

(1) Yaakov settled in the land where his father dwelled as a temporary resident in the land of Canaan.

(2) These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old. He would shepherd the sheep with his brothers. He was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Yosef brought a bad report about them to their father.

YAAKOV IS NOT ALLOWED TO DWELL IN TRANQUILITY

Consider the following questions:

1. Verse 1, which speaks of Yaakov settling in Canaan, seems to have no connection with either the previous verses, which describe the descendants of Esav, or the following verses, which deal with the difficult relationship Yosef had with his brothers. So why does the Torah put it here?
2. The verse could just have said, "Yaakov settled in the land of Canaan." What need is there for the rest of the verse?

Our Sages¹ commented on these verses:

Yaakov sought (בְּקֶשׂ) to dwell in tranquility and, [as punishment for this,] the terrible episode of Yosef [being sold by his brothers] sprang upon him. Is that which is set aside (מְתוּקָן)² for *tzaddikim* in the World to Come not sufficient for them that they seek to live in tranquility in this world?!

1. *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:3. See also Rashi on 37:2.

2. The literal meaning of מְתוּקָן is *fixed* or *rectified*. The Alshich will comment below on the Midrash's choice of words.

- (א) וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.
 (ב) אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְעֵ-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת־
 אָחִיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נָעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זְלָפָה נְשֵׂי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא
 יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם.

According to this interpretation, verse 1 is connected to the verses that follow: The whole episode of Yosef (as described in the following verses) took place because Yaakov acted wrongly in wanting to settle down in tranquility. [This is one answer to Question 1.]

However, this interpretation raises another question:

3. Why should a *tzaddik* be punished because he seeks tranquility in this world? Why should he not be able to receive the “fruits” (i.e., dividends) of his Torah and mitzvos in this world [and enjoy some sort of peaceful life], even as the principal remains intact for him to benefit from in the World to Come?³

I believe that an answer to this difficulty may be found by analyzing the Midrash cited above. First, what is the point of the Sages’ seemingly unnecessary question, *Is that which is set*

3. [See Mishnah *Pe’ah* 1:1 and *Shabbos* 127a for a list of mitzvos where “a person eats their fruits in this world but their principal remains intact for him in the World to Come.” This list, which includes the study of Torah and many acts of lovingkindness, is recited daily as part of the morning prayers, immediately following the blessings of the Torah.]

The Alshich writes that some answer this question by pointing to the language of the Midrash just cited, which states that Yaakov *sought* (בָּקַשׁ) tranquility — i.e., he actively looked for it — instead of saying simply that he wanted (רָצָה) tranquility. That is, it is legitimate for a *tzaddik* to desire that God grant him a measure of tranquility, but not that he should proactively chase after it. However, he says that this is not a good answer, for anyone who is familiar with Midrashic idiom knows that the word בָּקַשׁ (*sought*) is used countless times in the sense of “wanted.”

aside (מְתוּקָן) for *tzaddikim* in the World to Come not sufficient for them? Second, why do the Sages use the unusual term מְתוּקָן, which literally means “rectified,” instead of מְזוּמָן (or some similar term), which means “set aside” or “prepared”?

There are many *tzaddikim* who did not receive in this world the reward for their Torah learning or other mitzvos — for example, R’ Chanina ben Dosa and R’ Elazar ben Pedas. Why did they have to live in abject poverty?⁴ To understand this let us look at another Midrash:⁵

The Torah said before God, “Is it not written (*Mishlei* 3:16), ‘in the [Torah’s] left hand is wealth and honor’?⁶ If so, why are my children (i.e., those who learn Torah) poor?” God replied, “To those who love Me, I have something [special] to give” (*Mishlei* 8:21).

What is the meaning of God’s reply here? Why does He not grant those who love Him the “fruits” of their mitzvos in this world, while the principal remains intact for them in *Olam Haba*? The answer is that God was saying, “If I give them the reward for their mitzvos in this world, it will consist of things that are worthless — the material things of *Olam Haze*h. I want to give them something much more special. I want to transform even the material “fruits” of their mitzvos into spiritual reward in the World to Come.”

