

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayigash:*** **Genesis 45:16-28**
 Haftarah: **Ezekiel 37:18-19**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Luke 6:17-19**

The spirit of Ya`akov, their father, revived.

[Genesis 45:27]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 111:6-8;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 8, *Mishpat* [Justice]

V'ha-kol nishma beit-Paroh – And the commotion was heard at the house of Pharaoh ...
Genesis 45:16a.

No matter where in the world one goes, there always seems to be one constant: *gossip*. Gossip – *i.e. verbalizing, declaring as true, and/or hinting at details about other people's lives and relationships that those people have neither verified nor made public, and which are therefore no one's business but his/her own* - provides a flesh-pleasing distraction from the mundane. Gossip feeds a fallen human being's most dangerous appetites – including the cravings for *the adrenalin rush associated with involvement in interpersonal drama and the arrogant smugness that flows from the illusion of 'knowing' something that other people do not know*. It floods the human nervous system with dark-energy - activating every human reaction protocol from fight/flight response to pride/shame, outrage/revulsion, and sentimentality/offense. It then kicks the fallen pseudo-intellectual side of man's brain into high gear, eliciting opinions, attitudes, judgments, and paranoias. Once released into the sound spectrum, it spreads like wildfire. It distracts not only those who speak it but also those who hear it from focusing on their true calling, purpose, mission, and assignment. Gossip is therefore especially toxic for people of the Covenant, who are assigned to be a light to the nations, salt to the earth, healing balm for the injured and ill, comfort for the bereaved, betrayed, and brokenhearted, and provision for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner, and who therefore have no time to indulge.

The latest tidbit of gossip spreading through streets and markets of Egypt is that *Tzafanat Paneach* – the man who has been managing the empire for Pharaoh now for almost a decade - is a fraud. It turns out that he may not be an Egyptian at all! He is – don't you know it pained them to say it - a *HEBREW*. *Tzafanat-Paneach* isn't even his real name. His entire identity is an outrageous example of cultural

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misappropriation. Meanwhile, Pharaoh seems to have known this man's dark secret all along, and aided and abetted the charade. Isn't that treason? Everyone wants to know what Pharaoh intends to do about this national embarrassment. What happens now? Will Pharaoh abdicate? Will some close advisor of his – like maybe that despicable cupbearer - be made a scapegoat? Will Tzafanat Paneach – or whatever his real name is – be sent back to his own land? Will heads roll? Will war be declared on some poor nation out there to distract everyone's attention from this latest episode of political intrigue? Stay tuned – it is going to be very interesting, to say the least, how the palace is going to respond to this shocking news.

The Mascara Runs, and the Mask Disintegrates

In the course of the events of the last few days, a powerful beam of Divine Light pierced the heart of the man of Egypt's foreign-born Prime Minister. A supernatural laser skillfully struck and penetrated its target – and suddenly the life of the man in charge of not only Egypt's but the entire Middle East region's food supply was shaken *to the core*. We the reader of this stunning plot-twist in the narrative stood in amazement as Tzafanat-Paneach's '*man of fierce countenance*' persona began to unravel, thread-by-thread, before our eyes.

First came a flood of emotions that Yosef could neither control nor deny. His eyes began to well up with tears – tears that he had been holding inside for twenty-two years. The time had come for those tears to flow.

Pharaoh had assigned an elite unit of soldiers to serve as Yosef's bodyguards. Yosef dismissed them all from the room. He wanted to be alone in the room with these Hebrews. He was placing himself at risk, he knew – but he intended to make himself totally vulnerable to his brothers once again. If the wrecking crew that had decimated Shechem a few years previously wanted to overpower him, ransack the house, and escape with Binyamin, he was giving them that opportunity. Compared to Shechem, he was going to make this seem like a *piece of cake*.

