

## Parshat Vayechi: Living Life

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The first verse in this parsha states: "Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob - the years of his life - was one hundred forty seven years. What new lessons is this verse teaching us about Yaakov and about ourselves? How should individual days add up to full years?"

Rav Wolfson presents an analogy. Each day you are presented with a blank canvas upon which you will paint that entire day. At the end of the day, that canvas will ascend to heaven and a new canvas will descend the following morning. However, there are times you can review and edit that canvas. Each night before reciting Shema, at the end of each month, and at the end of every year.

Rav Gifter, Rav Sternbach, Rav Moshe all point out that a *tzadik* such as Yaakov lives each day meaningfully, focused on fostering an ever closer relationship with Hashem. This focus does not change no matter what circumstances he finds himself in. Whether Yaakov found himself almost persecuted by Lavan, or running away from Esau, or living in Egypt, there was always one focus, and Yaakov grew from each experience.

The Marvidei Chen cites the Saba of Kelm that the challenges Yaakov faced, and indeed that we all face, are catalysts for growth. As Rabbi Rosenblatt points out, rising to meet the challenges Hashem presents us with

forces us to rise above them and grow. The pain is temporary; the results are eternal.

Rabbi Schwab points out that during these seventeen years, Yaakov actually lived life, as opposed to the previous years which he described as "few and bad ...," for now he considered even those days good. What made them good was not the physical comfort, but rather his glimpse into *olam habo*, of the true, eternal life when all would be revealed. Yaakov could now look back on all his troubles and see how each was a necessary step in realizing the Divine plan and his exalted position in that plan.

But, as Rav Gifter points out, a life of ease presents challenges of its own, and we must learn how to flourish spiritually in exile. That's why Yaakov sent Yehudah before him to set up a house for Torah study. Take each situation, says the Toras Emes, and utilize it for growth. Yaakov wanted to stay in *Eretz Yisroel*, but Hashem told him to go down to Egypt, for that was where he needed to grow. And Yaakov cancelled his own ego to follow Hashem's command, for living in Egypt now became his challenge. As Rabbi Rosenblatt points out, "Circumstances may be fluid, but challenge is a constant - the purpose behind all events in life."

The Chayei Moshe cites the Sefas Emes and points to Yaakov's defining characteristic, truth which is also the defining characteristic of

Torah. Neither Torah nor truth can be changed based on circumstances. Therefore, it was necessary for Yaakov to go to a foreign land and establish the truth of *Torah* everywhere. As the Or Gedaliah points out, the truth of *Torah*, can be compared to living waters that flow constantly, for if they stop flowing, they can no longer be considered "living". The quality of the water must remain the same wherever it flows, just as the Torah must retain its truth and immutability wherever it is.

Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that Yaakov's life actually reached its pinnacle in Egypt. Until now, he and his children studied Torah in the halls of study. Now they were forced out of those cloistered surroundings into the darkness of Egypt to spread the light of Torah by actually living its precepts daily.

Although Yaakov dies in this parsha, he lives on through the legacy he imparted to all generations teaching us how to live our lives not only in *Eretz Yisroel* but in every land into which our exile would bring us.

The Netivot Shalom says that just as Yaakov descended from the holy land of Israel to the decadent land of Egypt, so too did our individual souls descend from the spiritual realm to the physical realm. But just as Yaakov lived a full Torah life in Egypt, so must we too rein in the physical lures of this world and remain focused on living as *Torah* Jews.

## The First Prayer: Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Yaakov gave us the ability to see the whole spectrum. He began where Yitzchak left off. He could see both black and white and know that they were meant to be part of a great mosaic called truth. Every one of us as Jews could seek that. We call the first blessing *Avot* because we try to know Hashem through the way our forefathers sought him. We don't have to start at the beginning. When we say the Hashem of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, it shouldn't just be a chant. It should be- "I know you the way Avraham knew you. I

see you in the enormity of your giving. I see you in the spirituality that was released through Yitzchak's sacrifice and struggle. I see the truth of Yaakov in the world You created, in the infinite number of pieces of the puzzle that make sense when you put them together, and I'll strive for that."

