

## Parshat Vayigash - From Breishit to Shmot

(To prepare for this shiur,  
see the [questions for self study](#).)

When Yaakov and family depart for Egypt, are they planning "yerida?" In other words, do they intend to make Egypt their permanent home, or are they planning just a 'short visit?'

While answering this question, this week's shiur lays the groundwork for our study of the transition of theme from Sefer Breishit to Sefer Shmot.

### Introduction/Review

In our shiurim on Sefer Breishit thus far, we have paid special attention to each "hitgalut," each time God spoke to the Avot regarding their progeny. We have shown how the primary theme of Sefer Breishit - "bechira" - develops with each "hitgalut." Therefore, we should expect to find special significance in the final "hitgalut" in Sefer Breishit - God's revelation to Yaakov as he departs to Egypt to see Yosef.

We begin this week's shiur with a careful examination of the events preceding this "hitgalut."

### Everyone has a Plan

As soon as Yaakov hears that Yosef is still alive, he immediately decides to go visit him:

"And Yisrael said, 'My son Yosef is still alive, I must go and see him before I die.'" ([see 45:28](#))

Does Yaakov plan to return immediately to Eretz Canaan after this visit? Is there any reason that he shouldn't?

It's not quite clear what Yaakov's original intentions may have been, but Yosef (as usual) already has detailed plans, of which he had informed his brothers:

"Quickly go up to my father and tell him, thus says your son Yosef: God has made me master over all of Egypt. Come down to me, do not stay [in Canaan]; for you should dwell in the land of Goshen to be near me, you and your children... And I will provide for you there, for **another five years of famine** still remain, lest you **perish**, you and your entire household..." ([45:9-11](#))

Clearly, Yosef intends for his family to stay for more than just a 'long weekend.' On the other hand, he is not inviting them to make Egypt their permanent home, either. He wants the family to come to Egypt specifically "because **five** years of famine still remain!" What will happen once the famine is over and economic conditions in Canaan improve? Most likely, Yaakov and his family plan to (and should) return to their homeland.

God, however, has a different plan, which He reveals to Yaakov before his departure from Eretz Canaan. To better appreciate God's plan, we must first trace Yaakov's trip from Chevron to Egypt:

"And Yisrael travelled with all that was his, and came to **Beer Sheva**, and he offered '**zevachim**' (sacrifices, peace offerings) to the God of his father **Yitzchak**." ([46:1](#))

When studying this pasuk, several questions arise:

- a) Why does Yaakov stop specifically at **Beer Sheva**? In fact, why does he stop at all?
- b) Why does he offer these zevachim specifically to the "God of his father **Yitzchak**?" Is He not the God of Avraham as well?  
[See [32:10](#) where Yaakov, in a similar situation, prays to the God of both Avraham **and** Yitzchak!]
- c) Why does he find it necessary at this time to offer korbanot? And why specifically **zevachim**?
- d) Why is Yaakov's new name - Yisrael - used in this pasuk?

To answer these questions, we must first consider Yaakov's concerns at this point in time.

[From God's response to Yaakov in the psukim that follow - "Don't worry..." ([see 46:1-3](#)) - we can infer that something certainly troubled Yaakov.]

Most probably, Yaakov is worried because he is leaving Eretz Canaan. Recall that his father Yitzchak, even in times of famine, was not permitted to leave the land:

"And there was a famine in the Land ... and God appeared to him (Yitzchak) and said to him: Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the Land that I show you..." ([see 26:1-3](#))

In that very same "hitgalut" to Yitzchak, God even explained the reason that he could not leave - because he was the 'chosen' son of Avraham Avinu: "Reside in this Land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and your offspring I have given these Lands, and I will fulfill the **oath** which I have sworn to Avraham..." ([26:3-4](#))

Although Avraham himself was permitted to leave the Land during a famine, Yitzchak, his **chosen** son, was required to stay in the Land.

Understandably, then, Yaakov had reason for concern prior to his settlement in Egypt. Although he had once received permission to leave Eretz Canaan (in Parshat Vayetze; [see 28:10-20](#)), his situation then was quite different, as he faced immediate, life-threatening danger ([see 27:41-43](#)). And even then, Yaakov still needed divine reassurance that **although** he was leaving Eretz Canaan, God would continue to look after him and **bring him back**:

"And behold I will be with you and take care of you on your journey, and I will **bring you back to this land...**" ([28:15](#))

[Note that on that first journey from Eretz Canaan, Yaakov also left specifically from **Beer Sheva** ([see 28:10](#))!]

