



## A Taste of Torah

### Lights in the Darkness

by Rabbi Yosef Melamed

This week's parsha begins by recounting that Yaakov Avinu lived in Egypt for seventeen years, and that he lived for a total of one hundred and forty-seven years. Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (1823-1900) points out that the Torah does not detail how many years Yaakov spent in a location or how long Yaakov engaged in an activity in any other location, but rather allows for these details to be deduced from other inferences. It is puzzling that specifically here, regarding the time Yaakov spent living in Egypt, the Torah does spell out how long Yaakov lived in Egypt. This is especially strange because in last week's parsha, Yaakov tells Pharaoh, upon his arrival in Egypt, that he was one hundred and thirty years old. Given the fact that Yaakov lived to be one hundred and forty-seven, it would have sufficed to record that fact, and one could easily calculate that Yaakov lived the remaining seventeen years of his life in Egypt. An additional point to ponder (see Rashi 47:28) is the fact that this parsha is a "stuma," a "closed parsha," meaning that there is no space between the beginning of this parsha and the end of the previous one, as is typical with the other parshios in the Torah.

Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen offers a powerful explanation to both of the above points: The Zohar teaches that the parsha's opening word, *vayechi*, "and he lived," is intended to stress that in contrast to the rest of Yaakov's life, which was clouded by the many trials and tribulations that Yaakov overcame, the seventeen years that Yaakov lived in Egypt, which were free

of any such challenges, are considered the true years of Yaakov's life.

This does not mean that Yaakov's trial and tribulations during the rest of his life did not serve a purpose. Rather, the spiritual completion that Yaakov attained was experienced in Egypt, where he was free to remove himself from the challenges of the physical world. The growth that Yaakov experienced during the rest of his life, which came through overcoming many difficulties, were in the realm of elevating the physical world by means of bringing the mundane into the realm of the service of Hashem.

Thus, the Torah is emphasizing that Yaakov "lived" in Egypt for seventeen years. These years were the true years of Yaakov's life, because they were the time that Yaakov was able to complete all of his spiritual undertakings and achievements. The Torah therefore details the seventeen years alongside the sum total of Yaakov's years, to indicate that these years breathed "life" into the rest of Yaakov's years, as they incorporated Yaakov's success in serving Hashem in the physical realm into the purely spiritual fulfillment that Yaakov had during his final seventeen years in Egypt.

This says, Rav Tzadok, is a mind-boggling reality. How is it fathomable that Yaakov attained spiritual completion in Egypt of all places, the world's center of immorality and idolatry?! As dumbfounding as it may be, however, this is the reality of the Jewish Nation. It happened with Yaakov. It happened with the *Shevatim* (Tribes), whom Yaakov blesses and

## Stories for the Soul

### Grave Regard

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld, one of the leaders of the old *yishuv* in Jerusalem at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was particular to accompany the funeral procession of a Torah scholar to his final resting place.

One such funeral took place on the final day of Chol Hamo'ed Pesach in 1900, just hours before the seventh day of Pesach was to commence. As the group travelled to Har Hazeisim (Mount of Olives), where the burial was to take place, they saw a huge group of Arabs, some 30,000 strong, coming from Jericho toward Har Hazeisim.

Such a large group of Arabs could spell serious trouble for the small Jewish group, and they quickly decided that, given the late hour and the potential danger, only the young, strong members of the entourage would quickly proceed toward and up the mountain to complete the burial. The other leaders there asked Rabbi Zonnenfeld, who was no youngster, to head home.

However, Rabbi Zonnenfeld ignored their request and ran ahead of the group, arriving at the start of the road going up the mountain just as the Arab group arrived. Rabbi Zonnenfeld climbed up a fence, raised himself to his full height, and, to everyone's shock, motioned to the sheikh who was leading the group to stop!

The sheikh approached Rabbi Zonnenfeld and told him that out of respect for him, he would stop his group as the funeral procession passed. Rabbi Zonnenfeld thanked the sheikh, and the processions continued up the mountain.

## Kollel Happenings

### TORAH FOR TYCOONS VIA ZOOM ON WED., JAN. 6

Torah for Tycoons resumes on Wed., Jan. 6 via Zoom. Please note time change for this class, 8-9 pm. Join Tuvia Harbater, Triage Analyst at Intellisecure, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for Hack Job: The Ethics of Hacking. Visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) for more info.

### KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### MILE HIGH TORAH PODCAST

Have you checked out the Kollel's Mile High Torah Podcast? Featuring a variety of subjects, from halacha to hashkafa to haftara, you are sure to find a Torah podcast that will pique your interest! Available on Amazon, Google, iTunes, Podbean, Spotify & Stitcher. Visit <https://jewishpodcasts.fm/denvercommunitykollel> for all podcasts.

## Halacha Riddles

**Last week we asked:** What type of food could have a different *bracha* depending on its shape?

**Answer:** Bread and bread-type foods. Bread only requires *hamotzi* if it has *tzuras hapas*, the form of bread. An item which is very thin, such as a crepe, or does not have a bread-type shape at all, such as many breakfast cereals, is therefore *mezonos* under all circumstances, even when one is eating these foods as a meal (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 168:15 and Mishna Berura

ibid.:38). There is much debate as to what contemporary foods fall into the non-*tzuras hapas* category. Wheat tortillas and wraps, which are quite thin, are the subject of a great deal of debate among contemporary halachic authorities; homemade pancakes, which are often randomly shaped, may also fall into the non-*tzuras hapas* category. A competent halachic authority should be consulted for practical rulings.

**This week's question:** How can cooking prevent hand-washing?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part X

Rav Saadia's scholarship and mastery of astronomy were evident as he clearly proved that Rabbi Aharon ben Meir had erred in his calendar. As his star rose during this debate, Jews from various communities sent him their own letters as they attempted to clear away the

confusion. His clear answers resolved the matter for communities across the Jewish world. Nonetheless, Rabbi Aharon ben Meir did not back down, and his refusal to do so cost him his following, resulting in the full restoration of the Babylonian Torah leadership.

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refers to as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, revealing their greatness in that same place of impurity. It happened with the descendants of the *Shevatim*, whose story of exile and persecution in Egypt, foreshadowed in this week's parsha, concludes with the amazing reality of a nation, formed and forged as slaves in a land of immorality, going on to reach the dazzling height of receiving the Torah. It happened yet again in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple with the production of the Talmud in Babylonia, in the depths of the darkness during centuries of exile. Finally, we firmly believe that it can and will happen again when we will become worthy of the coming of *Mashiach*, and the completion and perfection of the entire world that will be brought about through his coming, in the very same darkness of exile that we live in today.

This, explains Rav Tzadok, is also the

reason for the lack of a space between last week's parsha and this week's. The purpose of the spaces between the sections of Torah was so that Moshe, who received the entire Torah, would have time to digest the meaning of the previous section before moving onto the new one, which would require a new focus. However, this parsha of Vayechi is, as discussed, full with the amazing but incomprehensible reality of the spiritual success of Yaakov and the Jewish Nation in a land of impurity and exile. There is thus no need for a space and break because such a perplexing reality cannot be properly understood by a human regardless.

As lowly or downtrodden as we may feel, and as impossible as it may seem that we, living in a dark exile and surrounded by enormous spiritual challenges, can thrive spiritually and eventually bring *Mashiach*, the parsha teaches that it is indeed in our power!