

And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. (47:28)

Vayechi is considered to be a *parsha setumah*, a sealed *parsha*, because in the *Sefer Torah* there is no sign distinguishing it from the previous *parsha*, *Vayigash*. *Chazal* teach us that when Yaakov passed away, the hearts and eyes of *Klal Yisrael* became sealed from the affliction of the *shibud*, slavery. This statement is enigmatic. We are taught in the beginning of *Sefer Shemos* that as long as any member of the original émigrés that came with Yaakov was still alive, *Klal Yisrael* was not enslaved. Second, if the reason for the lack of "space" between *parshios* is attributed to the slavery, then *Parashas Shemos*, which occupies itself almost totally with *shibud Mitzrayim*, should be the *parsha setumah*. What is the connection between *Parashas Vayechi* and *shibud Mitzrayim*?

The *Sefas Emes* suggests that there are two distinct forms of enslavement: physical and spiritual. Indeed, the physical oppression did not commence until all of the members of that previous generation had passed on. The spiritual subjugation, however, began much earlier. The *shibud ha'ruchni*, spiritual subjugation to the Egyptian culture and lifestyle, had taken root quickly, running its course in the hearts and minds, the emotions and intellect, of the Jews.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l., comments on the last *pasuk* in *Parashas Vayigash*, "*And Yisrael settled in the land of Egypt...and they had possessions therein (47:27)*". He suggests that this was the commencement of their spiritual slavery. "*They had possessions therein*" is interpreted by *Horav Hirsch* as, "*And they let themselves be gripped by the land.*" The Egyptian lifestyle took hold of these defenseless Jews. While they had previously led an insular life, protected from the perversion that was characteristic of Egyptian culture, it began to influence them. When the eyes no longer see the iniquity, when the heart no longer senses the depravity, then we are confronted with the beginning of *galus*, exile. What occurred in *Parashas Shemos* is simply the response of the Jews to over-exposure to Egyptian immorality.