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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Promise

“I am the G-d of your father...Have no fear of descending into Egypt...I shall descend with you to Egypt and I shall surely bring you up.” (46:3-4)

It was the first night of Chanukah. The single light of the menorah gleamed with a strange radiance. Its light came neither from wax nor oil. This was a very special menorah. It was made from an old wooden clog. And the oil was boot polish. This was Chanukah in Bergen Belsen.

The Bluzhever Rav chanted the first two blessings in the customary festive tune. He was about to make the third blessing but then he stopped. He paused for what seemed like a long time. He looked around the room at all the faces in front of him. And then, with a voice filled with strength, he said: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, Who has kept us alive and preserved us and brought us to this time.” “Amein” was the whispered reply from the huddled throng. Later, one of the men came over to the Bluzhever Rav and he said, “Can I ask the Rabbi a question?” “What is your question?” said the Rav. “How can you possibly make a blessing thanking G-d for bringing us to this time? Should we thank Him for bringing us to Bergen-Belsen? For bringing us to a time like this?”

“You know,” said the Bluzhever Rav, “I had exactly the same thought as you. That’s why I stopped in the middle. I was about to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and some of my other colleagues if I could really make that blessing, and then I caught sight of all the faces looking so intently at that wooden clog, filled with black camp shoe polish. I thought: Here

we are in the depths, in the blackest darkness that could exist in this world. And here are some Jews lighting Chanukah candles. In spite of all the evil that those murderers are doing, we are lighting candles. And I thought to myself: *Ribono shel ha’olam!* Master of the world! Who is like your people Israel? Look how they stand with death staring them in the face and lovingly they hang onto every word – ‘*Who did miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this time*’ And I thought: If this is not the place to thank Hashem for bringing us to this time, then I don’t know when is! I have a sacred duty to say that blessing now.”

Chanukah is the only celebration in the Jewish calendar that spans two months. A month of light and a month of darkness. And despite the great light that was revealed on Chanukah, that light darkened in Tevet. On the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet we mourn three great tragedies: the translation of the Torah into Greek, the death of Ezra, which marked the end of prophecy, and, finally, the surrounding of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which led to the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. Tevet is a month of darkness.

The total number of candles that we light on Chanukah is 36 (excluding the *shamesh*). In the beginning of the Creation, a supernal light called the *Ohr Haganuz* shone. With it you could see from one end of the world to the other, meaning

that you could see cause and effect. You could see why things happened. All was revealed. After 36 hours, Hashem hid it away so that it could not be used by those who are evil. That supernal light reappeared in the lamps of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash, and it can be found in the lights of our Chanukah menorahs to this very day. 36. If you count the number of days from the beginning of Chanukah until the end of Tevet, it also comes to 36. The light spreads into the darkness even though you cannot see it.

I always thought that the end of Chanukah was a bit of an anti-climax. True, on the last night we light all the candles in a blaze of glory, but the following morning all that's left to do is to clean up the mess from the olive oil. And apart from our

mentioning *al hanisim* in our prayers, there's nothing we actually do on the last day except to put the Chanukah menorah away. It seems strange that the last day of Chanukah is called "Zot Chanukah," "This is Chanukah." And yet this epitomizes the very essence and the message of Chanukah. Sometimes our lives are filled with darkness – the darkness of illness, the darkness of depression, of unhappiness. The lights seemed to have gone out in our lives, leaving us in a very dark world. Our comfort is to know that the lights have not gone out in our lives, but that they burn secretly, hidden from sight, and that very soon the whole world will be ablaze with a great light when Hashem's promise to Yaakov Avinu will be fulfilled, and the entire world will recognize the G-d of Israel.

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Q & A

Questions

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers, "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said, "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

Answers

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke lashon hakodesh.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of Mishkan Shilo built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His ruach hakodesh (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina bat Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Freezing Cold

In the cold of the winter we can often find solace in the warm depths of the Torah by plunging ourselves into a deep Torah discussion and forgetting about the freezing weather. In this week's essay we do just that by examining two Hebrew words for "cold": *kor* and *tzinah*. Altogether, these rare words appear only four times in the Bible, so there is so much that needs exploration. Cognates of *kor* appear three times in the Bible: once when listing an annual cold season called *kor* (Gen. 8:22) and twice when describing "cold water" as *mayim karim* (Jer. 18:14, Prov. 25:25) – while cognates of *tzinah* seem to appear only once (see below).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) traces the words *kor* ("coldness") and *kar* ("cold") to the biliteral root KUF-REISH, which refers to a "strong impact" resulting from a high concentration of mass or velocity. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that "coldness" fits this core meaning of the root because the process of homeostasis ensures that one's body always remains warm. Therefore, when one encounters the chill of something cold, there is a crash/clash of conflicting temperatures, resulting in a sort of "strong impact." This is similar to the word *mikrah/keri* ("occurrence," "happenstance"), as in the Modern Hebrew expression "*Mah karah?*" ("What happened?"), which refers to the sudden collision of a person and a new set of circumstances.

Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim explains as deriving from KUF-REISH include *kir* ("wall"), *korah* ("wooden beam") and *tikrah* ("ceiling"). He explains that the weight of horizontal beams that make up the ceiling typically weigh down on a building's support, such that they create a point of "impact," while walls are often comprised of vertically-positioned wooden beams that carry the

weight of a structure, thus also creating a point of "impact."

What about the word *tzinah*? As mentioned above, that word appears only once in the Bible. Here is the full verse in which it appears: "Like the cold (*tzinah*) of snow on a harvest day [is] a messenger who is trusty to his sender" (Prov. 25:13). But what does this passage mean?

Rashi (1040-1105) explains that this refers to one's longing for the coldness of winter (i.e., "snow time") in the heat of the harvest season (i.e., the summer), while Rabbi Yosef Kimchi (1105-1170) writes that this refers to a cool wintery breeze blowing on a summer day. Either way, Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) and Rabbi Yishaya of Trani (1180-1250) explain the analogy by noting that a bit of icy coldness on a summer day gives a person the same sort of relief or satisfaction as being able to rely on his agent to handle his affairs.

Rabbi Moshe Kimchi (in the commentary to Prov. 25:13 mistakenly attributed to Ibn Ezra) suggests that the word *tzinah* in the sense of "coldness" is related to *tzinah* in the sense of "shield," as coldness serves to *shield* one from the heat of the summer. Interestingly, Abarbanel (to Amos 4:2) actually writes the converse, connecting *tzinah* in the sense of "shield" to *tzinah* in the sense of "coldness" by noting that a shield protects a person from the *heat* of battle.

Shoresh Yesha connects the word *tzinah* as "coldness" to the word *tzanuah/tzniut* ("modesty"), explaining that just as a modest person is not overly ostentatious or flamboyant, but instead prefers to remain reserved or reticent, so is the cold winter a time for retreating into one's abode and not venturing outside. He further explains that *tzinah* as a "shield" also relates to this idea because

a shield protects and covers a person in the same way that an individual who is described as *tzanuah* might remain hidden away from everyone else.

Although we claimed earlier that the word *tzinah* in the sense of “coldness” appears only once in the Bible, there are another three words in the Bible which some commentators understand to be related to *tzinah*:

1. The Jews' forty-year sojourn in the wilderness took them to a place called the *Midbar Tzin* (Num. 13:21, 20:1, 27:14, 33:36, 34:3, Deut. 32:51, Joshua 15:1), which Rabbi Dovid Golomb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* (to Ex. 17:1) explains was called so because it was an especially “cold” locale.
2. The word *tzintzenet* (Ex. 16:33) refers to the “container” used to store the extra manna that was preserved as souvenir. The way Rabbi Hirsch (there) explains it, this container functioned like an “ice box” that kept the manna cold.
3. The Bible postulates: “Thorns (*tzinim*) and traps are in the path of the perverted; he who watches his soul will distance himself from them” (Prov. 22:5). While most commentators explain *tzinim* in Prov. 22:5 as referring to “thorns,” Rabbi Yosef Nechemias (there) and Radak (1160-1234) in *Sefer HaShorashim* understand the verse as referring to the “cold.”

In fact, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim traces the very word *tzinah* to the biliteral root TZADI-NUN, whose core meaning he defines as a sort of “thorn.” Based on that core meaning, Rabbi Pappenheim notes that the word *tzinah* (“shield”) refers specifically to a spiky shield used in battle for both offense and defense. In the same vein, he explains that *tzinah* in the sense of “coldness” recalls the stinging bite of a cool frost, which resembles the sting of a thorn or spiky shield. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 16:33) similarly explains that the word *tzinah* primarily denotes something *painfully* cold (as if one were stung by a thorn).

Indeed, the Torah warns that if the Jews do not drive out the inhabitants of Canaan when they conquer the Holy Land, then those who remain

will be “*sikim* in your eyes and *tzinim* in your sides” (Num. 33:55). While most commentators explain the words *sikim* and *tzinim* as different types of thorns, Rashbam (there) explains that *tzinim* is related to the word *tzinah* in the sense of “cold.” Rashbam does not explain how this fits into the context, but based on what we have seen so far, perhaps the Torah refers to a sort of “sharp/stinging coldness,” which annoys a person and hampers his ability to accomplish more.

Radak notes that in Rabbinic Hebrew the final consonant NUN in the word *tzinah* was doubled, so an extra NUN was added to the word. Hence, in the Mishna, the word *tzonen* is used for “coldness” – usually as the opposite of something “hot” (*Maaserot* 4:4, *Shabbat* 3:4-5, 22:4, 22:6, *Pesachim* 3:3-4, *Yoma* 3:5, *Nedarim* 8:7, *Zevachim* 11:7, *Keilim* 3:7, *Mikvaot* 10:6, *Machshirin* 5:10). This term was also borrowed to other concepts related to “coldness”: The Mishna (*Chullin* 3:5) rules that an animal that is a *metzunenet* is not considered a *treifah* (“moribund”), and Rashi (to *Chullin* 58b) explains that this refers to an animal that became sick because of the cold (i.e. what we colloquially call in English “the common cold”). Similarly, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 39b) asserts that Ahab was *metzunan* (“frigid”) and this would only be changed by special efforts on the part of his wife Jezebel.

When comparing the terms *kor* and *tzinah*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that they refer to different degrees of “coldness.” He understands that *tzinah* denotes the most basic form of “coldness” that typically describes a solid object that has not been exposed to a source of heat, or to any liquid that simply feels cold. This form of coldness can be experienced on a typical winter day or even in the summer if one is not directly in the sun. It is a natural coldness that does not make a person sick, nor is it painful. Rather, it is a level of coldness that the human body was built to withstand.

On the other hand, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *kor* refers to an extreme form of coldness, which is only manifest on the coldest days of winter. It can also describe solid items which have become especially cold and are even painful to touch, like a cold metal or marble. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the Bible calls the winter *kor* (Gen. 8:22) not because it typically reaches this

level of coldness, but because of all the seasons of the year, real *kor* is most likely to happen in the winter.

Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg of the Veromemanu Foundation uses the juxtaposition of the word *tzinah* to *sheleg* (“snow”) in Prov. 25:13 to shed light on the two meanings of the word *tzinah*. He argues that just as snow covers a large area and surrounds

a person on all sides, so does a *tzinah* (“shield,” or perhaps “armor”) cover a large area and surround a person on all sides to protect him. Accordingly, Rabbi Steinberg argues that *tzinah* in the sense of “coldness” does not simply refer to the drop in temperature like *kor* does, but rather it denotes the fact that there is an all-encompassing “coldness” that covers a wide area and totally envelops a person.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of Hashem's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived.

Yaakov, together with all his family and possessions, sets out for Goshen. Hashem communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that Hashem will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation although they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption.

The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests, who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 11)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
- they must be felt with the heart.”
(Helen Keller)

The third blessing continues: “Upon the earlier and upon the later generations, this affirmation is good and enduring forever. True and faithful, it is an undisputable decree. It is true that You are our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers; our King and the King of our forefathers; our Redeemer and the Redeemer of our forefathers; our Creator; the Rock of our salvation; our Liberator and our Rescuer. This has been Your Name forever. There is no G-d but You.”

This part of the blessing carries with it the most wonderfully, poignant inference. The absolute bond with G-d that defines the Jewish Nation spans every single generation from the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It encompasses our generation and will continue into the future in a never-ending chain of devotion. Furthermore, each generation is indelibly joined to the generations that preceded it and to those that will follow it through the eternal words of the Torah that are learned throughout the generations.