Tzafanat Paneach had theretofore always communicated with the Hebrew delegation only through an interpreter. Now, however, he addressed his guests in their native tongue, Hebrew. The voice Yehudah and company heard coming forth suddenly did not sound like the voice of an Egyptian prince – but more like the garbled Hebrew cries they had heard that day at Dotan after they tossed their helpless little brother into a dry cistern with serpents and scorpions.

Could it *possibly be*? Could the voice that now spoke really be the voice of '*that dreamer*'? Could Yosef really be alive and well – and ... *ruling Egypt*? The last time ten of the Hebrews had heard Yosef's voice they had sat stone faced savoring

their dinner, contemplating how many pieces of silver each would get from selling ‘Dad’s little pet and snitch’ into slavery. *Then* it had been a time to laugh at the plight of a vanquished adversary; *now* it was a time to weep for a long-lost brother who was lost but had now been found. *Then* it had been a time to refrain from embracing; *now* it was a time to fall on his neck and hug him tenderly and joyfully. *Then* it had been a time for hatred and violence toward Rachel’s son; *now* it was a time for the true forgiveness and lasting reconciliation that would lead to real and meaningful *bayit shalom*. *Then* it had been a time for resisting the leadership of the only one of their number that dared to dream of something beyond the moment, and therefore perform every task, however mundane, with excellence; *now* it was a time for voluntary surrender by all ten of them to the Divine Plan. Now was their time to empty themselves of pride, unburden themselves from sin, and make *teshuvah* the way their father Ya’akov modeled for them at *Beit-el*, and bow their knee in worship before the One Who sits on the only Throne higher than Pharaoh’s.

Each of these 10 sons of Ya’akov had previously bowed before and had submitted to the will of the mighty *Tzafanat Paneach*, it is true. But that had been a reluctant submission under the compulsion of circumstances beyond their control, without full understanding of who it was they were really submitting to. This was different. Now the *Tzafanat Paneach* charade was over – and their web of lies exposed – and they humbled themselves. From this point forward the 10 older brothers would *gladly* bow before Yosef. They would finally accept Yosef’s pre-eminence, and prostrate themselves before him of their own free will – acknowledging that from the very beginning, as their father saw all along, though they did not, the Holy One had chosen Yosef to lead the family toward its destiny. Yes, Yosef’s first dream was coming true at last. It was *harvest time*. Yosef’s sheath really was standing tall, while his brothers’ sheathes all bowed low. So will it occur again, Beloved, in *the end of days*.

Meanwhile, in *Tzafanat Paneach*’s chambers, uncontrollable sobs are pouring forth from the chests of all twelve brothers simultaneously. The weeping will be followed by warm embraces - then a torrent of words of *shalom*. They will talk into the night. Bitter tears will turn to laughter. Offense will turn to forgiveness. Angst over the past will turn to excitement for the future.

It has taken a long, long time - but reconciliation, healing, and restoration will indeed come to Israel.

The reunion of long-lost brothers is the first of two stunning prophetic reconciliation scenes found in parsha Vayigash. The second will be the return of

the heart of a father toward his children, and the hearts of his children toward their father. What a plan! What a story! What a conclusion - or is it just a lead-in to an even more glorious sequel?

But wait a minute! What does Pharaoh have to say about all this?

What Saith Pharaoh?

Ah, but this was still Egypt. Yosef was a very powerful man – but Pharaoh was still the ultimate man in charge. Surely the thought must have occurred to someone *'I wonder what Pharaoh will have to say about all this?'* In the first section of today's aliyah Pharaoh finds out about the great reunion that has been going on at Tzafanat-Paneach's palace. What would be his response? What would be his decree? He could have had Yosef's brothers arrested – even tortured or killed. He could just as easily have blown it off, and act as if nothing had happened. But he did neither.

For two decades Yosef had lived as a fatherless, brotherless, rootless transplant. No one knew his parentage. No one knew his back story. No one knew his family history. Why should they – he was just a slave. All Egypt – or Pharaoh - had wanted or needed to know, it seems, was that the young man was brilliant, winsome, and very, very good at making silk purses out of whatever sow's ears they threw at him. He was, in their eyes, just a helpful robot, a useful android, a highly functional piece of technology; he was a Pinocchio, not a 'real boy'. The news that Tzafanat-Paneach had a family hit Pharaoh's ears like a discordant musical note? Our robot is human? He has brothers - and a father? Well, if they are anything like him - BRING THEM ON! Egypt's economy could use a few more brilliant, winsome androids to help make us even richer and more powerful than we are now! Let's go all out - and *collect the whole set!*

Pharaoh therefore did what monarch's do - he issued a royal decree. Here is the message he sent to Yosef and his brothers:

Zot asu

'These [things] do:

ta'anu et-b'irchem ulchu-vo'u art'zah Kena'an

Load your beasts and go directly to Canaan.

Ukechu et-avichem v'et-bateichem uvo'u elay

Bring your father and your families and come to me.

v'etnah lachem et-tuv eretz Mitzrayim v'ichlu et-chelev ha-aretz

I will give you good land in Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.

[Genesis 45:17-18]

Pharaoh had no natural love in his heart for the Hebrews, whose occupation as herders of sheep all Egyptians had been brought up to consider ‘abominable’. But he saw it as being in his – and Egypt’s best interest – to bring them under his dominion. His decree sounded very gracious – except, that is, for *one little detail*.

The One Little Detail

The interesting thing about Pharaoh’s invitation is that it *excludes one very important element* – it specifically excludes the “stuff”² of Israel. The invitation concluded as follows:

V'atah tzuveitah zot

Now you are instructed to do the following:

asu kechu-lachem me'eretz Mitzrayim agalot

You are to take unto yourself wagons from Egypt

L'tapchem v'linsheichem

for your small children and for your wives,

unsatem et-avichem uvatem

and also use them for your father, and come

V'eineichem al-tachos al-kleichem

and do not be concerned with your belongings,

ki-tuv kol-eretz Mitzrayim lachem hu

for the good things of the land of Egypt will be yours.'

[Genesis 45:20]

Pharaoh will, it seems, accept, even *welcome*, Ya’akov, his sons, their wives, and their children – but *But* he wants them to ride in *Egyptian wagons*, and he instructs them to leave their ‘stuff’ [Hebrew, *k’liy*] - all that makes them Hebrews - behind. They must pass through Egypt’s idea of a strait gate; its ‘eye of the needle’.

Why does Pharaoh insist Israel *ride in Egyptian wagons* and *leave all his Hebrew “stuff” behind*? Because Pharaoh wants Israel to become *Egyptians*, not hold onto their Hebraic/Covenantal heritage. He is not willing to accept the Hebrews as they are; he insists that they must leave their “stuff” behind. They must assimilate. They must ‘fit in’. They must not just be *IN* Egypt; they must become *OF* Egypt. They must become less and less like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov – and more and more like Potifar, and Potifar’s wife, and Poti-Phera - and, well ... like Tzafanat-

² The Hebrew word the King James Version translates as ‘stuff’ is *k’liy*, *kaf*, *lamed*, *yod*. Strong’s Hebrew word #3627, it is pronounced *kel-ee*. The first usage of this Hebrew noun is found in Genesis 24, in connection with the story of the acquisition of a bride for Yitzchak. It refers, in that instance, to the elements of the bridal gift paid by Avraham [through his servant] for Rivkah’s hand in marriage. The verse translates: “*And the servant brought forth k’liy of silver, and k’liy of gold, and raiment, and gave [them] to Rivkah.*”

Pharaoh and Pharaoh himself! This just might be a problem – but we will leave that discussion for another day.

The Essence of Galut – i.e. ‘Exile’

At the very beginning of the “exile” the issue is therefore cast very clearly. It is not so much *whether* Yisrael will go to Egypt – that is pretty much a done deal. Egypt has Yosef. The only question is, *when* Israel goes to Egypt, *will he take with him his “stuff” – the “stuff” of his Hebraic heritage?* Will he take the things – and the language and ways – passed down to him by his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak? Will he take the emunah? Will he take the *sh’ma* lifestyle? Will he take the *lech lecha, atar, suwach, abaq, and teshuvah* disciplines? Will he take the torch of covenant into, and sing the songs of Tziyon in, a strange land? Or will he *assimilate into the culture of Egypt and become like everyone there?* Will he and his sons *ride in Egyptian wagons/carts?* Will his children *wear Egyptian clothes, play Egyptian games, and adopt Egyptian as their native language?* Will they *adopt Egyptian hairstyles?* Will they *get caught up in Egyptian politics, look at the world from an Egyptian worldview, and think from Egyptian mindsets.* Will they *celebrate the Egyptian holidays?* Will they *exchange their values and priorities in life for Egyptian values and priorities?* Will they *start eating the same things the Egyptians eat?* Will they *laugh at the same things at which Egyptians laugh and weep at the same things at which Egyptians weep?* Will they *start getting intimidated by the things and people that intimidate Egyptians?* Will they *start being impressed by the same things by which Egyptians are impressed?* Will they *allow themselves to become outraged by the same things that outrage the Egyptians?* Will they *trade their sh’ma lifestyle for scheduled services in Egyptian temples?* Will they *bow their knee to Egyptian gods?*

Alas, questions like these lie at *the heart and soul of the challenge presented by any exile.*

Bringing It Home to You and Me

Look *over yon hill* to the horizon here in the 21st Century, Dear Reader. A modern-day Pharaoh’s wagons are coming – pulling up to your place and to mine as you read this. They are coming *for our children.* They are coming *for our marriages.* They are coming *for our hearts, for our minds ... and yes, they are coming for our souls.* The decree of the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, you see, does not really differ much at all from the decree of the Christian Pharaoh, or of the Muslim Pharaoh, or for that matter, of the secular/humanist one-world-order Anti-Messiah of the end times. In essence, the decree is always this: “**LEAVE ALL THAT HEBREW/COVENANT WITH GOD STUFF BEHIND!!**” For some reason, ‘Hebrew stuff’ seems to infuriate Pharaohs of all kinds, all nationalities, and all

ages.

The *wagons of lawlessness* that have been sent for us by the leaders of the world come loaded with *wealth*, and with *prestige*, and with all kinds of *exciting and entertaining new things*. But the one who offers all that wealth and prestige and excitement always adds one little detail to the offer: “*Come, partake, enjoy to your hearts desire – but leave behind that which marks you as a distinctive people, the people of God ... or die.*” The Maccabees, when faced with such a decree, considered death more palatable. What about you? Who will you become while in exile? Will you become a *Tzafanat-Paneach*? Or will you be able to remain a Yosef? Look at yourself right now. Look *closely*. Look at the externals – look at how you dress, look at how you talk, look at what you eat. But do not by any means stop there. Look carefully as well at the following things which are perhaps the best barometers of where - and who - a person is spiritually.

Look at *what pursuits and activities you most frequently engage in when you have free time*. Look at *what you think about most frequently when you are just daydreaming*. Look at *what you secretly wish for that you don't have*. Look at *what non-essential things you spend most of your money on*.

Look at *what are the most frequent topics of conversation when you converse with your peers*. Look at *what efforts you have made since the last Sabbath to obtain counsel from the Holy One as to how to live your life*. Look at *what is your most frequent areas of sinful thought, speech and behavior*. Look at *the areas of your life where you indulge and even enjoy what the Torah calls 'uncleanness' – and even abomination*.

Look at all the *philosophies, ideologies, causes, and cultural lies inconsistent with your Covenant identity and mission that you have swallowed hook, line, and sinker, without even thinking about it*.

