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YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayechi

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Yaakov's Love for Yosef

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The Unique Potential for Growth & Development of a Soul

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Yaakov's Impact on Egypt's Existence

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The Spiritual Representation of Yaakov

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The Significance of the Right and Left Hands

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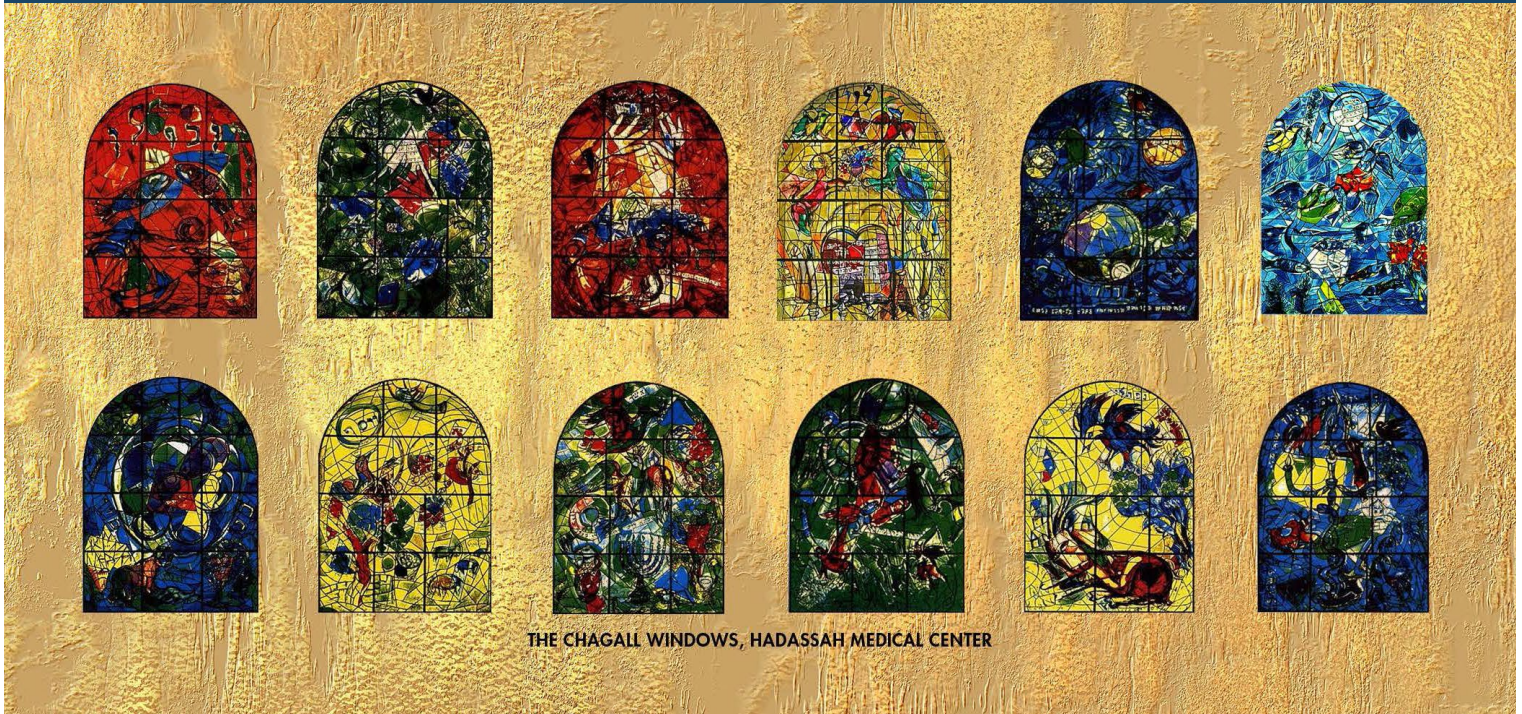
The Multileveled Blessing of Yaakov to His Grandchildren

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1. Yaakov blesses Yosef's sons *Ephraim* and *Menashe*.
2. His blessing concludes: "And you should increase in number like fish," etc.
3. *Midrash*: Fish proliferate In unlimited numbers.
4. *Midrash*: Fish are covered by water and subject to the human eye.
5. During the Great Flood all terrestrial species were destroyed; fish were spared.
6. The terrestrial, after the Great Flood, was the equivalent of a new creation.
7. The fish who were not destroyed were part of the original existence.
8. Yaakov's blessing: As fish aren't subject to the human eye you shouldn't be subject to evil eye.
9. As fish proliferate In unlimited numbers, so too should you.
10. Yaakov gave Yosef's children the most advanced blessing; they should be like the species of the original creation.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayechi



Yaakov's Ability to Transcend all Levels of Opposition

Torah: "Vayechi Yaakov – Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov – the years of his life – were one hundred and forty-seven years." Pharaoh was taken aback when Yaakov came before him. He had never seen anyone more aged than Yaakov, and he asked him, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" Yaakov responded, "The days of the years of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years." Thus, the *Torah* established that Yaakov was 130 years old when he arrived in Egypt.

