

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

Rashi asks (based on a *Midrash*), “Why is this *parsha setumah*, closed?” Despite the fact that *Vayechi* begins a new *parshah*, it is “closed.” This means it is not set off by the usual number of spaces that would normally mark it as distinct from the previous *parsha*. (In other words, when there are no spaces it is difficult to discern the beginning of a new *parsha*.) *Rashi* offers his responses. I would like to focus on a meaningful explanation which *Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, renders.

Life (can be – and is) unpredictable and mysterious. Life is like a “closed book,” its final chapters elusive and hidden until one reaches the end. Some individuals cannot tolerate the suspense of reading a mystery novel. Thus, they turn to the pages at the end of the book to find out what happens at the end before they actually read the book. This cannot be done with life. Man is formed from clay (*Adam, yesodo mei afar*), and he goes through life wondering when his end will come. When he is in a period of distress he wonders from whence will come his salvation. We all know that good might emanate from situations that appear (to our mortal vision) to be absolutely bad and vice versa. We never know when – or from where – our salvation will be delivered. (The only thing that we know for certain is that whatever will come, it will come from Hashem.)

Yaakov *Avinu* lived in the land of Egypt. Did the Patriarch ever imagine that the “Egyptian years” would be the best ones of his life? Did he believe that one day he would be reunited with Yosef? Certainly, he hoped that the education and inspiration that he imparted to Yosef would infuse him with positive spiritual character and moral traits, but did he ever dream that Yosef would achieve and maintain *tzaddik*, righteous, status?

Life is filled with surprises – some good and some that are not so (to the mortal eye) good. At the end of the day, the term *olam* (the Hebrew word for world), which shares its *shoresh*, root, with *he’elam/ne’elam*, concealment, is very appropriate. Life is a *parsha setumah*, closed book. We live in an *olam*, world, in which much of life is *ne’elam*, concealed. How do we do it? How do we successfully, confidently, navigate the sea of life? *Bitachon*, trust in Hashem. Without it, we are *ne’evad*, lost at sea.

We have no dearth of stories which demonstrate the significance of *bitachon* and to the lengths to which our people have gone in their commitment to Hashem. The following is a classic story which I remembered this morning, as a good friend rushed out early from *davening* to be at an important business meeting. The story was related by the venerable *Bover Rebbe, zl, Horav Shlomo Halberstam*.

A follower of *Horav Mordechai Chernobyler, zl*, had a particular habit which he revealed when he visited the *Rebbe* to petition his blessing. The *Rebbe* asked the *chassid* to recount his daily schedule. “First, I go to the market to purchase goods and wares for my business. Then, I go to *shul* to *daven*. Following *davening*, I go to the market to sell my wares at a profit.”

The *Rebbe* wondered, “Why do you start your day by purchasing wares and only afterwards *daven*?” The man replied, “The good merchandise is available early in the morning. If I wait until after I *daven* to purchase my wares, I would be selling inferior quality, because that is all I would find.”

It seemed like a common-sense response, one that any of us might agree is acceptable. The *Rebbe* countered with a story about a *melamed*, itinerant Torah teacher, who earned his livelihood by journeying from town to town teaching children Torah. He would eke out a meager livelihood from a profession that kept him on the road and away from home most of the year. In the meantime, his wife and children lived on the debt they incurred, which he paid when he returned home. Understandably, his year’s salary meant a lot to him, since it had already been spent.

The teacher was paid for his services with various coins: the wealthy paid with gold; the middle class “preferred” silver; those of more modest means paid with nickel or copper. The teacher made a money belt for himself in which he divided his coins into four pouches. After a year of teaching, he packed his bag and prepared for his journey home.

As the first *Shabbos* of his return trip approached, he knew that he had to remove his money belt and find a place to leave it for safekeeping. At first, he decided to bury it, but, when he saw people in the distance, he became paranoid and alarmed. Pressed for time, he decided the only alternative was to make a dash to the local Jewish inn and pray that the innkeeper with whom he would hopefully deposit the belt was honest and upright. This was a year’s earnings, which he could not afford to lose.

His doubts coursed through his mind the entire *Shabbos*. The innkeeper was accustomed to this, since many a Jewish traveler left his money with him for *Shabbos*. As soon as *Maariv*, the evening service of *Motzoei Shabbos* began, the innkeeper brought the money belt to the teacher to allay his fears. “Do not worry,” he said. “It is all there – every coin.” To the amazement of the innkeeper, right in middle of his supplications, the teacher began counting his coins. (I guess some things do not change.) First came the gold coins, which were all there. Then he opened the pouch containing the silver coins and ascertained that everything was there. He then proceeded to do the same with the nickel and copper coins. At this point, the innkeeper, who had observed the entire process, was shocked and a bit perplexed.

“I do not understand you,” the innkeeper began. “When you saw that all of your gold and silver coins were intact, why did you not trust me then? Yet, you continued to count the ridiculously less valuable nickel and copper coins.”

At this point, the *Chernobyler Rebbe* turned to his *chassid* and asked, “I want to present you with the same question that the innkeeper asked the teacher. Every single morning, you wake up and observe that Hashem has returned your *neshamah*, soul, your body, your very life – which is the equivalent of (the teacher’s) gold and silver coins. If Hashem can be “trusted” to return the

valuables, what makes you think that He will not provide for your livelihood (your nickel and copper coins)? I think you should work on increasing your trust in Hashem and believe that He will give you the physical sustenance that you require. You have no need to rush off to purchase your goods before you *daven Shacharis*. Hashem takes precedence.” P. S. Things have not changed. When we rush out of *davening*, we show where our priorities lie and how much trust we have that all will be provided for us.