

RACHEL'S CRIES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayechi

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Volume 25, No. 12
11 Tevet 5771
December 18, 2010

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Today's Learning:
Tanach: Yeshayah 21:22
Mishnah: Terumot 1:4-5
Halachah: O.C. 589:4-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 38
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Challah 6

Our parashah opens: "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov -- the years of his life -- were one hundred forty-seven years." Why does the Torah point out how long Yaakov lived in Egypt? [The question is heightened by the fact that it is possible to calculate this figure based on other verses in the Torah.] R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains:

We are taught in Pirkei Avot (ch.5), "According to the struggle is the reward." It is reasonable to say,

writes R' Kluger, that the years of a person's life are determined [in part] by how hard he or she struggles in this world to serve Hashem. A person who works hard can accomplish in a short lifetime what another person needs a longer lifetime to accomplish. This is the meaning of the verse (Kohelet 5:11), "Sweet is the year of the laborer, whether little or much -- he will eat." [Ed. note: Apparently, R' Kluger is interpreting the verse as follows: According to how hard one labors, so are whatever number of years he has considered "sweet." Whether they are few or many, he will eat according to the quality of his labor, not the quantity of his years.]

Certainly, R' Kluger continues, serving Hashem outside of Eretz Yisrael is more difficult than serving Hashem in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, Yaakov -- because he lived in Egypt for 17 years -- accomplished his mission in a shorter life span (147 years) than did his father Yitzchak (180 years) or his grandfather Avraham (175 years).

The Gemara (Berachot 8a) relates that the Sage Rabbi Yochanan was surprised to hear that there are old people in Bavel. However, when he learned that they attend shul morning and evening, he understood. R' Kluger explains that Rabbi Yochanan's surprise was due to the idea set forth above. However, when he was told that these people spend time in shul, where the yetzer ha'ra is less prevalent, he understood that their challenges were not as great as they might otherwise have been in the Diaspora, thus necessitating a longer life. (Chochmat Shlomo p.34)

"Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov -- the years of his life -- were one hundred forty- seven years." (47:28)

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and Yerushalayim) writes: A person who does not value the joys in his life, may ultimately shorten his own life. In this vein, early commentaries write that Yaakov lived 33 years fewer than his father Yitzchak, paralleling the 33 (Hebrew) words in his exchange with Pharaoh (Bereishit 47:8-9), "Pharaoh said to Yaakov, 'How many are the days of the years of your life?' Yaakov answered Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the life spans of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns'." Because Yaakov complained about the quality of his life, it was shortened.

However, R' Shmuelevitz notes, this requires further explanation. Why was Yaakov punished for Pharaoh's words, without which the total of 33 words is not reached? The answer is that Yaakov was not punished because of these words themselves; rather, the 33 words are a hint to us of why Yaakov's life was shortened. Why, in fact, did Pharaoh inquire about Yaakov's age -- a rather rude question to ask a stranger? The answer is that Yaakov appeared to Pharaoh to be unusually ancient. Yaakov's appearance was a reflection of his anguish over his difficult life, and that was a shortcoming in comparison to the level of bitachon expected of someone of Yaakov's caliber. Since Yaakov was to blame for Pharaoh's question, that question is included in the 33 words that the Torah

uses to teach us this lesson. (Sichot Mussar 5731 No.3)

"The time approached for Yisrael to die, so he called for his son, for Yosef . . ." (47:29)

Midrash Rabbah connects this pasuk to the verse (Divrei Hayamim I 29:15), "Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope." Says the midrash: "Not like the shadow of a wall or a tree, but like the shadow of a bird ('oaf')." What does this mean?

R' Yehoshua Horowitz z"l (the Dzikover Rebbe, whose 98th yahrzeit was this week) explains: We say in the High Holiday prayers, "A man's origin is from dust, and his destiny is back to dust." This is meant to teach man humility. However, this thought can also lead to depression. One might reason: What difference do my good deeds make since I am so insignificant before G-d? For this reason, the prayer concludes: "ka'chalom ya'uf " / "like a dream flies." This, writes R' Horowitz, is a reference to Chanoch, about whom the Torah says (Bereishit 5:24), "Chanoch walked with G-d; then he was no more, for G-d had taken him" - i.e., he entered Gan Eden while still alive. Indeed, the gematria of the word "chalom" (dream) equals the gematria of the name "Chanoch." This teaches that any person can, through his good deeds, ascend to Heaven in the same way that Chanoch did.

This is what the midrash is teaching: "The time approached for Yisrael to die" - if a Yisrael (a Jew) is humble and negates himself like one who is dead - let him remember to call for "Yosef" - the gematria of which equals the gematria of "oaf" / "bird." Let him remind himself of his ability to elevate himself to the highest levels. (Ateret Yeshuah)

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble, and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days'." (49:1)

In fact, we do not read in the verses that follow that Yaakov spoke of the End of Days. Rashi z"l explains: "He wished to reveal to them the end of Yisrael's exile but the Shechinah departed from him and he began to speak of other things."

The Gemara (Pesachim 56a) relates that when the Shechinah departed from Yaakov, he suspected that some or all of his children were unworthy of hearing what he wished to reveal. They assured him, "Shema Yisrael -- Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad!" / "Hear, our father Yisrael -- just as there is only One Hashem in your heart, so there is only One in our hearts!"

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) asks: Shema is a declaration about the unity of Hashem. Where in Shema is there any statement about what is in the declarer's heart? He explains:

Our Sages understood that (although one can of course say the words of Shema) regardless of what is in one's heart, one cannot actually recognize the Oneness of Hashem, i.e., the Unity of all forces in

the universe, unless one's own thoughts and desires are themselves united in this purpose. We state in Shema (Devarim 6:5), "You shall love Hashem, your Elokim, with all your hearts . . ." Why is "hearts" plural? Our Sages say that it refers to both the yetzer ha'tov and the yetzer ha'ra. Whether one has extinguished his yetzer ha'ra entirely or has merely subdued it to serve the ultimate good (for example, using haughtiness to stand up to heretics or using cruelty to deny oneself temptations that compete with one's fixed times for Torah study), the unity of one's positive and negative urges is a prerequisite for true recognition of Hashem's Unity. (Da'at Shlomo: Purim & Pesach p.320)

"Yissachar is a chamor gareem / strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries." (49:14)

Why did Yaakov call his son Yissachar, the leading Torah scholar among all of Yaakov's sons, a "donkey"? R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697- 1777) explains that the word "chamor" / "donkey" is an allusion to "chomer" / "material" (as in "materialism"). The word "gareem," usually translated "strong-boned," also can mean "breaking." Yissachar, through his Torah study, breaks materialism. Without Torah study, writes R' Valle, there is no way to overcome materialism.

R' Valle continues: The inclination for materialism "rests between the boundaries." This indicates that the moment one leaves Torah study, materialism is ready to grab hold of him; one does not even need to travel a distance from the bet midrash to be ensnared. (Ohr Olam)

Rachel's Cries

"But as for me -- when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Efrat; and I buried her there on the road to Efrat, which is Bet Lechem." (48:7)

Rashi z"l explains Yaakov's words to Yosef as follows: "Although I trouble you to take me for burial into the land of Canaan and I did not do this for your mother, which I might easily have done since she died quite close to Bet Lechem, yet I did not carry her even the short distance to Bet Lechem to bring her into a city; I know that in your heart you feel some resentment against me. Know, however, that I buried her there by the command of G-d." Rashi adds: The future proved that G-d had commanded him to do this in order that she might help her children when Nevuzaradan would take them into captivity. For, when they were passing along that road, Rachel came out from her grave and stood by her tomb weeping and beseeching mercy for them, as it is said (Yirmiyah 31:15), "A voice was heard in Ramah -- wailing, bitter weeping -- Rachel weeps for her children, she refuses to be consoled, for her children, for he is gone." But, Hashem replied to her (verse 16-17), "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your effort -- the words of Hashem -- and they shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for you ultimately -- the

words of Hashem -- and your children shall return to their border." [Until here from Rashi]

R' Moshe Alsheich z"l (1508-1593; author of a popular Tanach commentary) notes several textual difficulties in the verse from Yirmiyah quoted in Rashi. First, Ramah is a known place north of Yerushalayim, but that is not where Rachel is buried. Second, why the redundancy, "Rachel weeps for her children, she refuses to be consoled, for her children"? Third, why the singular form, "for he is gone"? Fourth, why the redundancy in Hashem's reply?

He explains: "Ramah" means "on high," and the verse is teaching that Rachel's bitter weeping reached "on high." Or, Rachel's weeping caused others to weep, until weeping overtook even those in distant Ramah. For what was Rachel weeping? For her children who were exiled at the time of the First Destruction and for her children who were exiled at the time of the Second Destruction. (Likewise, Hashem's double reply relates to the returns from the two exiles.) But, it is not for the exile itself that Rachel cries; rather, she cries "for He is gone" -- for Hashem's Presence that has departed from us. Had He not departed from us, the exile would not be as frightening. (Marot Ha'tzovot)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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