

The Sweetness of a Second Chance

VaYechi 5781

Despite his considerable fears about descending to the land of Egypt, Yaakov's experience there can only be described as his golden years. Reunited with his beloved Yosef, Yaakov lives in the pastoral quietude of Goshen, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, secure in the unwavering support of his royal son, and revered¹ by the grateful Egyptian populace.

While Yaakov descended at the age of one hundred thirty, and, as he told Pharaoh, a weary and tired man², his seventeen years in Egypt are- shockingly- a time of vitality, of rejuvenation, *Va-Yechi Yaakov*, Yaakov lived, and *Va-Yitchazek Yisrael*, he was strengthened.

What really made this time 'golden' for Yaakov, though, are the seventeen years immerses himself in study with his grandson Ephraim. As noted by Chazal, Ephraim left the bustling Egyptian capital for Goshen, and became his grandfather's *chavruta*. The traditions which Yaakov had imbibed in the home of his father and grandfather, which he clung to desperately in the house of Lavan, and which he endeavored to pass on to all twelve of his sons, were now being transmitted to the next generation. Yaakov merited what Chazal considered one of the most enriching earthly experiences a person could ever have, learning with one's own grandchildren, forming a 'three-fold cord that is not quickly broken.'

It should not be lost on any of us that these seventeen years correspond directly to the seventeen years which Yaakov had with Yosef prior to his sale. Before Yaakov learned with Ephraim, he learned with Yosef. As noted by Onkelos, and cited by Rashi, Yosef's status as the *ben zekunim* was established not through age, but through learning itself. Yaakov so deeply wished that those years would have been a time of quiet study, as Chazal formulate it, Yaakov desired to live in tranquility.

Tragically, these aspirations were crushed by the family tragedy, and Yaakov descended into inconsolable depression. The second set of seventeen years in Egypt are the fulfillment of that unfulfilled aspiration, not with Yosef, but with his son. For Yaakov, there could be nothing as sweet as a second chance.

¹ Perhaps too revered, as noted by Chazal, in the context of Yaakov's desire to be buried in the Land of Israel. Yaakov was concerned about the potential for deification in Egypt.

² See Radak's comments on this verse- Yaakov thought he would surely soon pass away.