

## פרשת ויחי

To me, at least, it seems to be paradoxical at the very least. Perhaps, incongruous is a better term.

On the one hand the first Posuk of our Parsha reads (B'reishis Perek 47/Posuk 28):

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂר שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יָמֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חִיָּו שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה:

Yaakov lived in the Land of Egypt for seventeen years; the days of Yaakov, the years of his life were 147 years.

On the other hand, Rashi teaches us:

ויחי יעקב - למה פרשה זו סתומה לפי שכיון שנפטר יעקב אבינו נסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל מצרת השעבוד שהתחילו לשעבדם. דבר אחר שבקש לגלות את הקץ לבניו ונסתם ממנו:

*Yaakov lived* – Why is Parshas Vayechi closed [without the normal spacing that exists between two Parshos]?

Because when Yaakov Ovinu died, the eyes of Israel and their heart became closed because of the troubles of the servitude when the Egyptians began to enslave them.

Another explanation-Yaakov Ovinu wished to reveal the End [of Days] to his sons and the revelation was closed off from him.

Vayechi – Yaakov lived; he was vibrant and vital and at the same time we are learning a *Parsha S'tuma* – the writing is closed, symbolizing that the freedom that B'nei Yisroel had enjoyed until that time was closed from them as well as was the knowledge regarding the closing of the epoch of Exile.

Furthermore, and we have discussed this in years past, the two events that Rashi raises, the death of Yaakov as well as his inability to reveal the End of Days, occur later in our Parsha and are preceded by other events. It would seem that the 'closing' of Parsha Vayechi is premature!

One might wish to dismiss the central question of the incongruity between 'living' and servitude as well as the closing of the revelation by thinking that ויחי doesn't mean 'living' in the sense of vitality of life but, it means he was alive and not dead.

After all, we find such a usage throughout the Torah when we learn genealogies and time-lines. Such is the case, for example, when we read (B'reishis Perek 5/Posuk 3):

וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד בְּדַמּוֹתָיו כְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ שֵׁית:

*Odom* lived for 130 years and he gave birth in his image and in his form; he called his name *Sheis*.

As we will see soon, this cannot be the case here, since this 'biographical' information regarding Yaakov's life is known to us from other verses.

Perhaps, though, וַיְחִי is telling us that Yaakov's abode was in Egypt and is not interested in revealing to us the subjective nature of his life.

It would seem that if such would be the case in our Parsha, that is, that the Torah was not interested in telling us of the spirit and attitude of Yaakov Ovinu, it could have written *vayeshv*<sup>1</sup> or *va'yo'gor*<sup>2</sup>, both meaning to live/to dwell. By writing

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<sup>1</sup> We read at the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev (B'reishis Perek 37/Posuk 1):

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוֵרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

Yaakov lived in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the Land of Canaan.

That verse is referring to his domicile.

It is true that later on (footnote 7) we will learn the Rashi that does interpret this verse as referring to the quality of life that Yaakov Ovinu sought – he wished for a peaceful existence but was confronted with hardship.

However, there, the source of the interpretation is the mix of the words וַיֵּשֶׁב and מִגְוֵרֵי with the former referring to sojourning, that is a temporary and unsettled domicile, and 'dwelling', referring a more settled one. It is the contrast between those two terms which is the source of that *drasha*.

<sup>2</sup> We read in Parshas Vayera (B'reishis Perek 20/Posuk 1):

וַיֵּסַע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיֵּגֶר בְּגִרְר:

Avraham traveled from there to the land of the Negev and he lived between *Kodesh* and between *Shur* and he sojourned in G'ror.

In this verse, both וַיֵּשֶׁב and וַיֵּגֶר are referring to the location of Yaakov Ovinu's dwelling.

*vayehchi* in our Parsha, the Torah undoubtedly was referring to the quality of life that Yaakov Ovinu led in Egypt, not just in providing us with the factual information that he lived there.

And, if the above logic is not completely persuasive, if we are not convinced that ויחי is coming to teach regarding this subjective nature of the life of Yaakov, the words of the Zohar HaKodosh will certainly prove to be convincing.

We read there (216 b):

כל יומיו לא איקרי ויחי בגין דכל יומיו בצערא הוו... בתר דנחת למצרים איקרי ויחי  
חמא לבריה מלכא חמא לכל בנוי זכאין צדיקין וכלהו בתענוגי ותפנוקי עלמא ...

