

Vayechi - Rabbi Lerner - December 23, 2012

47:28: *Yaacov lived in the land of Egypt 17 years; and the days of Yaacov, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty seven years.* **Rashi:** Why is this a 'closed' parsha (one that does not have the usual spacing from the last parsha)? Because when Yaacov passed away, it closed the eyes and sealed the hearts of the Jewish people - it was almost like the whole nation died with him. It was the beginning of the end of the high quality life they had lived and it was the beginning of the shibud mitzrayim, the time of servitude and oppression. When Yaacov died enormous problems began for Bnai Yisrael. Another reason for the closed parsha: Yaacov sought to reveal the end of days to his children, and his mind got closed up; he forgot and could not tell them. God made him go blank - it was the sealing of his eyes and knowledge.

This is not a regular parshas stumah, a typical closed parsha. Normally for most parshios, there are open spaces and there is a new line for the next parsha; a parshas stuma normally continues on the same line, with a break of 9 spaces. Here there was a break of only one space - there was no real break at all from the previous parsha whose final pasuk had described the proliferation of the Jews who were living in Goshen. There is no other place in the Torah where a brand new parsha looks as if it is the very next pasuk - it is a parshas stuma gemurah.

Yaacov lived in Egypt 17 years. **Da'as Zekanim:** why is it so important to say that he lived in Egypt for 17 years? Because there was incredible symmetry - Yosef lived with his father for the first 17 years of his life before the problems began and he was sold - and now, after a break of many years where they were separated, Yaacov has Yosef with him again for the last 17 years of his life - they are without a doubt the best years of his life, with no troubles and no mourning. There is a midah kaneged midah here - for the first 17 years of Yosef's life, Yaacov was taking care of his son; for the final 17 years of Yaacov's life there was a reversal of roles and Yosef took care of him. **Rabbeinu Bachya:** there are a number of different levels of tzedaka - the first level is giving money to a non-Jew which shows respect for all people, since all humans are created in the tzelem elokim. The next level is to give to a Jew from an outside town, one you are less obligated to support. The next level is to give to the people from your own city - the Torah tells you to give to "the pauper who is with you." The next level is to give to a pauper who is a relative of yours. The fifth level is to support your children - it says in Tehillim 'Bechal Es' - how do you give at all times? When you have young children whom you are supporting while they are under your own roof. The sixth level is to support one's father and mother. This is the highest level of tzedaka - it is a great mitzvah. If they cannot support themselves anymore, you must support your parents - it takes precedence over all. This is what Yosef was doing - it was now the wealthy, powerful son who was supporting his elderly parent. It is not just symmetry - it is Halachah. It was not an accident that there was these exact 17 years of support.

What does it mean that the galus began with the death of Yaacov?

Meshech Chachmah: some people live for themselves; some for their family; some for their neighbors; some for their city; and then some for the entire world. Yaacov's sphere of influence was on the entire land of Egypt, and thus the whole ancient world. Yaacov might have lived in Goshen, but he affected the entire land of Egypt because when he came down to Mitzrayim, the famine ended there after only two of the seven years predicted. When Yaacov died, there was a great mourning for all of Egypt, as the Torah says - "*there was a heavy mourning.*" There would not have been this heavy mourning if not for the fact that all of Egypt was affected. After his death, the famine resumed. When Yaacov died, everything turned black.

That is why it was a parshas stumah. They began to feel new problems. There was disillusionment amongst the sons as well.

Rav Nisan Alpert: Rashi had said that it is a closed parsha because the shibud began with the death of Yaacov. If this is the case, however, the opposite should be true - Vayigash ended on a high note, with the Jews proliferating - there was great success of the Jewish people, as the Jews took possession of the land - they were buying the land and increasing in numbers. Why have a parshas stumah, a continuation of the previous parsha, instead of a break, indicating the beginning of the persecution? There should be an open parsha break to indicate the dramatic change in circumstances of the Jewish people? Therefore, even though Vayechi is a new sedrah, the death of Yaacov is the beginning of the shibud with the Jews' 'sealing of their eyes.' But is it like the closing of the eyes because we are feeling new hatred? No - the closing of the eyes symbolizes that one is blind to the reality - one is pretending that it is not what it really is. With the death of Yaacov, even though Yosef was in power, there are the beginnings of anti-Semitism and servitude. The Jews began to fall out of favor, and we were blinding ourselves to that fact. This is the change from the end of Vayigash. There is no break despite the change in the standard of people of the Jewish people because they closed their eyes to the beginning of the persecution - they were in denial. They refused to see the darkening clouds, that it was not really as good as they thought. This is a condemnation of them - had their eyes been truly open and realized the reality, then it could have changed everything - it would have counted as the ticking of the clock that they were in servitude; they would have davened more; they would have been stronger in dealing with it. Had they realized that the Egyptians had turned against them, there wouldn't have been the mass assimilation. We would not have to have suffered the serious persecution that was needed to mold the nation. We had completely whitewashed the reality, forcing Hashem to make it worse and worse before we realized how bad the shibud and exile really was.

Kli Yakar: The **Akeidas Yitzchak** wrote from the golden age of Spain that when you have it great, you feel you will be there forever and you don't cry to Hashem to help you. This is what goes on in galus, you build mansions as if you are staying there forever - they deny that this is galus and there is always potential for massive sudden upheaval. This is what Mitzrayim was like. We felt deeply rooted in Goshen, that God had to shake us up; we were completely in denial. It is never good for Jews to be in Galus, and by the time we wake up, it is often too late.

Rav Yaacov Kaminetsky: What does it mean that the troubles began now? It was all because of the zechus of Yaacov and not Yosef that they did well for so many years. Yosef's ability to interpret dreams came from Yaacov. All of Yosef's success came from Yaacov, because of Yaacov's zechus. That is why the shibud began - because it was all attributable to Yaacov. **Abarbanel**: We know that Yosef was finance minister for 80 years - it was unheard of in history that a person should rule for 80 years as Yosef did. But it was not always great times, even though he stayed in power for such a long time. A good part of it was not as good as the beginning. That is why we have the continuity of the parshios - Yosef did well because of his father; when Yaacov died, his power was not the same.

Ramban: this galus of Egypt is the one we deal with today. The going down of Yaacov and the family to Egypt is our Galus today in the hand of the fourth beast, Rome. The children of Yaacov brought about this galus - sinas chinum, brothers who could not live together in harmony. When Jews can't live together, they go into galus with heavy suffering. The destruction of the second bais hamikdash was because of sinas chinum, and that is why our galus continues today - Jews cannot live together in harmony, and that is why this galus goes on forever.

48:1: **Da'as Zekanim**: When Yaacov became sick, Yosef was notified. The meforshim tell us that Yosef had to be told that his father was sick, telling us that he wasn't that close to his father - he was in the capital all the time, while his father lived with the rest of the family in Goshen. **Rabbeinu Tam**: he wasn't close to his father, he stayed away a lot deliberately. He didn't want to spend a lot of time with him because he was afraid his father would grill him about what happened to him during all of those lost years; he was afraid he would be forced into telling his father about what his brothers did to him. He did not want to tell his father about their actions, as Yaacov would curse them. But many meforshim say Yaacov found out anyway through Ruach Hakodesh.