Torah: "Yaakov passed away in Egypt at the age of 147." It is obvious that if the calculation was made, one would see that Yaakov had lived in Egypt for seventeen years. Nevertheless, the *Torah* feels that

it is necessary to mention that he had lived in Egypt for seventeen years. What is the significance of this?

Rabbeinu Bachya: The numerical value of the word "Vayechi" is thirty-four. This means that although Yaakov had actually lived for 147 years, his "life" was defined by the 34 years that he had been with his son Yosef. Yosef was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. Thus, he spent the first 17 years of his life with his father, Yaakov.

In addition, Yaakov spent the last 17 years of his life in Egypt, for a total of 34 years, with Yosef. Although Yaakov, our Patriarch, had achieved and accomplished many things in his lifetime, such as fathering the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the *Torah* is communicating to us that the essence of his life was the 34-year period that he spent with his son

Yosef. Perhaps we can understand the significance of “*Vayechi*” in a different manner.

Vayigash: “G-d came to *Yaakov* in a vision during the night – “*b’maris ha’layla*.”

Reb Meir Simcha of *Dvinsk z’tl* in *Meshech Chachmah*: We only find G-d appeared to *Yaakov* during the nighttime period – “*b’maris ha’layla*.” What is the significance of *Yaakov* receiving the prophecy during this time?

Gemara: The nighttime period represents exile. Thus, it is fitting that *Yaakov*, being the Patriarch who represents exile, should experience prophecy during the nighttime period.

Reb Meir Simcha citing the *Gemara* in *Moed Katan*: A prophet is able to continue to prophesize outside of the Land of Israel only when his prophecy began in the Land of Israel. *Yaakov*’s first prophecy was in the land of Canaan. Thus, although he was going to Egypt – into exile – his prophecy would continue. This is indicated by the fact that *Hashem* had spoken to *Yaakov*, “*b’maris ha’layla*.”

Torah when *Yosef*’s brothers revealed to *Yaakov* that *Yosef* was still alive: “The spirit of *Yaakov* became alive.” For the 22-year period that *Yosef* was separated from his father *Yaakov*, *Yaakov* did not prophesize because he was in a state of grieving.

Gemara: The Divine Presence only comes upon one who is in a state of joy. When *Yaakov* became aware that *Yosef* was alive, his prophetic status was reinstated. He became reconnected to that special level of holiness, as is indicated by the verse “the spirit of *Yaakov* became alive.”

The family of *Yaakov* was denied and deprived of their father’s prophecy for 22 years. One would think that if *Yaakov* were to leave the Land of Israel to go to Egypt, he might once again lose his ability to prophesize. Thus, *Hashem* appeared to *Yaakov* in the nighttime period to reassure him that despite the fact that he was going into exile, the Divine Presence would remain with him. *Hashem*’s communication with *Yaakov* in Egypt would be no different than it was in the Land of Israel.

Rashi: The reason the Portion of *Vayechi* is “*stuma* (closed) [relating to the closed paragraph structure found in the *Torah* scroll]” is to indicate that when

Yaakov passed away, the eyes and the hearts of the Jewish people became sealed. As long as *Yaakov* was alive, his family’s spirituality was unaffected by their environment despite its level of spiritual impurity. *Yaakov*, their father, generated a spiritual energy that created an insular environment for his family. However, upon his passing, they became spiritually diminished because that special protection no longer existed.

Now we are able to understand that “*Vayechi Yaakov–Yaakov* lived” is referring to the spiritual vibrancy of *Yaakov*, despite the Egyptian environment. Just as *Yaakov* existed as a spiritual being in the Land of Israel, so too did he continue to exist in that context in Egypt despite its depravity and spiritually contaminated state.