All the [other] days of Yaakov were not called *Vayechi* because all of his days were in pain. After Yaakov went down to Egypt, those days are called *vayechi* – he lived. Yaakov saw his son reigning, all of Yaakov's sons being meritorious and righteous. In all of those days [in Egypt] Yaakov enjoyed the pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

And, Shem MiShmuel (5672) brings the *Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu* that expands upon the words of the Zohar:

ובתנא דבי אליהו מפורש עוד יותר שחיים אלו היו שלא בצער ושלא ביצר הרע ומעין  
עולם הבא.

The words of the *Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu* are even more explicit teaching that Yaakov's life in those seventeen years in Egypt before his death were without pain, without the *Yetzer Ha'ra'* and had the essence of *Olom HaBo*.

For those who are familiar with it, the Dickensian quote, "It was the best of times and it was the worst of times", seems most apt.

Though such a description may be perfect for the French Revolution, it seems puzzling, to say the least, for the Divine Providence that is active and vital throughout history and was particularly profound for our Forefathers. How can we

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[Based on the explanation in the previous note, the contrast of terms וישב and ויגר here seems to imply that Avraham Ovinu was settled in the general area that is named in the verse, his in *Gror* was temporary.]

understand this unique segment of the life of Yaakov Ovinu with the negative events that were occurring simultaneously?

And thus, we need to examine the nature of that Divine Providence at that time, the time when Yaakov Ovinu and his children, all of B'nei Yisroel, were in the exile of Egypt during those final seventeen years of our final Patriarch's life, the Father who provided the 'finishing touches' to the nation of which we are a part.

Of course, far be it from this writer to pretend to have even a speck of understanding of the hashgacha p'ratis that guided us and continues to guide us forever. But we can certainly try to examine that which the Torah and Chazal and our commentators teach us in order to gain a foothold on such a matter.

We do not know whether or not Yaakov Ovinu intended to settle in Egypt when he traveled to see Yosef after those twenty-two years of separation, but an investigation into the relevant verses, and with the help of the Netziv, we can certainly raise and defend a hypothesis.

The Torah teaches us the declaration that Yaakov Ovinu made when he realized that Yosef was alive. We read in last week's Parshas Vayigash (B'reishis Perek 45/Posuk 28):

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חַי אֵלַי וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרֵם אָמוֹת:

Yisroel said, 'It is much; my son Yosef is still alive; I will go and see him before I die.

We read the commentary of the Netziv there, who notes that Yaakov is referred to as *Yisroel* in this verse:

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשִּׁיג מַעֲלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְרָאָה בְרוּחַ הַקּוֹדֵשׁ כִּי יוֹסֵף עוֹמֵד בְּצַדְקוֹ וְאָמַר רַב וְגו':

*Yisroel said* – At that moment, Yaakov Ovinu reached the high level of *Yisroel* and saw with his Divine inspiration that Yosef remained righteous and he said, 'rav', etc.

אלכה ואראנו. זה הלשון משמעו ראה איזה ימים או עשור... והיינו משום דיעקב לא הסכים לבא עם בניו מצרימה אפילו על זה המשך של הרעב... וזהו שאמר רב - די לי במה שאני יודע כי יוסף חי, אף על גב שאיני יכול להיות עמו בצוותא חדא, ולצאת מארץ ישראל, אך אלכה ואראנו וגו'...

*I will go and see him* - this expression implies [a temporary visit] seeing Yosef for a number of days or ten<sup>3</sup>. That is because Yaakov did not agree to come with his sons to Egypt, even when the famine was ongoing.

That is the meaning of the word *rav*. It is enough, sufficient<sup>4</sup>, for me that I know that Yosef is alive. Even though I will not be able to be together with him [for a long period of time which would entail] going out of *Eretz Yisroel* [on a permanent basis], but [what I will do is that] I will go and see him [briefly]....

That is. the words spoken by Yisroel Ovinu were not only an expression of sentiment and emotion that would be spoken by any person who cares and loves another. Yaakov Ovinu saw the fulfillment of G-d's providence when he was able to ascertain that *Yosef was in Egypt*. It was an objective statement regarding the extent to which his emotions would influence his behavior, to visit Yosef in Egypt, and the extent to which his emotions would not influence his behavior, his time in Egypt would be very limited.

