

Yaakov goes down to Mitzraim

Parshas Vayechi is the only Parsha in the Torah that is "סתומה", closed. This means that there are no empty spaces in the Sefer Torah before the beginning of the Parsha, indicating that it starts in middle of "nowhere"! The other Parshios have white space before they begin, so it's like they get off to a fresh start.

Rashi explains that a reason for this blockage is the Galus that began with Yaakov's Petira. This hints to the difficulties and trauma that the Bnei Yisroel would experience in Mitzraim.

Erev Shabbos was the fast of Asara B'Teves, which was the start of the Churban. How fitting to discuss the subject of Galus and Geula on this day.

Shechina in Galus

Yaakov Avinu had been afraid to go down to Egypt, and Hashem appeared to him and said "Yaakov, don't be afraid. I will descend with you to Egypt and I will return with you. Yosef will support you during your exile."

Chazal tell us whenever the Yidden were exiled, the Shechina, the divine presence, went along with them.

In our Parsha, we see an odd phenomenon. On two separate occasions, the Shechina departed from Yaakov Avinu. We need to study what caused the Divine Presence to leave, as well as what caused it to return.

The first time the Shechina withdrew was when Yaakov wanted to bless Efraim and Menashe. Yaakov was startled. He asked Yosef, “Are these children religious?”

Yosef answered affirmatively, and Yaakov wondered, “So why are they unworthy of being blessed?”

Then he saw with Ruach Hakodesh that they would have descendants that would be unfaithful to the Torah. Yeruvam ben Nevat, a king from the tribe of Efraim, would foist idol-worship upon the Jewish nation. Such a person is undeserving of Divine blessing.

“Unfortunately, I cannot bless your children”, Yaakov stated.

Yosef showed Yaakov his wife’s Kesuba. The children were born from this frum mother. Yosef davened and the Shechina returned. At this point, Yaakov was reinvigorated and exclaimed **הַמְּלֶאךָ הַגָּאֵל אֶתִּי מִכָּל רָע וְיַבְרֵךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים וְיִקְרָא בָהֶם שְׁמֵי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק וְיַדְגֵּוּ לְרֹב בְּקָרֶב הָאָרֶץ.** Additionally, he blessed the children with the famous words, **”יִשְׁמְרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים כָּאֲפָרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה”**.

The Shechina also departed when Yaakov gathered his children for the Birchos Yaakov, the Last Blessing. Yaakov was again saddened by this occurrence and he questioned them, “Are any of you depraved or

ignoble?" They declared in unison, "שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד". The Divine Presence was restored and Yaakov proclaimed "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד".

In order to investigate these two stories, let's understand Galus.

Galus - Exile

Galus is meant to be an extremely difficult experience. (It is substantially different today, as will iyh be discussed in future pamphlets) When a nation is exiled, they lose their self-importance and their nationalism, while they become subservient to the host country. Furthermore, they tend to respect and admire the existing citizenry. This typically leads to disassociation with their heritage, and eventually culminates with assimilation.

The Gemara echoes this concept (Chagiga 5b): Hashem sheds tears for the loss of Klal Yisroel's pride, and for the denigration of His Kingship."

Galus Mitzraim was fraught with many dangers. The very fabric of the Jewish nation was at risk. How can a small group of seventy maintain their autonomy in a hostile country? How can they remain steadfast in their faith when surrounded by idolatry? They will be hurt, criticized and scorned. Ultimately, the nation will be destroyed.

This was Yaakov's fear. How can my children retain their strength throughout this terrible ordeal? Hashem promised Yaakov that Yosef will ensure that the Shechina will remain with them and maintain them until the Redemption.

Yosef was sent to become a Viceroy in Egypt. This helped to build up the rest of the Yidden. Furthermore, Yosef forced all the Egyptians to move to different parts of the country. Thus, the Yidden were no less important than the existing citizens.

Yosef himself had a most challenging nisayon. By withstanding the allure of his master's wife, he gave the Yidden strength to conquer their own trials in Mitzrayim.

We also find that Yosef forced the Egyptians to get themselves circumcised. This is very unusual, since there is no Mitzvah for a gentile to have a Bris Milah. Perhaps Yosef's intention was to mitigate the Egyptians' lusts and desires, much like one may castrate a bull. This would make the Egyptians more docile and weaken the coming Nisyonos for the Yidden.

Yaakov was distraught when the Shechina abandoned him. Without the Shechina, how will they survive? Yosef showed him the Kesuba, written exactly as it was in Eretz Yisroel. He hinted that by keeping our Minhagim, we will be able to pull through.

Similarly, the Shevatim hinted that they may not be perfect, but by saying Sh'ma Yisroel, they will persevere. Yaakov replied with Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuso L'olam Vaed (Hashem's Honor and Kingship is forever) indicating that **the Yidden will indeed endure forever**.