

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Reb Meir ben Reb Dovid HaCohen. Sponsored by Hannah Finkel in memory of her father.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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12 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYECHI

Business as Usual

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years... (47:28)

Rashi (ad loc) points out that this week's *parsha* opens without the customary delineation that is commonly found between two *parshios*. That is, the Torah is generally broken up into paragraphs and chapters – known as "*p'suchos*" and "*stumos*." A chapter ending is indicated by leaving the rest of the line open and a paragraph break is delineated by leaving nine letter spaces blank. However, this *parsha* begins with no break in the writing from the previous *parsha*.

Rashi goes on to explain that this *parsha* is "*sossum*" or "sealed" because this *parsha* contains the death of Yaakov Avinu, and once he passed away the hearts and eyes of Bnei Yisroel were closed from the suffering of the enslavement, for that is when the Egyptians began to enslave them.

Yet this Rashi is directly contradicted by another Rashi in *Parshas Va'eira* (*Shmos* 6:16). Rashi says there that the reason the Torah records the age of Levi when he passed away is to teach us how many years the enslavement lasted. As Rashi explains, Levi lived longer than any of his brothers and "as long as Yosef and his brothers were alive the enslavement did not begin." Levi died approximately seventy-seven years after Yaakov Avinu. So, at which point did the enslavement begin?

Furthermore, Rashi's use of the word "*sossum*" to indicate that this *parsha* is sealed is a little hard to understand. The *halachic* definition of a "*stuma*" would include a nine letter gap, and Rashi's whole point is that here we have no gap at all. Moreover, Rashi seems to be taking poetic license to describe the pain and

suffering of Bnei Yisroel ("The eyes and hearts of Bnei Yisroel were sealed from the enslavement"). This is odd; Rashi doesn't write poetry – Rashi gives us the literal meaning of the words of the Torah. What does Rashi mean by these words?

A careful reading of Rashi reveals that he is describing a remarkable phenomena. Rashi is telling us that the eyes and hearts of Bnei Yisroel were closed; that is, they were in denial. Similar to Germany in the early 1930's, the Jewish population refused to "see" or "understand" the looming calamity that was slowly beginning to take shape. The Germans started by publishing virulently anti-semitic propaganda – portraying the Jews first as greedy and immoral, and eventually characterizing them as inhuman vermin to be exterminated.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the Jewish population willfully ignored the warning signs, refusing to see or internalize what was really going on. Even many years later, the German Jewish population was shocked that "their" country and "fellow citizens" suddenly turned on them and shipped them off to die. In truth, by 1939 it had already been a decade in the making. Part of the human condition is to ignore what we don't want to see.

That is what Rashi is teaching us here. Rashi points out that the *parsha* containing the death of Yaakov is written like every other verse of the Torah, with a one-space gap between the verses. The Torah writes it thusly to indicate that this event was not differentiated from anything else in their lives.



The transition of Yaakov's death, which should have been understood as a momentous signpost on the road to their enslavement, passed without anyone noticing – they sealed their eyes and hearts to the coming slavery. The entire generation was in denial of the looming enslavement, ignoring the slowly changing attitude of the Egyptians that began with the death of Yaakov. By the time Levi passed away, the transition of the Egyptian attitude was complete and the actual slavery began.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* (49:1), Yaakov tells his children he will tell them "*What will happen at the end of days.*" Rashi (ad loc) explains Yaakov wanted to reveal details of the "end of times" (i.e. when Moshiach will come, what it will be like, etc.) but that Hashem prevented him from revealing the details.

We find this same notion elsewhere; the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 97b) and Rambam (*Mishnah Torah Kings and Wars* 12:2) both say that terrible things should befall the person who attempts to calculate Moshiach's arrival. This is a very odd statement considering that both the Gemara and Rambam immediately proceed to tell us their predictions for when Moshiach will arrive.

This Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 97a) is probably the main source for the well known 6000 year deadline by which Moshiach →

What a Blessing

And he blessed them that day, saying, "In you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May Hashem make you as Ephraim and as Menashe'" (48:20).

This week's *parsha* introduces us to the blessing that Jewish fathers all over the world bless their sons on Friday nights. The text of this *bracha* is that which Yaakov Avinu composed when Yosef introduced his sons Ephraim and Menashe to Yaakov, "*May Hashem make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.*"

There has been much speculation as to what Yaakov intended when he blessed them. After all, very little is known about the actual lives of Ephraim and Menashe. Why would he designate them specifically as the paradigm with which all parents should bless their children?