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<sup>3</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Parshas Chaye Sarah, B'reishis Perek 24/Posuk 55.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the correct translation of the word רב is 'more than enough'. That is the usage of the word as spoken by Eisav, as we read in Parshas Vayishlach (B'reishis Perek 33/Posuk 9):

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יֵשׁ לִי רַב אָחִי יְהִי לְךָ אֲשֶׁר לְךָ:

Eisav said, 'I have more than enough, my brother; you will have that which is yours.'

We then read the response of Yaakov Ovinu (Posuk 11):

קַח נָא אֶת בְּרִכְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הִבָּאת לְךָ כִּי חֲנִנִי אַ...ל"קים וְכִי יֵשׁ לִי כָל וַיִּפְצַר בּוֹ וַיִּקַּח:

'Please take my offering that was brought to you because G-d has favored me and I have all'; he urged Eisav and Eisav took.

Rashi explains:

יש לי כל - כל ספוקי, ועשו דבר בלשון גאווה יש לי רב, יותר ויותר מכדי צרכי:

*I have more than enough* – But Eisav spoke with an expression of haughtiness – 'I have more than enough' – meaning 'more and more than my needs.'

And we know that Eisav was speak in a haughty fashion, not making an objective statement, because in the end despite protesting that he needed nothing, he accepted the gift that Yaakov gave him.

It was his sentiment and emotion that drew Yaakov Ovinu to *visit* Yosef in Egypt and it was the nature of his being 'Yisroel' to say that after that visit he would return to Eretz Yisroel.

And thus, as Yaakov Ovinu begins his descent into Egypt, we read of the revelation that he had in Beersheba (B'reishis Perek 46/P'sukim 2-4), a revelation that changed his plans:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַנִּנִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי הִקְלֵ אֱלֹהִים אָבִיךָ אֶל תִּירָא מִרְדֵּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימָךְ שָׁם: אֲנֹכִי אֵרֵד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם עֲלֶה וְיוֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ:

G-d said to Yisroel in the visions of the night, and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov'. Yisroel said, 'I am here'. Hashem said, 'I am the G-d, the G-d of your father; do not fear from going down to Egypt because I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you and I will surely bring you up; Yosef will put his hand upon your eyes [when you die].

The attentive reader will note at this point that although Par'o had sent wagons to transport Yaakov and his entire family and their belongings to Egypt, we were not told that Yaakov made use of those wagons. All that we have read until now is that Yaakov said that he would go to Egypt and that he began his journey. No mention of the wagons that would transport all of his possessions has been made.

Only after the Divine Revelation in Beersheba do we read (ibid. P'sukim 5-7):

וַיִּקָּם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם וְאֶת טָפְסָם וְאֶת נְשֵׂיהֶם בְּעֶגְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח פַּרְעֹה לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ מִצְרַיִם וְיַעֲקֹב וְכָל זֶרְעוֹ אִתּוֹ: בְּנָיו וּבְנֵי בְנָיו אִתּוֹ וּבָנוֹת בְּנָיו וְכָל זֶרְעוֹ הֵבִיא אִתּוֹ מִצְרַיִם:

Yaakov arose from Beersheba and the sons of Yisroel carried Yaakov their father and their children and their wives in the wagons that Par'o sent to carry Yaakov. They took their cattle and their property that they acquired in the Land of Canaan and they came to Egypt, Yaakov and all of his seed with him. His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters and the daughters of his sons and all of his see Yaakov brought with him to Egypt.

Thus our hypothesis and gained considerable support<sup>5</sup> from our reading of the verses as they are presented.

On the other hand, we do know that the Torah, at times, tells us part of an event and then goes back and refers to the event's earlier happenings, as Rashi tells us in Parshas Vayshev, for example<sup>6</sup>.

And, thus, we rely on the teaching of the Netziv. He writes at the onset of our Parshas Vayechi:

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<sup>5</sup> But, this does remain a hypothesis only and not a conclusion. The reason for this hesitation is what we read a few verses earlier (Perek 46/Posuk 1):

וַיֵּסַע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶז שֹׁבַע וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק:  
Yisroel traveled, and all that he had, and he came to Beersheva and he offered offerings to the G-d of his father Yitzchak.

Netziv's comments on this verse do not remove the need to see the words *וכל אשר לו* as being in conflict with the explanations that we are presenting.

