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

These seventeen years were the best years of his life—years of prosperity, goodness and peace; his other 130 years were filled with toil and pain. (Midrash; Baal HaTurim)

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866) was a child attending cheder, his teacher taught the verse, "And Jacob lived for seventeen years in the land of Egypt," according to the commentary of the Baal HaTurim—that Jacob lived the best years of his life in Egypt. When the child came home he asked his grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: How can it be that our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, lived the best years of his life in pagan Egypt?

Replied Rabbi Schneur Zalman: It is written that Jacob "sent Judah ahead of him... to show the way to Goshen" (Genesis 46:28). The Midrash explains that this was to establish a house of learning, where the sons of Jacob would study Torah. When one studies Torah, one is brought close to G-d, so that even in Egypt one can live a true "life." (HaYom Yom)

Nevertheless, in the very next verses we read how Jacob entreats Joseph: "Carry me out of Egypt!" So great is his urgency that he is not content with an agreement or promise on Joseph's part, but insists that his son take a solemn oath to fulfill his request.

A Jew might find himself living a most ideal life in galut (exile)—a life of material comfort and spiritual fulfillment, a life of Torah, mitzvot and charitable works. Nevertheless, galut can never be our true home. We constantly sense that this is not our place, constantly beseech G-d to "carry us out of Egypt."

Nor do we content ourselves with the guaranties and promises written in the holy books that the redemption will eventually come. After praying for the redemption in the morning prayers, we do so again in the afternoon prayers, and yet again in the evening prayers. We approach G-d every day, many times a day, to plead and clamor: Take us out of Egypt! (The Lubavitcher Rebbe) - chabadonline.com

Do me a kindness and a truth (47:30) A kindness done to the dead is a true kindness, for one does not expect a favor in return. (Rashi)

The Midrash relates that when G-d desired to create man, Truth argued that "he should not be created, for he is full of lies." Kindness, however, said, "He should be created, for he is full of kindness." To this, Truth might have replied: "But that, too, is just another of man's lies. Yes, man does acts of kindness to his fellows, but not because he is 'full of kindness'—only because he expects them to be kind to him in return."

However, there is one act of kindness that proves Truth wrong: the kindness done to the dead. This "kindness and truth," as the Torah calls it, shows that man is capable of a truly altruistic deed, thereby attesting that all our acts of kindness—even those superficially tainted by selfish motives—are in essence true, deriving from an intrinsic desire to give of ourselves to our fellows. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And it came to pass after these things, that it was said to Joseph: Behold, your father is ill (48:1) Abraham introduced aging to the world, Isaac affliction, and Jacob illness.

Abraham requested old age, pleading before G-d: "Master of the Universe! When a man and his son enter a town, none know whom to honor." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked a proper thing, and it will commence with you." Thus, from the beginning of the Book aging is not mentioned, but when Abraham came, old age was granted to him, as is written: "And Abraham was old and come along in days" (Genesis 24:1).

Isaac asked for affliction, pleading thus: "Master of the Universe! When a man dies without affliction, Judgment threatens him; but if You afflict him, Judgment would not threaten him." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked well, and it will commence with you." Thus affliction is not mentioned from the beginning of the Book until Isaac, as is written: "And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dimmed" (ibid., 27:1).

Jacob requested illness, saying to Him: "Master of the Universe! A man dies without previous illness and does not settle his affairs with his children; but if he were two or three days ill, he would settle his affairs with his children." Said G-d to him: "By your life, you have asked well, and it will commence with you." Thus it is written: "It was said to Joseph: Behold, your father is ill." (Midrash Rabbah) chabadonline.com

A Shepherd of Souls

Although raised in a secular home, Sarah had been a Lubavitcher for many years. In the summer of 1985, she was planning to visit Israel and organize Shabbatons for Americans living there. Before leaving, she wrote to ask the Rebbe for a blessing for success in her outreach activities, and also in finding a shidduch. The Rebbe answered with a blessing and gave her two bills to give to charity. Without examining the bills, she folded them and put them in her purse.

On her way to Israel, Sarah stopped off in London to visit relatives. There she unfolded the bills the Rebbe had given her. The top bill was an Israeli ten shekel note, but the second was an English pound!

Sarah had not told the Rebbe anything about a trip to England. And indeed, the stopover proved providential, for it was there that she was introduced to her future husband. (From: To Know and to Care)

THE ONE CALLED FOR THE LAST ALIYA (CONCLUDING EACH BOOK OF THE CHUMASH), ALSO SAYS CHAZAK CHAZAK VENIT'CHAZEIK (AS DOES THE CONGREGATION). IN SAYING VIYHI NOAM (P. 116) ON SATURDAY NIGHT, REPEAT THE VERSE ORECH YAMIM...; BUT NOT AT SHACHARIT (OF SHABBAT, P. 154).

WHEN THE TZEMACH TZEDEK WAS A BOY AND LEARNED THE PASSAGE, "YAAKOV LIVED IN THE LAND OF EGYPT SEVENTEEN YEARS," (1) HIS TEACHER TRANSLATED ACCORDING TO THE BAAL HATURIM COMMENTARY: "OUR FATHER YAAKOV LIVED HIS SEVENTEEN BEST YEARS IN EGYPT." WHEN HE RETURNED HOME FROM CHEDER HE ASKED HIS GRANDFATHER, THE ALTER REBBE: HOW CAN IT BE THAT OUR FATHER YAAKOV, THE ELECT OF THE PATRIARCHS, SHOULD HAVE AS THE BEST YEARS OF HIS LIFE THE SEVENTEEN THAT HE LIVED IN EGYPT, THE LAND OF CORRUPTION? (2) THE ALTER REBBE ANSWERED: IT IS WRITTEN, "AND YEHUDA HE SENT BEFORE HIM TO YOSEF TO GIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR GOSHEN." (3) THE MIDRASH STATES, AND RASHI QUOTES THIS, R. NECHEMYA SAID - TO ESTABLISH A HOUSE OF STUDY SO TORAH WOULD BE THERE AND THE TRIBES WOULD STUDY TORAH. "TO GIVE INSTRUCTIONS (4) FOR GOSHEN" MEANS (IN A DEEPER SENSE), WHEN ONE LEARNS TORAH HE COMES CLOSER (5) TO THE AL-MIGHTY, MAY HE BE BLESSED, SO EVEN IN EGYPT IT WAS TRUE TO SAY VAY'CHI - HE LIVED. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM TEVET 18).

The Same G-d who is beyond all things, He is the same one who hears your cries and counts your tears. The same G-d who is the force behind all existence and transcends even that, He is the same G-d who cares about what is cooking in your kitchen and how you treat your fellow man. G-d cannot be defined, even as transcendent. He is beyond all things and within them at once.

-Bringing Heaven Down To Earth