



“Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim seventeen years” Yaakov Avinu Spent 34 Years of His Life with Yosef Two Spans of טו"ב Years

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayechi, we would like to focus on the opening passuk (Bereishis 47, 28): **“ויחי יעקב בארץ—Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim seventeen years.** In the Zohar hakadosh (Vayechi 216b), the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, explains the significance of this fact. After Yosef was born, Yaakov Avinu enjoyed being with his favorite son Yosef seventeen years, as we learn from the beginning of parshas Vayeishev (ibid. 37, 1): **“אלה תולדות—These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock.**

We know how special and dear Yosef was to Yaakov from the following passuk (ibid. 3): **“וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן—and Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age (wise); and he made him a “Kestones passim” (a striped tunic).** Rashi comments: **“ואונקלוס תרגם בר חכים הוא ליה, כל מה שלמד משם—Onkelos translates the phrase as indicating that Yosef was his wise son; therefore, everything Yaakov learned from Shem and Eiver, he conveyed to Yosef. At the age of seventeen, however, Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers, the shevatim. Then, Yaakov did not see him for 22 years, during which Yaakov cried and grieved for him daily. As compensation, HKB”H gave Yaakov another wonderful 17 years with Yosef in Mitzrayim at the end of his life. Here is the passage from the Zohar:**

“מאי טעמא [הודיע הכתוב שחי יעקב במצרים] שבע עשרה שנה, אלא אמר רבי שמעון, כל יומיו דייעקב בצערא הוה [כל ימיו של יעקב לפני שנולד יוסף בצער היו], בצערא אעבר לון בקדמיתא [כי בצער העביר אותם בתחילה], כיון דחמא ליוסף והנה קאים קמיה [כיון שראה את יוסף אחרי שנולד והיה עומד לפניו], בד יעקב מסתכל ביוסף [כשהיה יעקב מסתכל ביוסף], הנה אשתלים בנפשיה כאילו חמא לאמיה דיוסף [היה נשלם בנפשו כאילו ראה את רחל אמו של יוסף], דשפירו דיוסף דמי לשפירו דרחל [כי יפיו של יוסף היה דומה ליפיה של רחל], והנה דמי בגרמיה כמה דלא אעבר עליה צערא ביומוי [והיה נדמה בנפשו כמו שלא עבר עליו צער מימיו].

“וכד יוסף אתפרש מניה [וכאשר פרש יוסף ממנו כשנמכר למצרים], כדין אתקיים [אז נתקיים אצלו מה שכתוב] (איוב ג-כו) לא שלותי ולא שקטתי ולא נחתי ויבא רגז, דדא קשיא ליה ליעקב מכל מה דעבר [כי זה היה קשה ליעקב יותר מכל מה שעבר], ובזמנא דאתפרש יוסף מניה [ובזמן שפרש יוסף ממנו] מה כתיב, יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה היה רועה וגו'. וכל יומיו דייעקב לא הנה ליה צערא קהאי [וכל ימיו של יעקב לא היה לו צער כזה], והנה ככי כל יומא לאיגון שבע עשרה שנה דיוסף [והיה בוכה כל יום מגעגועים לאותן שבע עשרה שנה שהיה עם יוסף].

“מאי קאטיבו ליה [מה השיבו לו מן השמים], [בראשית מו-ד] ויוסף ישית ידו על עיניו, [פירוש] הא לה שבע עשרה שנה אחרניו, בענגויו ותפנוקיו והנאות וכסופין [הרי לך שבע עשרה שנים אחרות בתענוגים ותפנוקים והנאות וגעגועים], הדא הוא דכתיב ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה.”

Why was it necessary for the Torah to inform us that Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim for 17 years? Rabbi Shimon explains that prior to the birth of Yosef, Yaakov's entire life was troubled. Once Yosef was born, and Yaakov would see Yosef standing before him, it would seem to him as

if he was looking at Yosef's mother, since Yosef's beauty resembled Rachel's beauty. Thus, it would seem to him as if he had not experienced any suffering in his life.

Yet, when Yosef was taken away from him (when he was sold into slavery and landed in Mitzrayim) . . . it was worse for Yaakov than anything he had experienced previously. At the time Yosef was taken away from him, it is written: "Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd etc." Throughout his entire life, Yaakov experienced no suffering of this magnitude; he cried every day for those 17 years that he had spent with Yosef.

He was told from the heavens . . . that he would have another 17 years of pleasure and delight (with Yosef). That is the significance of the passuk: "Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim 17 years."

This coincides magnificently with what the Tosafists wrote in Da'as Zekeinim regarding the allusion in the passuk (which also appears in the commentary of the Ba'al HaTurim): "Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim 17 years."