<sup>6</sup> We read at the end of Perek 37 in Parshas Vayeshev (Posuk 36):

וְהַמְדָּנִים מְכָרוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל מִצְרַיִם לְפוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס פְּרֹעֵה שֵׁר הַטְּבָחִים:  
The *Medonim* sold Yosef to Egypt, to Potifar, the officer of Par'o, the Minister of the Kitchens.

Only at the beginning of Perek 39 (Posuk 1) do we read the continuation of the event as it unravels:

וַיֹּסֶף הוֹרֵד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקְנֵהוּ פוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס פְּרֹעֵה שֵׁר הַטְּבָחִים אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמָעֵאלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדוּהוּ שָׁמָּה:  
Yosef was taken down to Egypt and Potifar, the officer of Par'o, the Minister of Kitchens, an Egyptian man, bought him from the Ishmaelites who brought him down to there.

In the intervening Perek (38) we read (Posuk 1):

וַיְהִי בְעֵת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֵד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו וַיֵּט עַד אִישׁ עַדְלָמִי וּשְׁמוֹ חִירוֹ:  
It was at that time that Yehuda descended from his brothers and he turned to an Adulamite man whose name was *Chiroh*.

Rashi writes:

ויוסף הורד - חוזר לענין ראשון...  
*Yosef was taken down* – The Torah now returns to the first matter.

ויחי יעקב וגו'. כל זה מיותר, שהרי כתיב ויהי ימי יעקב שבע שנים ומאה וארבעים שנה, וכבר כתיב שהיה בבואו למצרים מאה ושלושים שנה, אלא הפירוש ויחי יעקב שהיה חי חיים טובים ומתוקנים מה שלא הורגל כזה בארץ ישראל:

*Yaakov lived etc.* – all of these words are superfluous. The rest of the verse says that the days of the life of Yaakov were 147 years and it was written earlier that Yaakov was 130 years old when he came to Egypt<sup>7</sup>.

But, the explanation of these opening words of our Parsha is that Yaakov lived a good and proper life in Egypt – something to which he was unaccustomed in Eretz Yisroel<sup>8</sup>.

In his *Harchev Dovor*, Netziv expands upon the pleasant life of Yaakov in Egypt:

ומיעקב אבינו סימן לבניו שעיקר חיותם ורוב השנים יהיו בגלות, ועוד היה סימן שכל זמן שיחפצו להיות בגרות יחיו בטוב כמו שכתוב בפרשה דברית בין הבתרים...

From Yaakov Ovinu we have the events that occurred with him being a sign of what will occur to his descendants in the future – the main part of their lives and the majority of their years will be in exile. Additionally, there was a sign that as long as his descendants will desire to live in exile they will live

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<sup>7</sup> In Parshas Vayigash, we read Yaakov's words (B'reishis Perek 47/Posuk 9) in response to Par'o's question regarding the former's age:

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל פַּרְעֹה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי מְגוּרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה מְעַט וְרַעִים הָיוּ יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי וְלֹא הִשְׁיגוּ אֶת יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אֲבֹתַי בְּיַמֵּי מְגוּרֵיהֶם:

Yaakov said to Par'o, 'The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred thirty years; few and bad were the days of the years of my life and they did not reach the days of the years of the lives of my fathers in the days of their sojournings.

<sup>8</sup> The opening verse of Parshas Vayeshev (Perek 37/Posuk 1) reads:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

Yaakov lived in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the Land of Canaan.

Rashi comments there in Posuk 2:

ועוד נדרש בו וישב ביקש יעקב לישב בשלום, קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף.

There is an additional interpretation in the Midrash there – *Vayeshev Yaakov* – Yaakov sought to dwell in calm; the anger of Yosef then jumped out at him.

well as is written in the the section of *Bris bein HaB'sorim* [in Parshas Lech Lecha].

והיינו שאמרו בתענית דף ה' יעקב אבינו לא מת כו' אמר לו מקרא אני דורש כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק ואת זרעך מארץ שבים, מקיש הוא לזרעו מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים, והוא פלא. והנראה באשר ראינו שהוקשו יעקב לזרעו לסימן הליכות עולמם...

This will now explain what we learn in Masseches Taanis where it says, 'Our Father Yaakov has not died' [and the Gemara asks how that could be so when the Torah itself describes his death and burial]. And Gemara answers that such is the interpretation of a verse that says, 'Behold, I Hashem am your savior from a distance and your seed from the land of their captivity.' This verse compares Yaakov ['your'] to his seed. Just like his seed is alive; so is Yaakov alive.'

