

Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. (1:6)

Sforno comments that, as long as any member of the original generation that had descended with Yaakov *Avinu* to Egypt was still alive, the present generation was able to maintain the proper spiritual level. Once they were gone, however, the spiritual decline which led to slavery and persecution accelerated. In his commentary to *Shemos* 6:16, *Rashi* teaches that, as long as a member of the original group of immigrants was alive, the Jews enjoyed freedom. The slavery commenced with the demise of the last one. This seems inconsistent with *Rashi's* commentary to the beginning of *Parashas Vayechi* (*Bereishis* 47:28), where he describes *Vayechi* as a *parsha setumah*, closed *parsha*. He explains that the lack of the nine-letter spacing that usually divides the previous *parsha* (*Vayigash*) from the next one reflects a condition which teaches us something about the Jewish People's mood when the Patriarch died. At that moment their hearts were "closed", in anticipation of the persecution and suffering that would be their lot immediately following his death. If, in fact, the *shibud*, enslavement, did not begin until everyone had passed on, why were they so overcome by the exile? Indeed, Yaakov sought to reveal to them the source of hope, the end to the exile, but was prevented from doing so by Hashem. Were they enslaved – or not?

Horav Dov Schwartzman, zl, distinguishes between two forms of *shibud*, enslavement. The Torah teaches us, *Vayechi Yaakov b'ereitz Mitzrayim*, "And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt." What does "living" in Egypt mean? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *Yaakov Avinu lo meis*, "Yaakov did not die." An eternal trait of our Patriarch, Yaakov, transcends the *galus*, bitter exile. This ability to rise above the exile, to maintain a sense of fidelity to Hashem, to continue hoping for redemption and waiting for it daily, is intrinsic to *Vayechi Yaakov*. The Patriarch saw beyond the pain, perceived beyond the troubles, because his life source was Hashem. Yaakov's inextricable bond to the Almighty was an enduring quality, which he infused in his descendants throughout the generations. *Vayechi Yaakov b'ereitz Mitzrayim* is the catchphrase for Jewish transcendence in the diaspora, for the almost daily confrontation with adversity and pain. This emotion comprises our generative force that keeps us strong and committed despite the overwhelming challenges which confront us at every turn.

Rashi alludes to the idea that our *parsha* is closed due to two factors: The eyes and heart of the people became closed in response to the upcoming enslavement; Yaakov wanted to reveal the end of the exile to his descendants, and his "access" was blocked. If the *shibud* had not yet commenced, why were the people so "closed"? Apparently, two aspects to the exile/enslavement existed. With Yaakov's passing, an aspect of *shibud Mitzrayim* began, which may be referred to as *timtum ha'lev*, "stuffed/oppressed heart." Depression, hopelessness, is a symptom of *timtum ha'lev*. When Yaakov was alive, the Egyptians had no adverse influence over the Jews. He lived – and infused his family – with life, hope and optimism. Once Yaakov was gone, the Egyptians began to enslave the Jews. This does not mean that there was actual slavery. It is just that the Egyptian

mindset took over their lives. They no longer expressed the emotions of hope for the future, and joy of life in the present that had infused them when the Patriarch had been alive.

Shibud malchiyos, enslavement by (gentile) monarchies, is a term which describes the Jew under the influence of the gentile nations; subject to their mindset, culture, habits and lifestyle. The Jew loses his uniqueness, his individuality, his independence, his Jewish selfhood. This is what is meant by the eyes and heart of the Jews were closed due to the troubles of the enslavement.

The second reason that our *parsha* is designated a *parsha setumah* is that Yaakov was prevented from revealing the end of the exile. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that it was not simply the end of the Egyptian exile which he wanted to reveal, because this was no secret. Four hundred years, which began with the *Bris bein HaBesarim*, Covenant Between the Parts, was the timespan allotted for the Egyptian exile. It was the end to all exiles, the Final Redemption, which Yaakov wanted to share with his children, but it was blocked to him.

Revealing the end to our *tzaros*, troubles, by extension, also indicates to us what is incumbent upon us to do, so that this event takes place in the nearest future. Thus, Yaakov's children would develop an acute understanding of their obligations in this life. What happened? Why did he stop? The *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, left him. This means that Hashem veiled the means for effecting the Redemption in a cloak of ambiguity. The people knew that the Redemption would occur. How – and when – was not revealed. We will just have to continue acting appropriately by focusing upon our responsibility and obligation to Hashem while we are in this world, never giving up hope and never ceasing from trying to bring about an end to our *galus*.