



Wembley Synagogue

יחי

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Vayechi

וַיַּחַי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם - And Yaakov lived in the Land of Egypt (47:28)

The text of the Torah is divided into paragraph-like passages, which are separated from each other by a number of blank spaces. Those who read regularly from the Torah will know that the Sidra of Vayechi is separated from the previous Sidra of Vayigash by just one letter. (It is a 'closed' Sidra known as a *parasha setuma*) – Rashi asks why this sedra is *closed*. He answers saying that Yaakov had wanted to reveal to his sons the date of end of days but his vision was *closed* from him.

Why would Yaakov have wanted to reveal the date of the end of days to his sons? Because exile is easier to endure if one knows in advance when it will end. But Hashem wanted the Jews' exile to be difficult, and therefore He closed Yaakov's vision from him so that the Jews would not discover when their final redemption would occur. (Source: Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa quoted in Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

Rabbeinu Bachye elaborates on the above and suggests that Yaakov observed that the letters Chet (ח) and Tet (ט) do not appear in any of the brothers' names. These are the two main letters of the word חטא *chet*-(sin). Yaakov took the fact that the brothers' names did not contain this word as an indication that they were clean of sin and worthy of being told when the future redemption would occur.

But then Yaakov noticed that the letters *kuf* (ק) and *tzaddi* (צ), which together spell the word *Keitz* (meaning 'the end') also do not appear in their names. At that point Yaakov thought that perhaps his sons were not worthy of knowing this secret after all. Because of his hesitation, Yaakov kept the secret closed and he did not reveal the information to his sons. (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

אַל תִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם - Please do not bury me in Egypt (47:29)

Rashi explains that there were three reasons for Yaakov's request.

- 1) Because the dust of Egypt (in which he would be buried) was destined to turn into lice (He foresaw this happening during the Ten Plagues which would befall Egypt)
- 2) Because the resurrection of people who are buried outside of Eretz Yisrael, will be accompanied by the discomfort of rolling through the special underground tunnels (*Bereshit Rabbah* 96:5)
- 3) So that the Egyptians do not deify him (since the famine had ended when Yaakov arrived in Egypt)

The *Avnei Shoham* wonders why Yaakov concerned himself about the lice. Presumably, even if he were buried in Egypt, it would have been in the Jewish district of Goshen which was not affected by the plagues. However, this is clear proof of the words of the Rambam (Avot 5:4) that though the plague of lice did not, of course, actually cause harm to the Jewish people, it differed from all the others in one important aspect: it spread into Goshen as well. Yaakov had a further reason for not wishing to be buried in Egypt. He feared that if he were buried there, his descendants might begin to consider Egypt their homeland. They would reason that if it were not a holy land, Yaakov's body would not have been interred there. Yaakov wanted his descendants to be conscious of the fact that their stay in Egypt was only temporary. (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

וַאֲקַבְרֶהָ שָׁם בְּדַרְדַּר אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לֶחֶם - And I buried her there on the road to Efrat, which is Bet Lechem (48:7)

The words אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לֶחֶם - *Efrat which is Bet Lechem* would seem superfluous, since the Torah has already told us that Rachel died on the road to Efrat. It would have been sufficient to simply state that Yaakov buried her "there" without naming the location a second time. Rashi teaches that Yaakov's choice of location for Rachel's grave followed Hashem's instructions. It had been destined that when Bnei Yisrael would go into the Babylonian exile, they would pass by this spot and Rachel would pray for her beloved children. Hashem would then take mercy on His people and promise that "the children shall return to their borders." (Jeremiah 31:16) In other words, the exile would soon end, and Bnei Yisrael would return to their homeland.

How many years would pass from the time of Rachel's death until the promised return of the exiles? Rachel died at the birth of Binyamin, when Yosef was 8 years old. Yaakov and the family descended to Egypt when Yosef was 39 years. Hence 31 years passed from the time of Rachel's death until Bnei Yisrael went to Egypt. The nation was in

Egypt for 210 years. From the time they left Egypt until all twelve tribes were in Eretz Yisrael took 40 years. From the time Bnei Yisrael entered the land until the onset of the Babylonian exile was 850 years (see Gittin 81a and Rashi). The first returnees to the land from Babylon arrived 52 years later, during the reign of Cyrus. Thus 1,183 years passed from Rachel's death until the arrival of the first returnees to the land in the aftermath of the exile. The numerical value of אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם - *Efrat which is Bet Lechem* is 1,183. (Source: Kol Dodi – Seasonings of the Torah)

בְּךָ יִבְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר יְשַׁמְךָ אֱלֹקִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וּכְמְנַשֶּׁה - By you shall Israel bless saying, "May G-d make you like Efrayim and Menasheh." (48:20). Why did Yaakov want his future descendants to bless their children with the example of Efrayim and Menasheh, of all the tribes? One explanation of the Rabbis is that Yosef's two sons exemplified a fundamental principle of the Torah: There was no competition between them, and neither considered himself greater than his brother.

Although Yaakov set Efrayim, the younger son, above Menasheh, the firstborn, Menasheh was not jealous and Efrayim did not become arrogant. Pretensions and rivalry were far beneath them. Each had a deep respect for the other, and a feeling of happiness in the other's success. Yaakov, therefore, expressed the hope that all of his children in generations to come would be like Efrayim and Menasheh. He created a tradition that this blessing be given by Jewish parents to their children throughout history that they be free of both arrogance and envy. (Source: Ma'ayana Shel Torah- quoting the Bnei Yissaschar)

The Chatam Sofer says that every generation is on a lesser level than the previous generation. Nevertheless, every father naturally wishes his son to be greater than himself. The Gemara in Sanhedrin 105b says that 'a father is not jealous of his son nor a rebbe (teacher) jealous of his student.' Yaakov saw that his grandsons Efrayim and Menasheh were of the same caliber as his own sons, the tribes – "like Reuven and Shimon they shall be to me (48:5). Thus, each father blesses his son with this unique blessing – just as Efrayim and Menasheh were equal in greatness to the generation preceding them, so should our children equal, or even surpass us in greatness. (Source: A Gut Vort)

וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ - And may they (proliferate abundantly) like the fish *within* the land (48:16). The Kli Yakar asks the question "would it not have been sufficient for the passuk to have said, וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֹב בְּאֶרֶץ" and may they proliferate abundantly like fish in the land?" Why is the word בְּקֶרֶב 'within' necessary? The Gemara in Sota 11b says that following Pharaoh's evil decree to kill all newborn infants, Jewish mothers had no choice but to flee to the fields to give birth safely and then abandon these newborns in the fields. Hashem sent angels to care for these babies, and whenever the patrolling Egyptian soldiers searched for them; the ground would open up and conceal the infants from sight. The soldiers searched the fields but never discovered a single child. As soon as the soldiers left the fields, these children sprouted forth from the ground like grass in a field, and when these babies grew up they returned to their parents' houses. This was Yaakov's blessing – may they proliferate from, literally, *within* the earth. (Source: A Gut Vort)

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה עֲלֶה וְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעֶךָ - And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father as he made you promise." (50:6) The Gemara (Sotah 36b) reveals details of the dialogue between Yosef and Pharaoh which are not written in the Torah (also quoted by Rashi). Yosef informed Pharaoh of his wish to fulfil his promise to his father to bury him in Eretz Yisrael. Pharaoh refused Yosef's request and instructed him to go back on his promise. Yosef responded by saying that if he is coerced into relinquishing the promise made to his father, then he will likewise forgo the promises he made to Pharaoh! What was the promise? Although Pharaoh and Yosef were proficient in many languages, Yosef knew one additional language – Hebrew. When Yosef attempted to teach this to Pharaoh, Pharaoh could not grasp it. Were this to become public knowledge, it would be catastrophic for Pharaoh. Therefore Pharaoh had forced Yosef to swear to him that he would never reveal this piece of information. (Source: Shabbos Delights)

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 3.51pm



Shabbat ends: 5.01pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html