This is a wondrous explanation. But the meaning seems to be that the seed of Yaakov is compared to him regarding their role in history [in exile].

ועיקר סיבה זו שיהא רוב חיותנו בגלות כבר נתבאר בפרשת לך פרק י"ז פסוק ו'<sup>9</sup> דהקדוש ברוך הוא גלה לאברהם אבינו אשר נתנו בניו להיות לאור גוים (ישעיה מט/10<sup>10</sup>), וזה אי אפשר רק כשהם מפוזרים בגלות... וכן יעקב אבינו כשבא למצרים שהיה אז עיקר הישוב שם, נתגדל בזה שמו יתברך כשראו השגחתו על יעקב וזרעו:

The main reason for the majority of Israel's years being in exile is as Hashem revealed to Avraham Ovinu who placed his descendants to be a 'light to the nations' and such is impossible unless that Israel is spread out among the nations in exile.

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<sup>9</sup> That verse reads:

והפִּרְתִּי אֹתְךָ בְּמֵאֹד מְאֹד וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְגוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ יֵצְאוּ:  
I will cause you to be very, very fruitful and I give you to the nations; kings will come forth from you.

<sup>10</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר נָקַל מִהְיוֹתְךָ לִי עֶבֶד לְהִקִּים אֶת שְׁבִטִי יַעֲקֹב וּנְצוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהָשִׁיב וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְאֹר גּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד קֵצֵה הָאָרֶץ:  
Hashem said, 'I will ease you from being a servant to Me in order for you to establish the Tribes of Yaakov and the guarded ones of Israel to return and I will place you as a light for the nations to be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'

When Yaakov Ovinu came to Egypt where the main life of exiled Israel was, through Yaakov and his family the Name of G-d was aggrandized when the Egyptians saw His Providence over Yaakov and his seed.

The difficulty of this passage from the Netziv cannot be denied. That difficulty begs to be addressed.

Was there some type of romanticism in the numerous exiles that our ancestors experienced over the millennia? Did not the various exiles come to their conclusions with calamity, tragedy and death?

Do we really think that someone needs to tell the Netziv about that which appears to be a completely unrealistic approach to the history of *Am Yisroel* throughout the ages?

Perhaps the following passage from *S'fas Emes* (Parshas Vayechi 5647 d.h. *baMidrash*) will shed some light upon our dilemma. We read:

במדרש למה פרשה זו סתומה שנסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל דבר אחר שביקש  
לגלות הקץ ונסתם ממנו. הגם כי לא היה השיעבוד בימי השבטים. אבל מקודם  
הרגישו הגלות בפנימיות בעבודת השם יתברך...

We read in the Midrash, 'Why is this *Parshah* closed? – Because the eyes and heard of Israel were closed [because of the death of Yaakov]. Another explanation – Yaakov wished to reveal the End of days and it was closed for him.

Even though the enforced servitude and enslavement did not occur as long as the *Shevatim* lived, nonetheless, earlier they felt the exile in their inner sense of serving Hashem Yisborach.

Do not think, teaches the *S'fas Emes*, that the brutal enslavement that began with the passing of all of the *Shevatim*, long after the passing of Yaakov Ovinu, was the beginning of the process of the servitude of our ancestors in Egypt. That is not true.

In fact, despite the separation that existed between our ancestors and the Egyptians because our ancestors lived separately from the latter in *Eretz Goshen*, there was creeping 'Egyptianization' that began much earlier.

In fact, the commentary of *S'fas Emes* implies, that process of acculturation or acclimatization began when they arrived in Egypt. That is the interpretation of *S'fas*

Emes of Rashi's comments that appear at the beginning of Parshas Vayechi, long before the physical enslavement began and before the *Ruach HaKodesh* that Yaakov Ovinu wished to access to reveal the End of Days was closed off and blocked from him.

In the past, we have noted that such was implied by Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch in his commentary to the last verse of Parshas Vayechi, the verse in the Torah that immediately the Posuk of *Vayechi*.

That verse (Perek 47/Posuk 27) reads:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד:

Yisroel dwelled in the Land of Egypt, in the Land of Goshen; they took hold of it and they greatly were fruitful and multiplied.

Rav Hirsch points out that the word *וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ* is in the passive *nifal* form and literally means that 'they were possessed'. That is, he explains, our ancestors were also possessed by the land, in addition to becoming its possessors.

