

פרשת ויחי

'I blanked out' is a phrase that most of use one time or another. We try to remember an event or a name or a number and we just can't recall it. And we feel the loss.

If the information is not so important we go on to other things. But if it is significant to us, we don't let up. How many times do we wake up in the middle of the night and recall the information!

If we are healthy bEzras Hashem then these episodes are bothersome very occasionally. If, *Chas V'shalom*, one has an illness that causes forgetfulness then there is ongoing pain and suffering – until one forgets that they used to remember.

And what must it feel like if the knowledge that is no longer attainable came from an unforgettable source? A source that is so deeply ingrained that it is unimaginable that the information that it imparts could be lost?

And that is what happened to Yaakov Ovinu twice in our Parshas Vayechi.

We read (B'reishis Perek 49/Posuk 1):

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל בְּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֶאֱסֹפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים:

Yaakov called to his sons and he said, 'Gather and I will tell you that which will happen to you at the end of days.

When we read this verse we certainly have a right to expect that the next verse will present us with a vision of the *GeulaShleima* which was apparently anticipated thousands of years ago.

However, the next verse contains nothing of the kind. Rather, it seems almost like a paraphrase of Posuk 1. We read (Posuk 2):

הַקְבִּצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:

Gather and listen, sons of Yaakov, listen to your Father Yisroel.

Rashi explains what happened. He writes:

ואגידה לכם - בקש לגלות את הקץ ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו והתחיל אומר דברים אחרים:

And I will tell you – Yaakov wished to reveal ‘the end’ and the Shechinah departed from him and he began saying other things.

Those ‘other things’ are the blessings to the various *Shevatim* that follow in the subsequent P’sukim.

We should not think for a moment that this departure of the Shechina at that moment was not an event of supreme importance.

The importance of that knowledge casts its shadow on the entire Parsha.

The first verse of the Parsha reads (Perek 47/Posuk 28):

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂר שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יְמֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חִיָּו שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים
וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה:

Yaakov lived in the Land of Egypt 17 years and the days of Yaakov, the years of his life, were 7 years and 40 years and 100 years.

Rashi notes that there is no unique space in the Torah between the last verse of the previous week’s Parshas Vayigash and the opening verse of this week’s Parshas Vayechi. There is a space that exists between any two words, the last word of Vayigash and the first word of Vayechi, but not the expected larger space that we find almost everywhere else in the Torah. That is, our Parsha is ‘closed’, a פרשה סתומה¹.

¹The term פרשה סתומה as it is used here could be misleading.

Throughout the Torah we have longer than usual spaces between one verse and another (and occasionally in a verse itself). When the space goes to the end of the line and the next word begins the next line, we call that a פרשה פתוחה, an ‘open

He writes:

ויחי יעקב - למה פרשה זו סתומה...דבר אחר שבקש לגלות את הקץ לבניו ונסתם ממנו:

Yaakov lived – Why is this Parsha ‘closed’?...Another answer is that Yaakov wished to reveal the ‘end of days’ to his sons and it was closed off from him.

Yaakov Ovinu’s inability to retrieve this vital information was not only a grave disappointment for the moment; it clouded the very last part of his life to such an extent that the Torah makes an exceptional change in the way that it writes.

However, this is not the only time in our Parsha where the RuachHaKodesh that was bestowed upon Yaakov Ovinu was withheld.

We read early in our Parsha (Perek 48/P’sukim 8-9):

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּסֶף וַיֵּאמֶר מִי אֵלֶּה: וַיֵּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָבִיו בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִי אֱלֹהִים... לְקִיָּם בָּזָה וַיֵּאמֶר קְחֵם נָא אֵלַי וְאֶבְרַכְכֶם:

Yisroel saw the sons of Yosef and he said, “Who are these?” Yosef said to his father, ‘They are my sons that Hashem gave to me in this’ and Yaakov said, ‘Take them please to me and I will bless them.’

