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**A Parsha Weekly by the Friedman Kollel  
of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Vayechi  
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## **The Closing of the Jewish Heart**

**By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel**

Today is the Tenth of Teves, the day when the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem. It marks the start of the process that culminated in the destruction of the Temple, the subjugation of the Jewish people and their exile from their homeland. Similarly, this week's Torah portion begins with a subtle hint that the process of the subjugation and enslavement of the Jewish people to the Egyptians was starting.

Ordinarily, a new parshah starts in a new line in the Torah scroll, or is separated from the previous text by a nine letter space. This week's portion, Vayechi, is the one exception - there is no space at all between it and the previous section. The Midrash comments: "Why alone of all the portions of the Torah is this one 'closed'? It is because once Yaakov passed away, the Egyptian enslavement of Israel began" (Bereishis Rabbah 96:1).

It is not clear from the Midrash, however, how the portion being "closed" hints at enslavement. Rashi (Bereishis 47:28) explains that the closed portion alludes to "the eyes and heart" of the Jewish people being "closed" due to the start of their bondage. This comment itself requires elaboration: What is the meaning and significance of this closure? Why does the Torah hint at the creeping enslavement of the Jewish people using the motif of closure?

Interestingly, the Tenth of Teves is also about the theme of closure, as it commemorates the siege of Jerusalem. A siege encloses a city, preventing people from leaving it and supplies from entering it. What is so essential about the concept of closure, that both our bondage in Egypt and our exile from the land of Israel are viewed as starting from a state of being closed?

Let us examine Rashi's comment further. What does it mean that "the eyes and heart" of the Jewish people were closed? The term "eyes," used here in a metaphoric sense, refers to the aspect of man which finds and detects reality. The term "heart" refers to that aspect of man

which responds to and relates to the reality that the "eyes" have seen (see Bamidbar 15:39, with Rashi). "Eyes and heart" being closed refers to a profound state of human constriction, when man is closed off in himself and cannot apprehend and relate to realities outside of himself. The implication is that this constriction lies at the essence of subjugation and slavery. It is not the hard work of slavery that is demeaning to the human condition; rather, it is the limitations that slavery imposes upon man, which include these inabilities of "eyes" and "heart."

Similarly, our exile from the land of Israel also started from a closure. At one level this closure is literal and not metaphoric; the city of Jerusalem was physically closed off and besieged. At a deeper level, however, God, who watches over us and protects us, would not have let this physical closure take place had we not analogously "closed" ourselves beforehand. The Sages teach us that the First Temple was destroyed on account of the sins of idolatry, immorality and bloodshed, and the Second Temple on account of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b); all of these sins come from our closing our "eyes and hearts," so that we did not apprehend and relate to God and our fellow-Jew properly. Just as the physical destruction and exile of the Jewish people started from a "closing" (the siege of Jerusalem), so too our spiritual destruction (the sins we performed) started from a closing of our eyes and hearts from God and our fellow man.

May God help us all to open our eyes and hearts fully, to enable us to appreciate and relate to Him and to our fellow Jews properly.

## About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at [FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org](mailto:FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org).

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