



SICHA – 29 ELUL 5740, EREV ROSH HASHANA 5741

One of the stories, which is already published about the Tzemach Tzedek's childhood, relates to when he was still in school, and studied the Written Torah with his teacher, starting with Chumash.

He taught him, "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years." That Yaakov found himself in Egypt for seventeen years.

But he also explained to him, that "Yaakov lived" there. He didn't just find himself there; he actively "lived" there.

My father-in-law the Rebbe related: When the Tzemach Tzedek, as a child being taught Chumash in school, he came to the Alter Rebbe – who was raising him at the time – he asked: "How could this be? Yaakov, who was "the chosen one of the forefathers" – among Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, while the land of Egypt was "the most corrupt among nations," "the shame of the Earth," a land in which the behavior was immoral, completely improper. Yet, we say that when Yaakov was in the land of Egypt, not only was it not a difficulty for him, but rather, "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt?!"

The Alter Rebbe answered him: before Yaakov arrived in Egypt, he "sent Yehuda before him to direct him in Goshen." Our Sages explain that he sent him there to create a place—an institution— where Torah would be studied. This place is called Goshen from the root "gesh" –to approach and come close, for through Torah study one becomes closer to G-d.

When we approach the study in this way and then study Torah, one becomes closer and closer to G-d, and with G-d, then it is possible for Yaakov to "live": This is the true life even of the "chosen of the forefathers."

Why are we told this story? Why is it printed, and presented in such a manner that it should not only be read every now and then, but also studied and applied?

One of the lessons is obvious: First and foremost, this story teaches us how to raise a child, how to educate a Jewish boy or, of course, a Jewish girl.

The first step is to educate them in such a manner, that whenever they are taught something from the Torah, they are interested and involved in it, and want to understand it; looking for answers if there is anything in the lesson that they do not understand.

His interest was so great that he asked his grandfather. This wasn't a friend, the teacher, or even his father. The Tzemach Tzedek was well aware of how everybody behaved towards the Alter Rebbe – with the greatest respect and esteem as befitting the Alter Rebbe's greatness.



Nevertheless, when a point in the Chumash that he did not understand bothered him, he was not deterred by anything in his quest to find an answer to his question to find an explanation for the words of the Chumash.

The story also teaches us the attitude required even from someone on the level of the Alter Rebbe:

The Alter Rebbe was a “lofty soul,” a leader of the Jewish people. He had tens of thousands of followers, who would come to hear from him the deepest secrets of the Torah, and he would also explain complex issues in the revealed Torah, for which people would come to hear his explanations.

When a child of four or five years of age approaches him with a question, one might have expected him to reply: Tomorrow when you go back to school, your teacher will surely answer it. Even if he did not want to push him off until the next day, there were plenty of people around the Alter Rebbe who could have answered his question.

Nevertheless, the Alter Rebbe put everything aside, in order to answer the child in words that would be understandable to him. He made sure to explain it in a manner of “place it before them —like a table set with everything ready”— that the child would fully understand the concept in his own mind. True, it was the mind of the Tzemach Tzedek, but it was as he was no more than four or five years old.

Now, we have yet another clear lesson from this story:

A Jew may suddenly realize that his soul is “literally a part of G-d,” and yet it is en clothed in “a cloak of worldliness” — looking through sunglasses, and concealed under ten covers! To put it in Rashi’s terms, the soul has fallen “from a high peak to a deep pit.”

He is in the land of Egypt, a land of limitations and boundaries.

How can one possibly know how to find the light within everything, to discern the purpose of every object, and to know why it is needed? Only through Torah study.

When one studies Torah, then, even in the land of Egypt itself, “Yaakov lived”; he is able to live, not just plain living, but life as only “a Yaakov” lives!