Egypt– the Setting for the Evolution of the Jewish People

Torah: Before *Yaakov* passed away, he made a special request for his son *Yosef*, who was the Viceroy of Egypt. The *Torah* states, “The time approached for *Yisroel* to die, so he called for his son, for *Yosef*, and said to him, ‘Please – if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh... please do not bury me in Egypt.’” Why did *Yaakov* not want to be buried in Egypt? *Yaakov* did not say that it was because he wished to be buried in the Tomb of *Machpelah*, but rather, he said that he did not want to be buried in Egypt.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: There are three possible reasons *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt. The first reason offered by the *Midrash* was that *Yaakov* foresaw the plague of lice that would come upon Egypt. He did not want the lice to crawl under his body. The second reason is that at the time of resurrection, all the remains of people that are buried outside of the Land of Israel will roll through underground caverns in order to be resurrected in the land. *Yaakov* did not wish to be subjected to this painful process.

The third reason given by the *Midrash* is that *Yaakov* did not want to be deified. *Yaakov* was renowned as a spiritual individual because the famine had ceased when he came to Egypt. In addition, his blessing to Pharaoh caused the Nile to rise and irrigate the land.

It is because of this that *Yaakov* was concerned that upon his death, he would be deified. These are the three reasons cited by *Rashi* as to why *Yaakov* did not wish to be buried in Egypt. However, the *Yalkut (Midrash)* offers a fourth reason.

Midrash: There is a verse that refers to *Yaakov* as the “sheep” (*seh*). There is a verse in *Yechezkel* that identifies the Egyptians as donkeys (*chamorim*), “Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (*chamorim*).” *Yaakov* had said, “I do not wish to be the sheep to redeem the donkey.” As it says in the verse, “the donkey shall be redeemed by the sheep.” The *Halacha* states that one is forbidden to benefit from a first-born male donkey until it is redeemed with a sheep (that is given to the *Kohen*).

Maharal of Prague *z’tl*: The word “*chamor*” in the verse in *Yechezkel*, which refers to the Egyptian people, is derived from the word *chomer* – which means physicality/material. Among the seventy nations of the world, the essence of the Egyptian people is the least spiritual. Thus, they are referred to as *chamorim*. Because of their level of physicality, the Egyptian people had sunk to the lowest depths of depravity, such as incest, adultery, witchcraft, and idol worship.

Maharal of Prague, in *Gevuras Hashem*: The reason the bondage of the Jewish people had taken place in Egypt and not any other location in the world was because in order to bring about a great level of spiritual development/*Kedushah* (holiness), it must be in a setting of the most extreme level of *Tumah* (spiritual contamination). Thus, in order for the Jews to develop their fullest potential to be worthy of receiving the *Torah* at the most advanced level, they had to be enslaved in Egypt (the lowest point of spirituality in the world) for 210 years. The *Maharal* cites many sources to support this principle.

Wherever there is the greatest absence of spirituality, it is exactly in that location where the highest level of spirituality can be attained. When one serves a deity, one does so in a manner in which he believes that the service will bring about the greatest level of respect and satisfaction for that deity. If *Yaakov* were to be deified and worshiped, as other deities, the Egyptian people would have served him by emulating his unique spiritual posture as a person who is divorced from physicality. Thus, the Egyptians would have become less physical, worshiping *Yaakov*

in this manner. Thus, *Yaakov*, who is compared to the sheep, would be the redemption of the Egyptian people, who are compared to the *chamor/chomeir* (physical/material), causing them to rise to a more spiritual state.

Yaakov did not want this to occur because the Jewish people could only advance themselves to the most advanced level of spirituality if they were in the abyss of material and spiritual impurity. Thus, the spiritual future of the Jewish people would be jeopardized if *Yaakov* were to be buried in Egypt.

It is interesting to note that the *Torah* states in the Portion of *Ki Seitzei*, “Do not reject the Egyptian.”

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: Although the Egyptians had enslaved the Jewish people and thrown their male children into the Nile, one must not reject the Egyptians because they were the host country for them in their time of need. Simply, one could understand this to mean that the Jew is not permitted to reject the Egyptian because he must be beholden to him for hosting him in a physical sense. However, with our understanding of why Egypt was the location of exile for the Jewish people to experience their exile, we can understand the *Midrash* in another vein. The Jew must be beholden to the Egyptian people for creating a setting for him to develop his spiritual potential. The only reason the Jewish people were able to attain the highest degree of spirituality was because the essence of the Egyptian was “*chomeir*” – the antithesis of spirituality.

Yosef, the Heir of His Father, Yaakov

Torah: “And it came to pass after these things that someone said to *Yosef*, “Behold! -your father is ill.” So he took his two sons, *Menashe* and *Ephraim*, with him... *Yaakov* said,” And now your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; *Ephraim* and *Menashe* shall be mine like *Reuvain* and *Shimon*...” Meaning that although *Menashe* and *Ephraim* were only his grandchildren and were not raised under his influence and tutelage, they assumed the status of tribes as his own children, *Reuvain* and *Shimon*. Thus, they were established as the “shivtei Ka- the Tribes of G-d.”

Yaakov continues to say to Yosef, “But as for me – when I came from Paddan, *Rachel* died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.” Yaakov explained to Yosef that he did not bury *Rachel*, his mother, in the Tomb of *Machpelah*, but rather “on the road.”

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: Yaakov said to Yosef, “I did not bring your mother *Rachel* even into Bethlehem (which is in the Land of Israel). I know that you (Yosef) have a claim in your heart against me (for not burying your mother in the Tomb of *Machpelah*). However, you should know that it was only because of G-d’s Dictate that I buried her there, so that she should be of assistance to her children when *Nevuzaradan* will take them into exile. When the children of Israel will pass by her grave on that road, she will come out and cry and beseech *Hashem* for *Rachamim* (Mercy) on their behalf.... and *Hashem* will respond – and the children will return to their border (homeland).”

If Yaakov understood that Yosef harbored ill feelings in his heart against him since the passing of his mother, then why did Yaakov not explain to Yosef the basis for his decision sooner? It could not have been because Yosef did not have the capacity to appreciate Yaakov’s explanation at an earlier age. Yosef is referred to by the *Torah* as the wisest of all of Yaakov’s children. If so, why did Yaakov withhold the basis for his decision from Yosef until the time immediately before his passing?

As much as Yosef possessed all the qualities of his father and was thus loved by him to a greater degree than any of his children, nevertheless, Yosef was not the person who fully internalized and understood all of the aspects and ramifications of exile (*golus*). Only Yaakov is identified as the Patriarch of exile. He established within himself (and thus within all of his progeny until the end of time) the ability to survive spiritually despite all of the overwhelming negative influences of exile. All of Yaakov’s children, except for *Binyamin*, were born in exile. No other Patriarch experienced exile like Yaakov. Although Yosef was similar to his father in every sense of the word, he was not able to fully appreciate and internalize the reality of exile as his father had.

When Yaakov was about to pass away, he chose to transfer the responsibility of being the guardian of the Jewish people to Yosef, who had himself experienced exile. Yosef had survived the Egyptian environment despite being a solitary individual without any degree of support. It was only at the time that Yaakov transferred the responsibility to Yosef that he could fully appreciate and understand the value of *Rachel* being buried “on the road.”

If Yaakov had shared with Yosef the basis for his decision to bury *Rachel* on the way earlier, although he had the capacity to comprehend its value, he would not have been able to fully internalize it. It was only at the point when Yosef assumed full responsibility for the Jewish people that he was able to fully comprehend that the importance of his mother’s burial location was to plead with and beseech *Hashem* for His Mercy to guarantee that the Jewish people would return to their homeland.

Yaakov’s Bestowment of Kingship Upon Yehudah

Torah: Before Yaakov passed away, he blessed his children. The blessing which he gave to his son *Yehudah* was one of “kingship.” As the verse states, “...the scepter shall not part from *Yehudah*...” The princes and leaders of the Jewish people descend from *Yehudah*.

Ramban: The reason the family of the *Chashmonaim* were annihilated was that even though they had defeated the Greeks, and had reinaugurated the Temple, since they had assumed the position of “king” of the Jewish people, they violated the dictate of Yaakov, our Patriarch. He had stated that the kingship shall not pass from the house of *Yehudah*. The *Chashmonaim*, who were *Kohanim* from the Tribe of *Levi*, had no relevance to that position. Why did *Yehudah*, the fourth son of Yaakov, merit being chosen as the “king” of Israel?

Torah: “Then Yaakov called for his sons... *Yehudah*, your father’s sons shall prostrate themselves to you. A lion cub is *Yehudah*; from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself. He crouches, lies down like the lion, and like the awesome lion, who dares rouse him?” Yaakov compares *Yehudah* to the lion that, despite his enormous strength, is able to restrain

and exercise complete control over all his faculties and emotions.