One’s first sense may be to attribute this query of Yaakov Ovinu to failing eyesight. However, such an assumption seems difficult because only later do we read that Yaakov’s vision was impaired.

That disability is told of in a following verse (10):

וַעֲיַיֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבָדוֹ מִזֶּקֶן לֹא יוֹכֵל לָרְאוֹת וַיִּגַּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁק לָהֶם וַיַּחֲבֹק לָהֶם:

section’. When there is a space (nine letters long) in the middle of a line and the next word is on the same line, after the space, we term that a פרשה סתומה, a ‘closed section’.

Here, however, סתומה in our Rashi, means completely closed with no more spacing between Parshos than there is between one word and the other.

The eyes of Yisroel were heavy because of old age and he was not able to see; and he drew them near to him and he kissed them and he hugged them.

It would certainly have been natural for the Torah to teach us about Yaakov's semi-blindness prior to his question of 'who are these' if that was the reason for the question. The fact that the Torah did not write this verse then and wrote it only after Yaakov's question points to the fact that his question had nothing to do with identifying them as his grandsons.

What was the issue? Rashi explains:

וירא ישראל את בני יוסף - בקש לברכם ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו לפי שעתיד ירבעם ואחאב לצאת מאפרים, ויהוא ובניו ממנשה:

Yisroel saw the sons of Yosef – Yaakov wanted to bless them and the Shechina departed from him because in the future Kings Y'rov'om and Achav would come out from Efraim and King Yehu and his sons from Menashe.

The fact that future progeny is a factor in determining worth of someone should not come as a surprise to us.

In Sefer Sh'mos we read (Perek 12/P'sukim 11-12):

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הֵהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסֹבְלֵתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכֶּה אִישׁ עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו: וַיִּפֹּן כִּי הִי וְכִי וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:

And it was in those days and Moshe grew and he went out to his brothers and he saw their sufferings and he saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man from his brothers. Moshe turned this way and that way and he saw that there was no man and he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Now, we understand that Moshe checked that there was no one looking when he killed the Egyptian and thus Moshe was able to punish him for his grave actions. That explanation can be questioned, however, as we read on in the next two verses:

וַיֵּצֵא בַיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וְהִנֵּה שְׁנַי אַנְשִׁים עִבְרִים נֹצִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרָשָׁע לָמָּה תִכֶּה רֵעִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שְׂמִיךְ לְאִישׁ שֶׁר וְשׂוֹפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלֹהֲרִגְנִי אַתָּה אֲמַר כְּאִשֶׁר הֲרַגְתָּ אֶת
הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מִשָּׂה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר:

Moshe went out on the second day and behold two Hebrew men were fighting and Moshe said to the wicked one, 'Why are you going to hit your friend? And he said, 'Who placed you as an officer and a judge over us; do you say to kill me like you killed the Egyptian? Moshe was afraid and said, 'Surely, the matter is known'.

Rashi writes:

שני אנשים עברים - דתן ואבירם...

Two men – Dason and Aviram

ויירא משה - כפשוטו. ומדרשו דאג לו על שראה בישראל רשעים דלטורין, אמר מעתה שמא אינם ראויין להגאל:

Moshe was afraid – According to its simple meaning. Its Midrash is that Moshe was worried because he saw that in Israel there were wicked informers. He said, 'Because of this – perhaps they do not deserve to be redeemed?'

אכן נודע הדבר - כמשמעו. ומדרשו נודע לי הדבר שהייתי תמה עליו, מה חטאו ישראל מכל שבעים אומות להיות נרדים בעבודת פרך, אבל רואה אני שהם ראויים לכך:

Surely the matter is known – as it implies. Its Midrash is that 'Now it is known to me the matter that I wondered about – what did Israel sin more than the other seventy nations of the world to be subjugated with backbreaking servitude. But now I see that they deserve it.

And the reason why our explanation that Moshe was checking to see if anyone was looking is questionable is clarified by the following verse (Posuk 15):

וַיִּשְׁמַע פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּבְקֹשׁ לְהַרְגֵּהוּ אֶת מֹשֶׁה וַיִּבְרַח מִשָּׂה מִפְּנֵי פְרַעֲהַ
וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל הַבְּאֵר:

Par'o heard this matter and he sought to kill Moshe and Moshe fled from before Par'o and he dwelled in the Land of Midian and he stopped by the well.

Rashi explains:

וישמע פרעה - הם הלשינו עליו:

Par'o heard – they informed on him.

Who are 'they'? Dason and Aviram!

Now, of course, it could be that Moshe looked here and there and did not see Dason and Aviram and was surprised that they knew the matter.

However, it is no less likely that he saw that Jews were looking and was not worried that Jews would inform upon him as he meted out appropriate justice. If that is so, what does it mean that Moshe saw that there was 'no man'? Rashi explains:

וירא כי אין איש - עתיד לצאת ממנו שיתגייר:

He saw that there was no man – that in the future would come from the Egyptian who would convert [and who would make it worthwhile for Moshe to spare the Egyptian's life].

Thus we see that a person could be judged based on his further offspring.

This type of judgment is not for punishment only because if that offspring will be worthy, a future generation could save a previous one.

We read in Sefer D'vorim (Perek 2/Posuk 9):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי אַל תִּצֹר אֶת מוֹאָב וְאַל תִּתְּגֹר בָּם מִלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אֶתֶן לָךְ מֵאֶרְצוֹ
יְרֻשָׁה כִּי לְבִנְי לֹט נָתַתִּי אֶת עַר יְרֻשָׁה:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Do not lay siege to Moav and do not provoke a war against them because I will not give to you an inheritance from their land because to the children of Lot I gave *Or* as an inheritance.

In Masseches BavaKamma (38 a), the Gemara questions why Hashem would command Moshe Rabbenu, seemingly out of nowhere, not to make a war against Moav. The Gemara reads:

: ויאמר ה' אלי אל תצר את מואב ואל תתגר בם מלחמה, וכי מה עלה על דעתו של משה לעשות מלחמה שלא ברשות? אלא נשא משה ק ל וחומר בעצמו, אמר: ומה מדינים שלא באו אלא לעזור את מואב, אמרה תורה: צרור את המדינים והכיתם אותם, מואבים עצמן לא כל שכן! אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: לא כשעלתה על דעתך עלתה על דעתי, שתי פרידות טובות יש לי להוציא מהן, רות המואביה ונעמה העמונית;

Hashem said to me do not lay siege upon Moav and do not provoke a war against them. What did Moshe think – that he would make a war without [Divine] permission?² Rather Moshe made his own *kalvachomer*. He said, If regarding the Midianites who only came to help Moav the Torah said, 'Cause the Midianites pain and smite them', the Moavim themselves is it not all the more so to smite them?

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Not what you thought did I Hashem think. There are two women whom I will take out from them, Rus the Moabite and Naama the Amonite. [And for their sake I will not allow you to smite Moav and Amon.]

Therefore we are not surprised that Yaakov surmised that the two sons of Yosef were undeserving of a brachah because of their future seed.

However, even though we have hear a loss of RuachHaKodesh, this lapse of *RuachHaKodesh* does not seem to be mourned in the same way that the lapse regarding telling of the End of Days is. This lapse is not given as a reason for our Parsha to be closed.

And there are two more questions that we may raise.

² The question is why Hashem had to tell Moshe not to make a war that wasn't seemingly contemplated or commanded?

The first is in regards to the sons of Yosef. We read in the following verse to Yaakov's question of 'who are they':

וַיֹּסֵף אֶל אָבִיו בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמַר קְהָם נָא אֵלַי
וְאֶבְרַכֶּם:

Yosef said to his father, 'They are my sons that Hashem gave me in this; and Yaakov said, 'Take them to me and I will bless them'.

Rashi explains that although Yaakov had a reason not to bless them, he did so in the end because:

בזה...- ובקש יוסף רחמים על הדבר ונחה עליו רוח הקדש:

In this – Yosef sought mercy about this matter and *RuachHaKodesh* descended upon Yaakov Ovinu.

Isn't the question obvious? If the *RuachHaKodesh* could be restored through prayer, why didn't all of the *Shevatim* pray that Yaakov's knowledge of the End of Days also be restored?

The final question that we will raise is that it is hard to say that the *RuachHaKodesh* was taken from Yaakov when we read the blessings. Many of them are replete with visions of the future.

As Rashi explains in each of these incidents, Posuk 6 of the blessings refers to Zimri and Korach; Posuk 7 refers to Bil'am and Posuk 8 to Dovid HaMelech. Posuk 10 also refers to Dovid HaMelech as well as to *Moshiach*. Isn't *Moshiach* at the End of Days?

And the list continues.

So, what was taken from Yaakov Ovinu when so much is counter-indicative? Is it easy to understand that he was cut off from *RuachHaKodesh* and yet demonstrated it time and time again?

However, upon further analysis we need to distinguish between the three issues that are under discussion in the order in which they appear in the Parsha:

1. Parshas Vayechi is סתומה, closed, as explained above. One of the reasons that Rashi attributes to that phenomenon is:

שבקש לגלות את הקץ לבניו ונסתם ממנו:

Yaakov wished to reveal the End of Days to his sons and it was closed from him.

That is, in anticipation of that which is yet to be told, we find the *siman* of a future event opening our Parsha.

As a reflection that such a revelation was 'closed from him', so our Parsha is closed.

2. The Shechina goes away from Yaakov Ovinu, as Rashi writes:

בקש לברכם ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו

He wished to bless them and the Shechina departed from him.

The Shechina departed, as Rashi says, because they were not worthy of a blessing because of the descendants that would eventually come from them.

However, in this instance the Shechina returned to Yaakov Ovinu and he did bless them.

3. At the time when Yaakov wished to reveal the End of Days, he wasn't allowed. We read there:

בקש לגלות את הקץ ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו והתחיל אומר דברים אחרים:

Yaakov wished to reveal the End and the Shechinah departed from him and he began other things.

As we noted, this was foreshadowed by the very appearance of our Parsha's beginning.

However, as is apparent, the Shechinah did return to him and thus what he said when he blessed each Shevet certainly was with RuachHaKodesh.

However, even though the RuachHaKodesh returned, Yaakov could not reveal the End and this is in contrast to when the RuachHaKodesh returned to Yaakov when

he was previously prevented from blessing his grandchildren, and he did bless them.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves the following question:

What is more surprising? Is Hashem's 'recalcitrance' to restore the fullness of the RuachHaKodesh to Yaakov Ovinu more expected or was the restoration of the RuachHaKodesh to Yaakov to bless his grandsons more expected?

I think that our constant remembrance of Hashem's kindness and mercy would make the latter the least surprising. Even though there was a reason to block the blessings that would accrue to Efraim and Menasheh, that reason was overridden by Divine mercy.

If so, the focus is upon the blocking of Yaakov's ability to tell his sons of the End of Days. We have already seen that the blockage was limited and specific. RuachHaKodesh did not depart from Yaakov Ovinu fully; the blessings that he subsequently gave the Shevatim demonstrated that the Shechinah was still with him.

What could be the explanation for what appears to be inconsistency in similar matters?

In Massechet Sanhedrin (97 b) the Gemara interprets a verse from Chabakuk (Perek 2/Posuk 3). The verse reads:

כִּי עוֹד תִּזְוֹן לְמוֹעֵד וְיִפְחַח לִקְצֵץ וְלֹא יִכְזֵב אִם יִתְמַהֲמַה חֶפְזָה לוֹ כִּי בֹא יְבֹא לֹא יִאַחֲרֶה:

There is yet a vision for the appointed time; he will speak regarding the end and not deceive; if he will tarry, wait for him because he will certainly come and not be late.

On the one hand this Posuk seems most mysterious. On the other hand, because of our familiarity with the popular formulation of one of Rambam's principles of faith, we recognize that this verse is dealing with Moshiach.

Our examination of the verse leads us to see paradoxes with it.

If there is an appointed time, how could it be that he will tarry? If he will tarry, how can it say that he will not be late?

It is likely that these inherent difficulties in this verse led Chazal to write there a Midrashic interpretation of the word ויפח, which Rashi explains as a synonym for speaking. In the Midrashic interpretation the word ויפח is like the word פח which means 'trash'. If so, ויפח לקץ would mean something like 'he will be trashed for the End of Days'. The Gemara explains:

מאי ויפח לקץ ולא יכזב - אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: תיפח עצמן של מחשבי קיצין, שהיו אומרים: כיון שהגיע את הקץ ולא בא - שוב אינו בא. אלא חכה לו, שנאמר אם יתמהמה חכה לו... וכי מאחר שאנו מחכים והוא מחכה, מי מעכב? - מדת הדין מעכבת, וכי מאחר שמדת הדין מעכבת, אנו למה מחכין? - לקבל שכר, שנאמר (ישעיה ל"ח) אשרי כל חוכי לו.

What does the phrase ויפח לקץ ולא יכזב mean? Rabi Sh'muel bar Nachmeini said in the name of Rabi Yonoson: Let the very beings of those who compute the End become destroyed. Because people [who heard such unrealized calculations] would say, 'Since the time has arrived and Moshiach has not yet come, he will never come [and thus it will appear as if he deceived]. Rather wait for him, as it says, 'If he will tarry, wait for him'.

If he is waiting to come and we are waiting for him to come, what is preventing his arrival? It is *MiddasHaDin*, Divine judgment. If Divine judgment is preventing his arrival, why should we wait? To receive reward as it says, 'fortunate are those who wait for him'.

Netziv on the beginning of our Parshas Vayechi questions the need for the opening verse of our Parsha. Why do we need to be told that Yaakov lived for seventeen years in Egypt? The Torah had already told us that he was 130 years

³The entire verse reads:

וְלֵכֵן יַחְפָּה ה' לַחַנּוּנֵיכֶם וְלֵכֵן יְרוּם לְרַחֲמֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי... לְקִי מִשְׁפָּט ה' אֲשֶׁרֵי כָל חוֹכֵי לוֹ:
Therefore, Hashem will wait to favour you and therefore he will raise to have mercy upon you because Hashem is the G-d of justice; fortunate are those who wait for Him.

old when he came to Egypt⁴ and tells us in that opening verse that he was 147 years old at his death.

He explains that Yaakov's years in Egypt, his final seventeen years on earth, were his most productive. In Egypt, Yaakov Ovinu realized his intended role of leadership throughout the world, and thus it could have only been in *chutzla'aretz* where that leadership could be recognized and significant.

It is for that reason that the Torah writes:

ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה

Yaakov *lived* in the Land of Egypt for seventeen years.

It was in Egypt where we see the pinnacle of his achievement, although the Torah does not describe his actions there.

In fact, this idea that the supreme value of Yaakov's accomplishments was in Egypt is already mentioned in the Zohar.

Shem MiShmuel to our Parsha (5671 d.h. vayeichi) writes:

ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה. מבואר בזוהר הקדוש דאופן שבע עשרה שנה היו ברום המעלות מאד. נראה כמו שהלך יעקב אבינו לבית עבר על י"ד שנה קודם לכתו לבית לבן כדי לקשר את עצמו בתורה שלא יתקלקל חס ושלום בבית לבן, כמו כן היו י"ז השנים במצרים, כדי שיתקשרו ישראל על ידי אמצעות יעקב בקשר חזק ואמיץ שלא תזיק להם הגלות חס ושלום.

Yaakov lived in the Land of Egypt seventeen years – It is explained in the *Zohar HaKodosh* that those seventeen years were the very highest in the levels [that a person can attain].

[The explanation] appears to be that this is similar to when Yaakov went to the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver for fourteen years before going to the House of Lovon. He did so to connect himself to Torah so that he would not be ruined, G-d forbid, in the House of Lovon.

⁴Perek 47/Posuk 9.

Similarly, the seventeen years in Egypt were for the purpose of allowing his descendants to be connected through Yaakov [to HaKodosh Boruch Hu] with a strong and powerful tie so that the exile would not harm them, G-d forbid.

It is most clear that the reason for that excellence in Egypt is not agreed upon by Netziv and Shem MiShmuel. According to Netziv, Yaakov's task was to serve as an inspiration to the nations until the redemption would be realized and that is why he had to be in ChutzLa'Aretz. In fact, Netziv uses this idea to explain why the lives of the Jewish People throughout our history have been primarily out of Eretz Yisroel – because we have a task for the benefit of humanity.

It is through Israel's sojourn outside of Eretz Yisroel that this verse in Sefer Zecharia (Perek 14/Posuk 9) will be realized:

וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה ה' אֶחָד וַיִּשְׁמוּ אֶחָד:

It will be that Hashem will be the King over the entire land; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name One.

Unlike the Netziv who does not cite the Zohar, Shem Mi'Shmuel interprets the Zohar to explain that Yaakov Ovinu's final years were spent preparing Israel to face the future in exile and to insure that Israel would not fall by the wayside and instead continue to exist and to thrive. That excellence was the reason why the Torah begins our Parsha with the word *Vayechi* – Yaakov *lived*.

Whether we understand our Parsha like the Netziv or like the Shem MiShmuel, it is clear that Yaakov's unstated activity in Egypt was legion.

Yaakov who one time desired to live in tranquillity, transformed his life from the tragedy of Yosef that left him greatly incapacitated to a new life when he was reunited with his lost son.

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev we read (B'reishis Perek 37/Posuk 1):

וַיָּשָׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְרִי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

Yaakov dwelled in the land of the sojourning of his father in the Land of Canaan.

Rashi to Posuk 2 there writes:

ועוד נדרש בו וישב ביקש יעקב לישב בשלוח, קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף. צדיקים מבקשים לישב בשלוח אומר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא דיין לצדיקים מה שמתקן להם לעולם הבא, אלא שמבקשים לישב בשלוח בעולם הזה:

It is additionally interpreted that Yaakov sought to live in tranquillity and then the anger of Yosef pounced upon him.

The righteous wish to live in tranquillity. Hashem says, 'Is it not enough for the righteous that which is fixed for them in the World to Come that they seek to live in tranquillity in this world?'

That tranquillity was shattered with the loss of Yosef and that loss included far more than Yaakov's incessant mourning. We learn the extent of the mourning when Yaakov discovered that Yosef still lived.

The Torah writes (B'reishis Perek 45/Posuk 27):

וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֵגְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב בְּאֲבֵיהֶם:

His sons spoke to Yaakov all the words that Yosef spoke to them and Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent to carry him and the spirit of Yaakov their father became alive.

Rashi writes:

ותחי רוח יעקב - שרתה עליו שכינה שפירשה ממנו:

And the spirit of Yaakov became alive – the Shechinah that had departed from him rested upon him.

Yaakov Ovinu had been bereft of the Shechinah for over two decades and now it had returned to him for the final seventeen years of his life.

How alarmed he must have been when it left him when he wanted to bless his grandsons! How alarmed he must have been when he wished to reveal the End of Days to his sons.

And yet, for the duration of the seventeen years, with the exception of those brief moments, Yaakov Ovinu was suffused with Ruach Hashem.

Its purpose, we have seen, was to vitalize a population, whether the nations of the world or his own descendants for the time until there would be the redemption.

What would happen to that enthusiasm with which Yaakov Ovinu wished to infuse the population he was to inspire if they were to be told that End would come at a certain time?

What would happen to that fervor if they saw a ticking clock heading toward a time that was affixed permanently?

What would happen to the enthusiasm and dedication of those who wished to work towards an ideal if they knew that the ideal was going to be reached no matter what? If the End was guaranteed, what would be the use of dedication to work towards that end?

It was not the same with the blessings for Yaakov's grandchildren. Divine mercy allowed them to be blessed. The blessing had no harm in it; in fact it is the blessing that has been bestowed upon us and we bestow upon our children throughout the ages.

Knowledge of the End, however, was far different. The relief that its knowledge would bring for a moment would be drowned by the sense of inevitability that would certainly seep in to the psyche of those who would be aware of that time in the future, near or far.

Revelation of the End could not be allowed because the goal of its anticipation and the actions necessary to actualize it are the very ingredients to make those who wait worthy.

Rashi tells us two reasons why Parshas Vayechi is סתומה, closed. One we have dealt with at length. The other reads:

ויחי יעקב - למה פרשה זו סתומה לפי שכיון שנפטר יעקב אבינו נסתמו עיניהם
ולבם של ישראל מצרת השעבוד:

Yaakov lived – Why is this Parsha closed? Because when our Father Yaakov died the eyes and heart of Israel were closed because of the travails of the subjugation.

Let us think about it. If their eyes and heart were closed, how did our ancestors survive spiritually? What was it that let them maintain their names and dress and other aspects of their heritage despite the fact that they were completely impacted upon by all that surrounded them?

That which let them survive spiritually was *Vayechi Yaakov*. Yaakov lived with them and enlivened them. The RuachHaKodesh that he possessed injected them with the ability to survive the savage and brutal slavery to which they were subjected. Had they known the End and its inevitability, that inner source of power would not have been able to pulse through their veins⁵.

And, in closing, we will remember what Rambam writes at the end of Mishneh Torah (HilchosMelachim Perek 12/Halachah 2):

אמרו חכמים (סנהדרים צח ב) אין בין העולם הזה לימות המשיח אלא שיעבוד
מלכיות בלבד... וכל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן לא ידע אדם איך יהיו עד שיהיו,
שדברים סתומין הן אצל הנביאים, גם החכמים אין להם קבלה בדברים אלו, אלא
לפי הכרע הפסוקים, ולפיכך יש להם מחלוקת בדברים אלו, ועל כל פנים אין סדור
הויית דברים אלו ולא דקדוקיהן עיקר בדת, ולעולם לא יתעסק אדם בדברי
ההגדות, ולא יאריך במדרשות האמורים בענינים אלו וכיוצא בהן, ולא ישימם עיקר,
שאין מביאין לא לידי יראה ולא לידי אהבה, וכן לא יחשב הקצין, אמרו חכמים תפח
רוחם של מחשבי הקצים, אלא יחכה ויאמין בכלל הדבר כמו שבארנו.

⁵This is in accordance with Shem MiShmuel, of course. See Netziv for his discussion of how Yaakov Ovinu affected the nations of the world.

Chazal said that the only difference between the world as it is today and the period of Moshiach will be the obliteration of our subjugation to the nations of the world. And all of the explanations [dealing with what will happen at the End of Days and the order in which they will occur] and similar things no one will know what they will be like until they will be. These things are סתומים, closed, to the prophets and also the Chachamim do not have a tradition in these matters.

[The way that we understand what will be] is based on our deciding the meaning of the various verses and therefore there are differing opinions.

But, no matter what, neither the order of when these events will occur nor their particulars are a fundamental of Judaism. A person should not be overly involved in these Aggadic matters and not spend undue time on the Midrashim in these and similar matters and not make them to be fundamentally important. These matters do not bring one to the fear of G-d nor to the love of Him.

Similarly a person should not calculate the End. Our Chachamim said that those who calculate the End should be destroyed.

Rather one should await the End and believe in the general idea of these matters.

When Sefer B'reishis concludes this week and we recite חזק חזק ונתחזק, let us remember that the RuachHaKodesh of our Father Yaakov is pulsing within us reminding us to be strong as we anticipate the Redemption and do our part to hasten its arrival.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock