**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT VAYESHEV**

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In loving memory of my parents: Shmuel Binyamin (Samuel) and Esther Rivka (Elizabeth) Lowinger z”l

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Dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky z"l, whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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Dedicated in memory of my father, Hillel ben Yechiel (Herman) Reiter, of Debrecen, Hungary, whose yahrzeit falls on the 24th day of Kislev. May his soul be among the Righteous in Gan Eden

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**“These are the Generations of Yaakov”**

**Rav Yoel Bin Nun**

The book of *Bereishit* contains ten books of "generations" (out of the twelve books of "generations" in all of Scripture[[1]](#footnote-1)). They are the skeleton of the book of *Bereishit* as a whole. The long and the short stories are included in the main and important books of generations. "The generations of Terach" is the sixth such book in the book of *Bereishit*, and it contains all of the stories concerning Avraham and Sara. "The generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham" is the eighth such book, and it presents Avraham as the father exclusively of Yitzchak; it also includes the entire story of Esav and Yaakov until and including his twelve sons. "The generations of Yaakov" is the tenth such book, and it brings the book of *Bereishit* to a close; it includes all seventy of Yaakov's descendants who came to Egypt, with the entire story of their descent.

This is what the Rashbam writes in his commentary (*Bereishit* 37:2), after noting that the twelve sons of Yaakov had already been mentioned earlier:

"These are the generations of Yaakov" – his children's children, which totaled seventy, and how they were born. How so? Yosef was seventeen years old, and his brothers were jealous of him, and as a consequence of that Yehuda went down from among his brothers and had sons in Keziv and in Adulam – Shela, Peretz and Zerach – and matters developed that Yosef was brought down to Egypt, where he fathered Menashe and Efrayim, and Yosef sent for his father and his household until there were seventy of them in Egypt.

This is a unique perspective of the great biblical commentator who clung to the plain meaning of the text,[[2]](#footnote-2) refusing to accept the word "*toledot*" in the borrowed sense (known in our language) of events that happened to Yaakov. He understood "these are the generations of Yaakov" as a heading, and all the narrative chapters that follow it as leading to the list of the seventy descendants of Yaakov who went down to Egypt. Although this list will only appear nine chapters later (*Bereishit* 46:8-27), the entire story leads up to it, and the narrative chapters that follow it merely complete the list of the generations.

A strong proof for the Rashbam’s interpretation (which he does not mention) can be brought from the opening verses of the book of *Shemot*: The verse, "Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt with Yaakov; every man came with his household" (*Shemot* 1:1), is followed by a list of the twelve sons of Yaakov-Yisrael, and the short summary: "All the souls that came out of the loins of Yaakov were seventy souls; and Yosef was in Egypt already" (*Shemot* 1:5). Only on the basis of the last list of "generations" in the book of *Bereishit* can the story in the book of *Shemot* begin: "And Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them" (*Shemot* 1:6-7).

According to this, we must re-read the entire book of *Bereishit*, with the stories included in the books of the generations, and abandon the erroneous reading of the lists of generations as connecting links between the stories.

These are the ten books of "generations" found in the book of *Bereishit*:

1. "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created" (*Bereishit* 2:4). This is a comprehensive book that includes man ("dust of the ground"), trees, rivers, and beasts, and those born in Adam's family – Kayin and his descendants, Hevel, Shet and Enosh. Thus, the book ends at the end of chapter 4, and the story is part of the book of generations.

2. "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man…" (*Bereishit* 5:1). This is a selective book that describes the dynasty of Shet, who was selected from among Adam's descendants (until Noach), who had been created "in the image of God." This book ends only after the death of Noach, after his rescue from the flood (*Bereishit* 9:28-29), for only then were "the generations of Adam" truly completed.

3. "These are the generations of Noach…" (*Bereishit* 6:9) > "And the sons of Noach that went forth from the ark were Shem, and Cham, and Yafet; and Cham is the father of Canaan" (*Bereishit* 9:18). This too is a selective book about the rescue of Noach's family from the flood. Only at the end of that book, with the curse of Cham and Canaan and the blessing of Shem and Yefet (*Bereishit* 9:18-27), will "the generations of Noach" come to an end, and afterwards "the book of the generations of Adam" will also end with the number of Noach's days and his death (950 "years, and he died"). Thus "the generations of Noach" and the story of his rescue from the flood are part of the first selection in the chain of "Adam > Shet > Enosh > … Noach."

4. "Now these are the generations of the sons of Noach: Shem, Cham, and Yafet; and to them were sons born after the flood" (*Bereishit* 10:1). This is a comprehensive book that includes all of the descendants of the sons of Noach and the nations that emerged from them.[[3]](#footnote-3)

5. "These are the generations of Shem ..." (*Bereishit* 11:11). This is a selective book that includes only the dynasty of Shem, until Terach.

6. "Now these are the generations of Terach…" (*Bereishit* 11:27). This is a comprehensive book that includes all of the descendants of Terach, including the progeny of Lot (*Bereishit* 19:37-38), the children of Nachor, including Rivka (*Bereishit* 22:20-24), Yishmael, Yitzchak, and the sons of Ketura (*Bereishit* 25:1-6). It is possible that "the generations of Terach" is included in the selective book of "the generations of Shem," just as "the generations of Noach" is included in "the book of the generations of Adam," but there is no evidence of this in Scripture at the end of the days of Avraham (*Bereishit* 25:7-11).

7. "Now these are the generations of Yishmael, Avraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sara's handmaid, bore to Avraham" (*Bereishit* 25:12). This is a book of rejection, which removes Yishmael and his descendants from the chosen dynasty, in accordance with God's promise to Avraham concerning Sara: "For in Yitzchak shall seed be called to you" (*Bereishit* 21:12). In striking distinction from most of the books of generations, this book includes no narrative, but only a list of generations. (The stories involving Yishmael are included in the sections dealing with Avraham, in "the generations of Terach.")

8. "And these are the generations of Yitzchak, Avraham's son: Avraham begot Yitzchak" (*Bereishit* 25:19). This is the most distinctively selective book in the entire book of *Bereishit*. It opens with the exceptional pregnancy of Rivka and the birth of Esav and Yaakov, continues with the struggle over the birthright and the blessings, with Yaakov's flight, and the women he married, and it ends only with the list of all twelve sons of Yaakov (*Bereishit* 35:23-29) and the death of Yitzchak and his burial at the hands of "Esav and Yaakov, his sons." Regarding Esav, mention is made only of his wives, but not of his children (*Bereishit* 26:34-35).

9. "Now these are the generations of Esav, the same is Edom" > "And these are the generations of Esav the father of the Edomites in the mountain-land of Seir" (*Bereishit* 36:1-9). This is a book of rejection that removes the birthright from Esav and his descendants, doubly emphasizing that Esav, "the father of the Edomites," left and went to "the mountain-land of Seir." Therefore, his "generations" are mentioned twice, in Canaan and in Seir. The list of kings also comes primarily to emphasize his separation from Israel.

10. "These are the generations of Yaakov" > "All the souls of the house of Yaakov, that came to Egypt, were seventy" (*Bereishit* 37:2 > 46:8-27). This is a comprehensive book that includes all of "the house of Yaakov." It is also a selective book, and it therefore closes the book of *Bereishit.* The sons of Yaakov were already listed in the book of "the generations of Yitzchak," and we are thus dealing here with their descendants after them. The entire story about Yosef and his brothers relates to the list of Yaakov's seventy descendants who went down to Egypt, but it does not end until Efrayim and Menashe are redefined as the children of Yaakov and Rachel (*Bereishit* 48) and Yaakov blesses all of the tribes (*Bereishit* 49), effectively saying that "they are all my sons."

According to the ordinary and superficial reading, "the generations of the heaven and the earth" are merely the trees, man, and the beasts, whereas the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam's expulsion therefrom, and the children of Adam and Chava is an independent story; "the book of the generations of Adam" ends with Noach when he is 500 years old and has begotten "Shem, Cham, and Yefet" (only chapter 5), and the story of the flood stands on its own. The lists of generations are sort of connecting links between the truly important stories. But this is a mistaken reading. The wording of the last two verses in chapter 9 (vv. 28-29) about Noach living 350 years "after the flood," and the totaling of "the days of Noach… and he died," leave no room for doubt that it is only here that the book of "the generations of Adam" ends, for only there do we find such formulations.

According to the ordinary reading, "the generations of Terach" contains only 6 verses, until "and Charan died in Haran," and then begins the great story about Avra(ha)m. But upon closer examination, we notice an amazing phenomenon – the names Avram, Sarai, Lot, Nachor, and Milka are the names of the main actors in the great story that follows:

1. The promise of seed to Avra(ha)m, which was fulfilled in the end through Sarai > Sara.

2. Lot's separation from Avra(ha)m, his rescue from captivity by way of Avra(ha)m, and also his rescue from the overturning of Sodom, which ends with the birth of two sons, Moav and Ben-Ami, from whom emerged two nations, Moav and Amon (*Bereishit* 19:37-38).

3. The rescue of the seed of Avra(ha)m from death by thirst in the wilderness, and, of course, from the altar of the *Akeida* (in both cases, by way of an angel).

4. Immediately after the *Akeida* and the rescue of Avra(ha)m's seed, there appear the sons of Nachor and Milka, together with "and Betuel begot Rivka." This is clearly a list of "generations," without a separate heading, but as was told to Avraham.