And, a further investigation of the verse implies the very paradox about which we are discussing.

It was *Yisroel* who lived in the Land of Egypt, not just in the Land of Goshen. There was an overlap and although that their physical residence was in Goshen, they resided in Egypt as well.

Furthermore, when we note that the word 'vayeshev' is in the singular whereas the second clause of the verse, 'va'yifru va'yir'bu' is in the plural, we have an additional insight. The verse is referring to Yaakov Ovinu as well as referring to his entire family.

The struggle to be free from 'Egyptianization' began immediately upon our ancestors' arrival in Egypt.

Perhaps we remember the commentary regarding this passage from Haggadah Shel Pesach:

ואילו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו ממצרים הרי אנו ובנינו ובני בנינו משועבדים היינו משועבדים לפרעה במצרים.

If G-d had not taken us out of Egypt, behold, we and our children and our children's children would be *me'shu'a'bodim* to Par'o in Egypt.

Certainly, the term משועבדים means enslaved. But, since the phrase does not state עבדים, which does mean 'slaves' but משועבדים, the interpretation of term is open for discussion.

The word משועבד means 'indebted', that I owe someone something. It does not mean, necessarily, that I have a monetary debt from money that I borrowed from someone else. It also means that I have an obligation to someone else; I let the other dictate to me. The 'other' becomes the primary individual and I am relegated to being secondary.

Explains this commentary – the Haggadah comes to teach us that had we stayed in Egypt any longer we would have been so psychologically enslaved to the Egyptians, that we would not have wanted to leave<sup>11</sup>. That is what the term משועבדים comes to teach.

And, so, we are faced with a dilemma. We do not fault Yaakov Ovinu for taking his family to Egypt. We saw that he did not wish to do so and he and his family went down to Egypt to reside there by virtue of the Divine Command alone.

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<sup>11</sup> Meshech Chochmoh writes in his *peirush* to the *Tochecha* in Parshas Bechukosai (Vayikro Perek 26/Posuk 44):

...והישראלי בכלל ישכח מחצבתו ויחשב לאזרח רעון. יעזוב לימודי דתו, ללמוד לשונות לא לו, יליף מקלקלתא ולא יליף מתקנא, יחשוב כי ברלין היא ירושלים...

The Jew will completely forget from where he was hewn and formed and will be considered to be an active citizen. He will forget the teachings of his religion, learning languages that are not his. He will learn from the bad parts of the civilization of which he is part, not from the good parts, and will think that Berlin is Jerusalem.

Decades ago, an American-born Rosh Yeshiva, who had resided in Eretz Yisroel for many years since his youth, spent a year in the United States. After viewing what he saw as being an echo of the above words of the Meshech Chochmoh, he said to me quite cynically, 'I think that if Moshiach would come in the month of June, people would say, 'Would you please return in September after our summer vacations and our summer camps are over.'

And at the same time, we know that the years of our living in Egypt brought our people perilously close to extermination, *chas v'Shalom*. That is what we read in the Haggadah:

שהקדוש ברוך הוא חשב את הקץ

G-d recalculated the end of servitude in Egypt.

The end of servitude in Egypt that was to have been at the conclusion of 400 years had its beginning recalculated 190 years before the actual physical enslavement began. Had that date not have been recalculated, there would not have been a Jewish People to be saved' the Egyptianization would have been complete!

And, thus, we have not removed the paradox. It is there, seemingly part of the Divine Plan that remains hidden from us.

Uncertainty is inherent to our lives. That is the comment of the Maggid MiDubno on another Posuk at the beginning of our Parsha.

We read the words of Yaakov Ovinu to Yosef (ibid. Posuk 29):

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יָמָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׂים נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אֵל נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם:

The days of Yisroel to die drew near and he called for his son, for Yosef, and he said to him, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, place, please, your hand under my thigh and do kindness and truth for me; do not bury me in Egypt.

We are familiar with the fact that *chessed ve'emes* are terms that we use to discuss our treatment of the dead, treating them respectfully and with propriety until they are brought to their proper burial.

We are also familiar with the standard and true explanations as to why the treatment of the dead is referred to as *chessed shel emes* – true kindness. That explanation teaches us that unlike other types of kindnesses where the doer may expect something in return from his beneficiary, when caring for the dead one knows that the beneficiary will not repay the kindness and thus the kindness, the *chessed*, is a *true* kindness.

