

# TEARS OF JOY

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the parsha of Vayechi, completing the Sefer {Book} of Breishis. "Vayechi Yaakov {And Yaakov lived} in the land of Mitzrayim {Egypt} for seventeen years. [47:28]"

When Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim and was brought before Paroah, he told Paroah that he was one hundred and thirty years old. The Torah later tells us that Yaakov lived for one hundred and forty seven years.

The arithmetic is simple. Why did the Torah need to tell us that Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim for seventeen years?

The Ramban writes that Breishis is called the 'Sefer Yetzirah,' the Book of 'Forming.' It contains both the physical forming of the world, the creation, and also the life-events of the Forefather's which 'formed' and shaped the destiny of their offspring. Their lives laid out the blueprint for what we would endure and experience as a nation.

We as a nation have endured and are enduring many difficult exiles and persecutions along the demanding path toward our ultimate redemption. The blueprint for this was laid out by Yaakov and the many challenging hardships he endured throughout his life. There are commentators who go as far as to delineate how each of Yaakov's hardships aligns with each of our exiles.

Ultimately, we will reach the point of redemption. The point where we will be able to look back, reflect, recognize the need for and appreciate each national and personal stumble and persecution that we were subjected to. This too must be contained in the formative blueprint of our Avos' lives.

Where does the Torah allude to this state of redemption?

"And Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim {Egypt} for seventeen years. [47:28]" The Medrash teaches that Yaakov was vibrantly alive for those seventeen years. (It's interesting to note that the numerical value of the word 'tov' {good} is seventeen.) Having endured all of the hardships his life would contain, he was in a redeemed state, similar to the state that one experiences in the World to Come.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains the exact moment when Yaakov reached this state. When Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim he had an emotion-filled reunion with his long lost son, Yosef. "He (Yosef) appeared before him (Yaakov) and fell on his neck and wept. [46:29]"

Yosef fell on the neck of his father and wept. The passuk {verse} pointedly writes this in the singular.

Yosef was crying on his father's neck. His father, Yaakov, wasn't crying on his neck. What was he doing? Rashi brings from the Medrash that he was reciting the 'Shema' prayer: Hear Israel, Hashem is our G-d (Elokim), Hashem is One.

The questions are very obvious. Why did Yaakov decide to say Shema precisely at the moment when he sees his beloved son after a twenty-two year separation? Not five minutes earlier, not five minutes later! Furthermore, if this actually was the only time to say it, why didn't Yosef also recite the Shema?

The Mahara"l explains beautifully that at that moment, Yaakov's heart was filled with a most incredible, all-encompassing feeling of love. Yaakov didn't want to let that once in a lifetime opportunity pass without utilizing it to its full potential. He wanted to channel that feeling toward Hashem. At the moment when Yosef came to him, when the feeling of love was at its strongest, he said the 'Shema.'

However, based on what we've said so far, the Ohr Gedalyahu offers a different explanation.

"Hear Israel, Hashem is our G-d (Elokim), Hashem is One." We have different names for Hashem, each describing a different way that He deals with and interacts with this world. He is called Hashem, referring to His compassion. He is called Elokim, referring to His judgment. In this confusing world there are different names for what we view as almost contradictory ways that Hashem acts. Ultimately, Hashem will be one and His name will be One. Ultimately, we will achieve that understanding that there was no contradiction whatsoever in the myriad ways that He dealt with this world. There were no separate situations of 'tov' [good] and 'ra' [evil]-Hashem is Elokim. His name will be One.

"Hear Israel, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One." That is a proclamation of our belief that we will ultimately reach that understanding and clarity.

Yaakov had thought that Yosef, along with his life-mission of fathering the twelve tribes of Israel, was lost. He was in a state of darkness. A state where the pieces of the puzzle didn't seem to fit together correctly. Suddenly, he hears the news that Yosef is alive. Not just in a physical sense, that Yosef is alive and is ruler of Mitzrayim, but in a spiritual sense, "Yosef, my son, is alive." He had continued to behave as a son of Yaakov even during their long separation.

The pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place for Yaakov. He had his twelve sons intact. All righteous. Yosef had remained true to his upbringing under the most trying of circumstances. That which seemed to be his greatest cause of anguish, the disappearance and seeming death of Yosef, was suddenly transformed into his greatest cause of joy. Yosef's disappearance wasn't a foretelling that he had failed in his mission of building the nation. On the contrary! Yosef was busy transforming Mitzrayim into the place which would then transform his family into a nation.

He looked back on his life. It all made sense. It was 'tov.' He said the Shema. He lived and breathed

the Shema. He had reached that stage of tangible understanding while still existing in this confusing world.

Yosef, on the other hand, was about to begin the national odyssey of retracing and re-'forming' the blueprint that had been laid out by the Forefathers. He was still at the beginning of the journey. He didn't say Shema-many tears would be spilled before that point would be reached. He cried on his father's neck...

May we speedily reach the stage where our tears will be of joy as we too pronounce the Shema with that perfect understanding that Hashem is Elokim.

Chazak, chazak v'nischazek! Good Shabbos,

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