Ask yourself candidly *what non-essential 'stuff' [Hebrew, k'liy] you would be most be inclined to want to take with you if you received a legal edict from the local authorities telling you that had to move out of where you live tomorrow*.

These suggested self-inquiries are designed to reveal *how much in exile* you presently are. If you will take the answers to these inquiries seriously you will be able to see exactly *who you presently are*, and, perhaps more importantly, *who you are presently in the process of becoming*. Use this self-examination process somewhat like an altimeter to check how far you have migrated from the 'ground zero' of the Torah foundation. Use it as a barometer to check how much you are

fluctuating from the Torah standard expressed in the *Sh'ma*³ due to the atmospheric pressure from your place of exile.

Meanwhile, let's return to our text. Yosef is about to send his brothers and Pharaoh's wagons back to Ya'akov's camp outside Hebron.

Just What have you got in Those Wagons, Anyway?

The text of today's aliyah contains a rather thorough discussion of the contents of the wagon train Pharaoh sends to bring Ya'akov and his family to live in Egypt. Pharaoh didn't want Yehudah and family to go back empty-handed. Oh no, that would not do at all. He makes sure they 'put on the ritz'!

Vayiten lahem Yosef agalot al-pi Par'oh

Yosef gave them wagons according to Pharaoh's instructions

V'yiten lahem tzedah l'darech

and he also provided them with food for the journey.

L'chulam natan l'ish chalifot smalot

He gave each of [his brothers] an outfit of clothes.

Ul'Binyamin natan sh'losh me'ot kesef

To Benjamin, however, he gave 300 pieces of silver

V'chamesh chalifot smalot

and five outfits.

Don't you know Yehudah and Levi and crew looked dashing in their new Egyptian outfits! And wait until Binyamin counts out for Ya'akov his **300** shiny new pieces of silver – *k'chink, k'chink, k'chink* – a wagonload of silver by my estimation. Oh, but that's not all. Keep reading!

Ul'aviv shalach kezot

[Yosef] sent the following to his father

asarah chamorim nos'im mituv Mitzrayim

Ten male donkeys, loaded with Egypt's finest products

v'eser atonot nos'ot bar v'lechem umazon

as well as ten female donkeys, loaded with grain, bread, and food

l'aviv l'darech

for his father's journey.

[Genesis 45:23]

³ I refer primarily to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which begins: "*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. You will love the Holy One with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. Set these words, with which I instruct you this day, upon your heart. Teach them faithfully to your children. Speak of them as you sit in your home and as you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind them as a sign upon your hands, and let them be a signpost before your eyes. Inscribe them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.*"

Pharaoh has spared no expense. In today's society what he sent would be roughly equivalent to ten *Leer* jets and ten stretch limos packed to the gills with stuff from Niemen Marcus and Harry & David. Pharaoh does, it seems, intend to command Ya'akov's full attention. It just could be that someone's got something up his sleeve. Meanwhile the brothers have more pressing things to worry about. Yosef has one last thing to say to them before they leave for home. Here is how Torah records Yosef's last word to his brothers before they left Egypt this second time:

Al-tirgeizu b'darech

Do not get agitated/upset on the way!

[Genesis 45:24]

Commentators have long found Yosef's parting instructions, '***al-tirgeizu b'darech***', fascinating⁴. This was much more, it seems, than a mere '*Bon voyage*' or '*have a nice trip*'. A literal reading of this phrase would seem to indicate that Ya'akov spoke the words after his brothers had already left – perhaps just as they were getting out of sight, or perhaps as a kind of spiritual blessing. The Septuagint translators, joined by Rashi, interpreted this Hebrew phrase to mean '*Do not quarrel along the way*'.

Yosef was clearly expressing serious concern for his brothers' peace of mind. The operative verb in the phrase Yosef used is a form of the verb root *ragaz*⁵. This verb is usually translated as '*tremble, quake, rage, quiver, be agitated, be excited, or be perturbed.*' In the only other two instances in Torah when this verb root is used it is going to be translated to mean to *tremble*, or to *shake violently in fear or rage*. See Exodus 15:14, and Deuteronomy 2:25. Hence Yosef's parting words literally meant something like "*Do not tremble, or shake violently, in fear or in rage.*" Why all the concern? Why on earth would the prospect of delivering to their father, their wives, and their children the good news that their long-lost kinsman Yosef was alive and well in Egypt make brothers *tremble or shake violently in fear or in rage*?

Once in a Lifetime News!

On the one hand, of course, the news that the brothers were bringing was indeed *good news* – Yosef the long-lost brother was not only alive but was in charge of the storehouses of Egypt - had invited them all to come to live with him to ride out the famine, with Pharaoh's blessing. With this good news, however, will inevitably come the revelation to their father, their wives, and their children of some *very, very ugly realities*. The family's *dirtiest little secrets* were about to be exposed. Everyone back home would eventually want to know, you see, just how it came to

⁴ A passage in the Talmud theorizes that Yosef was instructing his brothers not to get involved in studying Torah while traveling, lest they became distracted and lose their way. See **Tractate Ta'anit 10b**

⁵ *Ragaz* is *resh, gimel, zayin*. Strong's Hebrew word #7244, it is pronounced *raw-gawz*'

be that Yosef got ‘lost’ in the first place - and how exactly he wound up in Egypt of all places, etc.

Now that Yosef has been discovered the *whole ugly truth* about what happened 22 years ago at Dotan is eventually sure to come out. So just how *does* a person break it to his father – or to a loving wife and trusting children – that he has been keeping a horrible secret from them for over 20 years? How does one break the news that – in conspiracy with his brothers [except Binyamin] – he plotted to murder his younger kinsman, mercilessly beat him up, stripped him naked, threw him in that naked condition into a pit with vipers and scorpions, and then laughed and enjoyed a good meal as the hapless younger kinsman screamed in agony and begged for mercy?

How does one break the news that he once sold his kinsman out to Yishmaeli traders for a few pieces of silver? How does one break the news to those he loves that he and his brothers covered up the deed by killing a goat, smearing its blood on the hapless victim’s coat to make it look like he had been killed by a wild animal, and presenting that falsified evidence to an already bereaved man who they knew loved the victim of the plot more than anything else in the world?

How does one explain why never once in the intervening 20 + years he has felt even so much as a pang of remorse over these despicable actions, much less lifted so much as a finger to try to find or redeem the hapless victim from slavery, but instead went on nonchalantly with life for over two decades like nothing whatever had happened?

This is *once-in-a-lifetime news*. With Yosef found, the brothers could keep their dark, dirty secret no more. Their façade of spirituality was about to be ripped away. The dark side of their hearts was about to be unmasked. Their evil deeds were about to be exposed. The web of deception they had woven for all these years was about to come completely undone, thread-by-thread, in front of everyone.

Yosef saw it all. He knew what a humbling experience the trip back home to report to Ya’akov and to their families all that had transpired was going to be for Yosef’s brothers. He knew this trip was going to be traumatic for them. So, realizing how emotionally disturbing the trip home would be, and how the tendency would be for each to try to point the finger of blame for Yosef’s disappearance at someone else, he wanted to make sure they stayed focused on the positives, and on the future – not be overwhelmed by the negatives and paralyzed with shame about the past. And hence he said to them – or perhaps spoke over them as they walked out of sight – *al-tirgeizu b’darech* [Do not tremble or shake in fear or rage along the way.]

Breaking the News to Ya'akov

We are not told specifically what the conversation was or what emotions were felt or expressed by the brothers as they made the trek back to Kena'an. That is apparently something the Holy One has determined should be *a private matter* between the brothers themselves. The only thing about the trip Torah tells us is the following:

Vaya'alu mi-Mitzrayim

[The brothers] headed north from Egypt,

v'yavo'u erez Kena'an el-Ya'akov avihem

and they came to their father Ya'akov in Kena'an.