Why does our blessing mention the “earlier” generations and the “later” generations? And what is the connection to “this affirmation is good and enduring forever”? Many years ago I heard an intriguing interpretation from one of my Rebbes. His explanation was based on the brilliant work of Rabbi Yitzchak Ber Weiss (1873-1942) that is entitled *Siach Yitzchak*. Rabbi Yitzchak Ber Weiss was the Chief Rabbi of Verbo, (in what was then) Czechoslovakia. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1942 and, unfortunately, most of his recorded insights and innovative works were lost to

posterity. After the Holocaust, his surviving family managed to recover fragments of his original writings, which they published under the title of *Siach Yitzchak*. He writes that the “earlier generations” is a reference to those who stood at Sinai and received the Torah from G-d. Their experience was unparalleled and incomparable to any other event in Jewish or world history. Never before or after has there been such an obvious revelation of G-d’s Presence in the world. The revelation at Mount Sinai was foundational, leaving no room for doubts or questions regarding the unique nature of G-d’s relationship with His chosen nation. And, as such, our Sages defined them as “*Dor Deah*” – the “all-knowing generation” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19). Their knowledge of G-d’s Torah was crystal clear and it was passed down to them by Moshe Rabbeinu without the need for great intellectual effort on their behalf. However, this extraordinary gift was reserved only for the generation that was actually present then at Mount Sinai. After the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu, however, the only way to receive and understand Torah is by toiling over it and striving to plumb its profundity and unfathomable depths. In this way, the way the Torah endures – by being passed from one generation to the next in an unending chain of study and scholarship, from parent to child and from teacher to student.

The reason that the word “truth” is repeated both in conjunction with the generations and, immediately afterwards, with the statement that G-d is our G-d, is because it is not possible to have one without the other. In the same way that “our” Torah is the same Torah that the previous generations accepted at Mount Sinai, so too G-d is

unchanging. Just as G-d is the King of our ancestors, so too He is our King and He is our Redeemer.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab relates that he once read that as the Nazis were taking out a group of Jews to murder them, there was a great and revered Rabbi among them who told his fellow Jews that the last thing they should do before they were butchered was to recite this prayer with tremendous intent and concentration. To go to their deaths declaring complete and total affirmation in both G-d and His Torah.

These chilling words should leave each of us in a state of great disquiet. However, Rabbi's Schwab's purpose is not to frighten us unnecessarily, but, rather, to teach us the magnitude of our blessing and what it can achieve when said in the correct way. We have been granted the privilege to be able to recite these beautiful words every single day. Not under duress and not under threat of death, but, rather, free to joyously declare G-d's Monarchy over us. And it is beholden upon us to do so with deliberation and the correct gravitas so that we can *truly feel* that which we are saying.

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE SEAS

The ocean says: "More than the sounds of the great, mighty waters and the breaking ocean waves, mighty on high is Hashem". (Tehillim 93:4)

The rivers say: "The rivers will clap hands; the mountains will praise in unison." (Tehillim 98:8).

The river's song is part of the joyous depiction of the forthcoming redemption, when Hashem will rectify the world with justice. Then, rivers will seem to excitedly clap hands as they stream down the mountainsides. To a lesser degree, they sing of Hashem's dominion that is apparent even today.

The rivers teach a profound lesson. Although the waters of the river flow downhill, which could be considered a lessening of their strength and importance, they nonetheless do so happily, irrigating the land and fulfilling their purpose. So too we should be willing to humble ourselves in order to fulfill the will of our Creator and help people. Even if it involves compromising personal accomplishment, we should do so happily, with the liveliness of the clapping river.

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ta'anit 16-22

In the Eye of the Beholder

The (“ugly”) man said to Rabbi Elazar, “If you have a complaint about my appearance, go and tell my Maker how ugly is the utensil He made.”

This sharp reply came from a man whose appearance was disparaged by the great Torah Sage Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, as we are taught in a well-known and enigmatic story on our *daf*.

Here is the story, in brief, that we learn in a *beraita*: Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was returning home from a long period of Torah study and was quite pleased with himself for having studied so assiduously. He met a man who was very ugly. The man approached Rabbi Elazar and spoke to him in a (seemingly) degrading manner. The man told the Tana, “If you have complaints about my appearance, go tell my Maker how ugly is the utensil He made.” Rabbi Elazar realized that he had spoken wrongly and pursued the man with pleas for forgiveness. Yet, the man refused to be appeased. The Tana and the man eventually reached Rabbi Elazar’s city and the ugly man told the townspeople what the Tana had done to him. Only then, when the townspeople begged the man to forgive the great and holy Tana, did he finally agree to forgive him.

