

YEARS OF LIFE

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Va'y'chi, begins: "And Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim [Egypt] seventeen years, and the days of Yaakov was, the years of his life, one hundred and forty seven years. [47:28]"

What is the significance of the 'days' and the 'years' of his 'life?' Furthermore, why does the passuk [verse] use the singular: "the days of Yaakov was" as opposed to the plural that "the days of Yaakov were?"

Back in last week's parsha, when Paroah saw Yaakov, he exclaimed in surprise: "What are the days of the years of your life? [47:8]" Yaakov responded in a surprising, seemingly 'kvetchy' way. "The days of the years of my sojourn have been one hundred and thirty years. Few and deficient were the days of my life's years and they never reached the days of the years of my forefather's lives. [47:9]" Once again, 'days', 'years' and 'life' figure prominently.

The Malbim offers a beautiful explanation. He writes that 'years of life' connote good, peaceful, successful years. Paroah, unaware of the nuance of his question, asked Yaakov about the years of his life--the years that he had the peace of mind to serve Hashem in a fitting, wholesome way.

Yaakov responded, pointing out the difference between years of sojourn and years of life. "I've sojourned on this earth for one hundred and thirty years," he told Paroah, "but in terms of what I've actually accomplished, the years of my 'life', they've been few and deficient compared to my forefathers."

Rav Shimon Shwab builds on this theme in his explanation of our passuk. "Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim [Egypt] seventeen years." Those years were alive! And not only were they alive, but they now allowed him to reflect back upon his life and see it from a totally new perspective. Reunited with his beloved Yosef, seeing all of his sons living together in brotherly harmony, he understood that even the difficult years of his life, those years of sojourn, were true years of his life.

The Talmud [Pesachim 50A] teaches that in this world, when a good event occurs we pronounce the blessing of "Hatov umaitiv--He is good and does good." When a 'bad' event occurs we pronounce the blessing of "Dayan Emes--He is the true judge." However, in the next world we will only pronounce the blessing of Hatov umaitiv--He is good and does good." We will recognize that every event was actually good.

That was the level that Yaakov reached in his final years. The "days of Yaakov was the years of his

life!" Those days of travail where he thought he was distant from Hashem, he now understood that they were the days of his life. It was the composite of all his years that formed the tapestry of life.

The Ohr HaChaim writes that the name Yisroel, as opposed to Yaakov, was used when he was in a lofty, uplifted state. As such, once Yaakov reached this Olam Habah {World to Come} state in this world, "and the days of Yaakov was the years of his life," the next passuk tells us that "the days of Yisroel were drawing close to death." He had reached the level of Yisroel.

Although that is a level that we will only attain with the advent of Moshiach {Messiah}, Yaakov did reveal the key through which to reach that time.

"And Yaakov called his sons and told them: 'gather and I will tell you what will occur in the end of the days'. [49:1]"

Rashi explains that Yaakov wanted to reveal the time when Moshiach would come but Hashem's presence left him, rendering him unable to reveal that information. The Zohar writes that Yaakov did actually reveal that which needed to be revealed. Some explain this to mean that Yaakov told them to gather...

Become one group, have unity and then, the same way that that propelled me into a state of the World to Come, it will also propel you as a nation into the stage of heaven on earth--the coming of the Moshiach.

Good Shabbos,
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