

# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

דף זה נתנדב לעילוי נשמת מרת שבע ב"ר משה יוסף ע"ה (טייטלבוים) יאצ"ט ט"ו טבת תשמ"ט לפ"ק, נתנדב ע"י משפחתה ולע"נ ר' אשר זעליג ב"ר חיים ע"ה ולע"נ גיטל בת ר' אברהם ע"ה, נתנדב ע"י בנם הרה"ח ר' חיים צבי פריעדמאן ני"ו

Vayechi

**And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years. (47:28)**

The Baal Haturim comments that those seventeen years, together with the seventeen years from when Yosef was born until he was sold, were the 34 best years of Yaakov's life – equaling the numerical value of the word Vayechi.

Not only were things good during the lifetime of Yaakov – Rashi tells us (on Shemos 6:16) that as long as Yaakov's sons were alive, there was no slavery. This means that the slavery could not have lasted longer than 116 years, from the death of Levi until the Exodus.

The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azoulay, 1724-1807) in his commentary Simchas Haregel on the Haggadah, asks: We know the exile in Egypt was supposed to last 400 years, as Hashem promised Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 15:13). The commentators all deal with the question of why the decree was shortened to 210 years. But even of these 210 years, the Jews suffered for only 116. What happened to Hashem's decree? In what way was the first part of their stay in Egypt considered exile?

He answers this based on the words of the Haggadah: "And he descended to Egypt – by compulsion of Hashem's word." For tzaddikim such as Yaakov Avinu and his sons, all worldly pleasures, wealth and honor were unimportant. Their only desire was to live in the Holy Land and be close to Hashem. After they came to Egypt, were reunited with Yosef and the famine ended, they would have returned to the Holy Land, but they were forbidden to do so by the decree of Hashem. Now we understand why those years counted as part of the exile – they longed to return to the Holy Land, yet they stayed in Egypt in obedience to Hashem.

Rabbi Yitzchok Lebovits of Khal Yereim, Woodridge, applied this lesson to our situation in American exile today. We must arouse within ourselves nostalgic emotions for the Holy Land, intense cravings for the land of our forefathers. By doing so, we will sense that our existence here is exile, and only Hashem's decree compels us to abide by it. We control our longing for Eretz Yisroel and do not attempt to force the end of the exile through any means whatsoever, G-d forbid; we accept the decree of the Creator with love and we dwell in these lands of the exile because that is what Hashem decreed.

Historically, maintaining this attitude ensured that when exile was not so comfortable, during the many centuries when Jews were subjected to humiliation, intimidation and persecution, they entertained no thoughts of self-emancipation. They surrendered their personal desires to the will of Hashem, lovingly accepting His decree and the hardships accompanying it. Even following the Holocaust, when the Jewish people were tempted with the opportunity to establish a Jewish sovereign state - which would supposedly fulfill the natural desire prevalent amongst Jews then, to have their

dignity reinstated – the strongest among us resisted and declared their willingness to continue living in exile, despite all that they had been through.

But not everyone was so strong. Then Hashem had mercy on His nation and the United States of America too opened its doors. In America, where there exists a constitution ensuring justice for all, as well as a multicultural society where one particular nation does not have sole dominion or permanence, the feeling of being alien has been somewhat lessened for us Jews who reside here. This decreased the difficulty of the challenge of desiring Jewish independence and statehood prior to the arrival of moshiach. If not for the existence of this comfortable exile, who knows if there would even be a minyan of Jews left who could withstand that challenge?

But the test remained difficult for those who had traveled to the Holy Land. Upon the recognition by the nations of the Zionist claim to an independent state, even many of those Jews who had up until that time chosen to remain uninvolved in Zionist activity became gripped with confusion. They began to be inclined to regard the heretical enterprise as a benefit to Jews and an advancement for Judaism. These circumstances prompted our rabbis of blessed memory to once again wage the war of Hashem and protest with all their might against the legitimacy of a Jewish state prior to the arrival of Moshiach.

Presently however, we Jewish residents of America must conduct a session of genuine soul-searching to ensure that America's liberty from which we benefit so much has not adversely affected us. Perhaps the fact that we have not succumbed to the Zionist temptation – a fact on which many of us pride ourselves - is the result of a phenomenon deserving of much shame. Perhaps it is not because of our loyalty to Hashem and His Holy Torah that we find ourselves able to remain uninfluenced by Zionism, but rather due to our feeling comfortable and satisfied here with an abundance of mundane pleasures. Because of the freedom that we feel here, we have ceased to long for the announcement of the Eliyahu Hanavi, the redemption of moshiach and the return to Zion. We remain apathetic to the plight of the Holy Shechinah in exile.

Under such circumstances, bathing in earthly pleasures, it is certainly simple to exercise restraint and not attempt self-emancipation. Heaven forefend, who knows if Hashem will be impressed with us?

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 33:6) expounds on the verse, "She sat amongst the nations but did not find sanctuary" (Eicha 1:3), as follows: "R. Yudan bar Nechemia said in the name of R. Shimon bar Levi: If she found sanctuary she would not return." If the Nation of Israel found rest amongst the nations of the world, they would not desire to be redeemed. The Chasam Sofer writes, "If we were affluent in the lands of the nations and the governments displayed affection to us, we would not desire redemption at all. We would expend all efforts in order to assimilate with the gentiles, to charm them and emulate them, Heaven forbid" (Drashos Chasam Sofer, p.335, column 3; see also Drashos Ksav Sofer, Tisha B'av p. 86).

It is Hashem who has presented this challenge and it is very difficult to withstand. It is our duty to constantly bear in mind, and not to forget even for a brief moment, that our existence here in this foreign land is by the decree of Hashem. He moved us from one country to the next, until He brought us here. We do not live here because life here is pleasant, but because we are compelled to by Hashem. (Drasha by Rabbi Yitzchok Lebovits, 5 Iyar 5758)



True Torah Jews  
183 Wilson St. PMB 162  
Brooklyn, NY 11211

For additional copies of this publication,  
or to sponsor an issue,  
PLEASE CALL 718-841-7053.