

A lot of things come together in this week's parsha. We've already discussed the conflict between Yosef and his brothers and what Yosef was trying to achieve with his actions.

Parshas Vayigash is a very central parsha in understanding Klal Yisroel in Egypt and our situation in golus in the 21st century.

When Yaakov heard Yosef was killed, he thought he lost much more than just a son. In distinction to the first two Ovos who had children who did not continue on their path, Yaakov worked so hard to be the one who would give rise to a complete family of twelve righteous sons which would become Klal Yisroel. His offspring would carry on the legacy of the Ovos for the rest of human history. With Yosef's loss however, his whole vision to found Klal Yisroel was gone. There would no longer be 12 children to carry on the mesorah of the Ovos.

If the brothers would come back in this week's parsha to report to Yaakov that Yosef is still alive and is the ruler of Egypt, it will be of little comfort to Yaakov. For what good is it to have a son who becomes a monster and terrorizes his own family? How could such a son make up the twelve shivtei Koh? Therefore Yosef needed to communicate to Yaakov that he is still the same Yosef hatzaddik who left him 22 years ago. He is still learning the same Torah—holding in the same sugya. He was able to stand up to the nisyonos of Egypt through learning and being connected to the Torah.

Wonderful—Yaakov is reassured he still has twelve righteous children.

But now Yaakov is faced with a new challenge of golus. The entire household has to uproot itself from Canaan and come down to Egypt permanently. There is deep concern for the future of his family—can they survive like Yosef survived?

Yaakov reaches Be'er Sheva and has a vision. Hashem reassures Yaakov that He will bring them up eventually and return to Eretz Cannan. How does Yaakov secure the future of Klal Yisroel in Egypt? He sends Yehuda ahead of them to set up a yeshiva in Goshen. A place for limud Torah is essential. It has to be ready—right when they came. It has to be there in every golus in order to ensure Jewish survival.

Before Klal Yisroel went to Bovel en-masse after the churbon, there was an earlier golus of the Sanhedrin where they set up yeshivos in Bovel to be ready. At the end of the period of the Geonim, when the Jews migrated from Bovel to North Africa and Spain, Hashem saw to it that gedolei Torah—the four shevuyim—went ahead to set up botei midrash in those lands. There were gedolei Yisroel in France and Germany who came in advance of the mass migration to the Jews there. And before the destruction of the kehillos in France, Germany and Spain, Hashem arranged in advance that yeshivos were already set up in Eastern Europe—Poland, etc., to allow Yiddishkeit to flourish uninterrupted.

There was one golus where the mass immigration came before yeshivos were in place—in America. There was a churbon of yiddishkeit there until the yeshivos were set up—millions of Jews were already living there. Only then did yiddishkeit begin to flourish. Yeshivos are the backbone of our identity.

How did Yosef survive golus? By his constant connection to limud haTorah. How did Klal Yisroel survive golus in Egypt? Yaakov sent Yehuda ahead of them to set up yeshivos. Before going to Lovon's house, Yaakov went to Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever to immerse himself in limud haTorah. That is how he survived Lovon's household.

This is one strategy.

The second strategy is revealed in one of the brochos of Bilaam in Parshas Bolok. Bilaam describes Klal Yisroel as a nation apart—isolated from the rest of the nations. This was the vision of Yaakov and this makes them strong and secure.

When the brothers were introduced to Pharaoh when they came down, Yosef prompted them to emphasize to Pharaoh that they brought all their flocks down with them because they were shepherds—and to emphasize that this is their only occupation for generations—it's all they know how to do. Why? Because this is an absolute abomination to the Egyptians. The natural response of Pharaoh was to send them off to live in a Jewish ghetto in Goshen—and have nothing to do with Egyptian society. In addition, Yosef didn't want Pharaoh enlisting the strong shevotim into his army. The army is no place for a nice Jewish boy. Horrible things go on in an army camp.

Keeping Klal Yisroel in a closed, insulated environment—this was the plan to survive the golus. And they initially succeeded in settling all the Jews in Goshen.

But it didn't last. After Klal Yisroel became numerous, they started to expand and move out of the Jewish ghetto. They begin assimilating into Egyptian society.

At the end of Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov attempts to reveal the end of times to the shevotim. But something happened and he switched to giving them brochos. Chazal have two approaches to why he switched topics. One is that because Klal Yisroel started to become assimilated, the Shechinoh departed from him and he was no longer capable of revealing this matter. The Zohar gives another explanation. Yaakov was still capable of conveying the secret of the geuloh. But the moment Klal Yisroel lost their madreigoh, the shevotim weren't able to understand the things that Yaakov was revealing to them.

What does this have to do with Chanuka?

The story of Chanuka is very interesting. If you read the general Jewish media's portrayal of the story of Chanuka, they'll tell you it is about freedom fighters who bravely resisted Greek tyranny and oppression. But if you read the text of Al Hanissim, you find a very different story. It was about the Chashmonaim—a few weak Jews who preserved their identity and remained tehorim, tzaddikim and oskei Torah in the face of a massive drive of Jewish society to become assimilated into Greek culture. They won the war precisely because they were tehorim, tzaddikim and oskei Torah. Not because they were trained, battle-hardened soldiers with superior strength, weapons, or strategy.

Let's back up a little and understand the historical background to the events of Chanuka and Chazal's view of it.

It was a very weird phenomenon. At the end of Golus Bovel, the Persian Empire conquered the world but were stopped in Europe by Greece. During that time, in Greece, the philosophers started to develop a whole view of the world. Chazal identify their chochmoh as Choshech. It was at the core a philosophy of kefiroh, but the Greeks were very skilled at the art of adopting other beliefs and other cultures and integrating them into their own philosophy—and then claim credit for those ideas

Klal Yisroel have an ancient mesorah about deep truths of the universe. There are midrashim which record that the Nevi'im came

into contact with Greek philosophers and taught them this wisdom. Then came Alexander the Great and conquered the civilized world from the Persians in just a few years. The novi describes Yovon as an ayil nogeiach. Alexander came to India and died suddenly. He arose 34 years after Bayis Sheni was built.

Why did Hashem arrange things in such a way where the Greeks develop an attractive philosophy and then sweep through the world and suddenly leave a huge vacuum? Chazal were bothered by this question. They tell us that when the second Beis Hamikdosh was about to be built, Anshei Knesses Hagedolah realized that without fixing the problems which led to the churbon of the first Bayis, the second Bayis will soon share its fate. There's no point in building another Beis Hamikdosh if the yetzer horo for avodo zoro still dominates the world. So they davened for Hashem to remove the yetzer for avodo zoro and Hashem complied.

But it came with a price—there is no ruach hakodesh, no nevuoh and no Urim Vetumim. Those tools by which Klal Yisroel connected directly with Hashem were also taken away. So the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah davened that the wellsprings of Torah Shebaal Peh be opened and revealed—to allow Klal Yisroel to connect directly with Hashem through Torah. Hashem agreed and there was an explosion of Torah Shebaal Peh throughout Klal Yisroel.

Although the yetzer for avodo zoro was removed from the world, Hashem still had to bring something that would replace avodo zoro—people were still clinging to it out of habit. This was the function of Greek philosophy and the sweeping conquest of the Greek empire. They spread their culture over the entire civilized world as Hashem's tool to show that avodo zoro was nonsense. But Klal Yisroel had a unique opportunity at this point in history which they squandered. The old avodo zoros of the world were crumbling, and it left a vacuum. If the beauty of the Torah had shone forth by Klal Yisroel for the world to admire, the world would have left Greek philosophy behind as a temporary fix and accepted the truth of the Torah. The era of Moshiach would have begun!

But Klal Yisroel themselves became enamored with Greek philosophy. They wanted to merge it and synthesize it with Torah. They became misyavnim.