Blessing means to maximize. If you bless someone you want more good for them. Hashem isn't static. He's blessed. He's continually bringing us and the world to its

maximation, to where it could be. When we say *Elokeinu*- our Hashem, we mean He has a relationship with us, and that there is *hashgacha* (divine intervention). Hashem is involved in everything. He's involved in the life force that maintains the smallest pebble on the beach. Yet His involvement with the Jewish people is more visible, more concentrated, and His relationship with individuals depending on how big their cup is, could be very intense. We're saying, "Hashem you're my source for blessing, you have a relationship with me, and

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I know you the way the *avot* knew you."  
*Hakel*- You're the force that keeps things from disintegrating every second and brings everything to life at every moment. *Hagadol*- your great, *Hagibor*-your powerful, *Nora*-you're awesome, everything combines together with you. *Kel Elyon*-the highest force, whatever I'm thinking when I say Hashem, there's more...

We say, "Hashem I know how much you have filled my cup, but I know that there's more, that the faucet is still pouring out water." We concretize it still further. "You do good acts of kindness." This implies that there are bad acts of kindness. On the human level, sometimes kindness can be manipulative. We give what we think is good, but sometimes we might be

wrong. Hashem's kindness is always good even when it doesn't feel good to us.

There's nothing random in this world. If someone is ill that's where they need to be at that moment. A person who loses their job might need to find a new direction for himself or must suffer a bit of deprivation and lack of status for a while in order to turn him into a compassionate person. If you're charismatic, it means you're supposed to give of yourself by using your charisma. If you're less charismatic, it's because you might need to be more internally directed and maybe that's just as holy and real.

"And you remember the kindness of the father and you are bringing a redeemer to the

children of their children for the sake of His name with love." Everything is taking us to a meaningful end goal. If you'd stop in the middle of a story in the *Torah*, you'd be left with an unsolvable puzzle. Picture Avraham told to sacrifice his son. He goes on a three day journey looking for the right place. Suppose on day two and half he would turn to Eliezer and say, "Look I can't find the place, I'm heading home." It would have been anti-climactic. He never would have become the person he was meant to be. Hashem wouldn't have made the covenant with him and Yitzchak would not have had the opportunity to be heroic enough to give himself up on the altar. When Avraham was told to do this there was an end goal -to make him into who he could become.

## Shir Shel Yom- Yom Sheini: Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

To be a king is to form a nation, to create harmony from diverse paths and differences. the concept of Monday is that although Hashem created us very differently, we unite under His kingship. Everything Hashem created can be part of the picture of bringing spirituality into the world.

The Bnei Korach wrote this chapter of *Tehilim*. When Korach began his war, his motivation was spiritual. He was a very great person. He claimed that the Jewish nation was holy and therefore didn't need Moshe and Aharon to lead them. He felt that we had reached the times of *Mashiach* of which it is written one will not need to teach the other as things will be so clear and everyone will have knowledge. Korach desired spirituality and closeness to Hashem on the level of a kohen gadol. The fact that there are so many arguments about spirituality indicates that this is a life question for *Klal Yisrael*. They want to express their unique potential and find their own path in serving Hashem in the best way. It stems from a good place. So, then what is

the problem?

*Chazal* define it for us in *Pirkei Avot*. A dispute that is *l'shem shamayim* (for the sake of heaven) such as that of *Hillel V'Shamai* will have a *kiyum* (future existence). A dispute that is not *l'shem shamayim*, where there is ego involved, such as that of Korach and his followers, will not have a *kiyum*. A dispute *l'shem shamayim* means fighting for the truth. We have to be careful that there is no personal interest involved. Korach's desire for closeness to Hashem was such that it made it very hard for him to realize this.

The reality in this world is that there are many conflicts and it almost seems like a disadvantage rather than an advantage. But the very fact that there are differences brings clarity. Shlomo Hamelech says we can appreciate the light because there's darkness. Going through a process of not seeing the truth fully and trying to figure it out through hearing different opinions, weighing them, and dissecting them, makes us eventually come to the right conclusion. The differences are a challenge

that enable us to gain clarity. When you teach students, they may question you, causing you to dig further, and by doing so the topic becomes clearer to you.

The challenge of the second day is the multitude of opinions on the spiritual and physical level. There are different views in the Talmud that seem contradictory. For example, some say the world was created in *Tishrei* while others say in *Nissan*. The Shem MiShmuel explains that it's really two aspects of the same thing. The first stage was when Hashem had it in mind, the plan was made. The second stage was when it became a physical reality. This disparity further clarifies our understanding of creation which we would have not understood without it. The greater the person, the more understanding and knowledge he has, and the more he can show us how the contradictory opinions really work together. Then we can discover spirituality because one of the things we know about Hashem is that that which is a contradiction by us is not a contradiction by Him.