

# Torah Portion for Vayechi

*Shabbat beginning January 6, 2023*

As we begin 2023, we conclude our reading of the Torah's first book with its portion, Vayechi, "And he lived." Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, giving preference to the younger and then calls his own sons to "bless" (prophesy about) them, sometimes with harsh words. A large entourage takes Jacob's body to his ancestors' cave at Machpelah in Canaan. Joseph allays his brothers' worries of his forgiveness. A final paragraph sums up Joseph's life with embalming in Egypt and a promise that his bones will eventually be taken to the promised land.

As readers mature, we learn to critique, beginning with summarizing and progressing to questions and interpretations. For example, Mussar commentator, Rabbi Brett Isserow, interpreted the portion as Jacob's struggle with truth: deceiving his father to get blessed, getting deceived by Laban and his daughters, and deceiving his brothers when they first came to Egypt. Deeper reading resolves multiple conflicts. For example, Rabbi Dvora Weisberg used multiple sources to show how Jacob's harsh rebuke of Simeon and Levi was still a blessing, offering them opportunities to become better people. The combined critiques in the *Women's Commentary* engage readers at all levels with poetry, narrative, lessons, and ultimately their Jewish identities.