Hashem can give us all the elements we need to bring the geuloh, but Klal Yisroel has to use the opportunities they were given. We were given independence and Torah Shebaal Peh and everything we needed. It was up to us and we blew it. The result was that the main struggle during golus Yovon was between the Chashmonaim and the misyavnim—the Jews who replaced the Torah with Greek ideas. Even though the beauty of Torah had just been revealed and all we had to do was stay pure and faithful to that truth, we became fascinated with a perverted and distorted version of Torah ideas and lost our mission. The Jews lost pride in their own identity.

Over time, the Chashmonaim won, the misyavnim were defeated, and the Greeks were thrown out of Eretz Yisroel. But Greek wisdom was still a dominant force in the world and Klal Yisroel were not pure enough to bring the rest of the world on board. 20% of the civilized world believed in one Creator, but it was Christianity which then filled the void created by Greek philosophy.

Chazal tell us the second posuk at the beginning of Bereishis refers to the four goluyos that Klal Yisroel endure in their history. Chazal identify choshech as Yovon, and tehom as Edom—the golus which

is so long and so deep that you don't see the end of it. Chazal saw Christianity, which is Edom, as the successor of Greece. But in the end, the ruach of Torah will spread over the world and Moshiach will come. There is a uniqueness and a superiority to limud haTorah and people will eventually notice the difference and come on board. When people today complain there is too much Torah being learned in the world, they are essentially complaining that Moshiach is too close.

What is a yeshiva supposed to be? Why did Yaakov send Yehuda off to set up a yeshiva in Goshen in advance of their arrival to Egypt? Unless Jews are learning Torah in an insulated environment, maintaining our identity, there is no way to survive the golus. Just punching in hours learning isn't enough. Having the right environment is crucial.

We grew up in a western world. It has infiltrated our values, our thinking, what we enjoy doing—everything we are. But when Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah—they faced Har Sinai and turned their back to the rest of the world. If most of us will eventually leave full-time learning in the beis midrash one day, how will we maintain our identity? If while you are in yeshiva you can't separate yourself from all the culture and ideas of the outside world, how can you expect to maintain your unique Jewish identity in the workplace?

There is no way a person can be a true ben Torah in any fashion if he can't disconnect from the world and the devices which connect him to the world and immerse himself in Torah—to mold himself into a true Torah personality. Keeping these devices with you is like going into a mikveh together with a sheretz. You simply can't achieve taharoh under those circumstances. If you can't immerse yourself in Torah while you are in yeshiva and develop Torah ideas and middos in your being, it won't just suddenly happen after you leave. How will you survive the workplace? Yaakov and Yosef both knew that we can only survive the golus when we distance ourselves from outside influences. We are only secure when we are separate and insulated from the tumoh of the outside.

One of my favorite maamorei Chazal is how they explain what happened during the journey of Avrohom and Yitzchok from Chevron to the Akeidah on Har Hamoriah. Chazal were bothered by the fact that it took them three whole days to get there! They tell us that the Soton tried all kinds of arguments and challenges which kept on delaying them. He first worked on Avrohom, telling him that he is crazy for throwing away everything he worked for, this command makes no sense, etc. And when that didn't go anywhere, he gave up on Avrohom and moved on to Yitzchok.

He tries to convince him that his father is delusional and shouldn't be trusted, etc. Nothing works. So he tries one last emotional argument. He reminds Yitzchok that when he was a little boy, his mother Soroh made him toys to play with. When he grew up, he put away those toys for his own children and he wanted to give those precious toys to them. But, now that he will be killed before marrying and raising a family, his toys won't be for his children. Out of everything else the Soton said, this challenge makes Yitzchok hesitate and call to his father Avrohom for chizuk.

Sometimes people can be moser nefesh and give up all big things for Torah and yiddishkeit. But sometimes, it is the little, insignificant things which people cling to and are the hardest to give up. Being a ben Torah means understanding the Torah on a deep level, immersing yourself in Torah, letting the Torah fashion your personality, and relating to Hashem through the Torah.