One of the more common answers given is that Ephraim and Menashe are the first two brothers in the Torah who don't have a bitter rivalry or fight with each other. After all, the Torah is replete with stories of brothers in conflict: Kayin and Hevel, Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav, Yosef and his brothers, etc.

Still, this approach is difficult to accept. First, there are many examples of brothers in the Torah who show no specific animosity to one another: Shem, Cham, and Yefet, and Avraham Avinu and his brothers, to name a few. Second, we have no specific indication that Ephraim and Menashe had a unique fraternal relationship. Third, it isn't a law of nature that brothers have to be in conflict, many famous brothers lived in harmony, such as Moshe and Aharon. Finally, it is highly improbable that none of the children of the other Shvatim had positive sibling relationships; why should Yaakov single out only Yosef's children for that reason?

Ramban (ad loc) comments that this *bracha* was a specific blessing to Yosef. When the *posuk* says, "*in you shall Yisrael bless*" this refers to Yosef himself. This sentiment is echoed by Targum Yonason Ben Uziel, who adds that this *bracha* is also given on the day of a boy's *bris*. Ramban also says (48:15) that Yosef may

have actually had more children after Yaakov and his family settled in Egypt, but this *bracha* was specifically regarding only Menashe and Ephraim. If this *bracha* is really for Yosef, why does Yaakov specifically designate only Ephraim and Menashe?

Yaakov is alluding to a very powerful message, one that would be crucial to all generations of Bnei Yisroel to come. Yosef had come to Egypt as a slave, sat in jail for a few years, and then rose to the highest possible position of authority, below only Pharaoh himself. Egypt was a place well known for immorality and idol worship. Yet, through it all, Yosef was able to maintain who he was and even raise children with the same values that he had absorbed from the house of his father Yaakov. Yaakov is alluding to this remarkable accomplishment and foretelling the importance of this for future generations.

We bless our children that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe; children who grew up in an environment totally bereft of holiness, yet persevered in representing the values of their father and the Jewish people. Yosef raised children under the most difficult of circumstances and they turned out exactly like him. This is also why Yaakov gives them the ultimate recognition by replacing Yosef with them among the Shvatim, each one heading his own tribe.

This further explains why we give our sons this blessing on the day of their *bris*. The day of one's *bris* a child is "brought into the covenant of Avraham Avinu." Avraham Avinu came from a family of idol worshippers and rose to make it his mission to bring Hashem into a world that had no knowledge of His presence. The very definition of being a Jew is bringing Hashem into this world by carrying on the values of your ancestors, no matter what life's circumstances may bring.

Did You Know Cont.

will have arrived. The Gemara discusses the many opinions of what the world will be like when the end of days finally come.

However, the fact that Moshiach is due to arrive by the year 6000 does not mean he will not arrive earlier. As we say in the *Ani Ma'amins* – we await his arrival every day. In fact, a who's who list of Chazal have attempted to predict the date of his arrival.

Rambam (*Iggeres Teiman*, ch. 3 p. 41) relates that his family had a tradition for many generations that Mashiach would arrive in the year 1210 CE. Ramban (*Bereishis* 2:3) calculates that the year would actually be 1358 CE, although the Chasam Sofer (*Teshuvos* 6:61) responds that Ramban made a miscalculation and brought it a lot closer to his lifetime out of his great desire for Moshiach to arrive. The Chasam Sofer calculated that it would actually be in the year 1790 CE.

Rashi quotes R' Saadia Gaon (*Daniel* 7:25) and calculates that the year that Moshiach will arrive is the year 1335 CE. Lastly, Malbim on (*Daniel* 12:12) calculated that the year would be 1927 CE, exactly 90 years ago. This is also important because the Malbim cites the Zohar who says that every 60 years there is an "awakening" and that year is especially meritorious to be the year that Mashiach comes. The Malbim calculated that that year would be one of those 60th years, which means that the year 2047 will be another one of those possible years. There is a different calculation that places his arrival in 2085.

By now you may have noticed a common theme; all these calculated times of arrival have come and gone and it certainly doesn't seem like Moshiach has arrived. But we are still left with the question, how were they allowed to calculate the exact year that Moshiach would arrive? Ostensibly, as we see from the Malbim, they weren't predicting with absolute certainty the exact arrival of Moshiach, but rather that those years had a strong possibility and special merit that Moshiach might come. What that exactly means is beyond the scope of this *Did You Know*, but hopefully we will understand soon, may Moshiach arrive speedily in our days.



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