5. The death of Sara, the purchase of a familial "possession of a burying-place," and the burial of Sara.

6. And the climax – the marriage of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham, the son of Terach, to Rivka, the daughter of Betuel, the son of Nachor, the son of Terach.

7. The names of the 6 sons of Ketura, the death of Avraham, and his burial in the Makhpela Cave together with Sara.

The necessary conclusion is that "the generations of Terach" continues until "the generations of Yishmael," from the end of chapter 11 until the end of chapter 25.

This gives rise to a most puzzling question. Why in the book of *Bereishit* is there no "generations of Avraham"? Why is Avraham the only main character with no book of generations associated with his name?

We will consider three answers (which do not necessarily contradict each other), two that accord with the plain meaning of the text and a third in the manner of a profound conceptual *midrash*:

1. In the first part of the story of Avra(ha)m, he has no seed, but only God's promise of seed. This is a situation of "no generations," with a promise of future "generations."

2. Yishmael and the six sons of Ketura are "generations of Avraham" in addition to Yitzchak, but it is only "in Yitzchak that seed shall be called to you" (*Bereishit* 21:12). Therefore, only at the beginning of "the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham" could it be added: "Avraham begot Yitzchak" (*Bereishit* 25:19), and this addition comes in place of "the generations of Avraham."

3. Had there been in the Torah a closed book of "the generations of Avraham," it would have been impossible to join him as a proselyte. Since there is no such book in the Torah, all of humankind and anyone who was created in the image of God can convert and join the seed of Avraham and fulfill in themselves: "and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (*Bereishit* 12:3). The list of "the generations of Avraham" in the Torah remains open, and all proselytes for all generations are called "the children of Avraham."

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**Where does God Appear and Where Does He Remain Hidden (In Parashat Vayeshev)?**

Surprisingly, in the first chapter (chapter 37), God's name does not appear at all, neither the Tetragrammaton nor the name *E-lohim*!

Where there is arrogance and jealousy, hatred, and separation between brothers, there is no room for God's name. It is as if God Himself is saying (what Yaakov will say about Shimon and Levi; *Bereishit* 49:6): "Let my soul not come into their counsel."

It all started with wives and children and with Yaakov's attempt to achieve family unity. After settling in the land, Yaakov appointed Yosef over the sons of Bilha and Zilpa, "his father's wives" (*Bereishit* 37:2). This is the first time that these women are called "wives"; until now they were handmaidens. Yaakov turned them into wives, and their sons into tribes who would have an inheritance in the land of Israel.

In this way, the 12 tribes of Israel were formed; against the 6 strong sons of Leah stood the sons of Rachel together with the sons of Bilha and Zilpa under the leadership of Yosef, who received a long royal garment (that reached his wrist, *pisat yad*; the *ketonet pasim* is not a pajama).

The sons of Leah responded harshly. The first hint of this was already sounded with Reuven's sin with Bilha, "his father's concubine" (*Bereishit* 35:22), which was apparently aimed at thwarting Yaakov's desire to upgrade the handmaidens into wives. Reuven sinned and also failed, and the anger of Leah's sons grew when they saw Yosef as a "lad" in a royal garment together with the sons of the handmaids who turned into matriarchs. From here the evil reports that Yosef heard from the sons of Leah and brought to his father. This was followed by dreams of kingship, and the hatred continued to grow like a burning fire.

In all of this, God's name is not mentioned.

It would appear that it was Shimon and Levi, who had taken revenge and committed a massacre in Shechem at the time of Dina's release, who led their brothers back to the Shechem area to try once again to gain a hold in it. Yosef thus met a man of the field in Shechem who knew the brothers and that they had gone to Dotan. It would seem that Shimon and Levi were also those referred to as "one to the other" (*Bereishit* 37:19; *Bereishit Rabba* 84:15) who wished to kill Yosef (for Reuven and Yehuda wanted to save his life, and the rest of the brothers were young).

When they cast Yosef into the pit, they did not imagine that they were also casting into the pit their plans of settling in the land of Shechem (= Shomron), because Yaakov would take it away from them and give it to Efrayim and Menasheh, the sons of Yosef.

After Yosef was sold to Egypt, Yehuda (who had proposed the sale) also went down "from his brothers," and he also went down from Chevron, which was high in the mountain-land, to the region of Adulam, in the Elah valley. His descent continued with his marriage to "the daughter of a certain Canaanite," something that Avraham and Yitzchak had prevented their sons from doing. The Canaanite influence is evident also in the conduct of his sons who died, Er and Onan.

In this chapter (*Bereishit* 38:7-10), God's name, the Tetragrammaton, appears three times – all in connection with the killing of Er and Onan: "And Er, Yehuda's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord slew him… And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the Lord, and He slew him also."

In the rest of the chapter, there is no mention of God's name, not even in connection with Yehuda who confessed his sin, nor in connection with the miraculous rescue of the twins Peretz and Zerach at the time of their birth. Yaakov and his sons lived in the land of Canaan, and the name of God is not mentioned among them except for punishment.

