

# LIVING FOR TOMORROW

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

*Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years ...* (Bereishis 47:28)

The Ramban writes on this verse:

"I have already mentioned (43:14) that Ya'akov's descent into Egypt alludes to our existing exile at the hand of the 'fourth beast' (of which Daniel spoke about; Daniel 7:7), which represents Rome. [For example,] it was Ya'akov's sons who, by selling their brother Yosef, caused their going down there. Furthermore, Ya'akov went down there because of the famine, expecting to find relief with his son in the house of his son's friend--since Paroah loved Yosef as a son. It had also been their hope to ascend from there as soon as the famine would end in Canaan, just as they had said, 'We have come to sojourn in the land ... for the famine is heavy in the land of Canaan ...' (Bereishis 47:4). But they did not return, and instead the exile prolonged itself and Ya'akov had been forced to die there. His bones were brought up from there accompanied by all the elders and nobles of Paroah, who greatly mourned for him. Our relationship with Rome and Edom is similar. We ourselves caused our falling into their hands, since they (the Chashmonaim rulers during the Second Temple period) made a covenant with the Romans, and Agrippa, the last king during the Second Temple, fled to them for help. It was because of the famine that Jerusalem was captured by the Romans, and the exile has greatly prolonged itself over us. Its end, unlike the other exiles [whose ending was told to us by the prophets], is unknown to us. We are in it as the dead who say, 'Our bones are dried up, we are completely cut off ...' (Yechezkel 37:11). However, in the end, they will bring us from all the nations as 'an offering before G-d' (Yeshayahu 66:20), and they will be deep in sorrow as they will behold our glory, and we will see the vengeance of the G-d. 'May He raise us, that we may live in His presence' " (Hoshea 6:2). (Ramban, Bereishis 47:28)

It is interesting how in all the prophecies about Jewish exile, only four are mentioned: Bavel, Medai, Yavan, and Edom--Babylonian, Median, Greek, and Roman. Except for G-d's allusion to Avraham Avinu during the "Covenant of the Parts," there is little mentioned about the Egyptian Exile, setting it apart from the other four exiles.

There have been many answers to this anomaly, such as, "It happened before Mt. Sinai and the nation became an official people," and, "It was meant to forge Ya'akov's descendants into a nation,

and wasn't a punishment for forsaking Torah like the other exiles had been." However, now, the Ramban is alluding to a new explanation: it was the forerunner of the longest and final exile in Jewish history-Golus Edom.

It makes sense too. After all, as the Midrashim and commentators point out, the work in Egypt had not been completed. Had it been completed, then that exile would have been the last one, and everything would have gone right for us from that point onward. We would never have had to look down the barrel of another gun the rest of history.

If this is in fact true, then we have to assume that themes of the Egyptian Exile, such as the identity of a Jew, and our ability as a people to remain Jewish in spite of our success among the nations, are also themes of our exile as well. And if this is in fact true, then we have to assume that failure to succeed at this mission means to miss the redemption, just as it did for four-fifths of the Jewish population in Egypt.

What went wrong in Egypt?

The problem there was that people stopped believing in the redemption and the coming of Moshiach. They also stopped believing that something would be gained by leaving Egypt and living in Eretz Israel. In short, rather than being Egyptian Jews, they had sunken to the level of being Jewish Egyptians, at which point one merely becomes an Egyptian--seeing the world as Egyptians do and living according to their philosophy of life as well.

As history comes to a close, and, as the Kabbalists says, the coming of Moshiach can be sensed everywhere, one has to contemplate these questions: Who am I as a Jew, and what do I believe? Do I see gain in redemption, or am I happy being just where I am, doing just what I'm doing? As we move forward in time, G-d will draw His own "line in the sand," and when He does, we want to be standing on the right side of the "desert."

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## Shabbos Day:

Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years ... (Bereishis 47:28)

Ya'akov's life was shortened because of his remark to Paroah in last week's parshah (thirty-three years, one year for each word):

Paroah said, "How old are you?" Ya'akov said to Paroah, "I've wandered for 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, which has not yet reached the years of my fathers in the days of their sojournings." (Bereishis 47:9)

Still, the last seventeen years of his life had been bliss-like, as the Talmud says:

Three were given a "taste" of the World-to-Come while still in This World. They were Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. (Bava Basra 16b)

Elsewhere, the Talmud states:

For a good person, they give him a taste of his good deeds while still in This World. (Kiddushin 41a)

The Pri Tzaddik explains that a person can work on himself in This World and achieve a level of spiritual perfection so great that it makes his remaining in the physical world meaningless. Perhaps he will die then. However, other times, he will remain in This World, physically that is, while actually "living" in a higher spiritual reality, as had been the case with Ya'akov, the last seventeen years of his life (Pri Tzaddik, Massey 1). That is why the posuk refers to Ya'akov as Yisroel at this point--the name that indicates a perfected Ya'akov:

The day came close for Yisroel to die ... (Bereishis 47:29)

Even the number seventeen alludes to this, for it is the gematria of the word "tov" (tes, vav, bais; 9+6+2), which means "good." This word is first used to evaluate the creation of light, but not just any light, but the Supernal Light of creation, that shone for thirty-six hours before being hidden in creation (Yerushalmi Brochos 8:5). It was a supernatural light, as the Talmud explains--other-worldly (Chagigah 12a). Even the first letter of the word, the tes, alludes to this light, for, numerically it is equal to "9" which, when multiplied by the number of crowns it "wears" (four), results in the number thirty-six. The word light appears thirty-six times in the entire Torah!

Perhaps this part of the meaning of the following account:

In the beginning, before the Egyptians saw the way the entire world honored Yisroel, they did not conduct themselves honorably toward the brothers of Yosef. However, after they saw how they were honored by the entire world, they too paid their due respects. The following posuk indicates this, "And they came to the threshing-floor surrounded by thorns." (Bereishis 50:10). Is a threshing-floor made of thorns? Rav Avahu said: This is to teach you that they [the kings of the entire world] surrounded the coffin of Ya'akov with crowns like a threshing-floor surrounded by thorns ... They went to do war, but when they saw the crown of Yosef on the coffin of Ya'akov, all of them took off their crowns and placed them on Ya'akov's coffin: thirty-six crowns they placed on the coffin. (Sotah 13a)

(Anyone interested in seeing the other remarkable thirty-sixes to do with the life of Ya'akov can see my book, "Chanukah and The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six.")

So, the seventeen years Yisroel spent in Egypt were really spent on a higher spiritual plain. After all, it was at the age of seventeen that Yosef was taken away from Ya'akov and his suffering began, at which time Rashi writes:

"And Ya'akov settled ... Ya'akov wished to live in tranquillity, but the episode of Yosef jumped upon

him suddenly. When the righteous wish to live in tranquillity, The Holy One, Blessed is He, says, 'Are the righteous not satisfied with what is stored up for them in the World-to-Come that they wish to live tranquilly in This World as well?' " (Rashi, Bereishis 37:2)

But Ya'akov did live in tranquillity in This World--but not as Ya'akov, as Yisroel, and in a spiritual dimension that better resembled the Next World more than This World.

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## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. He blessed them individually. He instructed them and said, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite ..." (Bereishis 49:28-29)

There are a few reasons why Ya'akov insisted on being buried in Eretz Yisroel, in spite of the great effort that would be required by Yosef and his brothers to fulfill this last request. Some are basic, and some are Kabbalistic. One reason is mentioned in a collection of midrashim called "Tov HaAretz," which says:

"Righteous people of Eretz Yisroel are able to protect all places [after they die and are buried in Eretz Yisroel], because Israel is called the 'heart which gives life and existence to all the limbs.' However, a righteous person of 'Chutz L'Aretz' (literally, outside the land) only provides protection for his place." (Tov HaAretz)

Apparently, even after tzaddikim die, they continue to exert an influence over the affairs of their community, or "communities" if they die and are buried in Eretz Yisroel. This, then, is one of the main reasons why Ya'akov was insistent upon burial in Israel, because it maintained his ability to protect his descendants no matter where they would be exiled in the world. And Yosef, who understood this from his father, had no difficulty carrying out his request.

The above Midrash also makes us aware, once again, of the centrality of Eretz Yisroel as the center of the universe--as the "heart" of the world. It is taught that all the spiritual influence necessary to keep life going in this world, everywhere in this world, first comes down over the Kosel (Western Wall), before going east and "feeding" the rest of the world. This is true not just during the times of the Temples, but in our time as well--a strong argument for living in Eretz Yisroel.

This is why the greatest among B'nei Yisroel have died to live there, and lived to die there. And though, as we have said in the past, making aliyah is a personal decision that has to be carefully thought out and arranged with wisdom, this does not mean that Jews who can't make it there can stop yearning to live there. For all we know, it is our lack of yearning to be in the "Land of Earning" (reward in the World-to-Come, that is), that is holding up the Final Redemption.

## Melave Malkah:

"Yehudah, your brothers will pay homage to you. Your hand is on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down to you. A cub of an old lion is Yehudah. My son, you have risen above prey, kneeling and resting like a lion ..." (Bereishis 49:8-9)

By the time Ya'akov was on his deathbed and began to bless his sons, Yehudah had come full circle. Others had not-but Yehudah, who had begun as the leader of the tribes, only to lose that position as a result of the sale of Yosef, and later, to suffer extreme humiliation through the incident with his daughter-in-law Tamar, had returned to being the king of the family once again.

In fact, Rashi says, after Ya'akov criticized his older sons, Yehudah began to sneak out because of fear of receiving the same treatment. Therefore, Ya'akov had to call him back in and tell him, "Don't worry! You're not like them." From Yehudah's journey, we can learn an important lesson.

(The truth is, I had actually written the following as part of an answer to a question unrelated to the parshah, or so I thought at first. However, as Divine Providence would have it, it is a lesson that is born out of Yehudah's travels from greatness to reduced eminence, to his rise to excellence once again.)

There are many traits of G-d of which we speak, two of which are that "He lowers the proud" and "raises the lowly." However, one could ask, if humility is such a valued trait, to such an extent that G-d will humble the proud, then why would He then go and raise up the lowly?

The answer to this question can come from the story of Channah (I Shmuel 2:1). According to the Radak, before Channah dovened for a son, she praised G-d for lowering the proud and raising the lowly. To whom was Channah referring? As Rashi mentions, she was calling herself the "lowly one" and Penina (her co-wife) the "proud one." Apparently, she made Channah feel inadequate for not being blessed with children. But how could Channah ask for the very pride that she accused Penina of possessing?

The answer is, there is a difference between one who elevates his own pride, and one whom G-d makes proud. In the latter situation, the result is not really pride, but joy from the Divine Providence that resulted in redemption from the difficult situation. This is what the Talmud teaches:

All who elevate themselves, G-d will reduce them. All who pursue greatness, greatness will allude them. All who flee from greatness, greatness will chase after them. All who allow the hour to run its course, the hour will stand for them. (Eiruvim 13b)

To be "great," and to feel good about being great is not a negative trait. It is this that often inspires one to show gratitude to G-d for the good we have enjoyed and all that we have been fortunate

enough to accomplish. The problem is making such greatness a goal unto itself.

Yehudah's "problem" from the beginning, it seems, was that he knew he was great and felt empowered by it to make decisions on behalf of all of Jewish history. We have to assume that Yehudah, being of the holy Twelve Tribes of G-d, ultimately traced his greatness back to G-d. However, perhaps not directly enough, and, as a result, was sent into a "tailspin" as he watched his life unravel.

Once Yehudah hit "rock-bottom" though, then G-d Himself began to re-build him and to restore his position of prominence, for which Yehudah became eternally grateful. And this is why from that point onward Ya'akov could promise:

"The [royal] scepter will not depart from Yehudah, neither will the law-engraving chisel from between his feet, until the coming of Shiloh..."

For Yehudah was a changed man-proud but extremely grateful to G-d, and very aware of the Divine Providence that made him who he was: the spiritual root of Moshiach ben Dovid.

May we merit to see him in our time--through pleasant means.

Chazak!

Have a great Shabbos,

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