

A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. (1:8)

When did the Egyptian exile begin? Most would have us think that the *shibud Mitzrayim*, Egyptian exile, commenced with the death of Yosef and his brothers. The Torah records Yosef's passing and immediately adds that a new Pharaoh came into the picture who had no knowledge of Yosef – or the debt of gratitude the country owed him. It would seem that this was the early stirrings of the exile. Surely, during the golden era of Egypt, when Yosef was viceroy in charge of the entire country, exile was the farthest thought from the minds of the people.

Chazal do not seem to agree with this hypothesis. In fact, they postulate that the exile did not commence with *chomer u'liveinim*, mortar and bricks, when the Jews were enslaved building pyramids for Pharaoh. It actually began much earlier, specifically during the golden era, when the Jews were satiating themselves from Yosef's beneficence, when they all enjoyed his good fortune. This seems odd. Yosef had exponentially enriched Pharaoh's coffers. The Egyptian population was in his eternal debt. He was the acknowledged savior of the Egyptian people.

The Jewish people lived in seclusion in Goshen, their families growing at an extremely quick pace. Everything seemed to be fine. Yet, the Torah alludes to their being conspicuous, expatriates in a country that supposedly had accepted them with open arms. *Rashi* observes that the usual space break between *Parashas Vayechi* and the preceding *Parsha, Vayigash*, is missing. (A new *parsha* either begins on a new line or is separated from the previous one by at least a nine-letter space.) *Rashi* thus describes *Vayechi* as a *parsha setumah*, closed *parsha*, a condition that is meant to imply something about the mood of Yaakov *Avinu's* children following his passing. At that moment, the hearts of Yaakov's children were "closed," in expectation of the suffering and despair of the coming exile that would follow his death. While the actual physical bondage and persecution did not begin immediately, the spiritual exile had commenced. *Rashi* actually derived this idea from the *Midrash* that states clearly: when Yaakov died, the *shibud* began.

We must say that *Rashi's* use of the phrase, *Nistemu eineihem v'libam shel Yisrael*, "The eyes and hearts of *Yisrael* became closed," means that, up until this point, as long as Yaakov was alive, he did not permit his offspring – both children and grandchildren – to lose sight of the fact that they were not home, Egypt was *galus* for them. "Do not get comfortable, you do not belong here. This is not your home." He constantly warned them not to get too close to the Egyptians, not to become impressed with all the glitz that represented their lifestyle. Once Yaakov *Avinu* died, however, the Jews' eyes became closed; they were no longer aware that they were in *galus*. They did not see the evil look on the Egyptians' faces. They did not observe the significance of maintaining their own exclusiveness, as they fell prey to the acculturation that was overtaking them. Next came the need to assimilate and be like the Egyptians. After all, were they not all Egyptians?

Rashi teaches us that exile does not mean only physical bondage. It refers also (and quite possibly in a greater sense) to spiritual disillusionment and exile. Not realizing that one is in exile is in and of itself the greatest exile. When one is acutely aware that he is not included, viewed as displaced,

reviled by the host nation, one is compelled to maintain his separation – which, for a Torah Jew, is a good thing.