"ויחי יעקב"—teaches us that the life of Yaakov was equal to the numerical value of ויחי. That is 34 years—17 years from the time Yosef was born until he was sold . . . and 17 years that he was with him in Mitzrayim. All the rest of his years were not life, because they were troubled and bad. Another interpretation of: "Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim"—should you ask, why did the Torah mention the number of years that he lived in Mitzrayim? To teach you that corresponding to the 17 years that Yaakov supported Yosef, when he lived with him (in his home in Eretz Canaan), correspondingly, his son Yosef supported him and took care of him.

A Person Should Always Depart and Enter with "Ki Tov"

It is now incumbent upon us to explain why HKB"H, the Grand Orchestrator, arranged for Yaakov Avinu and Yosef HaTzaddik to have the privilege of living together for these two sets of 17 years. What is the significance of these two parallel sets of 17 years? Undoubtedly, this was not sheer coincidence; it was ordained from above for a particular reason!

To begin with, it is apparent that the relationship between Yaakov Avinu and Yosef HaTzaddik, from start to finish, constituted a preparation for the galus in Mitzrayim. Only after Yaakov had finished teaching Yosef everything he had learned from Shem and Eiver (focusing on life in galus), during the first seventeen years of his life, did he send Yosef to find his brothers (ibid. 37, 13): **הלא אחיך רעים בשכם לכה ואשלחך—"are your brothers not shepherding in Shechem? Go, and I will send you to them.** As a result of this mission, he was sold by his brothers and ended up in Mitzrayim.

After Yosef announced to his brothers: "I am Yosef"—revealing his true identity—he sent a message to his father Yaakov requesting that he come down to Mitzrayim with his entire household. With his descent to Mitzrayim with seventy souls, the galus that lasted 210 years began. To allay his fears, HKB"H reassured Yaakov (ibid. 46, 3): **אל תירא מרדה מצרימה כי לגוי גדול אשימך שם, אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם עלה ויוסף ישית ידו על עיניך—do not be afraid of descending to Mitzrayim, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with you Mitzrayim, and I shall also surely bring you up, and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes.**

This explains very nicely the passuk related to the geulah of Yisrael from Mitzrayim (Tehillim 77, 16): **גאלת בזרוע עמוך בני יעקב—ויוסף סלה—with Your powerful arm, You redeemed Your people, the sons of Yaakov and Yosef, Selah.** They expound in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 19b): **וכי יוסף ילד, והלא יעקב ילד, אלא—now, did Yosef father them (the shevatim from whom Yisrael descended)? Why, Yaakov fathered them! Rather, Yaakov fathered, and Yosef sustained; therefore, they are identified as his (Yosef's).** In keeping with the topic of this essay, we can suggest that since Yaakov and Yosef paved the way for the galus of Yisrael in Mitzrayim, they are named after both of them.

Elsewhere in the Gemara, we are taught (Ta'anis 10b): **לעולם יצא אדם בכי טוב ויכנס בכי טוב—a person should always depart with "ki tov" and enter with "ki tov."** Rashi explains what this means: A person should wait for daylight before departing on a journey, as it says (Bereishis 1, 4): **G-d saw that the light was good ('ki tov').** Similarly, he should complete his journey while there is still daylight. It is worth pointing out that the gematria of the word **טוב** is 17.

Let us now apply this to the relationship between Yosef and Yaakov. When Yaakov departed his father's home in Eretz Yisrael in preparation for the galus in Mitzrayim, he was 17 years old—the gematria of טו"ב. When Yaakov went down to Mitzrayim at the end of his life, beginning the galus in Mitzrayim, he spent another 17 years with Yosef—another set of טו"ב. Thus, they fulfilled the directive: "לעולם יצא אדם בכי טוב ויכנס בכי טוב".

Yaakov Is Associated with the Third Day of Creation on which It Says "Ki Tov" Twice

Continuing our investigation, we will now introduce a fantastic explanation from the great Rabbi of Apta, zy" a. In Ohev Yisrael (Vayechi), he explains why it was ordained for Yaakov to experience two sets of seventeen good and happy years in his life. He cites Chazal's assertion that the only truly good and happy years of Yaakov Avinu's life were the years he spent together with Yosef HaTzaddik—in other words, the 17 years in Eretz Yisrael before Yosef was sold by his brothers (landing him in Mitzrayim), and the last 17 years of his life after he joined Yosef down in Mitzrayim.

