describes the affluence and growth of Yaakov’s family, “they were fruitful and multiplied greatly.” (*Bereishis*, 47:27) By omitting the space between these *parshiyos*, the Torah seems to imply that “Yaakov lived” is a direct continuation of the clause, “they were fruitful,” leading to the third explanation of the *Midrash*,

“the world’s misfortunes were closed off to him.” Why, then, does Rashi only cite the first two, negative explanations?

The Explanation:

Commentaries note that according to the first two explanations, the “closure” should have occurred later in the *parshah*, in the section pertaining to Yaakov’s death, or to his forgetting of the “End of Exile.” Yet the “closure” was made at the beginning of the *parshah* because that is where it would be most noticeable, due to the fact that, usually, the space between *parshahs* are larger than the space between sections within a single *parshah*.

Thus, the closure really did belong later in the *parshah*, yet it was made at the beginning only in order for it to be blatant enough to make a point. Because the bulk of the *parshah* after the first verse deals with Yaakov’s passing and the onset of the Jews’ enslavement, Rashi cited the first two explanations that view the closure as alluding to these negative events.

Yaakov’s Life:

Since the *parshah* focuses on Yaakov’s death, why does it open with the verse “Yaakov lived,” which alludes to the best years of his life? This verse should have been the conclusion of *Vayigash*, which deals with the success and growth of Yaakov’s family in Egypt. Instead, the *parshah* of his demise is called “[Yaakov] Lived.”

True, eternal life only applies to G-d. Every other living thing is contingent on G-d, and has an “expiration date.” The Jewish people are called “living” when they are connected to G-d, the source of life. When we cleave to G-d through Torah and *mitzvos*, we partake of His eternality. But this “life” and connection with G-d is expressed most deeply in the face of challenges and setbacks. When we remain strong in our connection with G-d despite challenges to our commitment, our spiritual “life” is revealed to be indestructible and deeply rooted within us.

Thus, Yaakov's "life" — his relationship with G-d — is revealed when his children remain committed to his ideals and to G-d's will and desire, despite the concealment that encroaches at the end of his life..

This is a deeper reason why Rashi cites only the two negative explanations of the closed *parshah*:

This highlights the theme of the *parshah* that Yaakov's life is cast into relief specifically against the backdrop of his death and the concealment of the End of Exile. At the moment when Yaakov passes and his clear perception of the Divine fades, we know that Yaakov is more alive than ever, for his children are alive.