

Parshas Vayechi

Teves 5772 January 2011

## Living in Exile

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂר שָׁנָה

**"Yaakov lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt." (47:28)**

The Midrash relates that Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah the Nossi) lived in the town of Tzippori for seventeen years. Rebbi referred to these years as the equivalent of the seventeen years that Yaakov dwelt in Egypt. Furthermore, the Gemoro (Kesubos 103B) relates that Rebbi, even after his death, would come each Shabbos to make Kiddush for his family members, just like Yaakov, who did not die. Harav Gedaliah Schorr explains why it is that the Gemoro and Midrash, and indeed Rebbi himself, linked the lives of Rebbi and Yaakov.

He writes, based on a different Midrash, that the seventeen years Yaakov dwelt in Egypt were seventeen years of peace and rest from all the troubles Yaakov had endured throughout his life. They were, in relation to his previous travails, comparable to the world to come in the rest they provided. These years, explains Harav Schorr, were a necessary aspect of Jewish history in that they enabled Yaakov to build a strong Torah base for Klal Yisroel during their exile in Egypt, and as such, acted as a preparation for what was to come. Similarly, the time of Rebbi living in Tzippori was just prior to the beginning of the exile we are currently in. Rebbi lived at the end of the Mishnaic period, at the point when the Torah leadership of the world passed from the Rabbis of Eretz Yisroel to those outside. Rebbi recognised that just as Yaakov had built a stronghold of Torah during his time in Egypt, so too it was necessary for him to build something that would see Klal Yisroel through the long exile they would soon undertake, something that would act as a beacon of light in the darkness of exile; the Mishnah. To achieve this, Rebbi spent his seventeen years of peace working on developing the Mishnah, creating something for Klal Yisroel to hold on to as the exile goes on. Furthermore, the Mishnah actually acts as a means of speeding up each person's personal exile, since the light within the Oral Torah permeates a person and reveals the light in the world even in the midst of the darkness of exile.

This link between Yaakov and Rebbi, writes Harav Schorr, can also be seen in the Gemoro regarding Rebbi returning from the next world to make Kiddush for his family. The Sefer Chassidim asks how this can be, when the dead are not obligated to fulfil Mitzvos, and therefore cannot exempt others from their obligation. He answers, that Tzaddikim are called alive even after death, and as such they can perform Mitzvos. Harav Schorr explains that this is because Tzaddikim, even when alive, take no pleasure from this world since their entire life is dedicated to finding the spiritual within the physical. In particular Rebbi, who testified about himself that he gained no physical pleasure in this world, can be said to have been totally dedicated to the spiritual at the expense of the physical. Therefore, death, which is the separation of the body and spirit, would have no meaning for someone like Rebbi, since he lived his entire life separate from physicality anyway. As such, asserts Harav Schorr, the body of such a Tzaddick actually accompanies his soul to the world to come, since even his body was dedicated to spiritual matters in this world. It was therefore possible for Rebbi to be able to appear in corporeal form and make Kiddush for his family. Similarly, when the Gemoro tells us that Yaakov did not die, concludes Harav Schorr, we are being informed that Yaakov lived in the way Rebbi would later i.e. that his body was entirely devoted to spirituality.

## The Living Dead

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף

**"And Yosef died." (50:26)**

The Chizkuni writes that Yosef died before his brothers since he embalmed his father Yaakov. The Chanukas HaTorah asks why the Chizkuni implies that Yosef was punished for his actions, when embalming is a tremendous honour normally only afforded to kings.

He answers based on the opinion of Chazal, that Dovid Hamelech lived for seventy years because both Yosef and Yaakov gave up some of the years of their lives, in order to give them to Dovid. However, according to the opinion in the Gemoro that Yaakov never died, it follows that there would have been no point in Yosef dying early since the idea that both he and Yaakov gave of their lives to Dovid would clearly be incorrect. Therefore, the Chizkuni was making clear that Yosef was of the opinion that Yaakov did die, which is evidenced by his having embalmed him. Since Yosef believed Yaakov died, it follows that he also gave up part of his life for Dovid, as his father had done, which explains why he died early.

## Grounds for Burial

וַאֲנִי בָבְאִי מִפְּדֹן מֵתָה עָלַי רַחֵל

**"And Rachel died on me on my way from Padon Arom." (48:7)**

The Meshech Chochmoh explains why it was that Yaakov mentioned the death of Yosef's mother while asking Yosef to bury him in Eretz Yisroel. The death of Rochel is attributed by many commentators to a punishment for the lack of fulfilment by Yaakov of an oath that he took to Hashem. As such, Yaakov was warning Yosef that if he swore to take Yaakov's body to Eretz Yisroel for burial, he should be aware of the dire consequences of delaying that oath.