

Kriyat HaTorah Companion 2.0

Questions Raised in Each Aliya

Vayechi

December 2017 | Tevet 5778

Shabbat Shalom

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Aliya 1 | 47:28-48:9

Examine verse 47:28.

Why are we told how long Ya'akov lived in Egypt? Why does this *Parsha* begin without a break from the last one?

Rashi suggests that, with the death of Ya'akov, the story of Jewish freedom closed and Jewish slavery began. The **Da'at Zkenim** does not like this interpretation because the rule of Yosef lasted for 54 years after the death of Ya'akov. The **Da'at Zkenim** also comments that just as Yosef was provided for in the first 17 years of his life, so too Yosef provided for Ya'akov in the last 17 years of Ya'akov's life. Thus, we record how many years Ya'akov lived in Egypt. The **Chizkuni** says that we stress the 17 years in which Ya'akov lived in Egypt because these were the only years in which he lived peacefully without worry. These were the years that he could truly live.

Aliya 2 | 48:10-16

Examine verse 48:10.

How is it that Ya'akov sees the sons of Yosef in verse 48:8 but does not recognize them here?

Rashbam suggests that even though Ya'akov was blind at this time (verse 48:10) he was still able to see silhouettes. Ya'akov recognizes the shape of his grandchildren but could not see their faces. **Rabbeinu Bahya** suggests that in verse 48:8 Ya'akov sees a vision of Yosef's sons but cannot actually see them as stated in 48:10. The **Ohr HaChaim** is amazed: if Ya'akov doesn't recognize his grandchildren, does that mean in his 17 years in Egypt, he never learned with his grandchildren? He answers that in order to impart a blessing upon Ephraim & Menashe, he needs to hear Yosef describe them. This is to help Ya'akov bless from a place of fatherly love.

Aliya 3 | 48:17-22

Examine verse 48:17.

Why did Yosef assume that Ya'akov was confused and was not switching his hands deliberately?

The **Da'at Zkenim** suggests that Yosef thought that Ya'akov doubted whether Yosef knew which child should go under which hand. Yosef, agitated by this assumption, tries to change his father's hands. The **Ramban** suggests that Yosef was concerned that Ya'akov had lost his divine connection, and therefore the entire blessing would be ineffective. What Yosef perceived as a mistake was in fact itself divine will. The **Netziv**, offering further context to the **Ramban**, suggests that Yosef was indeed concerned that Ya'akov would not bless his kids using *Ruach HaKodesh*. Thus, Yosef devised a type of test, i.e. changing his father's hands, to see if Ya'akov was acting with intent.

Aliya 4 | 49:1-18

Examine verse 49:1.

Who is Ya'akov gathering in this verse? Why does Ya'akov want to tell his sons about the end of days and not the conclusion of the Egyptian exile?

The **Rashbam** suggests that Ya'akov called out to his descendants who had turned into hundreds of thousands of people in 17 years (The Sages suggest they were already at 600,000 in number). **Rabbeinu Bachya** suggests that Ya'akov had already told his sons about the end of the current Egyptian exile in 48:21. He continues to suggest that the final redemption is a natural out-spring of the Egyptian redemption and therefore it was appropriate for Ya'akov to speak of the end of days. Though the Egyptian exile begins, they also know that this will be a limited exile.

Aliya 5 | 49:19-26

Examine verse 49:19.

Why does Ya'akov specifically bless the tribe of Gad with this blessing? What does this blessing mean?

Rashi suggests that this blessing is specifically one for the safekeeping of the soldiers of the tribe of Gad. They will all return safely from war. The **Sforno** points out that this blessing was ultimately one of unity. Unlike the blessing offered to the tribe of Dan that highlighted the strength of individuals (49:17), this blessing to the tribe of Gad highlights their ability to fight as a unit. The **Bekhor Shor** points out that the tribe of Gad will end up residing on the other side of the Jordan. They will fight the battle to conquer the land, as negotiated with Moshe, but this blessing will actually assure their safe return once they had finished their assistance in conquering Israel.

Aliya 6 | 49:27-50:20

Examine verse 49:33.

Why does the Torah tell us that Ya'akov "drew his feet into the bed?"

The **Ibn Ezra** suggests that Ya'akov is sitting on the edge of his bed with his legs dangling, like was the custom in Edom (and not in Egypt). This made his body language distinctive and different than everyone else in the room. The **Da'at Zkenim** suggests that Ya'akov had gathered all of his strength to bless his children. Now that he was done, he lost the strength to continue sitting up. The **Ohr HaChaim** says that Ya'akov's ability to control his feet shows that he did not die in the standard way. He was in full control up until the end. Since the verse is not explicit about Ya'akov's death, Jews live for millennia with the phrase 'Am Yisrael Chai'.

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Aliya 7 | 50:21-26

Examine verse 50:21.

What is Yosef saying in the second half of this verse? What reassurance is this offering?

Rashi suggests that Yosef is saying that his brothers' lives prove that Yosef was born into freedom and not into slavery, as was rumored, and therefore it was necessary that they stay alive. **Rabbeinu Bahya** offers the same comment as **Rashi** & he suggests that Yosef says to the brothers that just as they were unable to extinguish his light, he too would be unable to extinguish the ten lights of his brothers. *How powerful it must have been for them to hear Yosef describe each of them as a powerful light and how different that is from Yosef's initial dreams.*