Now, in Parshat Vayigash, Yaakov's situation is a bit different. Survival in Eretz Canaan, however difficult, is still possible, as food could be imported from Egypt. Furthermore, if it was so important for Yosef to see his father, why couldn't he come to Eretz Canaan? Is it absolutely necessary for Yaakov to resettle his entire family in Egypt at this time?

Unquestionably, Yaakov has what to worry about.

### **Applying for an Exit Visa**

We can thus assume that Yaakov fears that his departure to Egypt may be against God's will or possibly even a threat to his "bechira." Therefore, Yaakov first stops in Beer Sheva to pray - to 'ask permission' to leave Eretz Canaan.

Now, to complete our answer to question (a), we must explain why he stops specifically at Beer Sheva. The commentators offer several explanations:

- ◆ [Rashbam \(46:1\)](#) explains that Beer Sheva was the site of Yitchak's place of prayer. [[See 26:25](#), where Yitzchak builds a mizbayach in Beer Sheva. Note also that God offers reassurance at that site - [see 26:24](#)!]
- ◆ [Ramban \(46:1\)](#) adds to Rashbam's explanation that Yaakov chooses Beer Sheva to parallel his first excursion outside Eretz Canaan (from Beer Sheva to Charan - [see 28:10](#)).
- ◆ [Radak](#) considers Beer Sheva the 'official' southern border of Eretz Canaan, and therefore, the appropriate site for Yaakov to 'apply for an exit visa.'

[See also [Chizkuni](#) (like Rashbam).]

Although each commentator quotes different sources to explain why specifically Beer Sheva is chosen, all agree that Yaakov is indeed worried about his departure from Eretz Canaan.

This very same concern of Yaakov answers question **(b)**, as well. Yaakov prays specifically to the God of **Yitzchak** because when Yitzchak faced a similar situation, God did **not** allow him to leave Eretz Canaan. It is Yaakov's hope that despite this precedent, God will permit him to leave. [See [Radak](#) and [Seforno](#).]

[Note that [Ramban](#) offers a different approach (based on what he calls "sod"). Ramban explains that Yaakov recognizes that his departure to Egypt marks the beginning of the long historical process of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Realizing that this process may entail terrible suffering of "midat ha'din," Yaakov prays specifically to "pachad Yitzchak," the manifestation of God's providence through "midat ha'din," in hope that his children will suffer as little as possible.]

### **The First 'Zevach'**

With this background, we return to our third question **(c)**: why does Yaakov offer specifically "zevachim?"

Significantly, this is the **first** explicit mention in Chumash of a "zevach"-offering to God. As [Ramban \(on 46:1\)](#) points out, until this time, the children of Noach (and Avraham as well) only offered "olot."

[The technical difference between an "olah" and "zevach" is quite simple. In Sefer Vayikra we learn that an "olah" is entirely consumed by the flame of the mizbayach (chapter 1). In contrast, the meat of a "zevach" - alternately referred to as a "shlamim" (see [Vayikra 3:1, 7:11](#)) - is eaten by the owner, while only a small portion is offered on the mizbayach. Conceptually, its name "shlamim" implies a certain "shlaymut" - fullness or completeness, that this voluntary offering can express a feeling of 'completeness' in one's relationship with God. Although it is unclear if at this time Yaakov actually ate these "zevachim," it is significant that the Torah refers to them with the term, "zevach."]

There are three other seminal events in Chumash where specifically "zevachim" are offered:

- 1) The **Korban Pesach** (at Yetziat Mitzrayim)
- 2) Brit **Na'ase V'nishma** (at Ma'amad har Sinai)
- 3) **Yom ha'Shmini** (the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan)

At first glance, these three examples appear to involve joyous and festive occasions, quite the opposite of Yaakov's current situation (worrying about leaving Eretz Canaan). However, if we look a little more closely, all three share a 'common denominator,' which can help us appreciate Yaakov's offering of "zevachim" at this time. Note how each event marks the **completion** of an important process:

1) The **Korban Pesach**, called a "**zevach** pesach l'Hashem" ([see Shmot 12:27](#)) marks the **completion** of the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim. [See [Shmot 11:1-12:14](#). Note also that Chazal include Korban Pesach under the general category of "shlamim."]

2) At Ma'amad Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael offer special "zevachim" as part of the ceremony where they accept the mitzvot:

"Moshe wrote down God's commandments, and then, early in the morning, he set up a mizbayach ... and they offered **zevachim, shlamim** to God..." ([Shmot 24:4-5](#))

Here we find the **completion** and fulfillment of the ultimate purpose of Yetziat Mitzrayim - Bnei Yisrael's readiness to accept God's commandments.

3) On **Yom ha'Shmini**, upon the **completion** of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael offer a special korban "shlamim":

"And behold on the 8th day, Moshe called Aharon [to offer special korbanot] ... and an ox and a ram for a **shlamim - lizboach** - to offer..." ([see Vayikra 9:1-4](#))

As the name "shlamim" implies ["shaleym" = complete], a **zevach shlamim** usually signifies the completion of an important process. But, returning to our issue, what process is being completed when Yaakov goes down to Egypt? Why does Yaakov offer davka **zevachim**?

One could suggest that Yaakov's offering of "zevachim" points us in very different direction. However anxious (and fearful) Yaakov might be prior to his journey to Egypt, he is also very **thankful** that Yosef is indeed alive and that he has the opportunity to visit him. These "zevachim" may very well be a "korban **todah**," a **thanksgiving** offering! [Note that the "korban **todah**" is also a category of "shelamim" ([see Vayikra 7:11-12](#)).]

Before he departs upon his journey to Egypt, Yaakov **thanks** God for re-uniting his family. He therefore offers **zevachim** in Beer Sheva, the site of the **mizbayach** upon which his father Yitzchak had offered korbanot ([see 26:25](#) and [Rashbam 46:1](#)).

Furthermore, considering that the purpose of Yaakov's descent to Egypt is not only to visit Yosef, but also to **re-unite** his twelve sons, this journey could also be considered the **completion** of the "bechira" process. Without Yosef, the "bechira" process was not complete, for a very important "shevet" (tribe) was missing. Now, by offering "zevachim," Yaakov thanks God for re-uniting the family and **completing** the "bechira" process.

We could even take this idea one step further and suggest that while Yaakov asks for Divine permission to leave Eretz Canaan, he offers "zevachim" to explain **why** he is leaving - **in order** to unite the twelve tribes and thereby complete the "bechira" process.

This answer to our third question answers our fourth question (**d**), as well: why does the Torah use Yaakov's special name of **Yisrael**?

As we explained in our [shiur on Parshat Vayishlach](#), the name **Yisrael** reflects God's choice of Yaakov as the **final** stage of the "bechira" process. In other words, as opposed to previous generations where only one son was chosen, **all** of Yaakov's children have been chosen to become God's special nation. Now, as Yaakov descends to Egypt to re-unite his twelve sons, it is only appropriate that the Torah use the name **Yisrael**.

### **The End and the Beginning**

Even though Yaakov's "zevachim" may be a thanksgiving offering, he is still be worried about the implications of his departure from Eretz Canaan.

However, God's response to Yaakov's offering adds an entirely new dimension to this departure, a dimension that most likely catches Yaakov totally by surprise:

"Then God spoke to **Yisrael** ... Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there a **great nation**. I Myself will go down with you ... and I Myself will also **bring you back...**" ([46:2-4](#))

Yaakov, we explained, may have been planning only a 'short visit' to reunite the family. Yosef was planning for the family to stay for several years to survive the famine. Now, God reveals a totally new plan. Yaakov and family are departing on a journey of several **hundred** years. They will not return until they have first become a great **nation** in the land of Egypt! God Himself brings them down, and there they must remain until they emerge as a populous nation. Ultimately, God Himself will bring them back.

Hence, when Yaakov goes down to Egypt, not only will the prophetic dreams of Yosef be fulfilled, but so will God's promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit Bein Ha'tarim - the long and difficult process of Yetziat Mitzrayim ([see Breishit 15:13-18](#)).

Thus, God informs Yaakov that although his descent to Egypt involves leaving Eretz Canaan, it does not constitute a breach of the Divine covenant with his family. Rather, it forms a critical stage in His master plan of transforming Yaakov's family of 'seventy souls' into God's special Nation.

[The fuller meaning of this final "hitgalut" of Sefer Breishit will be discussed in our introductory shiur to Sefer Shmot.]

### From "Toldot" to "Shmot"

Let us now return to our psukim in Parshat Vayigash ([46:1-4](#)), i.e. God's promise to be with Yaakov and his family during their stay in Egypt.

Immediately after this final "hitgalut" to Yaakov, the Torah describes the actual journey of the entire family to Egypt ([see 46:5-7](#)). The Torah then devotes a special 'parshia' to the enumeration of the seventy members of Yaakov's family:

"These are the names ['v'ayleh shmot'] of Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Egypt..." ([46:8](#))

This special 'parshia' - "v'ayleh **shmot**..." - marks the conclusion of the "bechira" process of Sefer Breishit, as it is from these seventy "nefesh" (souls) that the Jewish nation will develop. The process of "bechira" which has progressed through the choosing of specific "**toladot**" is now complete. The chosen family is now presented as "**shmot**."

This may explain why Sefer Shmot begins with the very same phrase. In fact, its opening psukim ([1:1-4](#)) actually summarize this 'parshia' (i.e. [46:8-27](#)). Furthermore, the first primary topic of Sefer Shmot is the fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim - the story of how these seventy people multiply, become a multitude, are enslaved and then redeemed.

The remainder of Sefer Breishit (46:28-50:26) completes details of the relationship among the brothers, their dwelling in Egypt, the deaths of Yaakov and Yosef, etc. Sefer Shmot, which discusses God's fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'btarim, begins with "v'ayleh **shmot** Bnei Yisrael..." - right where the primary theme of Sefer Breishit left off. From these seventy souls God's special Nation will emerge.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Menachem

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### For Further Iyun

**A.** There are several instances in Sefer Breishit where korbanot are offered, most notably the "olot" offered by Noach ([8:20](#)) and Avraham (at the Akeydah - [see 22:13](#)). We also find many examples of the building of a mizbayach and calling out in God's Name. Yet, we never find "zevachim." Note that in [31:54](#), "zevach" refers to a joint feast between Yaakov and Lavan, not to a sacrifice to God.

## B. Hinayni...

The final "hitgalut" to Yaakov in Sefer Breishit begins as follows:

"Then God spoke to Yisrael in a vision by night saying: **Yaakov Yaakov**, and he answered **'Hi'nay'ni'** ('Here I am') ... Fear not to go down to Egypt..." ([see 46:2-3](#))

The unique style of God's opening statement to Yaakov creates a linguistic parallel pointing us both (A) backward - to the Akeydah, and (B) forward - to Moshe at the burning bush.

### (A) Hi'nay'ni - Back to the Akeydah

God's response is reminiscent of His opening statement at the Akeyda:

"And God tested Avraham, and called out '**Avraham**,' and he answered **'Hi'nay'ni'**" ([see 22:1](#))

Besides symbolizing the ultimate devotion to God, the Akeyda narrative also concludes with a Divine oath naming Yitzchak as heir to the earlier covenants and promises God had made with Avraham Avinu ([see 22:15-18](#)). This may explain why in God's reply to Yaakov's korbanot to the 'God of **Yitzchak**,' He affirms the deeper purpose for Yaakov's descent to Egypt - the fulfillment of that earlier oath to Avraham Avinu.

### (B) Hi'nay'ni - Forward to the Burning Bush

Just as we find a linguistic parallel to God's call to Avraham answered by "hi'nay'ni" at the Akeydah, we find a similar parallel to God's call to Moshe Rabeinu at the burning bush:

"And God called him from the bush saying: '**Moshe, Moshe**,' and he answered **"Hi'nay'ni"**" ([Shmot 3:4](#))

However, the significance of God's "hitgalut" to Moshe at the burning bush extends beyond this linguistic parallel. It is God's **first** revelation to man since the time of Yaakov's departure from Eretz Canaan! In other words, prophecy 'picks up right where it left off!'

Note the comparison between these two revelations, clearly suggesting a conceptual relationship between them. [It is recommended that you compare these psukim in the original Hebrew. See [Breishit 46:2-4](#) and [Shmot 3:4-8](#).]

Just as the linguistic parallel is obvious, so too is the thematic parallel. At God's "hitgalut" to Moshe (at the burning bush), He instructs Moshe to inform Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill the covenant of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim: to bring them out of bondage, establish them as a sovereign Nation and bring them to the Promised Land.

**C.** The emotional confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef at the beginning of this week's Parsha is symbolic of future struggles between shevet Yehuda and shevet Yosef.

1. Note that in this week's parsha they fight over Binyamin. How do the "nachalot" of the shvatim represent this struggle?
2. Relate this to the location of the Mikdash in the "nachala" of Binyamin, as well as to [Yehoshua 18:11](#).
3. Relate this to civil war against Binyamin, as described in [chapter 20 of Sefer Shoftim](#).