



## Parshat Vayechi, December 17, 2021

### The Week in Review

by Chana Bitman

Pikesville, MD

Beth Tfiloh

This week was meaningful with Giving Day, a siyum on Masechet Taanit, and mishmar. Sunday was Giving Day, where we raised money in honor of Tova Rhein to help give scholarships to future students. Reaching out to the greater Midreshet Lindenbaum community, we were able to meet and even exceed our fundraising goal! We also got super-cool Giving Day sweatshirts. On Tuesday, we had a shiur by Rabbi Brander where he talked about the balance between improving yourself and bettering the world. Shortly after, Midreshet Lindenbaum celebrated the Daf Yomi completion of Masechet Taanit! Taanit not only includes halachot of fast days, but also includes many classic Aggadic stories teaching how to use prayer, words, and actions in an appropriate and meaningful way. There were a few of us finishing, who were learning Taanit since the beginning of the year with Rabbanit Sally, and we were able to join the Daf Yomi siyum and feel part of something bigger than ourselves. It was empowering to be a part of this siyum with over 80 women committed to consistent Torah learning. On Thursday, we had a mishmar Q&A panel with Shana Bet. We are looking forward to more learning and siyums in our future!

# GIVING DAY!





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DID  
IT!





## Teacher Feature

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Shuli Frenkel  
interviews  
Rabbanit Rachel Leshaw

I know Rabbanit Rachel as my Gemara Ra'm. She is someone who cares deeply about exposing us to different contemporary Jewish thinkers and ideas. Right now we are learning an excerpt from Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's *By His Light* about the interplay of morality and the concept of good.

Other overseas students know Rabbanit Rachel as their teacher for *Bekiut Gemara* and *Women in Halacha* or their ISP mentor. But who is she when she's not at school?

### **Will you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family:**

I grew up in Teaneck and moved to Israel 6 years ago. I live in Efrat with my husband and three kids, Joshy (6), Anael (4), and Hadar (2)

### **What is your favorite thing to learn:**

I love learning and teaching Gemara and I've had a zoom chavruta with two of my friends to learn *Sotah*. We've been doing it since Pesach a year and a half ago-it's the highlight of my week!

### **What makes Midreshet Lindenbaum so special?**

The students. Not just that they come in so bright and motivated and excited to learn but also the way that the school provides space for the students to grow in their

learning by providing them with resources in terms of faculty and flexibility in their schedule and space in the beit midrash. The faith we have in our students that they will grow into Talmudic Chachamot is really unique.

### What is your favorite memory from Seminary?

At Migdal Oz I made a siyum on Massechet Sanhedrin. My favorite memory tied to that process was Shavuot night in my shana alef when we realized that we only had a week left before the siyum and we probably learned ten dapim that night. We sat and learned for I don't know how many hours. I remember feeling really good about it.

### What is a hobby of yours?

Baking!

Rabbanit Rachel can whip up banana muffins in 2 and a half minutes and makes the birthday cakes for her kids. When our Gemara class went to her house she introduced us to latke waffles helping us blend, squeeze, and shape our ingredients. She recently got into making sourdough. "Baking is calming," she said.

### What do you like to read?

I love historical fiction. If you want a few recommendations from Rabbanit Rachel she enjoys Ian McEwan, Barbra Kingsolver and recently had been reading a lot of Beatrice Williams.





## **MIDRASHA-WIDE SIYUM ON MASECHET TA'ANIT**





**DARKAYNU  
CHAVRUTA SIYUM**





# SHANA BET MISHMAR



# D'var Torah from our Students



Esther Cabot  
New York, NY  
Ramaz

## Individuals and a Nation following the Process to Redemption

נסים בן יוסף ואסתר Dedicated in memory of

In Parshat Vayechi, we read about the final years of Yaakov in Egypt, concluding Breisheet and closing the era of the avot. Here, a key distinction can be made between the patriarchs. Yitzchak receives one name, Avram becomes Avraham, but in Yaakov's case, G-d freely alternates between two names: "Yaakov," referring to the spiritual level of the individual, and "Israel," representing the nation. The dichotomy here is prevalent.

At the center of this week's parsha, Yaakov blesses his children (and grandchildren), prompting many questions. What are the blessings given by Yaakov? Are they all blessings or are some of them curses as Shimon and Levi's section would suggest? Did Yehuda's blessing allude to the time of Moshiach's arrival? Are the blessings normal hopes of a dying father or are they prophecies revealing the lives of future generations?

Rabbi Chaim Richman points out that "bracha" is related to "breicha," a pool or source of water. Hashem is eternal and overflowing to us. When we say, "Blessed are you, Hashem," we are saying, "You are the overflowing source of our lives." While the symbolism of water may seem far-fetched, the text offers various parallels. In blessing Am Yisrael, Yaakov says, "May they multiply like fish on the face of the earth." The common explanation for the use of fish is that fish are numerous, but one approach

suggests that if we are disconnected from Torah, if we don't have faith in G-d, we are like fish out of water and cannot breathe.

From a literary perspective, water symbolizes birth or clarity. Birth works perfectly with Vayechi, "and he lived," and clarity is also useful since Yaakov is clarifying everything for his sons: his opinions on them and what their lives are going to look like. Following that logic, the blessings are not hopes but rather, they are prophecies about the brother's murky futures.

More than just his sons, Yaakov takes the time to bless Menashe and Efraim. "The G-d whom my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, followed, who has shepherded me from my birth til this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless these lads." The Midrash in Breisheet Raba comments on "shepherded," saying how it refers to G-d's providing Yaakov with sustenance and "redeeming" him during difficult periods. The juxtaposition here shows that "Just as sustenance is each day, so is redemption each day." We should understand that every day that we as individuals are granted good health and safety are days where G-d is protecting us.

Shimon and Levi aren't even included in the brother's blessings of good fortune. Rather, they are condemned for their assault on Shechem to avenge Dina. Yaakov expresses, "Let my soul not come in their counsel and let my honor not be included in their assembly...for they killed a man." But is their anger not justified? It cannot be denied that they committed an act of murder, but shouldn't Yaakov at least understand their desire for revenge? The answer here is simple. Yosef, again and again, is an example of how the brothers should have acted. Yosef's brothers rejected him, cast him into a pit, caused him to spend a decade in prison, and yet, he forgives all of this upon meeting them. Why? He believes his suffering was G-d's will, a way to save Yaakov's household and all of Egypt during the famine. In other words, Shimon and Levi should have known not to lose faith in G-d's plan.

One of the most important blessings is granted to Yehuda, as it says, "Royalty would

always remain with the tribe of Yehuda until the arrival of Shiloh.” Many mefarshim seem to think that Yaakov was referencing Moshiach with this statement. According to a Gemara in Pesachim, Yaakov gathered his sons to tell them when redemption would arrive but at that moment, G-d took away Yaakov’s nevuah and he lost access to the information. What is the purpose of Hashem’s taking away this knowledge at the last second? G-d didn’t want Yaakov to reveal the time of the redemption because he didn’t want it to be taken for granted. He wanted us to “become worthy of it” (Masechet Sanhedrin 96a).

When are we worthy? Harav Baruch Gigi offers an explanation that can be best highlighted at this moment in Tanach. In Parshat Vayechi, we transition from viewing the children of Israel as a family to acknowledging them as a nation. While the twelve tribes will remain in their designated inheritances (blessings) for many generations, they will never be separate entities with individual aims. Each tribe has something distinct to offer in their shared goal: serving G-d.



# Shabbat Shalom!