4. The Gemara (*Berachos* 17b) tells us that R’ Chanina ben Dosa had only one *kav* of carobs to eat from one Shabbos to the next. Regarding R’ Elazar ben Pedas, the Gemara (*Ta’anis* 25a) tells us that he asked God why he had to be so poor. God responded in a dream and told him that if he wanted to be granted a reasonable standard of living, He would have to overturn the entire world and create it anew.

5. *Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 934.

6. The Midrash previously explained that “in [the Torah’s] left hand” refers to those who learn Torah, but not purely for its own sake; even they will gain wealth and honor. Presumably, this should be all the more so for those who learn Torah purely for its own sake.

Now we can return to the first Midrash quoted above. The Midrash asks, *Is that which is “rectified” (מְתוּקָן) for tzaddikim in the World to Come not sufficient for them*, as a response to the (unasked) question: why couldn’t Yaakov be given the fruits of his mitzvos in this world? The Midrash is teaching that the reward for *tzaddikim*’s mitzvos are “rectified,” i.e., upgraded and improved; they should be happy to receive a greater share of an everlasting spiritual reward and not seek (mere) material benefits in this world as well. [This answers Question 3.]

We can also explain the connection between verse 1 and the following verses in a completely different way, according to the plain meaning of the text.⁷ We asked above (Question 2) why the Torah states here that *Yaakov settled (וַיֵּשֶׁב) in the land where his father dwelled as a temporary resident (בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו)*. It should just have said, “Yaakov settled in the land of Canaan.” [It seems that the Torah is contrasting the fact that Yaakov wished to settle down in the land in a permanent way, while his father Yitzchak had only dwelt there as a temporary resident (גֵּר).]⁸

In order to understand this better, let us recall our explanation of the verse (*Bereishis 15:13*), *And He said to Avram, “Know, you should know (יָדַע תִּדְעַ), that your offspring will be a stranger (גֵּר יִהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ) in a land that does not belong to them. [Your descendants] shall serve them, and they shall oppress [your descendants] for four hundred years.”* With these words, God told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved for four centuries before

7. The previous answer was based on the Midrash sourced in footnote 1 — that Yaakov erred in desiring to settle down in tranquility and was punished by the brothers’ selling of Yosef. It is thus an answer based on *derash* (homiletic interpretation of the Torah). The following explanation will be based on a close examination of the wording of the Torah’s text. It is thus an answer based on *peshat* (the plain meaning of the Torah).

8. The Hebrew word מְגוּרֵי used here is from the root גּוּר, which means to dwell temporarily. The noun גֵּר, *stranger*, also comes from this root. By contrast, the root יָשַׁב (as in the word וַיֵּשֶׁב) means to dwell, or settle, permanently.

they would finally be redeemed. [Yet we know that the Jewish people spent only 210 years in Egypt — and in fact they were slaves for only part of that time.]⁹

If we look carefully at the verse, we see that it starts off in the singular (גֵּר יִהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ, *your offspring will be a stranger, or sojourner*) and ends in the plural (וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנוּ אֹתָם, “*they*” shall serve them, and they shall oppress “them”). Furthermore, the singular part speaks merely of being a stranger in a land that is not one’s own, while the plural part speaks of being actually enslaved and oppressed. The verse is written this way in order to tell us that the count of 400 years mentioned in the verse started with the birth of Yitzchak and not just with Israel’s descent to Egypt, as we will now explain.