Rashi citing Chazal: Yehudah exercised this level of control regarding Yosef, his brother.

Midrash: When *Yehudah's* brothers had initially wanted to kill *Yosef*, he interjected, "What would be the purpose of shedding our brother's blood?" *Yehudah* convinced them to sell him into slavery instead. It is also the case that *Yehudah* exercised restraint regarding the incident of *Tamar*. When *Tamar* intimated that *Yehudah* had fathered the children that she was carrying, rather than ignoring her plea in order to protect his honor and avoid disgrace, *Yehudah* publicly admitted that he, in fact, was the father of her children by saying, "She is more righteous than I am."

Despite his dimension of person and enormous strength and ability, *Yehudah* was able to keep things in perspective and not allow his conflicts of interest to interfere with what was truly correct. This is indicative of "kingship" and leadership. A king/true leader does not allow his own agenda and conflict to interfere to any degree with what he needs to do.

It is interesting to note that the *Torah* tells us that *Leah* initially had difficulty conceiving. After *Leah* had given birth to her first son, *Reuvain*, she said, "Because *Hashem* has seen my humiliation, for now my husband will love me." After *Shimon*, her second son, was born, *Leah* declared, "Because *Hashem* has heard that I am unloved..." After the birth of *Levi*, her third son, *Leah* said, "This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons..."

However, after she conceived and gave birth to *Yehudah*, her fourth son, *Leah* proclaimed her thankfulness to *Hashem* by saying, "This time let me gratefully praise *Hashem*. Therefore, she called his name *Yehudah*." If *Hashem* had allowed *Leah* to conceive despite her difficulty, why did she not express her thankfulness to G-d after conceiving her first child? Why was it only after *Yehudah* that she declared her thankfulness to *Hashem*?

It was only after *Leah's* personal issues were addressed by the birth of her first three sons that she was able to give thanks to *Hashem*. *Leah* was consumed with her personal need to be accepted and loved by *Yaakov* and did not focus on being

thankful for the gift that was bestowed upon her to be able to conceive. However, after bearing three children, *Leah* came to a level of understanding and clarity that enabled her to express her gratitude to *Hashem*. *Leah* should have come to this realization when she gave birth to her first child, which she did not. However, when she conceived and mothered *Yehudah*, she understood that she had received more than her share of children (There were to be four wives of *Yaakov* and Twelve Tribes of Israel that were meant to be born. Thus, three children would have been her even share of the total number.)

When one expresses his thankfulness, it is an indication that he appreciates what he has received. He sees his situation in its true light, although it could have been processed differently because of one's distractions and conflicts with his own needs. Similarly, a qualification that is a prerequisite to being a true leader/king is that one must have the ability to rise above his own conflict and see things as they truly are. A true leader transcends personal conflicts and feelings in order to do what is needed. This is *Yehudah*.

Yehudah did not allow his own feelings vis-à-vis *Yosef* to interfere with doing what was proper and correct. He was able to control and suppress his feelings towards his brother. He merited having this special ability only because *Leah*, his mother, had achieved this level of clarity and understanding, which allowed her to express her thankfulness to *Hashem*. Thus, *Yehudah* possessed this trait, which qualified him to be chosen as the king.

The language and terminology with which the Jewish people utilize to communicate with and beseech *Hashem* are the words that were set forth by King *David*, the Psalmist. King *David* was a warrior and a King of Israel. What qualifies such an individual to understand and appreciate how one must serve *Hashem*? *Tehillim (Psalms)* is the expression of King *David's* yearning, understanding, and appreciation of who *Hashem* is. One would think that *Levi*, who was chosen to be the officiant of *Hashem*, would have authored such a text.

Tefillah (prayer) is classified as the service of *Hashem*. It is only when one subordinates and negates himself and his self-interests that he has relevance to understanding who *Hashem* is. *Tefillah*

is not simply beseeching *Hashem* for one's own needs. We ask Him for our needs only because the request itself is an acknowledgment of recognizing and appreciating Him as the Omnipotent Being. Making the request is only a confirmation that one fully recognizes who *Hashem* is.

King *David* displayed and exemplified all of the characteristics of his forbearer *Yehudah*. He was able to rise above his own issues and invest every moment of his existence in the consecration and sanctification of the Name of *Hashem*. Because he was qualified to be the king, to the fullest sense of the word, he had the ability to control and subordinate his own self-interest and lead the Jewish people as *Hashem* wanted him to. Thus, King *David*, only because of the characteristic of "kingship" that he had inherited from *Yehudah*, was the one to author the book of *Tehillim*.

Yaakov Fully Invested His Life in the Jewish People

Torah: "Then *Yosef* brought *Yaakov*, his father, and presented him to Pharaoh...Pharaoh said to *Yaakov*, 'How many are the days of the years of your life?' Pharaoh was taken aback by *Yaakov*'s appearance. He had never seen anyone who appeared as aged as *Yaakov*. *Yaakov* responded, "The days of the years of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years. Few and difficult have been my days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the life spans of my forefathers..." At this time, *Yaakov* was only 137 years old; however, he appeared older than he was because his life was so arduous.

Daas Zikainim MiBaali HaTosfos citing the *Midrash*: "When *Yaakov* responded to Pharaoh – '(My years) are few and difficult...' G-d said to him, 'I have saved you from *Esav* and *Lavan* (*Yaakov* could have been killed or diminished by either of them). When *Dina* was raped, I returned her to you. I also returned *Yosef* to you. And now you complain that your days are few and difficult? I swear that your years will be shortened by every word that you have spoken to Pharaoh. Your father, *Yitzchak*, lived to be 180; however, because you uttered 33 words of complaint, I will deduct 33 years from your life. You will live until the age of 147 because you complained."

Torah: Regarding the passing of *Sarah*, "*Sarah*'s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years, the years of *Sarah*'s life." The conclusion of the verse, "... the years of *Sarah*'s life," seems to be superfluous.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: *Sarah* should have lived more than her 127 years; however, her life was cut short because of events that were beyond her control. (She was informed by *satan* that *Yitzchak*, her only child, born in her old age, was bound by *Avraham* to be brought as a sacrifice, thus causing her to die). Although she did not live her full life, she will be fully credited for those years that she did not live. The *Torah* is informing us that since a *tzaddik* dedicates his life to the service of G-d, even if he does not live his full life, he will receive credit as if he had lived a complete life.

Yaakov, the most special of the Patriarchs, dedicated his life to the glorification of G-d's Name and His service. If this is the case, even if *Yaakov* were to lose 33 years of his life and did not live to the extent of his father, he would still be fully credited for living the equivalent of 180 years. Thus, what was the punishment that G-d had brought upon *Yaakov*?

Torah: When *Yaakov* came to Egypt with his family, it delineates the various segments of his children. Regarding each group, the *Torah* states, "with him (eeto)." *Yaakov* was directly involved with every one of his descendants. The *Torah* reiterates the expression "eeto – with him" several times to communicate that regardless of the age and dimension of *Yaakov*'s family, they were totally under his influence. Because *Yaakov* understood the extreme level of impurity of Egypt, he had to be intimately involved with every member of his family so that they would not be diminished in any way by it. Everything that transpired regarding *Yaakov*'s family was through his influence and direction.

If *Yaakov* had 33 years deducted from his life, it would mean that the Jewish people would be denied 33 years of his presence and influence. Thus, without his presence, they would have been exposed to the impurity of Egypt. Had the Jewish people been under the tutelage and influence of *Yaakov* for an additional 33 years, they would have become another dimension of people and would have been influenced by the bondage to a lesser degree.

Yaakov had dedicated his entire life to establishing a Jewish people who possessed the greatest potential for spiritual development. Thus, the most severe punishment that could have been brought upon him was that his life should be shortened by 33 years, thus denying him the opportunity to develop his family to have even greater potential.

One of the mentors/rabbaim of the *Chasam Sofer* z'tl was Reb Noson Adler z'tl. When Reb Noson Adler passed away, the *Chasam Sofer* delivered the eulogy. He had asked, "Why do we mourn the passing of a *Torah* Sage?

Midrash citing a verse: "The sun has set and the sun has risen." At the time of the passing of a *tzaddik*, another *tzaddik* is born at that moment to replace the loss. Thus, the moment that *Sarah*, our Matriarch, passed away, *Rivka* was born. With the passing of Reb Noson Adler, another *tzaddik* was born – although we may not know his identity at present. What, then, is the tragedy of losing a *Torah* Sage? It is true that G-d brings another *tzaddik* into existence with the passing of a *tzaddik*; however, it will take many years for the new individual to develop into being that special *tzaddik* who will influence the Jewish people. We mourn that there is a segment of time when the Jewish people are deprived of the influence of the great *Torah* Sage. It is the interim period that is considered tragic."



Yad Avraham Institute