

BO (EXODUS 10:1-13:16)

Time Off for Bad Behavior

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

The numbers don't add up.

The habitation of the Israelites during which they dwelled in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. It was at the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, the legions of G-d left the land of Egypt.
(Exodus, 12:40-41)

There's a problem with the math.

Moses' grandfather Kehoth was one of the original Israelites who came to Egypt with Jacob. Kehoth lived until age 133 (ibid, 6:18) His son Amram lived until age 137. (ibid, verse 20) His son Moses was 80 when he met Pharaoh shortly before the Exodus. (ibid, 7:7)

Even without the obvious overlap of fathers' and sons' lives, the very maximum possible number of years from the birth of Kehoth -- which was before we went to Egypt -- until we left, was $133+137+80=350$. Obviously, our stay in Egypt must have been considerably shorter. In fact, says Rashi, we were only there for 210 years.

Let's go back several centuries to Abraham:

"...Be aware that your descendants will be aliens in a land that is not theirs; and they will serve them; and they will oppress them for four hundred years. But I will judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth..." (Genesis, 15:13)

It was already declared by G-d that Abraham's children would spend 400 years as slaves. If Rashi is correct, that the total was really 210 years, what happened to the other 190?

In reality, the 400 years are counted from the birth of Isaac, which took place 30 years after that prediction that G-d told to Abraham. The 430 years mentioned in the Torah are counting from the time of Abraham's prophecy until we actually left.

Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born. Jacob arrived in Egypt at the age of 130. Those 190 years from the birth of Isaac until Jacob came to Egypt, were included as part of the 400 years.

Why?

At the Passover Seder we praise G-d Who ... **calculated the end** of the slavery to do as he said to Abraham ... *“...Be aware that your descendants will be aliens in a land that is not theirs; and they will serve them; and they will oppress them for four hundred years...”*

What is meant by the phrase “...**calculated the end**...” mean?

Some commentaries point out that the Hebrew word **end** is ער. The numerical value of the letters ע and ר totals 190.

In other words, ***G-d calculated the 190...to do as He said to Abraham.* G-d included the 190 years from Isaac’s birth till Jacob arrived in Egypt as part of the 400 total years of slavery.

But why did He do that? We weren’t slaves when Isaac was born. We certainly weren’t slaves when Jacob came to Egypt. In fact, we were honored guests! Why should those 190 years be included as part of the four hundred years of slavery??!!

One reason that is that the Egyptians overdid it.

Yes, we were supposed to be servants to the Egyptians. That was G-d’s will. But the beatings? The murders? When did G-d tell Abraham that the Pharaoh had permission to bathe in the blood of Jewish babies? When did He say that it was ok to throw Jewish boys into the Nile?

G-d told Abraham that *“... they will oppress them for four hundred years.”* Oppression is not fun. He never promised us a rose garden. But He never said that the Egyptians were authorized to take away our humanity.

We couldn’t take it anymore. We suffered 400 years worth of oppression compacted into 210 years. G-d **calculated the end/ 190/ ער**. He took into account how much we had suffered and “credited” us those other 190 years.

We may sometimes get the feeling that the discomfort of other people is no big deal. G-d made it very clear that He pays attention to everything. If I cause pain to another person, G-d notices. The Egyptians caused more pain than they were permitted to do. And for that reason, they were severely punished.

If I say something hurtful to another person, G-d notices. That is why we need to always be cognizant of how our actions affect those around us. We don’t want to be called to task some day for being less than totally kind to our fellows.

Another thought.

We've been in exile for a long time. We've been persecuted. We've been tortured. Our People have endured pogroms, holocausts, and terrorism.

How much longer will we wait for our redemption? G-d *calculated the end* of slavery in Egypt and redeemed our nation. Surely He will take into account all the suffering our People have endured and will send the Messiah to finally rebuild the Temple and bring peace in the world.

Let us pray that it will be soon.

Have a great Shabbos.

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