The Dubno Maggid provides us with an additional outlook regarding this phrase.

He says that an intended kindness may not lead to the result that one has hoped. A true and sincere individual may feel that what he is doing is kind and compassionate and all may agree that it is so. However, the outcome may be different than what was intended, despite the best and most sincere of intentions.

In contrast, the kindness of burial does lead to the outcome that was intended because at death there is the finality of our control.

In life, however, we are not possessors of truth that permits us to see an outcome based on our actions. We may certainly do *chessed* but when performing that *chessed* we have no way of knowing that the end result will be in consonance with our objectives.

Of course, the Ribbono Shel Olom does know but He reveals to us only a little.

And, even when the Redemption is promised, its promise is conditional.

The promise is clear. It is what the Novi Yirmiyahu states (Perek 16/P'sukim 14-15):

לִּכְן הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נֹאֵם ה' וְלֹא יֵאמָר עוֹד חִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם: כִּי אִם חִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ צֹפּוֹן וּמִכָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר  
הִדִּיחֵם שָׁמָּה וְהִשְׁבִּתֵּם עַל אֲדָמְתֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵם:

‘Therefore, the days are coming,’ said Hashem; ‘It will no longer be said “The ever-living G-d Who brought up B’nei Yisroel from the Land of Egypt.” [But it will be said], “The ever-living G-d who brought up B’nei Yisroel from the Land of the North and from all of the lands that He pushed there” and I Hashem will return them to their land that I gave to their forefathers.’<sup>12</sup>

Yet, despite the *emes* of that promise, the way that *chessed* will unfold remains to be seen.

Thus we read in Sefer Yeshayahu (Perek 60/P'sukim 20-22):

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<sup>12</sup> See Masseches B'rachos beginning with 12 b for a discussion if the force of the future redemption will be so powerful that it will completely overshadow the redemption from Egypt or if it will only be the principle act regarding which we praise Hashem, without forgetting His miraculous deeds at the time of the Exodus.

לא יבוא עוד שמשך וירחך לא יאסף כי ה' יהיה לך לאור עולם ושלמו ימי אבליך: ועמך  
כלם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ נצר מטעי מעשה ידי להתפאר: הקטן יהיה לאלף  
והצעיר לגוי עצום אני ה' בעתה אחישנה:

Your sun will no longer set and your fragrance will not terminate because Hashem will be an eternal light for you and the days of your mourning will conclude. Your people will all be righteous; they will inherit the land forever; they are the shoots of My planting, the work of My Hands for which to be glorified. The small will be a thousand and the young will be a powerful nation; I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it.

The Redemption will arrive. It may come in its due time, בעתה or G-d may hasten it. But if G-d will hasten the Redemption we will not know if it is because we have bettered ourselves, made ourselves more righteous and thus deserve an earlier salvation or that we have become so distant from Him that it will be a 'now or never' moment; either He will redeem us or we will be lost forever. Certainly, the latter scenario is not one that we are to anticipate even if it will hasten the coming of Moshiach. Who knows how many of our people will be lost if G-d 'must' act since, otherwise, there will be no other hope at all.

And we are still awaiting that Redemption and so were our ancestors at the conclusion of Sefer B'reishis.

And, what could be more telling regarding the indecisiveness of the moment than the concluding verse of this first Sefer of the Torah. We read (Perek 50/Posuk 26):

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים וַיַּחַנְטוּ אוֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בָּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

Yosef died at the age of 110 years; they preserved his body<sup>13</sup> and he placed him in a coffin in Egypt.

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<sup>13</sup> The common translation of וַיַּחַנְטוּ אוֹתוֹ is that they embalmed him. That translation is in error. Embalming is a process in which the body fluids are removed from the body and are replaced with a liquid that retards deterioration. That process is forbidden.

Rather, וַיַּחַנְטוּ is explained by Rashi earlier in this final chapter of B'reishis (Posuk 2):  
ענין מרקחת בשמים הוא:

It is a type of compound of spices.

Yosef HaTzaddik awaited the Redemption. We, too, are awaiting that redemption.

If we strengthen that anticipation, it may be enough to make a difference. We would do well to remember the famous rendition of Rambam's article of belief that we read in our Siddurim:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח; ואף על פי שיתמהמה על זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא.

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach. Even if he tarries, I will await him daily that he will come.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock