

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

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TRUE LIFE

THE SEDRA TELLS US THAT JACOB LIVED FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT and that the years of his life were “seven years, and a hundred and forty years”. One question on this is why the Torah needs to tell us that he lived for seventeen years in Egypt. In the previous Sedra we learn that when he was introduced to Pharaoh shortly after arriving in Egypt, he said he was a hundred and thirty years old (Gen.47:9). In this Sedra we learn that his full lifetime was a hundred and forty seven years, so it is clear that he lived seventeen years in Egypt. Why does the Torah have to state the obvious?

Further, the Torah seems to be dividing his life in two: the years before he came to Egypt, and the years in Egypt. According to the Baal HaTurim² commentary, these years in Egypt were the best years of his life. That too raises a question, as was asked by Rabbi Menachem Mendel the Tzemah Tzedek when he was still a child, of his grandfather Rabbi Shneur Zalman: How could it be that Jacob our revered ancestor felt that the best years of his life were in the land of Egypt, which the Sages considered³ a depraved and immoral land?

The answer given by Rabbi Shneur Zalman is that the Sages tell us that a Torah academy was founded in Egypt⁴, and that is where Jacob spent his time,

בברכת רפואה שלמה וקרובה בשביל האשה העניא רבקה בת ברכה דבורה לאה תחי'
Praying for a Refuah Shelemah for Henya Rivka bas Brochah Devorah Leah תחי'

¹ Maamar Vayechi Yakov 5727 (1966). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Sedra Vayechi 5777. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² By Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, 14th century Spain.

³ See Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1:4.

⁴ See Rashi to Gen.46:28.

studying Torah. Hence even in a difficult environment he was able to feel spiritually uplifted and saw his years there as the best time in his life⁵. This discourse of 1966 presents a further perspective on this question as will be seen below.

Another question is why the number seven of the years of his life is given special prominence: he lived “seven years, and a hundred and forty years” ...

These points can be understood by considering the spiritual nature of Jacob. His name in Hebrew, Yakov, can be read as the Letter Yod, and the word Ekev, meaning ‘heel’. The letter Yod denotes the Soul in its most exalted level, as we say in the morning prayer ‘My G-d, the Soul which You Have given me is pure’⁶. The term ‘pure’ denotes the most exalted level of the soul, before it comes into this world, when it is still in the realm of Atzilut (Emanation), corresponding to the Sefirah Wisdom and to the letter Yod of the Divine Name.

But then the word ‘heel’, the lowest level of the body, denotes the lowest level in each world, such as in the world of Atzilut itself, the ‘heel’ represents the lowest attribute ‘Kingship’, and also the ‘heel’ signifies the lowest level of *all* worlds: our physical world, and in that, the lowest point, such as the immoral and depraved land of ancient Egypt.

This is the nature of Jacob: that he descends into the lowest level, as the exalted Yod of his name descends into the ‘heel’, and there at the lowest level he ‘lives’! But how could this be so? Surely, one would imagine that true ‘life’ is in an exalted, pure spiritual realm, rather at the lowest level of existence.

This question can be understood by considering a famous passage in Ethics of the Fathers (4:17). ‘One hour of Repentance and good deeds in This World is worth more than all the life of the World to Come’. This passage continues with the idea all the life – meaning the pleasures of life – in This World, is not worth as much as one hour of the delight of the World to Come.

What is the main thing? The Repentance and Good Deeds (Mitzvot) in This World, or the life of the World to Come?

There is also a Chassidic teaching⁷ that the effect of the Mitzvot we carry out in this world, is in order to enable us to come closer to the Divine Radiance in the Garden of Eden, where the soul dwells after leaving This World. The Mitzvot become garments for the soul, which protect the soul from the intensity of the

⁵ See *From Day to Day* entry for 18 Tevet.

⁶ From the prayer Elokay Neshama.

⁷ Torah Or, Chayei Sarah 16a.

Divine Radiance, and enable it to draw closer to the Divine in the Garden of Eden.

But this idea too suggests that the significance of studying Torah and keeping Mitzvot is only so that through them one is enabled to come closer to the Divine Radiance in the Garden of Eden, rather than there is any essential significance in Torah and Mitzvot themselves. Yet this contradicts the statement from Ethics of the Fathers: that one hour of Repentance and good deeds in This World is worth more than the whole of the World to Come.

The answer is that the ultimate reward is not in the Garden of Eden, but in the future time of the Resurrection of the Dead, when the souls will return to be enclothed in bodies in this physical world. The reward in the Garden of Eden provides only a ‘gleam’ of the Divine Radiance, powerful as this is. But the revelation in the time of the Resurrection, the World to Come, reveals the Essence of the Divine, which is expressed directly through the Mitzvot. As Ethics states (4:2), ‘the reward of a Mitzva is the Mitzva [itself]’.

Only, in order for the Soul to be able to experience this infinite reward, it first has to pass through the process of being in the Garden of Eden⁸.

We can now understand the idea of Jacob’s true life, which is manifested in the lowest dimension of existence, where he observes Torah and Mitzvot to the full. For this reason, the seventeen years he spent in Egypt are highlighted and were the best years of his life. The Mitzvot observed at the lowest level in each world, and at the lowest level of all worlds, are the key to the revelation of the Essence in the ultimate World to Come.

This also explains the special focus on the smallest number in the years of his life: seven.

Putting the smallest number first by itself, indicates that the true arena for service of the Divine is in the ‘smallest’ domain, the low physical world, the realm of ‘Egypt’. Further, in that domain a key objective is the transformation of one’s seven emotions, so that they should be dedicated to the Divine.

This is how Jacob found true life, giving an eternal example to his descendants. One lives to the full at the lowest level of existence, where through Torah and Mitzvot, one ultimately reveals the Essence of the Divine.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

⁸ See Tanya Part 4 sec. 17.