

# **פ' ויחי תשפ"ה**

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## **STORIES WITH ETERNAL MESSAGES**

*And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, and Yaakov's days, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty seven years (47:28)*

The Torah does not mention any events that occurred during the 17 years that Yaakov was in Egypt. This is because the holy Torah does not contain stories for their own sake, but only those that have a message for future generations. Yaakov's life teaches us how to overcome difficult trials; he had to deal with the misfortunes surrounding Eisov, Elifas, Dina, Yosef etc. His reactions to these events teach us how to accept difficult challenges silently with faith, in the knowledge that they are divine decrees. During the last 17 years of his life, on the other hand, Yaakov lived without sorrow or misfortune, learning Torah in comfort, since Yosef supported him. No events took place during that period that contain a lesson for future generations, and they are therefore not recorded in the Torah.

## **YEARS OF SUFFERING**

What is the Torah coming to add with the words "the years of his life"? The point the *possuk* is making – how long Yaakov lived for – would be conveyed just as well without those words.

Based on the beginning of the *possuk* which says that "*Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years*" we might have understood that Yaakov only "lived" happily and with vitality for the seventeen years that he was in Egypt because that was the only period of his life during which he was able to serve Hashem without all the troubles that he had experienced.

The *possuk* therefore emphasizes that Yaakov "lived" **all** "the years of his life" the same way he lived his last 17 years, because he considered his years of suffering to be a great benefit for him since they brought him to the afterlife. He was happy and enjoyed all the years of his life to the same extent.

## **WHO CAN OVERTURN DECREES**

*And he said, "I will do as you say" (47:30)*

These words can be interpreted as follows: "Since I also intend to request that after I die my remains should be taken to be buried in *Eretz Yisroel*, you can rest assured that I will do as you say, because I understand the importance of doing this matter and will not take your request lightly".

In a similar vein, at the time of the decree in Russia and Poland forbidding the Jews from wearing distinctive clothes (many *gedolim* thought that this was a case of *yeherag veal yaavor*, that one had to rather be killed than comply with this regulation), people asked Rav Yitzchak Volozhiner to approach his close friend, Sir Moses Montefiore, and ask him to use his connections with the authorities to get them to cancel this degree.

Rav Yitzchak did not agree to do this because in order to succeed in this mission of convincing the government someone was needed who understood the importance of the matter

so that he would use all his efforts to try to overturn the decree. Sir Moses was a pious Jew, but did not understand the danger and severity of this decree for the chareidi public. He would therefore not succeed in this mission, and so there was no point in asking him to intervene.

## CAUSING SORROW TO A FELLOW JEW

*"Now it came to pass after these incidents that someone said to Yosef, 'Behold, your father is ill'" (48:1)*

We would have expected Yosef to be constantly attending to his father's needs, so why did he not know about his father's situation until he was told about it by a messenger? *Chazal* (*Pesikta Rabati* 3, 10) ask this question and answer that this was because Yosef did not want to be alone with his father, lest the latter would ask him details about how he had been sold into slavery. If that were to happen, he would be forced to answer, and he was worried that his father would become upset with the tribes and curse them, and this would result in the destruction of the entire world, which was only created for the sake of the tribes. Therefore, Yosef was not constantly in his father's presence.

We have to be especially careful not to be in a place or situation that will cause others harm or embarrassment, or cause them to utter forbidden speech. The truth is that if a person speaks ill of someone, this arouses evil for the speaker himself, because when a person is judged in Heaven and accused of certain actions, many times his judgement is sealed on the basis of what he himself decreed when he spoke disparagingly about another, and judged him unfavorably. Therefore, he who guards his tongue saves his soul from evil, and benefits himself in this world and the next.

The late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, would visit his father, the previous Belzer Rebbe, Rav Yissochor Dov, together with his brothers, every week, and they would talk in learning. However, Rav Aharon would always stand aside without getting involved in the conversation. But on one occasion, after several years had elapsed, he did say a *dvar Torah* and took part in the discussions. When he was pressed for an explanation of his behavior until then and now, he explained that he had kept quiet until now, because his step-brothers' mother was always in the house, and she greatly enjoyed hearing her sons talking in learning. He did not want to spoil this by displaying his great intellectual acumen in the presence of his stepmother, lest this would diminish from her happiness. Only on this day, when she happened not to be at home, did he decide to start talking in learning to give pleasure to his father.

We should learn from our great leaders how careful we have to be not to harm or embarrass others, or even minimize the pleasure of a fellow Jew.

## BLESSINGS

*"And he kissed them and embraced them" (48:10)*

The Seforno writes: "In order that his soul should cleave to them and his blessing will be effective for them".

We see from this that in order for the blessing of a righteous person to be effective, he has to bless from the depths of his heart. Nowadays, some people go to rabbis for a blessing, with masses of people walking in front of the rabbi for a brief moment without the rabbi even having the chance to contemplate. A blessing given in such circumstances can have no effect, since the whole essence of a *brocho* is for the person making the blessing to make an emotional connection with the person being blessed.

In a similar vein, the Ramban (on *Bereishis* 25:34) explains that the reason Yitzchok asked Eisov to make him “savory food” before blessing him was because “he wanted to receive a benefit from him so that his soul would connect to his soul whilst enjoying (food), and he would bless him willingly and with a complete heart”.

Moreover, although it says “And I will bless them” when blessing the congregation, *Kohanim* have to bless them “with love” and out of a desire that the blessing should be effective, as the *medrash* says, “Hashem said to the *kohanim*: ‘Bless them with concentration, so that the blessing will be effective over them’” (see Tanchuma Buber).

Accordingly, the *Mogen Avrohom* (128:18) quotes the *Zohar* that states that if a *Kohen* does not love the people he is blessing, or if they do not love him, he should not bless them at all - and the *Ateres Zekeinim* adds in the name of the *Zohar* that if a *Kohen* nevertheless blesses in such circumstances, this can be very dangerous - because if the blessing is not given wholeheartedly that has a destructive effect on it.

This also explains the custom to say “*yasher koach*” to *kohanim* after their blessing, because even though they are obligated by *halocho* to bless the congregation, and need not be thanked for the actual act of blessing, we are thanking them for making the effort to bless us with the greatest possible amount of concentration and wholeheartedly.

The above also explains the custom amongst Chassidim and Sefardim to give a *pidyon* to the Rebbe or *chacham* from whom they seek a blessing. Since the money is given for the purpose of achieving the desired result from the blessing, the person making the blessing is actually obliged, for his part, to do his utmost to obtain salvation for the applicant’s trouble, and, if he does not do so, it is an act of quasi-theft, because the money was given for that specific purpose. Therefore, the *zaddik* has to feel complete empathy with the person’s suffering, and give his blessing wholeheartedly, if only out of the private desire that salvation come quickly, and his blessing be successful.

## **YICHUS AS A LIABILITY**

*My honor, you shall not join their assembly* (49:6); *Rashi*: *My name shall not join them there, as it says: “Korach the son of Yitzhar the son of Kehos the son of Levi”, but it does not say, “the son of Yaakov”.*

What motivated Yaakov to have his name omitted? After all, the mere act of omitting his name could not change the reality of Korach’s family tree.

An illustrious family tree can be a great asset if the person at the bottom of that tree follows in the footsteps of his ancestors, but also a dangerous liability if he does not, because if he sins, or behaves in a manner unworthy of his great roots, he will be held to account more than if he were a person without such roots.

Yaakov did not want his name associated with Korach, because then Korach’s punishment would be correspondingly greater. Yaakov did not want anyone to be punished on his account, and he therefore prayed that when Korach would sin by causing a *machlokes* despite being the descendant of Yaakov, Korach would at least not be punished more because of his lineage.

This week a young man asked Rav Sternbuch for a *brocho*, stating that he was the grandson of a certain rabbi. Rav Sternbuch told him that the main thing was the boy himself, and whether Hashem had *nachas* from him.

People with *yichus* would do well to remember the liabilities and responsibilities associated with it, and not only the advantages.

## HAPPINESS

*He saw a resting place, that it was good, and the land, that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear (49:15)*

If he saw that the resting place [*menucho*] was good, why did he bend his shoulder to bear a burden, instead of continuing to enjoy his rest?

This is because peace of mind and true enjoyment can only be obtained from toiling in Torah. It is obvious to anyone who observes them, that it is specifically *bnei Torah* who are busy with their studies delving the oceans of Torah who are the happiest people in the world, and enjoy more peace of mind than those who are busy with the material affairs of this world.

Hence, *He saw a resting place, that it was good*, he saw the peace of mind to be obtained from Torah in this world, *and the land, that it was pleasant*, he saw how pleasant it is to dedicate oneself to Torah, and therefore *he bent his shoulder to bear* the yoke of Torah by delving in it.

As Rav Dessler writes (*Michtav MeEliyohu* Vol. I pg. 3): “there is no such thing as material happiness, only he who is wealthy in spirituality is a happy person”. It is a fundamental principle when educating boys to inculcate the message that the only way to achieve happiness already in this world is through Torah learning, whereas if they choose any other avenue, they cannot achieve true happiness.

## HONORING PARENTS DURING THEIR LIFETIME

*And Yosef fell on his father's face, and he wept over him and kissed him (50:1)*

Why does the *possuk* mention Yosef's reaction and not that of his brothers? Surely they also wept.

Yaakov's sons cried not only because of his passing, but also because they had now lost the opportunity to perform the mitzvah of honoring their father. That unique lack upon the passing of a parent is also the reason why someone who loses a parent must tear his clothes until his heart is revealed, and not merely the upper item of clothing, as is required of those who lose other close relatives.

Hence, when Yaakov passed away, Yosef cried more than his brothers due to the intense pain he felt that he had not been privileged to perform the mitzvah of *kibbud av* during the many decades during which had been separated from his father (from the age of 17). Since his outpouring of emotion was the most intense of all the brothers, his tears are mentioned by the *possuk* because they are considered to be the main tears shed for Yaakov *ovinu* after his death.

This should inspire us to perform the mitzvah of *kibbud av voem* whilst our parents are still alive. Unfortunately, many people have regrets after a parent passes away that they did not perform this mitzvah properly during the parent's lifetime, and even though it is possible to perform this mitzvah even after a parent passes away (see *Kiddushin* 31b), the reward of those who honor a parent during his lifetime is greater (several *poskim* hold that *kibbud av* after death is only *miderabonon*, and even those who hold that it is *mide'oraisa*, the main mitzvah is during the parent's lifetime).

## ...AND BEYOND

*"And I will lie with my fathers" (47:30)*

The most important blessing a person can have is to have sons who are *talmidei chachomim*, because if he has sons continuing in the path set out by him, he does not really die. Yaakov was privileged to have children following his path, and someone who passes away leaving behind children following the path of the Torah has not died, but is merely "lying".

*"And he blessed Yoseph... may the angel who redeemed me from all harm bless the youths"* (48:15-16)

The *possuk* starts off saying that Yaakov blessed Yoseph, but in the next *possuk* we are told that Yaakov blessed the youths, Menashe and Ephraim. How are we to understand this?

If a person's sons follow the path of Torah, he never dies, since he will be credited for his sons' good deeds, so that even after his death, he will still be considered to be alive. That was the blessing which Yaakov wished to give to Yosef. It is the ultimate blessing a parent can give his child, especially when they are situated in surroundings as unfavorable as those in Egypt, seeped as it was with *tumoh*. Hence, blessing Yosef's sons was tantamount to blessing Yosef himself.

The Zohar (in *parashas Bechukosai*) says that a person is even more in need of his sons after his own death than during his lifetime, because if the son follows the path of Torah, Hashem has pity on the father and honors him in the eternal world, whereas if the son does not do so, his father suffers in the *olom ho'emess*. Therefore, by dedicating ourselves to our children's education, we are actually looking after our own interests in the eternal life.

Whenever the *Baal Hapardes* performed a mitzvah, he would say that he was performing it in order to fulfill the Will of Hashem, and also for the *mitzvah* to be a merit for his father and mother in *Gan Eden*. Some people think that the main *tikun* ("rectification" of the soul) they can do for a deceased parent is to say *kaddish* and be a *chazan*, but they are making a mistake. The *medrash* does indeed emphasize the importance of these actions, but it is more important - especially during the first year when the judgment of the *neshomo* is still strong - to endeavor to add additional hours of learning, to pray with greater devotion, and give more charity, and whenever doing so, to say expressly "I am giving this *leiluy nishmas* (to elevate the soul) of father/mother followed by their name and their mother's name".

In a similar vein, the Chofetz Chaim writes in *Shemiras Haloshon* (Conclusion, section B): "The main rectification for one's fathers' souls is effected when the son strengthens himself to learn Torah every day, and also performs acts of kindness". The *Ridvaz* (Rav Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky) writes in his will (end of *Shut Ridvaz*): "After I pass away, be careful on the day that you say Kaddish to learn a *daf* of *gemoro* on that day, and should there be some reason, G-d forbid, preventing you from this quota, be very careful not to say Kaddish on that day at all, because you will not give pleasure to my soul when you say Kaddish without learning a *daf gemoro* on that day. Be careful about this".

## ZERIZUS NOT HASTE

*[You have] the restlessness of water: Rashi: The restlessness and the haste with which you hastened to display your anger, similar to water which hastens on its course.*

*Therefore, you shall not have superiority. Rashi: You shall no longer receive all these superior positions that were fit for you (42:4)*

The claim against Reuven is that he acted with haste. Even though he acted for the sake of Heaven, and even though the act of switching the beds was a good deed in and of itself, he should have waited to contemplate whether taking this step was the right thing to do then. Although the trait of *zerizus* (alacrity) is very praiseworthy, it should only come into play after a person has pondered the wisdom of his intentions carefully, and come to the clear conclusion that it is his duty to act.

Once he has reached that stage he is indeed duty-bound to act with alacrity. But Reuven did not come to the clear rational conclusion that he was obliged to switch his father's beds and he was therefore (based on his superior level) held responsible for not having acted with more moderation.

Rav Dov Yaffe heard from the Chazon Ish that in Radin some zealots set fire to a large library that contained improper literature. As a consequence, the town's residents suffered from the library's owners, who took steps to prevent the Torah life in the town from flourishing. The Chazon Ish commented that even though the zealots' motives stemmed from a positive desire to eliminate impure literature, Reuven's acts too stemmed from the positive motive of defending his mother's honor, and yet the Torah denounces his deed as having been done with restlessness. These zealots should not have done what they did, they should have consulted with *daas Torah*, rather than acting independently. Had they done so, they would not have caused major damage to the city's spiritual situation.

### **PONDERING HASHEM'S KINDNESSES**

*And Yosef's brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, "Perhaps Yosef will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him (50:15)*

The *Medrash Tanchuma* asks what the brothers saw that they were now afraid, and replies that they saw that upon returning from burying their father, Yosef went to make a blessing at the same pit into which the brothers had thrown him. He made the blessing there which one is obliged to make at such places: "Blessed is Hashem Who performed a miracle for me at this place". Seeing this, the brothers feared that Yosef would now hate them and pay them back for their evil deeds.

What is the connection between Yosef's making this blessing and the brothers' fear of his reprisal? After all, Yosef was merely doing what he was halachically obliged to, so why did they think that this would arouse his hatred towards them?

When a person thanks Hashem for His kindness in saving him from danger, he is obliged to picture in his mind the extent of the danger he had been in based on natural causes, and how he was saved supernaturally due to Hashem's kindness. Therefore, when Yosef was making the blessing for the miracle that had been performed at this location, he must have thought about the grave danger he had been in, and how only Hashem had saved him from the situation that had been brought about by his brothers, who had left him in the pit to die an almost certain death. Since these thoughts must have been going on in his mind, the brothers were worried that he would now take revenge on them, and they therefore came to ask him to forgive them. Yosef replied, "Do not be afraid... you intended evil against me, but Hashem designed it for good".

### **END OF DAYS**

*Yaakov called for his sons and said, "Gather and I will tell you what will happen [yikre] to you at the end of days" (49:1)*

The commentators explain that at the end of days people will attribute everything to chance [*mikre*] and natural causes and forget that everything actually depends on Hashem. That is the *avoda zoro* of the end of days.

Our task is to work on internalizing the fact that everything comes from Hashem, so that we will not "call anymore the work of our hands our gods" (Hoshea 14:4).