



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Did Yaakov Ever Find Out?

After years of sorrow and sighing at home in Canaan, the old father was brought to Egypt by his son Yosef and he lived there for seventeen years. Eventually he died and he was buried by all his sons together.

Did he ever find out how Yosef had got to Egypt and what the brothers had done to him?

The text does not offer a decisive answer, and the commentators are divided. Some say that Yaakov never found out, others that he knew but kept it to himself.

Presumably, the brothers were ashamed of their actions and did not know how to handle the situation. Without their father, would Yosef bear them a grudge for the events of years before and make them suffer for their sin?

The text indicates this when it says that after the funeral they told Yosef that they were willing to become his slaves. Yosef responded, "Who do you think I am, God? You meant me harm but God used the situation for good. Have no fear: I will look after you and your children."

Mighty Blessings

Yaakov the patriarch gives a personal message to each of his children, summing up their character and hinting at their future.

As we would expect, Yosef receives the most extensive blessing. This is why Yaakov uses the singular when, speaking to Yosef, he refers to himself as "thy father". He says, "The blessings of thy father are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors... They shall be on the head of Yosef." (B'reishit 49:26)

In case we thought Yaakov is saying that blessings bestowed by him upon his children are more valuable than those bestowed by Avraham and Yitzchak, Rashi explains that "the blessings of thy father" mean "the blessings thy father has received".

Avraham, says Rashi, was merely promised the land of Israel (13:15). Yitzchak was promised a broader territory, "all these lands" (26:3). Yaakov himself was told, "You shall spread abroad to the west, the east, the north and the south" (28:14), i.e. all four corners of the earth.

The word translated "spread abroad" is UFARATZTA, which can be understood spiritually and culturally, in the sense of conveying a message wherever one goes.

Thus Hermann Adler wrote that the

Jew, the descendant of Yaakov, "has gone up and down the earth proclaiming his belief in the One Supreme Being - a Being whose spirit fills all time and all space, a Being never embodied, but made manifest to man in the glory of the Creation and in His all-wise behests, which teach mercy, love, and justice..." -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH