

The Lens of Golus **Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

The Jewish people were blessed with three avos. Yaakov Avinu was the av of golus. He was the one who left Eretz Yisroel for extended periods, and the last seventeen years of his life were spent in Mitzrayim.

This week's parsha of Vayechi is the final chapter of Seder Bereishis and of Yaakov's life. In this parsha, Yaakov bequeaths to his children and to his progeny throughout the ages the lessons they would need to survive and excel as Jews in the Diaspora. Some of what he bequeathed is more apparent through reading the pesukim that recount his words to his sons and some require deeper study.

Parshas Vayechi is what is known as a parsha setumah, meaning that the blank space that usually separates the Torah's parshiyos does not exist here. The word setumah means blocked or closed.

Rashi begins his exegesis on the parsha by giving two reasons why Vayechi is setumah. One is that when Yaakov passed away, which is recorded in this parsha, the Mitzriyim began subjugating the Jews and their eyes and hearts became blocked from the pain of the subjection.

The other explanation is that prior to his passing, Yaakov wanted to reveal what would happen at the time of the final redemption and it was blocked from him.

It is commonly understood that Rashi is saying that Yaakov was blocked from telling his children when the final redemption would arrive. If this is so, we need to understand what benefit there would have been for the shevotim to know then that their children would sin and go into exile for thousands of years. What consolation would it have been for the shevotim to know that the geulah would come in 5784?

If Yaakov intended to give hope to his family who longed to leave Mitzrayim and return home to Eretz Yisroel, knowing that their offspring wouldn't get to live permanently in the land of their fathers for thousands of years would have been a cause for further despair.

Meforshim question that, according to this second explanation of Rashi, the stimah should have been placed where the posuk hints that Yaakov wanted to reveal the keitz to the shevotim and not at the beginning of the parsha. Why, then, is the hint that Yaakov was prevented from revealing the period of the End of Days placed at the opening of the parsha?

Let us take a closer look at the pesukim at the beginning of the parsha. The pesukim recount that Yaakov made Yosef swear that he would guarantee that Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Yisroel. The pesukim tell us that sometime later, Yosef heard that Yaakov was ill and brought his children to be blessed by him. Yaakov strengthened himself, sat up on his sickbed, and proceeded to bless the two sons of his beloved son, Yosef. He told Yosef that his sons are as precious to him as his own sons, Reuvein and Shimon, and that Yosef's sons would be included among the shevotim.

Yaakov then interrupts himself to digress to events in the past. He recounts to Yosef the death of his mother, Rochel, and how he buried her in Bais Lechem. The Torah then relates in posuk 9 that Yaakov saw the sons of Yosef and asked who they were. When Yosef answered that they were his sons, Yaakov told Yosef to bring them closer to him so that he could bless them.

Posuk 10 continues that Yaakov was unable to see. Posuk 11 tells us that Yaakov remarked to Yosef that he never dreamed he would be privileged to see his beloved lost son again, and now, on top of that, he even merited seeing Yosef's children.

Yosef then approached Yaakov with Menashe on his right and Efraim on his left. Yaakov placed his right hand on the younger Efraim and his left on the firstborn, Menashe, and blessed them. Yosef was troubled that his father reversed his hands so that the younger son "received" the right hand that should rightfully have been placed on the firstborn, the bechor. Yaakov explained that the younger son is destined to achieve greater stature than his older brother in the future. He blessed them again and said that for all time, Jews will bless their sons with the words, "Yesimcha Elokim k'Efraim v'ch'Menashe."

What transpired here was obviously a great deal more than a simple scenario of an old and blind grandfather blessing two grandchildren he hardly knew. Both Efraim and Menashe were born to Yosef prior to Yaakov's arrival in Mitzrayim. Yaakov, by now, had been in Mitzrayim for 17 years, so these boys were at least 18 years old. Yaakov had surely come to know them. The Medrash, in fact, states that Efraim would study Torah every day with Yaakov.

Yet, posuk 9 states that Yaakov saw the boys but did not know who they were, Posuk 10 says that Yaakov could not see at all, and then, finally, in posuk 11, the Torah states that he was overjoyed to have seen Yosef's children!

It is obvious that in the give-and-take between our hallowed forefathers, lofty matters were being discussed. Perhaps we can gain some insight into these profound exchanges with a different explanation to the Rashi and Medrash that discuss why the parsha is setumah.