Some commentaries explain that Rabbi Elazar was in fact justified in speaking to the man as he did. Why? The way that the man addressed the great Tana could be viewed as showing a lack of respect for the Torah and for the Torah scholars who embody it. The Tana’s intent was to point out that this lack of honor was “ugly” and perhaps was indicative of the lack of respect for the Torah in the man’s city as well. However, instead of the man thanking the Torah Sage for this rebuke of love, he took it as a personal insult and was deeply offended. Rabbi Elazar felt

responsible for the man’s emotional pain and took every measure possible to appease him and receive forgiveness.

Other commentaries, however, explain that Rabbi Elazar was actually not justified in his speaking to the man in an insulting manner. These commentaries understand his insults as resulting from the Tana feeling even a microscopic degree of forbidden haughtiness. He was correct to feel great *happiness* for his superhuman efforts in Torah study, but he had no right to feel any haughtiness and self-importance as a result of his accomplishments. Hashem gave us the Torah and gave Rabbi Elazar the opportunity to study the Torah as he did. Torah study – especially for a Torah scholar of his great stature – should be purely for the honor of Hashem and His Torah, and not for any feeling of self-aggrandizement. When he was called out on his inappropriate, insulting words, Rabbi Elazar realized his misstep and went to extraordinary lengths to seek forgiveness.

Accordingly, Rabbi Elazar said at the end of this story: “One must always be as soft as a reed and not unyielding like the cedar.” The Maharal of Prague explains the meaning of this teaching in the context of our story. Even when one has “grown tall” in the heights of the Torah, he should be careful to act like a tall *reed* and not like a tall *cedar*. A reed bends with humility even as it grows taller, unlike a cedar that gets stronger in its rigidity as it grows taller. This is an important lesson to internalize for anyone who studies the holy Torah. As it raises a person up to great heights, the Torah scholar must become even more flexible and humble.

Another approach to understanding Rabbi Elazar’s harsh words is based not on the concept of haughtiness but rather on the need for a person to

have a correct perception of Hashem's creation. The primary aspect of Torah study is to see the value of all His creations, by shining the light of the Torah on them. A person might look at the world outside of the Yeshiva and see it as full of ugliness and negative qualities. Unfortunately, the Tana had this outlook

in this story and therefore spoke in a negative way to the "ugly" man. However, the purpose of connecting to the Torah is exactly the opposite – to see the beauty of everything in existence in Hashem's creation.

▪ *Ta'anit 20a-b*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

A Day in the Life

When Yosef presents his father Yaakov to Pharaoh, Pharaoh asks him: *How many are the days of the years of your life?* Not, *how many years*, but *how many days of the years*. Yaakov's answer is cryptic: *the days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty years; the days of my life have been few and unhappy, and they have not reached the days of the lives of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.* The days of his *sojourning* were one hundred and thirty years, but the days of his *life* were few and unhappy, and did not measure up to his fathers' days. What does this mean? What is the difference between days of sojourning and days of life?

When one counts by years, one does not reckon days. Few see the one-day wonder of each day – and see in it a special mission. But only one who can seize the day can, in the end, win the day. Our entire lifespan of seventy or eighty years is an insignificant speck in history. We survey only a small window, and are incapable of comprehending the larger context. But from the perspective of G-d, *a thousand years...are but as yesterday when it is passing* (Tehillim 90:4). A thousand years, in the eyes of G-d, frequently have no more significance than a transition point, a moment of time that lies between one day and the next.

G-d recognizes the days of those who live wholly with Him (Ibid. 37:18). It is not the years that are noticed – it

is the days – and the minutes of those days that are recorded before Him. Therefore, we ask, *teach us to count the days – then we will bring home a heart of wisdom* (Ibid. 90:12). Teach us to make each day count, and fill it with acts of worthiness.

Pharaoh asks: *How many days have you lived in the years of your life?* In his response, Yaakov differentiates between living and existing: I have not *lived* much, but I have *sojourned* on earth a hundred and thirty years. The days of the years that I can call my *life* – a fulfillment of my mission – are few. In his humility, Yaakov considers the *days* of his life as woefully fewer than the *days* of the lives of his fathers. In his mind, their *days* added up to lives of greater moral worth.

Yaakov here teaches us that the way to live a full life is by living day to day and by utilizing each day to the fullest.

- Sources: Commentary, Bereishet 47:8; Bereishet 23:1; Tehillim 90