He proposes that Yaakov Avinu, a" h, is associated with the third day of creation, on which it says twice "ki tov." Since the gematria of "tov" equals 17, Yaakov enjoyed two 17-year periods of good, happiness and solace in his life. This explanation relies on the fact that Yisrael had seven shepherds—primary leaders or guiding lights—Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and David. They align with the seven midos employed by HKB" H to create the world, which are associated with each of the seven days of creation, respectively.

According to this format, the first day of creation aligns with Avraham Avinu and is associated with the midah of "chesed." The second day of creation aligns with Yitzchak Avinu and is associated with the midah of "gevurah." The third day of creation aligns with Yaakov Avinu and is associated with the midah of "Tiferes." The fourth day of creation aligns with Moshe Rabeinu and is associated with the midah of "netzach." The fifth day of creation aligns with Aharon HaKohen and is associated with the midah of "hod." The sixth day of creation aligns with Yosef HaTzaddik and is associated with the midah of "yesod." Shabbas is aligned with David HaMelech and is associated with the midah of "malchus."

In the description of the creation in parshas Bereishis, the word טו"ב appears twice in relation to the third day. The first time (ibid. 1, 10): "ויקרא אלקים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים: ויקרא הארץ—G-d called the dry land "earth" and the gathering of the waters He called "seas." And G-d saw that it was good ("ki tov"). The second time (ibid. 12): "ותוצא הארץ: דשא עשב מזריע זרע למינהו ועץ עשה פרי אשר זרעו בו למינהו וירא אלקים—and the earth brought forth grass, herbs yielding seed of its kind, and trees bearing fruit which has in it seed of its kind. And G-d saw that it was good ("ki tov").

In contrast, the word טו"ב does not appear in relation to the creation of the second day. Rashi explains (Bereishis 1, 7): **Why does it not say "ki tov" on the second day** (as it does on all the other days of creation)? **Because the work associated with the creation of the water was not completed until the third day, although He began it on the second day. And a thing which is incomplete is not in its state of fullness and goodness. On the third day, when the work of the creation of the water was completed, and He began and finished other work, the Torah repeats the phrase "ki tov" twice—once for the completion of the work of the second day and once for the completion of the work of that day.** Thus, we see that on the third day of creation, which aligns with Yaakov Avinu, it says "ki tov" twice.

Let us digress for a moment to introduce a related idea from the Likutei Maharam Shik (Vayishlach). Citing our master Sar Shalom of Belz, zy" a, he addresses Yaakov Avinu's tefilah (ibid. 32, 13): "ואתה אמרת היטב איטיב עמוך"—and You have said, "I will surely do good with you." The commentaries ask where do we find that HKB" H promised Yaakov: "היטב איטיב"—a double dose of "tov," so to speak? So, he explains that he (Yaakov) was referring to the third day of creation, which aligns with Yaakov Avinu, on which it says twice "ki tov."

We will now return to the explanation of the Ohev Yisrael. HKB" H arranged for Yaakov to be together with Yosef for two periods of 17 years in his lifetime, each with a numerical equivalent of טו"ב. These two periods of time correspond to the third day of creation, which aligns with Yaakov and his midah, and on which the phrase "ki tov" appears twice. Notwithstanding, it is still incumbent upon us to explain the significance of two times "tov" to Yaakov Avinu. Additionally, what does this have to do with the two periods of seventeen

years that Yaakov and Yosef spent together in preparation for galus Mitzrayim?

Two Times “Tov” corresponds to Yaakov with Yosef

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to clarify the explanation of the righteous Ohev Yisrael. Yaakov and Yosef together paved the way for all of Yisrael to sanctify themselves in Mitzrayim, as per the Midrash (V.R. 32, 5): **”יוסף ירד למצרים וגדר עצמו מן הערוה, ונגדרו ישראל בזכותו. אמר רבי חייא בר אבא, כדאי היה גדור ערוה בעצמו שנגאלו ישראל על ידו.”** **Yosef descended to Egypt and safeguarded himself from immorality; in his merit, Yisrael also safeguarded themselves from immorality. Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: The guarding against immorality alone was sufficient cause for Yisrael to be redeemed.** It is evident from this passage that HKB”H orchestrated Yosef’s descent to Mitzrayim, so that he would pave the way with his kedushah for all of Yisrael to also sanctify themselves in Mitzrayim. In the merit of safeguarding themselves from sexual immorality and promiscuity, they would be redeemed.

As we know, however, Yosef’s ordeal was extremely trying. In fact, he required his father’s assistance to withstand the persuasions of his yetzer. When his master’s wife tried to seduce him and grabbed onto his garment (ibid. 39, 12): **”ויעזוב בגדו בידה וינס ויצא החוצה”**—**he left his garment in her hand, and he fled, and went outside.** Here is what we learn from the Gemara about this incident (Sotah 36b): **”באותה שעה באתה דיוקנו של אביו ונראתה לו בחלון, אמר לו, יוסף עתידין אחיך שיכתבו על אבני אפוד ואתה ביניהם, רצונך שימחה שמך מביניהם.”** **At that moment, the visage of his father came and appeared to him in the window. He said to him, “Yosef, your brothers are destined to be inscribed upon the stones of the ‘ephod,’ and you are among them. Do you want your name to be erased from among them?”**

In other words, Yaakov was instrumental in helping Yosef withstand this ordeal and maintaining his kedushah. Now, we have learned that Yisrael maintained their sanctity in Mitzrayim in the merit of Yosef, but, in truth, it was in the merits of both Yaakov and Yosef. This provides us with a better understanding of the passuk cited above: **“With Your powerful arm, You redeemed Your people, the**

sons of Yaakov and Yosef, Selah.” Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim, because they safeguarded themselves from immorality due to the influence of Yaakov and Yosef.

Following this sublime path, we will now explain why HKB”H arranged for the kedushah of Yisrael in Mitzrayim to be attributable to both Yaakov and Yosef. We know that HKB”H brought the neshamos of Yisrael to Mitzrayim to purify them in preparation for the receiving of the Torah, as it is written (Devarim 4, 20): **”ואתכם לקח ה' ויוציא אתכם מכור הברזל: ממצרים להיות לו לעם נחלה כיום הזה”**—**but Hashem has taken you and withdrawn you from the iron crucible, from Mitzrayim, to be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day.** Rashi explains that an **“iron crucible” (“כור הברזל”)** is a vessel in which they refine gold. In other words, just like the impurities adherent to the gold need to be removed by means of melting in an iron crucible, so, too, it was necessary to purify and refine the neshamos of Yisrael from their adherent impurities, by means of the suffering and hard labor in Mitzrayim. This was the preparation necessary for them to receive the Torah: **“To be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day.”** This is implicit in HKB”H’s remark to Moshe (Shemos 3, 12): **”בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלקים: על ההר הזה—when you take the people out of Mitzrayim, you will worship G-d on this mountain.”** Rashi comments: **”וששאלת מה זכות יש לישראל שיצאו ממצרים, דבר גדול יש לי על הוצאה זו, שהרי עתידים לקבל התורה על ההר הזה לסוף ג' חדשים שיצאו ממצרים.”** **In answer to that which you asked, “What merit does Yisrael have that they should depart from Mitzrayim?” I have a great matter dependent on this departure. For, they are destined to receive the Torah upon this mountain three months after they leave Mitzrayim.**

Furthermore, we know that to be worthy to receive the Torah, one must be sanctified with regards to matters related to the kedushah of the “Bris.” For, if one is not, the following applies to him (Tehillim 50, 16): **”ולרשע אמר אלקים מה לך לספר: חוקי ותשא בריתי עלי פיך”**—**but to the wicked, G-d said, “What benefit is it to you to recount My decrees and to bear My covenant upon your lips?”** Hence, to be worthy and ready to receive the Torah, Yisrael had to first be purified and sanctified in matters of kedushah. They accomplished this by safeguarding themselves from immorality.

The House of Yaakov Will Be Fire and the House of Yosef a Flame

We can now appreciate the incredible connection between Yaakov Avinu and Yosef HaTzaddik. Together they prepared for the galus in Mitzrayim. As the passuk states explicitly (Ovadhiah 1, 18): "והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה"—**the house of Yaakov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame.** To explain the connection between Yaakov's fire and Yosef's flame, let us refer to the Mishnah (Avos 1, 2): "על שלשה דברים: על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים"—**the world stands on three things (it is supported by three pillars)—on the Torah, on religious service and on the performance of acts of kindness.** The Zohar hakadosh (Vayeitzei 146b) explains that the three Avos are these three pillars: **The (pillar of) Torah is Yaakov; (the pillar of) religious service is Yitzchak; (the pillar of) acts of kindness is Avraham.**

Thus, we learn that Yaakov Avinu is the pillar of Torah, as it is written (Bereishis 25, 27): "ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים"—**Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents.** Rashi explains that this refers to the tents of Shem and Eiver. This then is the meaning of the passuk: "**The house of Yaakov shall be fire**"—since by studying Torah, we ignite Yaakov's fire of Torah. As we learn in the Gemara (Ta'anis 7a): "למה"—**why are words of Torah compared to fire, as it says** (Yirmiyah 23, 29): "**Behold, My word is like fire, says Hashem**"?

However, it is impossible to study Torah and merit and retain what we have learned without emulating the behavior and kedushah of Yosef HaTzaddik. Therefore, the Navi teaches us that: "**The house of Yaakov shall be fire**"—referring to the Torah—only on the condition that: "**the house of Yosef will be a flame**"—that we adhere to and emulate the kedushah of the flame of Yosef HaTzaddik, the epitome of righteousness and the foundation ("yesod") of the world. The magnificent partnership of Yaakov Avinu and Yosef HaTzaddik that prepared for the galus in Mitzrayim is now readily apparent. In the merit of the kedushah of Yosef HaTzaddik—safeguarding Yisrael from immorality—Yisrael were deemed worthy to receive the Torah—the fire of Yaakov.

We can now present something fascinating! Yaakov's fire of Torah is described as "tov," as we learn in the Gemara

(Berachos 5a): "ואין טוב אלא תורה, שנאמר כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם"—**there is no "tov" other than Torah, as it states** (Mishlei 4, 2): "**For I have given you a good teaching ('lekach tov'), do not abandon My Torah.**" Similarly, the midah of Yosef HaTzaddik, "yesod," is also described as "tov," as we find in Sha'arei Orah (Sha'ar 2, Midas HaYesod): **Know that this midah is called "tov" throughout the Torah; here is a mnemonic phrase** (Yeshayah 3, 10): "**Tell each tzaddik that it is 'tov' (good).**" Thus, it is apparent that the "tov" of the Torah is intimately related to the "tov" of the tzaddik; only someone who is able to sanctify himself with the kedushah of "yesod" merits the Torah.

As we learned, Yaakov aligns with the third day of creation. We can now explain why it says "**ki tov**" twice on the third day—once for the Torah which is described as "**tov**" and once for the kedushah exemplified by Yosef HaTzaddik which is also described as "**tov.**" The two are inseparable.

This also sheds some light on the wonderful insight of the Ohev Yisrael. HKB"H arranged for Yaakov Avinu to enjoy two periods of "**tov**"—seventeen years—in his lifetime with Yosef HaTzaddik, because he is associated with the third day of creation, where it says "ki tov" twice. This implies that the Torah—which is described as the ultimate "**tov**"—is intimately related to the kedushah of "yesod tzaddik"—which is also described as "**tov.**" Since the combination of these two "tov"s is due to the union of Yaakov and Yosef, they lived together for two periods of "**tov**"—seventeen years each. Together, they made the necessary preparations for galus Mitzrayim, which purified Yisrael, making them worthy to receive the Torah, in the merit of the kedushah exemplified for them by Yosef HaTzaddik.

Upon further reflection, we can suggest that the first seventeen years that Yaakov and Yosef spent together, Yaakov taught his wisest sone--"כי בן זקונים הוא לו"—the "**tov**" that is Torah. Whereas during the second seventeen years that they spent together (in Mitzrayim), Yosef paved the way for all of Yisrael to maintain their kedushah—the "**tov**" of "yesod tzaddik." This is evident from the following passuk (Bereishis 49, 22): "בן פורת יוסף בן פורת עלי עין בנות צעדה עלי שור"—**a son of grace is Yosef, a son of grace to the eye; girls stepped up to gaze.** The Midrash expounds on this passuk (B.R. 98, 18): **When Yosef became the ruler of Mitzrayim, the daughters of kings peeked out at him through the lattices. They would**

throw bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and finger-rings at him to draw his attention (so that he would lift up his eyes and look at them). Nevertheless, he did not look at them.

In the merit of the “tov” that Yaakov and Yosef performed for the entirety of Yisrael in Mitzrayim, the following teaching in the Gemara was fulfilled (Menachos 53b): **”יבוא טוב ויקבל”** טוב מטוב לטובים, יבוא טוב זה משה, דכתיב ותרם אותנו כי טוב הוא, ויקבל טוב זו תורה, דכתיב כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם, מטוב זה הקב”ה, דכתיב טוב ה’

Let “tov” come and receive “tov” from “tov” for those who are “tov.” “Let ‘tov’ come” refers to Moshe, as it is written (Shemos 2, 2): “She saw that he was ‘tov.’” And receive “tov” refers to the Torah, as it is written: “For I have given you ‘lekach tov.’” From “tov” refers to HKB”H, as it is written (Tehillim 145, 9): “Hashem is ‘tov’ to all.” For those who are “tov” refers to (the people of) Yisrael, as it is written (ibid. 125, 4): “Do ‘tov,’ Hashem, to those who are ‘tov.’”



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לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע”ה

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