Yosef was the only member of Yaakov's family who did not go down to Egypt; he was taken there by force, as a slave. As surprising as it may seem, God was with him with whatever he did in the house of Potifar. Yosef was in Egypt, and God was with him!

Potifar's wife understood this and saw in Yosef the slave the real master of the house. However, her seduction failed, because Yosef was a righteous man and overcame it. (Yehuda was a penitent, but Yosef was a righteous man.)

Potifar's wife then inverted the guilt (as often happens). Yosef was "guilty" of attempted rape, and she had "fiercely resisted." Had Potifar truly believed his wife, he would have had Yosef executed. He was apparently familiar with his wife’s tendencies, and he simply sought to separate them. Jail is not only a punishment; it also protects the inmates from revenge.

And here, too, God is with Yosef, in the prison: "And that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper" (*Bereishit* 39:23).

But this is the last time that God's name, the Tetragrammaton, appears in the book of *Bereishit* (apart from in the prayer: "I wait for Your salvation, O Lord"; *Bereishit* 49:18). From now on we find only the name *E-lohim*, which was known and familiar even to Pharaoh.

Why so? From the moment that Yosef met the two Egyptian officers in jail, there began his relationship with the Egyptian royal house, which would bring him to Pharaoh as a recognized "interpreter of dreams." Here Yosef entered Egyptian culture, and he also recognized Pharaoh as the ruler in charge of justice in Egypt.

To the officers who had been put in custody, he said: "Do not interpretations belong to God [*E-lohim*]? Tell it to me, I pray you" (*Bereishit* 40:8).

Using the same language, he will later say to Pharaoh: "It is not in me; God [*E-lohim*]will give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (*Bereishit* 41:16). And Pharaoh will answer him: "Forasmuch as God [*E-lohim*] has shown you all this, there is none so discrete and wise as you" (*Bereishit* 41:39).

The name *E-lohim* is a common (universal) noun, and it has an objective and hierarchical meaning. Like any other common noun, it takes a definite article (*ha-E-lohim*), and it can be declined (*E-lohai, E-lohekha*). The abridged forms (*E-l*, *E-loha*) are known from Scripture, and also from other ancient languages.

The Tetragrammaton, in contrast, is a proper (particular) noun. It does not take a definite article, nor can it be declined. Linguistically, the Tetragrammaton and *E-lohim* are not two parallel names (as many Bible scholars think), but rather complementary names – a proper noun and a common noun.

Among the sins of arrogance and hatred there is no name of God whatsoever, even in the land of the patriarchs. However, in exile, within Egyptian culture and against Pharaonic rule, the Tetragrammaton, which expresses providence, is concealed, and the universal name, *E-lohim*, appears. This is true in *Bereishit* (from chapter 40 on) and also at the beginning of *Shemot* (chapters 1-2).

Moshe is the opposite of Yosef – he will grow up in the house of Pharaoh, but he will leave. When Moshe will flee from Pharaoh and leave Egypt, God will appear to him with the Tetragrammaton at the burning bush.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. The list of "the generations of Aharon and Moshe" (*Bemidbar* 3:1-4) grew out of a list of the sons of Levi (*Shemot* 6:16-25), though there it is still within a list of the "names of the sons of Israel, who came to Egypt" (*Shemot* 1:1-7 > 6:14-15). Both of them are abridged versions of the list of "the generations of Yaakov" and his sons who went down to Egypt (*Bereishit* 46:8-27). Only the priesthood of Aharon and his sons created a new book of "generations." At the end of the book of *Rut* (4:18-22): "And these are the generations of Peretz," there is the twelfth book of generations, which was intended to establish the kingdom. The generations of the priesthood and of the kingdom reflect selection, but they contain no rejection, in sharp contrast to the books of generations in *Bereishit*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Rashbam's fundamental introduction to his commentary to the Torah and to his Torah outlook in general is found at the beginning of his commentary to "the generations of Yaakov." Many explanations and novel insights have been written about it and in the wake of it, and therefore it is more widely known than his unique explanation of the books of generations and his commentary to *Bereishit* in general. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 14 descendants of Yefet, 30 of Cham, and 26 of Shem are listed in chapter 10, "and of these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood" (*Bereishit* 10:32). These are the 70 nations of the world counted by *Chazal* (*Sukka* 55b). The 70 nations parallel the 70 members of Israel who went down to Egypt – 70 nations of the descendants of Noach corresponding to 70 descendants of Israel. As formulated in the song of *Ha'azinu*: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will declare to you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the children of men, He set the borders of the people according to the number of the children of Israel [70 vs. 70]; for the portion of the Lord is His people, Yaakov the lot of His inheritance" (*Devarim* 32:7-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)