We can explain that Yaakov's desire was to reveal to his sons the secrets of how to bring about the period of Acharis Hayomim. He wanted to tell them what they had to do to bring about the keitz that we so desperately yearn for. The world must be prepared for Moshiach to arrive and reveal himself to the masses. Yaakov wanted to teach them the principles that deal with preparing the world for the ultimate redemption.

This knowledge was suddenly withheld from him. Hakadosh Boruch Hu, so to speak, told him that these mystical truths must be concealed. They can only be revealed through the pious efforts of ehrliche Yidden who dedicate themselves to Torah learning and purify themselves to the degree that they merit to attain that deeper wisdom.

Am Yisroel must work on itself to reach those levels of holiness and purity that lead to a grasp of what Hashem desires of us. It's not something that can be taught or fed to us. We have to arrive there through our study of Torah.

The middah of Yaakov is that when he left home for Mitzrayim, he brought along the cedar trees that would be required to construct the Mishkon in the desert. He was preparing his family for a life of kedusha in the exile of the midbor. In the same vein, when, prior to his passing, Yaakov saw that he wasn't able to teach his sons how to bring about the geulah, he instead taught them how to live and persevere in golus.

That's why the parsha is setumah before the story of the encounter between Yaakov and Yosef and Efraim and Menashe. Moshiach ben Yosef is the harbinger of the geulah. Thus, Yaakov wanted to reveal to Yosef the

secrets of how to bring about the inception of the messianic era. But suddenly, the information vanished, triggering confusion for Yaakov.

Yaakov wondered if there was something faulty with his vision. He thought that perhaps the boys who accompanied Yosef were not his sons. He thought perhaps this was the reason he wasn't able to impart to Yosef and his sons the ability to awaken within them their ability to bring about the redemption through their middah of Bais Yosef lehava.

Yaakov told Yosef that his sons, Efraim and Menashe, would be like his own sons, the shevotim. Yaakov saw them, but didn't recognize them, so he knew that something was amiss and that he wouldn't be able to deliver the secrets of ikvisa diMeshicha.

Instead, he revealed to them the secrets of golus survival. He said that Jews would bless their children to be as Efraim and Menashe. Just as these two sons were born in a strange land and merited to attain the level of Reuvein and Shimon, so too, for all time, Jewish boys would be reminded that although they are in exile, if they work on themselves, they can rise to the highest levels of Torah and gedulah.

Yaakov revealed to Yosef that his mother was buried at a lonely site along the side of the road because of something that was to transpire centuries later. As the Jews would be driven out of Yerushalayim and Eretz Yisroel, Rochel would cry for them and Hashem would promise, in her merit, to return them to the Promised Land.

Yaakov blessed the sons that the angels who accompanied him as he went into exile and protected him throughout its duration would stand by them in golus. The angels would call upon them the names of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and Am Yisroel would thus prosper in the Diaspora.

He foretold to Yosef that the kings Yerovom and Achav would come from Efraim and Yeihu would descend from Menashe. But he also told him that Menashe would give birth to Gideon, and Efraim to Yehoshua, who would lead the Jews into Eretz Yisroel after Moshe's passing. And then he set about revealing other secrets of the golus to the rest of shevotim.

We have not yet perfected ourselves and made ourselves worthy of Moshiach ben Yosef arriving and foretelling the arrival of Moshiach ben Dovid. Thus, we remain in golus.

As we contemplate the current painful reminder that we are in golus, we know that we've been here before. Once again, we find Jewish soldiers fighting an existential war. Once again, the State of Israel feels it necessary for its men to take up weapons to defend themselves from depraved enemies. Once again, the nations of the world take the side of the murderers as ancient anti-Semitism is evident.

People who had become so assimilated that they almost lost touch with Judaism are now reminded wherever they go and seek to reattach to the faith of their forefathers and mothers. We, too, are reminded that most nations of the world detest us. That reality pains us and we seek to understand the deeply felt hatred and anger at a people that simply seeks to live in peace, without bothering anyone. Yes, America is different than many of the Western countries and the vast majority of the political leaders of this country are friendly and welcoming towards us and supportive of Israel, even now.

While we used to take their friendship for granted, we no longer can. Since October 7th, it has become more apparent that a growing number of Democrats and educational institutions despise us and seek our ruin. We need to express appreciation to those who show us friendliness and sympathy and be thankful to Hashem that we live in the greatest democracy ever known to man.

We have the comfort of living in freedom, with the military draft long ago abolished. Do we know the fear of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and wives and children as their sons and husbands paint their faces, load up their gear and go to battle, never knowing if they will come back again alive and whole?

Those who are younger and those who aren't tuned in well enough forget about the rivers of tears and oceans of blood that have been spilled over the past decades. But we all know that we are living in unprecedented times. We realize that history is being made daily, and as the events unfold, they are carefully guided and orchestrated by our Heavenly Father.

Political leaders and military generals will ultimately have to face the infuriating fact that they are powerless. They are pawns in Hashem's hands. Israel's leaders thought that by handing Gaza over to the Palestinians, they would be satisfied to rule over themselves and never terrorize Israel again. Yet, as the world watches the war and ponders the post-war Gaza, they ignore that ever since Gaza was evacuated on America's insistence and Arik Sharon's malfeasance, the area has become a hot-bed of anti-Semitism and a base for terrorists to attack Jews.

The terrorists' promises of making a better life for the people of Gaza proved to be empty propaganda, as fictitious as the very notion itself of a "Palestinian people." Since Israel abandoned Gaza, there were no efforts undertaken there to establish permanent peace, build up an economy, or create a normal life for Gazans.

On the contrary, the group Gazans voted into power has so little regard for the lives of Gaza's citizens that they readily use the civilian population as human shields. They welcome civilian casualties, using the carnage they provoke to incite global outrage and hatred against Israel. Once again, they are proving how adept they are at that, as they are clearly winning the P.R. war, while they are losing the military war. Thousands demonstrate against Israel, not only in Arab capitals, but in every major Western city. The media internationally covers the war with a clear pro-Hamas bias, bashing Israel at every opportunity.

None of this should surprise us. We have to be sure to view what is transpiring through the lens of golus and remember the double standard that has prevailed since time immemorial. We have to turn to sifrei kodesh to understand how we are to respond to the current crisis.

We live in the times of ikvisa diMeshicha, the times that Chazal warned about. We must increase our devotion to limud haTorah, lomdei Torah and shemiras hamitzvos. We have to embrace each other and increase the achdus among us, ridding ourselves of hate and division. The world was created for Torah and in its merit, we exist and prosper.

The first thing that Yaakov Avinu did when he realized that his family was going to be spending time in Mitzrayim was send Yehudah to establish a yeshiva where they would be able to study Torah. He was sending a message to all coming generations that the Jewish people require yeshivos for their very existence. All throughout Jewish history, there have been yeshivos wherever we were, and it was the yeshivos that kept our people enduring, vibrant and connected to Hashem. The yeshivos cannot exist without communal support, and there is no greater zechus than contributing to allow them to exist and expand.

In the early days of Jewish life in this country, there were very few, if any, yeshivos, for whatever reason, and the result was that millions of Yiddishe neshamos were lost. It was only after intrepid souls were moser nefesh to follow Yaakov Avinu's lesson and established yeshivos where the new generation could be educated that frumkeit began to continue from one generation to the next. The fact that Yiddishkeit sprouted and took hold here and is flourishing today is thanks to the foresight and dedication of those exemplary people.

There is another lesson from Yaakov Avinu relevant to us during these tough days.

The Medrash states that in the words of Yaakov Avinu we detect what will bring the long-awaited geulah. He called to his children and said, "Hayosfu v'agida lochem es asher yikra e'schem b'Acharis Hayomim hikovtzu v'shimu bnei Yaakov v'shimu el Yisroel avichem – Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days, assemble and listen children of Yaakov and listen to Yisroel your father."

In these words of telling them to gather together and listen to Yisroel to hear about Acharis Hayomim lies the hint that in order to bring about the period known as the End of Days, you must gather together. There cannot be any division or separation between you.

Moshiach can only come when the Jewish people are united, respecting and loving each other, irrespective of differences.

Yaakov bequeathed to us the secret of the geulah: coming together in complete achdus.

We must bless our children that they should be like Efraim and Menashe and excel despite the darkness of golus. We have to train and guide them to grow and mature into talmidei chachomim and tzaddikim who can light up the world with their Torah and righteousness. We have to be mechaneich them and ourselves to love and not hate fellow good Jews, bring Jews together and not divide them, treat everyone with respect and seek to create achdus.

We bless our children as our parents blessed us. Be like Efraim and Menashe, who remained loyal to the mesorah of their father and grandfather as they lived in the depraved swamp of golus. Be like Efraim and Menashe, who cleaved to a life of Torah and mitzvos as the world around them sank deeper into tumah.

We are nearing the day when the grandson of Yosef, Efraim and Menashe, namely Moshiach ben Yosef, is so close to revealing himself to us that we can almost hear his footsteps. It is up to us to make it happen.

In Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu showed us the way.