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Vayigash 5774

Ahavas Yisroel

Rabbi Baruch Simon

Parshas Vayigash is usually read within the week of Asara B'Teves, the day on which the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem. This concurrence can be explained by the fact that the idea of Ahavas Yisroel (loving our fellow Jew), which permeates Parshas Vayigash, is crucial in understanding Asara B'Teves.

Parshas Vayigash recounts the story of the reunification of Yosef with his brothers. The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh points out that Yosef twice told his brothers “Ani Yosef,” or that “I am Yosef,” and the second time he added “acheichem,” meaning that “I am your brother” (Bereishes 45:3-4). The Ohr HaChayim explains that Yosef repeated this phrase twice, because while the brothers were embarrassed at the fact that they had sold Yosef, they did not truly believe that this person was their brother. Therefore, Yosef addressed both concerns by telling them that he is Yosef, and despite the fact that they sold him into slavery, he always loved them and would deal with them as a loving brother. This highlights the importance of Ahavas Yisroel.

Regarding the midah of Ahavas Yisroel, Yosef serves as a role model for all of Klal Yisroel. Yosef did not take revenge on his brothers, but instead tried to inspire and create a loving relationship. He assuaged their fears and told them that everything turned out well in the end. Just as Yosef was careful when addressing his brothers' feelings, every individual must be sensitive to others. This was the greatness of Yosef and is the epitome of Ahavas Yisroel.

The Maharal writes that a person who loves Hashem will look to love all of his “children.” Thus, a person who hates other people is in essence showing his hatred of God, as he displays his disgust for something God created in His own image. As people are unable to comprehend Hashem's master plan for everybody in this world, they must show love to all God's creations and not harbor hatred for

anyone. As it is written in the Midrash, all Hashem wants from the Jewish People is that they should love, honor, and respect each other.

Before examining the connection between Parshas Vayigash and Asara B'Teves, a closer inspection of the fast-day is necessary. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l, once commented that during the siege on Asara B'Teves, there was a tremendous opportunity for the Jewish people to unite in time of pain and sorrow. The Rebbe remarked that if the Jews would have united, the Temple would not have been destroyed. However, the Jews were unsuccessful and their failure directly resulted in the Churban HaBayis.

The Talmud Yerushalmi writes that in any generation, if the Temple is not rebuilt, it is considered as if it had been destroyed in that generation. Every Asara B'Teves, Hashem decides if the Temple will be rebuilt that year, or if the Temple will again be “destroyed.” Therefore, Asara B'Teves is not just a day mourning the Babylonian siege of Yerushalayim, but is instead a day of introspection looking at the possibility of correcting our sins, resulting in the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash.

After explaining the importance of Asara B'Teves as a day of introspection and correction, it is clear why Parshas Vayigash is read during that week. Parshas Vayigash recounts the story of Yosef and his brothers, a story permeating with the idea of Ahavas Yisroel. Hashem demands from Klal Yisroel that they accept Yosef as their role model in loving all fellow Jews. If the people of the Jewish Nation can learn to respect and love each other, then they are in essence “correcting” the mistake of Asara B'Teves, when Am Yisroel was unable to create a strong level of unity.

We pray that Hashem should decide that this Tisha B'Av should be a time of joy and happiness instead of a time of sorrow and mourning.

Judah's Plea to the Ruler of Egypt

Rabbi David Horwitz

A student I had quite a number of years ago, who had confided in me that he had experienced much bullying, especially during his high school years, shared a crucial insight with me, one which was the fruit of “wisdom born in pain.” “Bullies,” he remarked, “move on. It’s easy for them. They forget about the incidents in which they were cruel to someone, and don’t give it a second thought. But it is harder for the bullied to move on!”

The beginning of Parashat Va-Yigash is an example of an event where the Torah records the words of a character (in this case, Judah) but does not discuss his internal frame of mind. Was he submissive to the mysterious ruler of Egypt who was now about to take away Benjamin? Was he, on the contrary, threatening or confrontational to the Egyptian? The Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (Genesis 93:6) cites various three opinions on the matter and states:

Then Judah came near unto him: R. Judah, R. Nehemiah and the Rabbis commented. R. Judah said, “He came near for battle, as in the verse, So Joab and the people that were with him drew nigh unto battle (II Samuel x:13).” R. Nehemiah said: He came near for conciliation [to appease him], as in the verse, Then the children of Judah came near unto Joshua (Josh. xiv:6)- to conciliate him [to appease him].” The Rabbis said, “Coming near applies to prayer, as in the verse, And it came to pass at the time of the evening offering that Elijah the prophet came near, etc. (I Kings, xviii:36).” R. Leazar combined all three views: “I come whether it [will] be for battle, for conciliation, or for prayer.”

If one scans R. Menachem Mendel Kasher’s collection of Midrashim on the topic in his monumental Torah Shelema, one in fact finds that apparently, the majority of midrashic comments seem to that Judah actually threatened the ruler (as does Rashi, in his commentary ad loc.). In other words, Judah came for battle. Here and there, however, here are some sources that follow the shitah of R. Nehemiah understand that Judah was really, sincerely pleading for Benjamin and was honestly offering to serve as a slave in place of Benjamin. He was definitely not threatening the ruler of Egypt, explicitly or obliquely. An example of this latter opinion written in the medieval era can be found in a remarkable work called Coat of Many Cultures: The Story of Joseph in Spanish Literature 1200-

1492 (Selected, Translated, and Introduced by Michael McGaha [Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1997]). On p. 331ff. of that work he cites the interpretation of Judah’s words to the ruler of Egypt found in the 13th century book General estoria (General History). First, a few words about this source are in order.

The General estoria (General History) (begun 1272) of Alfonso X the Learned, King of Castile (1221-1284), has been described as the first attempt to write a history of the world in a modern language (in this case, medieval Castilian, a forerunner to modern Spanish). The principle sources of the General estoria are the Bible, Josephus’s Antiquities of the Jews, Peter Comestor’s 12th century Historia Scholastica and the Book of Roads and Kingdoms of Abu ‘Ubaid al-Bakri (d. 1094), “the most important geographer that Arab Spain ever produced.” How involved in the actual production of the work was King Alfonso? It is difficult to tell. It is known that he “caused to be assembled” the various sources, “selected from them the most reliable and the best that I knew,” and then “made this book” and “commanded” it to be written.” In general, the book has been praised as a medieval work that contains the “inclusion of many humanizing details.”

The question is: how does this work, as a representative example of a medieval interpretation of the Bible, look at the words of Judah to the mysterious ruler? The words of the General History read as follows:

When Judah had spoken these words, he bent his knees and prostrated himself on the ground before him, and said again, “Sir, I am your servant, and if you want to punish this deed, and take revenge for it, take me, and order all the punishments you like done unto me, but be so kind as to release Benjamin so that he may go with his brothers to his father, that his father not perish on his account. Unless he goes, I shall never return nor stand before my father to see him die of this pain. For all of us- both we and our father- are still grieving over the loss of the other one, and every day our grief over him weighs more heavily on our hearts, and our longing for him; and we are comfortless, and want to perish because of him. Sir, have pity on our father and on us. As I have just said, this is the great man’s honor: to forgive a great mistake and thereby be like God, Who does likewise and thence to win grace and honor.”

In short, this work followed the *shitah* of R. Nehemiah. It may be that *davka* in this type of depiction of Judah's approach towards Joseph, in the portrait already adumbrated and prefigured by the *shitah* of R. Nehemiah in the Midrash, there is an analogue in the *halakhot* of *teshuvah*. When one repents, one cannot hold on to any aspect of his former behavior. If he does, he would be "immersing with an [impure] insect in his hands, which invalidates his repentance." Judah, along with his brothers, had to (and indeed did) repent of their actions regarding Joseph. They certainly did not want to let Benjamin stay in Egypt and cause their aged father Jacob even more pain. But they also had to let go of the violence that characterized their behavior towards their little brother, when "we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us (Genesis 42:21)." According to this approach, Judah had to let go of that aspect of his

personality. If he would threaten to kill the ruler of Egypt, he would still be carrying a bit of a "might makes right" perspective. But Judah had to stop not only violence, but threats of violence. He had to follow the celebrated Mishnah in *Pirke Abot* that states the following: "Who is strong? He that conquers his desire."

Perhaps R. Nehemiah means to stress that only by truly coming not in war but as a contrite individual, Judah proved that he had turned over a new leaf. When Joseph saw that, he proceeded to reveal himself to his brothers, and the reunification of the sons of Jacob could start anew. And Judah could truly be the subject of his father's blessing, "You, O Judah, Your brothers shall praise (Genesis 49:8).

Learning the Lesson Before It's Too late

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

In one of the most dramatic conversations in the entire Torah, Yehuda confronts Yosef and pleads with him to free Binyomin. After recounting all of the events that have led up to this climactic moment, Yehuda makes an emotional appeal based on the impact that Binyomin's imprisonment will have on their father Yaakov. Yehuda concludes his plea by acknowledging his personal responsibility for his younger brother's welfare and, as a result, even offers himself as a prisoner in lieu of Binyomin.

At this point, after hearing Yehuda's request, "Lo yachol Yosef le'hisapeik" (Bereishis 45:1), Yosef could no longer control himself and could no longer withhold his true identity. After all of the years apart and alone, "Va'Yomer Yosef el echav," Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, "ani Yosef, ha-od avi chai," acknowledging his true identity and immediately asking about Yaakov (45:3).

Confronted with this startling revelation, "lo yachlu echav la'anos oso ki nivhalu mi'panav," the brothers were speechless, unable to respond because they were so ashamed.

Commenting on this verse, the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 93) makes a fascinating observation: "Oy lanu mi'yom ha-din, oy lanu mi'yom ha-tochachah," woe is to us from the Day of Judgment; woe is to us from the Day of Rebuke. In other words, if this is how the brothers reacted to

Yosef's revelation then how much more should every person fear God's ultimate judgment.

While the basic lesson of the Midrash seems straightforward and pertinent, the commentators have nevertheless struggled to understand the source of the Midrash. After all, the assumption of the Midrash seems to be that Yosef rebuked his brothers – and hence we should fear God's rebuke – but there is no mention in the text of any actual rebuke. All Yosef did was reveal his identity; we might have expected him to continue with some stinging critique, but in fact he did not. Where, then, did the Midrash glean its teaching from?

Moreover, while it is a central tenet of Jewish belief that there will be an ultimate Day of Judgment when every person will have to answer for his or her behavior, since when will that also include a mussar schmooze!? Are we really going to be rebuked by Hashem?

Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (*Liferakim*, p. 607) suggests that by not lashing out at or threatening his brothers Yosef gave them, in essence, the greatest possible rebuke. When the brothers realized that, despite Yosef's immense power, Yosef actually had no intention of harming them, at that moment they truly understood the error of their ways and they were truly humiliated. Similarly, says R. Weinberg, the additional *tochachah* that accompanies the Day of Judgment

will not result from anything God actually says, but rather from our recognition of His greatness. When clearly confronted with this previously unappreciated reality the shame we feel will be the ultimate rebuke.

The Shem Mi'Shmuel (5671) offers a different explanation which, while similar in one respect, is ultimately quite different from R. Weinberg's suggestion.

Numerous meforshim have pointed out that Yosef initially withheld his identity from the brothers as a way of testing whether they had learned their lesson from the way they had treated him. Yosef wanted to see if they possessed the necessary familial responsibility to protect their brother Binyamin and to be sensitive to their father's pain – both of which had been lacking all those years before when they threw him into the pit and told Yaakov that he had been killed. Once Yosef saw what Yehuda was prepared to do for Binyamin and Yaakov, at that point Yosef understood that his mission was complete – the brothers had learned their lesson – and he revealed himself.

However, from the brother's perspective something very different occurred. From the moment that Yosef revealed himself their entire world view and self-image came crashing

down. Yosef was alive and the second in command of Egypt – this was living proof of the validity of Yosef's dreams and, more importantly, this demonstrated the error of their judgment and treatment of their brother. And not only did they realize their mistakes – the yom ha-din – but they also came to the crushing realization of time and potential lost. How different could and would things have been had they correctly judged Yosef all those years ago? How much could all of them have accomplished over the previous 22 years had they not made such a catastrophic error? Yosef didn't rebuke them – he didn't have to; their own realization of the lost potential was the only rebuke they needed, and it truly was a yom ha-tochachah. Similarly, when we are confronted with the potential that we never realized we too will feel a stinging rebuke that does not need to be articulated.

The story of Yosef's revelation to his brothers provides us with a powerful model of spiritual growth. Whether we are motivated by the greatness of Hashem, as R. Weinberg suggested, or we are inspired by our own potential for greatness, as the Shem Mi'Shmuel explained, it is far better to learn the lesson now and not wait until the Day of Rebuke.

Lessons from Beer Sheva

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

The Torah records that Yosef's brothers met with Pharaoh, that Yaakov subsequently met with Pharaoh, and that it was Yosef who arranged these meetings. (Bereshis 46:31-47:10)

Why did Yosef's brothers meet with Pharaoh first? Would it not have been more proper and respectful toward Yaakov for him to precede his sons in meeting with Pharaoh? Why did Yaakov's sons precede him in this matter?

The simple answer is that it was first necessary to secure Pharaoh's commitment for B'nei Yisroel to be granted residence in Goshen, in order to establish a distinct and homogeneous Jewish neighborhood in Mitzrayim. Pharaoh's commitment to this critical and urgent need had to be requested by Yosef's brothers, who were at that point in time the chief shepherds of B'nei Yisroel and could ably demonstrate their need for residence in Goshen, which was prime pasture land. Only after being granted this request could the other introductions and meetings, such as Yaakov's

audience with Pharaoh, occur.

While it is obvious from the Torah that securing Pharaoh's commitment to grant B'nei Yisroel residence in Goshen was critical, and we read of Yosef's detailed prepping of his brothers before meeting with Pharaoh in order to persuade Pharaoh to consent to this plan (ibid. 46:32-34), it is odd that such effort was really necessary. After all, Pharaoh himself had already told Yosef, "Take your father and your households and come to me here, and I will give you the choicest of the Land of Egypt, and you shall eat of the fat of the Land... Take wagons to transport your families and wives, and bring your father here. And do not worry about your possessions, for the best of Egypt will be yours." (Ibid. 45:18-20)

Seeing that Pharaoh had already consented to grant B'nei Yisroel prime residence in Mitzrayim and to provide them with the maximal bounty of his country, why did Yosef need to scheme with his brothers in order to convince

Pharaoh to grant them residence in Goshen? It would seem that residence in any part of the country with its unlimited bounty upon demand had already been promised by Pharaoh. Why was there a need to now start from scratch and persuade Pharaoh to do that which he had already promised?

As midrashim and commentators have noted, Pharaoh and his nation only extended special courtesies to Yosef and his family as long as Yosef's services were needed. After Yosef's management of the years of famine was completed, Pharaoh was no longer on close personal terms with Yosef. As soon as Yosef and his brothers passed away, Egypt's enslavement of B'nei Yisroel commenced. In short, Egypt's professed benevolent relationship with Yosef and his family was in truth purely utilitarian.

Yosef thus knew that, despite Pharaoh's grand and broad initial promises to grant B'nei Yisroel everything that Mitzrayim had to offer, it would be necessary to scheme and persuade in order for Pharaoh to keep his word. It is for this reason that before introducing Yaakov Avinu to Pharaoh, Yosef had to first secure proper and critical residence for B'nei Yisroel in Mitzrayim, and he therefore presented his brothers to Pharaoh to plead this case prior to doing anything else. Only after this task was accomplished was Yaakov Avinu's audience with Pharaoh, which should have been the first item on the agenda, able to occur.

Based upon this understanding, we can perhaps gain new insight into an event recorded earlier in the parshah. As soon as Yaakov Avinu was told that Yosef was alive, he was determined to see Yosef, and he traveled southward toward Mitzrayim. "And he came to Beer Sheva and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzchak." (Ibid. 46:1) Midrashim and commentators ask why Yaakov traveled specifically to Beer Sheva to offer korbanos, and why the korbanos were offered "to the God of his father Yitzchak", whereas the Torah typically states "the God of Avrohom and Yitzchak" (or the reverse).

In Parshas Toldos, the Torah describes the disputes between Yitzchak Avinu and Avimelech and the arguments between Yitzchak's and Avimelech's servants, all relating to the wells of Avrohom Avinu which were taken over by Avimelech and his nation and the resentment toward Yitzchak on the part of Avimelech. Rather than attempt to appease Avimelech, Yitzchak was firm, and in the end, it was Avimelech and his general who came to Yitzchak in appeasement. This occurred in Beer Sheva. (Ibid. 26:13-33)

When Yaakov stopped at Beer Sheva on his way to Mitzrayim "and offered korbanos to the God of his father Yitzchak", Yaakov sought to connect with the legacy that Yitzchak created at Beer Sheva. Yaakov knew that his trek to Mitzrayim and his family's stay there would elicit all types of challenges from the Egyptians. Mitzrayim was the world center of hedonism, and its values clashed head-on with those of Yaakov and his family. Whereas Pharaoh externally expressed benevolence and refinement, Yaakov knew that it was a façade for utilitarianism and personal needs and desires. In order to prepare for the value clash that his family was about to experience in Mitzrayim, and as a means of inoculation for the challenges of Pharaoh, Yaakov needed the inspiration and fortitude as exemplified by his father Yitzchak at Beer Sheva when dealing with Avimelech, for Avimelech's quest for personal gratification and his internal lack of proper values were akin to those of Pharaoh. Yaakov sought to draw from his father's example and legacy at Beer Sheva of uncompromising steadfastness, in order to be ready for similar challenges in Egypt. This is why he stopped to sacrifice at Beer Sheva on his way to Mitzrayim and thereupon invoked the name of the God of his father Yitzchak.

One of the most difficult aspects of life in the greater world for the Jew to assimilate and absorb is the lack of integrity and truth among many people and systems. Whereas the Torah teaches us honesty, and we are born with a Divinely-ordained desire for truth, the outside world often seeks anything but truth, and words and promises are only meaningful to the extent that they feed a self-serving agenda. This lack of emes can influence the Torah Jew and result in religious dilution, compromise and destruction. It can devalue Torah observance and utterly strip the Jew of his integrity and his pure commitment to Hashem.

Yaakov, in his wisdom, and drawing from the lessons of his father Yitzchak, was aware of the acute challenges to his value system which Mitzrayim would pose. Yosef, following the ways of Yaakov, acted upon this concern by orchestrating his brothers' session with Pharaoh and giving it utmost priority.

May we too draw from the example and inspiration of the Avos as we continue our mission to hold fast to and promulgate Torah, with Hashem's help.

Why did Yosef cry over the Churban?

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

When Yosef meets Binyamin for the first time in two decades, Rashi writes, quoting Chazal, that he asks Binyamin as to whether he has children. Binyamin replies that indeed he has ten sons, all of whom are named in some way related to Yosef. For example, Bela, because Yosef was *nivla* (swallowed up) among the nations; Becher, because Yosef was the *bechor* of his mother; Chupim, because Binyamin and Yosef were not present at each other's *chuppah*. When Yosef heard this, he could not restrain himself and fell upon Binyamin's neck in tears.

This outburst is certainly a natural release of Yosef's pent-up longing for his brother. Were Yosef not to burst out in tears, we would probably be quite surprised. These tears need no explanation. Yet Rashi explains that Yosef cried not because of this emotional reunion, but because he foresaw the future destructions of the First and Second Beit HaMikdash, which would be built in Binyamin's portion in Eretz Yisrael.

The Sfat Emet poses the obvious question: Why does Yosef cry over the Churban at this exact moment? Why can't he cry because of the emotional reunion with his brothers? The Churban hardly seems relevant.

The answer is that Yosef had a goal to unite his brothers. He understood that the only way to realize this goal given the current circumstances was to cause them *tzarot* – through the *tzarot* they would bond together and come to the realization, as they did, that the current stressors were punishment for the sale of Yosef. The genius of Yosef is apparent in the parallelism between the *tzarot* he causes them and their cruelty to him twenty-two years prior:

1) At first, Yosef imprisons all of the brothers and declares that one brother will go home to bring Binyamin while the rest remain behind. He then changes his mind and sends nine of the ten brothers who came to Mitzrayim back to bring Binyamin while one remains behind. The brothers immediately declare, "Aval asheimim anachnu al achinu, We are truly guilty concerning our brother" (Bereishit 42:21), recognizing the first parallelism: twenty-two years earlier, ten brothers had left home and only nine returned from the *bor* (pit), leaving Yosef behind; now, ten brothers had left home for Mitzrayim and only nine would return from the *bor*

(prison), leaving Shimon behind.

2) When Yosef's brothers find their money in the sacks of grain they had purchased, they have their second sign. Nine brothers had returned home with money from the sale of Yosef as well.

When Yosef's brothers return home and Yaakov sees their money, he doesn't say a word. But when they tell him that they must bring Binyamin to Mitzrayim, he adamantly opposes them. Twice, he says, you've come home with money and without a brother: first Yosef, now Shimon. Would I let the same fate befall Binyamin? What convinced him to let up and allow Binyamin to be brought down to Mitzrayim was Yehudah's personal guarantee – when Yaakov saw that a son of Leah, indeed the most important son of Leah, was prepared to guarantee the safety of a son of Rachel, he was prepared to let them go.

When Yosef heard from Yehudah that he had personally guaranteed the safety of Binyamin, Yosef understood that his mission was nearing its end. Yosef only needed to hold a little longer in order for the *achdut* to become complete before revealing himself to his brothers. But for some unknown reason, the Torah tells us that Yosef was unable to hold back his emotions, despite the fact that he knew he was revealing himself before the right time, that the brothers' *achdut* was not 100% perfect. If there is a flaw in the "foundation," it would become apparent once the "building" was built – at some point, the building would fall to ruins because of this tiny flaw in its foundation. This was the Churban Bayit, and this is why Yosef mourned its destruction at this moment, showing his brothers that the key to future generations' strength and completeness in our land is *achdut*. Against our *achdut*, none can stand.

The more we feel true *areivut*, responsibility for one another—the more we fulfill Yehudah's promise to Yaakov, which resulted in the proclamation of "Ani Yosef, I am Yosef" (Bereishit 45:3)—the sooner we will hear the proclamation of "Ani Hashem, I am God" speedily in our days.

A Disappointing Encounter?

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

After orchestrating his family's descent to Egypt, Yosef brings his father before the Egyptian king. The patriarch blesses Pharaoh and the king asks, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"

Yaakov responds, "The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred thirty years. Few and difficult were the days of the years of my life and they did not reach the days of the years of the lives of my fathers, in the days of their sojourning."

Yaakov blesses Pharaoh again, and the encounter ends.

Questions

The conversation between Yaakov and Pharaoh can only be described as deeply disappointing. The setting, after all, is momentous. This is not only an encounter between two great world leaders, but a confrontation between two vastly different, powerful cultures. Meeting for the first and only recorded time are the monarch of the world's greatest empire and the last patriarch, the progenitor of an eternal nation which will outlast countless empires beyond Egypt.

We wait with bated breath as two worlds collide, only to finally ask in frustration: Is this all these great leaders had to say to each other?

Why is Pharaoh so concerned with Yaakov's age?

What is the real meaning of Yaakov's elliptical response to the king?

Why the diplomatic doublespeak? Why not answer simply and directly?

Above all, if the conversation between Yaakov and Pharaoh was so banal, why does the Torah bother to record it at all?

Approaches

A: Clearly there is much more to this brief encounter than meets the eye. Carefully read, the dialogue actually reflects a vast philosophical divide between the participants. This rift becomes clear when Yaakov, responding to Pharaoh's inquiry, distinguishes between two concepts: *chaim* (life) and *megurim* (sojourning).

Once this distinction is noted, the conversation unfolds with evident subtext. Pharaoh, king of an empire preoccupied with life, death and life beyond death, turns to the patriarch and, seeing a man apparently older than any

he has met before, exclaims:

"How many are the days of the years of your life?" My God, how old are you? How have you managed to attain the longevity we all seek? What is your secret?

Yaakov replies:

"The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred thirty years." Do not be impressed with my chronological age. Living long is, in and of itself, no accomplishment at all. There is a vast difference between life and sojourning, between living and existing. I have existed, but not lived, for one hundred thirty years.

"Few and difficult were the days of the years of my life and they did not reach the days of the years of the lives of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." Do not envy me. My days of true life, of peace, comfort and ease, have been few and far between. Do not aspire to simple sojourning, to longevity alone. Be impressed, instead, by life – years of meaning. Chronological age is of little value when your days and years have been as difficult as mine.

In subtle yet emphatic fashion, Yaakov reprimands Pharaoh for his preoccupation with prolonged existence. The patriarch has learned a difficult lesson through his years of struggle with external foes and internal family strife. What counts, says Yaakov, are years of *chaim* – life – meaningful years of peace, comfort and ease.

B: One final, powerful twist to the substance of this conversation, however, emerges from a lesson possibly learned by the patriarch later in his life.

The last parsha in Sefer Bereishit, Parshat Vayechi, opens with the statement "Vayechi Yaakov b'eretz Mitzraim shva esrei shana (And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years)."

The Torah rarely records the exact length of periods in the lives of its heroes. Computations concerning the passage of time are usually made by the rabbis, based upon hints within the text. Why, then, does the Torah go out of its way to specify the length of time that Yaakov lived in Egypt?

Because, some commentaries explain, these were the only years that Yaakov truly lived (aside, perhaps, from the years between Yosef's birth and his sale into servitude). Finally, after a lifetime of struggle, reunited with his

beloved Yosef, surrounded by a harmonious family, Yaakov earns the peace of mind and spirit which has eluded him for so long. He ultimately experiences years of chaim – seventeen years of life.

The truth, however, is more complicated than it seems.

While Yaakov's last years may very well have been his only years of peace and quiet, they were also the only years of Yaakov's life that we know nothing about. In stark contrast to the rest of his existence, Yaakov's years in Egypt produced no great contribution.

As Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch notes, "The troubled years of his life, in which the test had to be gone through... were those in which Yaakov won his everlasting national importance."

Perhaps Yaakov learns, in his final days, that Pharaoh was not the only one mistaken in his apprehension of life's goals. For while the quality of life cannot be measured by longevity alone, neither can it be measured by the attainment of comfort or ease. The very struggle of living, with all its pain and challenge, creates the cauldron from which growth and contribution can emerge.

Points to Ponder

How is the quality of our lives ultimately to be judged? Is our purpose the pursuit of happiness, comfort, peace, tranquility? Is success to be measured by the attainment of those goals?

One of the most creative scholars of our day, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, bemoans the fact that "peace of mind" has become in our time "a spiritual ideal and significant

life goal, the final achievement to which various schools of thought and meditation aspire."

"Peace with no content," continues Steinsaltz, "meaningless tranquility, rest without sanctity – all are empty vessels.... There are goals that cannot be attained except through struggle waged within the soul."

For his part, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik, considered by many the foremost teacher of our era, proclaims that religion does not provide a solution to life's problems but, instead, "deepens the problem."

"The beauty of religion with its grandiose vistas," maintains Rabbi Soloveitchik, "reveals itself to man not in solutions, but in problems, not in harmony, but in the constant conflict of diversified forces and trends."

In a society where so many have achieved a level of physical comfort and ease undreamt of in previous years, we ironically witness an extraordinary measure of existential sadness and spiritual disquiet. The more "happiness" is pursued as a goal, the more elusive it becomes. Man is built to struggle with himself, his surroundings, his fate, even with his Creator – to never be satisfied with the world as it is, but to strive to make it better. The more we try to retreat from this struggle of life, the emptier our lives become.

Significance will be found not in the futile search for "peace of mind" but in the embrace of what Steinsaltz calls the "strife of the spirit." From the battlefield of that effort, value, purpose, accomplishment and true happiness emerge.