

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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CHAZAK CHAZAK VENISCHAZEK!

Why do we say “*Chazak chazak venischazek*” when we finish a Chumash?

On a simple level, finishing a Chumash in Torah is an opportune time to gather strength and inspiration. This is based on the Midrash which states that when Yehoshua finished studying the Torah, Hashem told him, “Be strong and courageous!”

But *chazak chazak venischazek* is more than just a general call to strengthen ourselves. Everything in Torah is precise. Since these words are proclaimed after the final *possuk* in the *sefer*, there must be some connection between the two.

Moreover: The final *possuk* is the source from which we derive this strength.

A PERPLEXING CONCLUSION

However, the final *possuk* in Sefer Bereishis does not seem to be the best place to look for encouragement.

The *possuk* relates that Yosef passed away, and his body was embalmed and placed in a casket in Mitzrayim. This was in direct contrast to Yaakov, who made Yosef swear that he would bury him in Eretz Yisroel. Yosef, on the other hand, remained buried in Mitzrayim, and not just temporarily, but for the remainder of the Jews’ 210-year stay there. It was only then that his body was finally transferred to Eretz Yisroel (which took an additional forty years to come to fruition).

What type of inspiration are we supposed to get from this?!

Furthermore: How does this *possuk* comply with the principle that each *sefer* is supposed to conclude on a good note?

OUR STRAIGHT FOREFATHERS

Sefer Bereishis is called Sefer haYashar—The Book of the Upright, as it describes the life of the *avos*, who were righteous and upright. Sefer Shemos is called Sefer HaGeulah—The Book of Redemption, as it relates the story of the persecution of the

Jews in Mitzrayim and their subsequent freedom.

Why were the *avos* called *yesharim*, upright? Chassidus explains that *yashar* can also mean *straight*. When something is straight, it stays the way it is from the beginning until the end. The *avos* were “straight”: Even upon descending to this world, their source on High continued to illuminate them, allowing them to retain the high spiritual state they had enjoyed Above.

This theme was reflected in their physical lives as well, in that a change of location did not change their status.

We see this with Yaakov. Although journeying to Mitzrayim was certainly

a *yeridah*, he felt Hashem accompanying him there, and therefore, in many ways, things stayed the same as they had been in Eretz Yisroel: The Jews dwelled in Goshen, the choicest part of the land, and Yaakov was respected by the local inhabitants. It was only once Yaakov and his sons passed away that *golus Mitzrayim* began in earnest. (In this area, the *shevatim* are seen as a continuation of the *avos*, and therefore the brunt of *golus* only began once they, too, had passed on.)

These two *sefarim* thus reflect two distinct eras: The era of Bereishis, when the *yesharim* lived and there was no room for *golus*, and the era of Shemos, when the Jews were enslaved.

THE GOAL OF GOLUS

However, Sefer Shemos is known not as Sefer HaGolus, but rather as Sefer HaGeulah, because that is the goal of *golus*: the subsequent *geulah*.

The purpose of every *yeridah* is to lead to an *aliyah*. Moreover, the resulting *aliyah* is not simply a return to the pre-*yeridah* state; it is a level that had never been attained before.

Similarly, the reason the Jews were oppressed in Mitzrayim was so they would ultimately be redeemed. *Geulas Mitzrayim* climaxed with receiving the Torah, which surpassed not only Yaakov’s state in Mitzrayim before the *shibud*, but his state in Eretz Yisroel, too. But in order to attain this *aliyah*, it was

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necessary to undergo a *yeridah*—first Yaakov's descent to Mitzrayim, and then the backbreaking labor that followed the passing of Yaakov and his sons.

One of the objectives of *golus Mitzrayim* was to elevate the sparks of *kedushah* hidden in that land. Hashem promised Avraham that the Jews would leave Mitzrayim with "great riches." This refers not only to material wealth, but to spiritual wealth as well—the lofty sparks of *kedushah* lying dormant in that land. This boost of *kedushah* prepared the Jews to receive the Torah at Har Sinai.

(The Arizal explains that this is the deeper meaning of the *eirev rav* who accompanied the Jews out of Mitzrayim. The *gematriya* of *rav* is 202, hinting that the Jews successfully elevated 202 out of the 288 sparks of *kedushah*.)

All this could not have been accomplished so long as Yaakov and the *shevatim* were still alive. It was only once they had passed away that the persecution of Mitzrayim could begin, initiating the process of *birur hanitzotzos* which ultimately led to the *geulah* and Matan Torah.

YOSEF IS WITH US!

Let's imagine a Jew slaving away in Mitzrayim. He knows there is a purpose to it all, and that the terrible suffering he is experiencing will lead to the greatest *aliyah*. He also knows that this *aliyah* can only be achieved in the absence of Yaakov and his sons.

However, while he knows that all this is true, in the meantime the situation is quite bleak. "How can I survive so much suffering for so many years without Yaakov and Yosef?!" he cries out bitterly.

The Zohar explains that this is why Yosef was buried in

Mitzrayim, unlike his father. Yosef's *aron* was the counterpart of the *aron* of the *shechinah* (and indeed, during the forty years in the desert, both *aronos* were carried side by side). Knowing that Yosef, and thereby the *shechinah*, was with them in *golus* gave the Jews the strength to persevere, so that instead of being overwhelmed by their surroundings, they prevailed with flying colors.

AN ENCOURAGING POSSUK

All this relates perfectly to our situation today.

Just like *golus Mitzrayim*, the present *golus*—*golus Edom*—is a preparation for the *geulah* and for the new dimension of Torah that will then be revealed. In fact, this is why this *golus* is so long—because the subsequent *aliyah* will be that much greater.

However, just as then we cry out today: "Yes, we know that *yeridah tzorech aliyah*, but in the meantime the *golus* is long and bitter. How will we persevere?!"

The last *possuk* of Sefer Bereishis gives us a dose of encouragement: "Yosef was placed in a casket in Mitzrayim." We have with us the power of the *tzaddikim* of previous generations who are buried with us in *chutz la'aretz* (and not in Eretz Yisroel). While they might not be with us physically, they are here nonetheless, encouraging and inspiring us so that we will triumph over *golus* and merit the *geulah*.

For further study, see *Sefer Hasichos* 5747, vol. 1, pp. 249ff.

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