The 400 years were to be fulfilled in two stages. The first was that of being “a stranger (sojourner) in a land that did not belong to them,” when Avraham’s offspring would be unsettled and constantly on the move from place to place. The second stage was that of actual enslavement. God therefore uses the double expression “*know, you should know* (יָדַעַ תְּדַעַ),” since Avraham needed to know about these two separate stages.¹⁰ The first stage would begin when he would first have offspring, i.e., from the birth of Yitzchak,¹¹ and continue so long as his progeny remained few in number and could thus be considered a single entity (גֵּר יִהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ, *your offspring will be a stranger* — in the singular). The second stage would begin when his offspring would become numerous, i.e., in Egypt (וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנוּ אֹתָם, “*they*” shall serve them, and they shall oppress “them” — in the plural),¹² and would continue until the Exodus, at the end of the 400 years.

9. See footnote 12 below.

10. In *Parashas Lech Lecha*, 15:11–17 (answer to Question 5), the Alshich gives a different reason for this double expression, one that fits the theme of that piece.

11. Yishmael was not considered Avraham’s offspring. See Alshich above, *Parashas Vayeira* 21:9–13.

12. Indeed, the slavery did not begin until Bnei Yisrael became very numerous in Egypt (see *Shemos* 1:7ff).

In order for their life spans to count toward the fulfillment of the four-century prophecy, Yitzchak and Yaakov had to fulfill the requirement of being “strangers” who keep moving from place to place.

This explains why, when Hashem told Yitzchak not to go to Egypt when there was a famine in Canaan, He told him (*Bereishis* 26:2–3): שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲמַר אֵלֶיךָ, *Dwell in the land that I shall indicate to you*, and then immediately afterward: גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, *Sojourn in this land*. For when He told Yitzchak to *dwell* there, Yitzchak responded that if he were to dwell in this land as its owner, this would not be a fulfillment of “*your offspring will be a stranger/sojourner in a land that does not belong to them*” and the time he spent there would not count toward the 400 years. Hashem therefore changed His command and told him to *sojourn* in the land, conveying that he would be considered a stranger/sojourner, for the Land would belong to his children only in the future; it was not yet his.

The *stranger/sojourner* stage continued with Yaakov. In our passage, therefore, if Yaakov had now settled down — meaning that things were peaceful and quiet — the period of being a wandering stranger would have been interrupted. The count would have had to start all over again from Yaakov’s children.¹³ This is what the Torah is conveying when it states, *Yaakov settled in the land where his father dwelled as a temporary resident in the land of Canaan*. Yaakov wanted to live in tranquility, but this would have broken the chain of being a *ger*/stranger in the land that had begun with Yitzchak, who had helped fulfill the decree of 400 years by dwelling only *as a temporary resident in the land of Canaan*. [This answers Question 2.]

It was to prevent this chain from breaking that God brought

13. This would presumably mean that the 400-year count would have started again only upon the Jewish people’s descent to Egypt, when a state of wandering was recommenced.

(2) These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old. He would shepherd with his brothers¹⁵ among the sheep. He was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Yosef brought a bad report about them to their father.

(3) Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons because he was born to him in his old age, and he made him a tunic of fine wool.

(4) His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and they hated him; they could not speak with him in a peaceful way.

about Yosef's sale into slavery by his brothers, causing Yaakov not to settle down peacefully. Verse 1, which states that *Yaakov settled in the land* is thus followed by: *These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old*. Yosef was the main continuation of Yaakov.¹⁴ His being sold removed the state of tranquility from Yaakov's life. Furthermore, Yaakov's situation would be defined by that of his main offspring, Yosef — who was certainly not in a peaceful state himself and whose life was now pulling the descendants of Yaakov towards their eventual state of true slavery in Egypt. In this way, the 400-year count would not be interrupted. [This is another answer to Question 1.]

Another
Answer to
Question 1

WHY THE BROTHERS HATED YOSEF

Consider the following questions:

1. After saying, *These are the generations of Yaakov*, why does the Torah mention only Yosef and not any of his other sons?

14. See Rashi, citing the Midrash.

15. Translation of the phrase *הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת-אֶחָיו* follows Onkelos (who takes *אֶת* to mean *with*) and is how Alshich initially understands it as well.