

וַיַּעֲחִי THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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ISRAEL IS SAVED BECAUSE OF THE MERIT OF THE TORAH *(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

It is written, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years. And the days of Jacob – the years of his life – were 147 years" (Genesis 47:28). Rashi cites the words of the Sages in his commentary: "Why is this section 'closed'? It is because when Jacob died, the eyes and the heart of Israel closed due to the sufferings of slavery that then began. There is another reason as well: He wanted to reveal to them the end times, but this prophetic revelation escaped him" (Bereshith Rabba 96:1).

The tradition we have received from the prophet Ezra tells us that this section is "closed" in Scripture, and that we have nothing to add to this subject. However we may at least try to understand the meaning of it. The following points come to the fore.

1. If this section is "closed" because it deals with Jacob's death, why is it written, at the end of the previous Parsha, that "Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they had possessions there, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly"? Surely this was a cause for joy. The Sages say, "Our father Jacob did not die, and in the way that he is alive, his descendants are alive" (Taanith 5b). Hence if his teachings are perpetuated from generation to generation, there is nothing sad at his death.

2. The Sages say, "When Jacob died, the eyes and the heart of Israel closed due to the sufferings of slavery that then began." This contradicts that which was stated concerning the verse "and the years of the life of Levi were 137 years" (Exodus 6:16), namely that the length of Levi's life is related to us in order to make known the duration of the slavery. As long as one of the fathers of the tribes was alive, there was no slavery, as it is said, "And Joseph died, and all his brothers ... and there arose a new king over Egypt," and Levi lived longer than any of the brothers (Seder Olam Rabba 3). It was thus that the slavery began with the death of Levi, and not at the death of Jacob. Therefore the question remains: Why is our section "closed"?

3. The second reason given by the Sages is that Jacob wanted to relate to his children the end times, but prophecy escaped him, something that is difficult

to understand because our section only deals with this revelation afterwards: "Gather yourselves together and I will tell you that which will happen to you in the latter days" (Genesis 49:1). On this passage the Sages comment: "He wanted to reveal the end times, but prophecy escaped him" (Pesachim 56a). Why is this section of the Torah "closed" from the beginning, and not in that place?

4. If Jacob desired to reveal the end times to his sons, one must try to understand why he was prevented from doing so. One must also ask why Jacob wanted to make such a revelation, for in any case the sufferings of Israel would last for a long time, so how would such information comfort them? If the Children of Israel repented of the sins that caused their suffering, their deliverance would be hastened, as it is written: "In its time I will hasten it" (Isaiah 60:22). This is because the end times do not have a fixed date. What advantage is there to reveal such a date? We must especially understand why we have but evasive prophecies concerning the end times, without any precise indications.

5. Concerning the verse that states, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years" (Genesis 47:28), the commentators explain that he was in full possession of his entire strength and that he finally lived a tranquil life, after 130 years of a life filled with suffering (Ohr HaChayim, Kli Yakar). In the land of his fathers' travels, there was no possibility for him to live a tranquil life, since he was struck with the tragedy of Joseph's disappearance (Bereshith Rabba 84:3). It was specifically in Egypt, in a land of perversions (Shemot Rabba 1:22), that he had the chance to live in peace for 17 years. How is that possible?

One must understand that the two reasons provided by the Sages are connected to and complement one another. As long as the Jews were few in number in Egypt, as long as they felt secure, they supported each other and felt no lack. However later, when they multiplied (Genesis 47:27), they were no doubt happy because of their growth, but at the same time they began to experience servitude because they were forced to work for the Egyptians for their sustenance. The fact is, someone who is used to independence does not feel comfortable working for someone in order to earn a salary. Already then, during

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the lifetime of the fathers of the tribes, the Children of Israel had begun to experience servitude and the weight of exile. Although it was not yet slavery, they did not feel at home as in the land of Canaan, where they were respected.

In fact, as long as Jacob was alive, his status protected them. His influence was beneficial and he sustained their morale. Yet after his death and that of his sons, the Children of Israel experienced lack. They worked for the Egyptians for their sustenance, and “the slavery and exile began” (Shemot Rabba 1:4).

At the end of his life, Jacob sensed and foresaw that the slavery of his children would henceforth begin, for he saw on the faces of his children and grandchildren an expression of fear as to their future. He wanted to reveal the end times in order to encourage them by making them understand that this situation would end. Yet he was prevented from doing so, and this is why the section is “closed” from its start.

In spite of everything, this situation had something positive to it. The Torah specifies that Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years, which is the numerical value of the word טוב (“good”). This alludes to the Torah, as it is written, “I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah” (Proverbs 4:2) and also, “And the [true] good is only Torah” (Perkei Avoth 6:3). It was precisely in Egypt that Jacob lived a life filled with Torah. One must not conclude from this, however, that he settled down comfortably in Egypt, for G-d does not allow the righteous to live in comfort in this world, and He reserves their reward in the world to come (Bereshith Rabba 84:3).

However it was precisely in Egypt that Jacob knew a bit of rest, and this period of time was considered as the best of his life, for there he served G-d with all his strength. Those years were also ones in which his children were united. The Children of Israel “dwelt in the land of Egypt” (in the Torah), “were fruitful” (in understanding), “and multiplied exceedingly” (by discipline). The teachings of Jacob continue to spread and the effects of the exile are nothing to worry about.

Nevertheless, Jacob wanted to reveal the end times to his children. Why? It is written, “The precepts of the L-RD are upright, gladdening the heart” (Psalms 19:9), for the Torah rejoices the heart, and it is acquired through joy (Perkei Avoth 6:6). Furthermore, “joy is only obeying the commandments” (Rokeiach 3:1). When Jacob felt happy, he desired to reveal the end times because “prophecy is only given in joy” (Midrash Hagadol Vayigash 45:27) and “Ruach Hakodesh is only found with one who is happy” (Shabbat 30b). Yet this prophecy was hidden from him. Heaven desired that Jacob be shown that the one who stays connected to the Torah has nothing to fear, since “the Torah protects from all evil” (Kiddushin 82a) Moreover, the Final Redemption can happen before its set time, as the Sages say: “The Children of Israel were saved only by the merit of the Torah” (Pesikta Zutah Va’etchanan 4:32). Redemption depends on our attachment to the Torah.

There is another reason as to why this prophecy escaped Jacob. He desired to make known to his children that the redemption would take place after 6,000 years (Avodah Zarah 9), and to reveal the course of history to them. However, it is possible to precipitate events and to hasten the redemption because of the Torah and repentance, and moreover Mashiach can come at any moment. This is why Jacob was not able to reveal anything to them. In the verse that states, “Gather yourselves together and I will tell you that which will happen in the latter days” (Genesis 49:1), the last letters of the final two words form the word מָוֹת (“death”) which implies: I want tell you when G-d will judge the world and when the Satan – who is the Angel of Death – will die (Bava Batra 16a). He revealed to them that the Torah and the observance of its laws can hasten the redemption, and that this can occur at any time and in every generation. In fact, it is said that King Hezekiah could have been Mashiach (Sanhedrin 94a). The Sages also say that in Ezra’s time, the evil inclination was blinded and no longer led people to sin, yet the Final Redemption did not occur then because the Jews had mixed themselves with the peoples (having married foreign wives), and were serving the nations. The redemption also did not arrive at that time because not all Jews had left their place of exile to live in Israel, as the prophets affirm (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 9). The Talmud recounts that Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi encountered Mashiach at the gates of Rome and asked him, “When will my master reveal himself?” He answered: “Today – today if you obey G-d’s voice!” In the same way, the righteous of all the generations, such as the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Kuznitz, the Chozeh of Lublin, and the holy Rabbi of Rymanov anticipated the redemption.

Given that the redemption can come at any moment, and that it depends only on us, G-d does not want the Children of Israel to try to determine the date of the end times, as it is written, “The thing is very close to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). Furthermore it is said, “The Children of Israel will only be saved from the grip of the world’s nations by the merit of the Torah” (Pesikta Zutah Va’etchanan 4:32).

In fact, knowing that he did not have the right to live in tranquility in this world, not even in the Land of Israel, Jacob did not settle comfortably in Egypt, but rather plunged himself into the Torah in order to be saved from the harmful influences of that perverse place. The Torah is called Life; “it is an elixir of life” and “a tree of life” (Proverbs 3:18), and “the one who attaches himself to the Torah is attached to the tree of life” (Zohar III:176a). The Torah itself testifies concerning Jacob that during these 17 years, it was his source of life.

This is a teaching for all those who live in countries where idolatry, immorality, and crimes are commonplace. To save oneself from this collection, one must know and attach oneself to the values of the Torah that protect and save from all evil and suffering

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years. And the days of Jacob – the years of his life – were 147 years" (Genesis 47:28). The commentators have looked into this juxtaposition, and the Gemara tells us, "The righteous begin with suffering but finish with tranquility." The Book of Job expresses this very same idea: "Though your beginning was insignificant, your end will flourish exceedingly" (Job 8:7). In fact, if G-d in His goodness makes a man suffer and undergo tribulations at the beginning of his life, it is in order to better reimburse him, near the end of his days, that generous portion which he lacked beforehand, as if each day of the righteous was made to hold just a certain amount of prosperity. This is exactly what happened to Jacob. At the end of his life, all the time that he had known only trials (with Joseph, Shimon, Benjamin, etc.) were returned to him in Egypt. This is why "Jacob lived in the land of Egypt." There, he found himself so satisfied that it compensated for all his previous miseries, so much so that we may assert that he lived fully for 147 years, the last years having brought him joy for all his life.

This principle allows us to hope that one day, Hashem will come and heal the wounds of His child Israel. Having been, up to that time, subject to the outbursts of His anger, He will finally satisfy us with all the goodness that has escaped us till now. That will be the day when He will choose and bring us to Zion. May He inundate us with His blessings to the point that we be fully compensated for all that has been cruelly done to us during our history, exactly as He did for our father Jacob. We should not forget, however, that "the acts of the fathers are a sign for their children."

Concerning this future, we find an announcement of it from Jeremiah the prophet: " 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said, 'I see a staff of an almond tree.' The L-RD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I hasten to fulfill My word' " (Jeremiah 1:11-12). All the same, are we not aware that Hashem normally does good for His people? We can better understand what this means with a parable.

The wife of a rich man had just died. Now living in the same town was a woman of great virtues that ran a business since her own husband's death. She owned nothing outright, but purchased merchandise on credit. The rich man found this woman pleasing to him, and to convince her to marry him, he told her, "I won't ask you for any kind of dowry, but you must at least clear up all your debts and not be in a position whereby someone can claim money from you, for I have no intention of paying for you." Not only did it take her time to liquidate her business and settle with all her creditors, but she also prolonged the process by dragging her feet on it. She acted like an evasive debtor, finding all sorts of excuses and claiming not to have taken merchandise from such and such a person, or denying a portion of her debt to another person. When her creditors finally decided to bring her to justice, she contradicted herself before them in order that they get tired of attempting to recoup her debt and finish by being content with what she was willing to pay them.

Her suitor saw that time was passing, and he did not like it at all. He therefore secretly went to find the creditors and gave them a bit of advice on how to quickly recoup their money. When the woman found out what he had done, she exclaimed, "If it's like this that you're behaving with me now, what's waiting for me after we get married!" He replied, "Please understand that I don't have the slightest intention of wronging you by this. On the contrary, everything that I'm doing is dictated by my eagerness to marry you!"

"It is because of My affection for you," Hashem tells us, "that I hurry in allowing harm to come to you. It is in order that it may quickly pass – so that I may hasten to do you good – that I allow this." As it is written, "I hasten to fulfill My word" (Jeremiah 1:12) even more for the good than for the bad. Through My word, I send a message of consolation and salvation, a message that has been foretold by the prophets.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI SHLOMO GANZFRIE AUTOR OF THE SHOULCHAN ARUKH

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried was born in Ungvar, Hungary in 1804 (5564). His father, Rabbi Yossef Ganzfried, died during his childhood, and this orphan was brought up by one of the great of his generation, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Heller, better known as Rabbi Hirsch Charif, the Rav of Ungvar. He saw in the boy the potential of becoming one of the great authorities of Israel. During all the years of learning next to his teacher, his soul thirsted to penetrate the depths of Halachah until a clear answer was achieved. It was this objective that was the driving force of his various Halachic books, and which pushed him to give us – us and future generations – books destined for the instruction of practical Halachah. All those that devoted themselves to the Torah and all Talmidei Chachamim received everything that he wrote in the field of Halachah with favor and love. Yet more than with any other book, each of which in itself represented a special blessing, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried acquired great merit for himself with his Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, a work that greatly benefited the general public.

Beginning from 1864 (5624), when it was printed for the first time in Ungvar, this book has for more than a century been reprinted dozens of times in hundreds of thousands of copies. This has never been the case with any other author or book of its kind, so much so that Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried's Kitzur Shulchan Aruch has become one of the most popular works of all time, destined for and worthy of every Jew. It is in complete harmony with Rabbi Yossef Caro's hope that "young students consult it [the Shulchan Aruch] constantly, studying it by heart and having this study of youth well in their mouths in order to know the Halachah in each specific case, and also so as not to distance themselves from it in their old age." Kitzur Shulchan Aruch study groups have been formed in hundreds of cities and towns, with the goal of learning and disseminating its teachings to the public at large in synagogues and houses of study.

"Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried was a man aided by Providence," of the great masters of Lithuanian Jewry once said concerning him. In fact, none of the great men of Israel have ever seen in their lifetime, as did he, their works crowned by Halachic commentaries and new Dinim of other Rabbis. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch was printed 14 times during the lifetime of the author, and at each reprint he himself added numerous new Dinim. During his lifetime, Rav Ishaya Hacohen came and "encircled" his work with a commentary entitled Misgeret HaShulchan (lit. "The Border of the Table"), which was printed, with permission from Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, together with the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. This resulted in a book that was important both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Despite the fact that Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried's Shulchan was already vast in scope and had all sorts of sub-divisions, he decided to stay with the title Kitzur Shulchan Aruch ("Abridged Shulchan Aruch"). When a close friend asked why he incessantly clung to the name Kitzur, he responded with a smile: "In the book of Psalms, it is written, 'You prepare [ta'aroch] a table [shulchan] before me' [Psalms 23:5]. It is not written, 'You will lengthen [ta'arich] a table [shulchan] before me.' " May his merit protect us all. Amen.

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE – PART IV

Anyone who adorns his or her body in order to take pride in it forgets Hashem. Such people do not keep to the mitzvot, and they do not seek to do good, worrying instead only about themselves. They care only about adorning their short-lived bodies, bodies destined to be eaten by worms. A man who does this is likely to commit immoral acts: He will walk in front of women in order to please them, then will approach and flatter them, speaking to them frivolously. Similarly, a woman that makes herself more attractive in front of men arouses their desires and gives birth to wicked thoughts. Her punishment for having made others sin will be very severe. If our Sages made it forbidden just to look at colorful female clothes (that is, even when they are not being worn – Avodah Zarah 20b), how much more severe will a woman's punishment be if she adorns herself in front of men in order that they cast their eyes upon her.

In addition, arrogance leads to coveting, for the heart of a proud man is always open to all forms of temptation and desire. Now coveting is the worst characteristic there is. By pride, one desires to wear expensive clothes, own beautiful houses, and eat choice foods. The arrogant always covet precious objects, and if they cannot acquire them, they will come to steal in order to arrive at their pursuits. This is because a haughty man covets riches, and he is never content with what he has. His possessions seem insufficient to him, particularly in view of the numerous pursuits that his arrogant desires bring about.

In addition to this, pride drives a man to become impatient with others. Needless to say, it is not necessary to detail the baseness of an impatient person, for this is known by all.