V'yagidu lo l'emor

They broke the news to him:

od Yosef chai vechi-hu moshel b'chol erez Mitzrayim

'Yosef is still alive. He is the ruler of all the land of Egypt.'

v'yafag libo ki lo-he'emin lahem

And [Ya'akov's] heart became numb, for he could not believe them.

[Genesis 45:27]

The news the boys brought back from Egypt seemed *surreal* to Ya'akov – as indeed it was. The words were simply more than a broken old man who had known nothing but heartache for decades could process.

First, the idea that Yosef was *od chai* [still alive] did not fit with the tangible evidence he had seen. He had personally seen Yosef's *coat of many colors* torn to shreds and covered with blood. The logical deduction was that Yosef had been torn limb from limb by a lion, or bear, or pack of wolves. That evidence, especially when combined with the lad's brothers' silence and their failure to even go out looking for Yosef, all these years had convinced him Yosef had to be dead. It should therefore not have surprised the brothers one whit if Ya'akov played the part of a *doubting Thomas*. And the second part of the story, that not only was Yosef ***od chai*** [still alive], he had somehow become ***moshel b'chol erez Mitzrayim*** [ruler of all the land of Egypt], was even more difficult to imagine. The Yosef whom Ya'akov had known was, after all, no Egyptian. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. No Egyptian ruler Ya'akov had ever heard of had been a Hebrew. Hebrews, after all, were an abomination to the Egyptians. How, Ya'akov must have wondered, could Yosef have become ruler over a people who considered him an abomination? And what is more, if what the boys were saying was true WHY WAS YOSEF NOT HERE WITH THEM RIGHT NOW!!!!!! It simply did not compute.

Ya'akov Has a 'Melt-Down'

Our text describes Ya'akov's initial response to the report of the boys as *vyafag*

libo - ‘and his heart became numb’. The verb root of this phrase is *pug*⁶. It means to *interrupt or cease an ongoing process*. In connection with a person’s heart [Hebrew *leb*] the clear implication is that Ya’akov’s heart function became erratic – or perhaps stopped. We might, thus, interpret *vyafag libo* to mean ‘his heart skipped a beat’, or perhaps even ‘he flat lined’.

In Hebraic thought however a person’s *leb* [heart] is much more than the 4-chambered muscular organ that pumps blood to the body. A man’s *leb* is the *seat of all his emotions* as well as *the source of all his thoughts*. This means that what happened when Ya’akov heard that Yosef was *od chai* and *moshel b’chol erez Mitzrayim* is that his already strained emotional state completely overloaded, and his intellectual circuits simply blew. He had a veritable *melt down*.

The Holy One’s Defibrillators: Yosef’s Words and Pharaoh’s Wagons!

The brothers had perhaps hoped the good news that Yosef was alive and doing great in Egypt would by itself be enough to satisfy their father. They had hoped, I am sure, that he would not have to hear all the sordid details or know the painful truth as to how all this had happened. But Ya’akov’s melt down made it clear that whether they liked it or not they were going to have to *spill some at least some of the beans*.

V’yedabru elav et kol-divrei Yosef asher diber alehem
They told him all the words of Yosef, which he had said to them.

vayar et ha-agalot asher-shalach Yosef laset oto
When he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him,

vatechi ruach Ya'akov avihem
the spirit of Ya`akov, their father, revived.

Vayomer Yisra'el rav
'This is big!' said Israel.

od-Yosef beni chai elchah v'er'enu beterem amut
'My son Yosef is alive! I must go and see him before I die!'

It took *two tonics/defibrillators* to stop Ya’akov’s meltdown: ***kol divrei Yosef*** - ‘all the words of Yosef’ which he had said to his brothers, and Ya’akov being shown *ha-agalot* [the wagons which Yosef had sent to ‘fetch’ him]. It behooves us to look at both of these tonics/defibrillators a little more closely.

Tonic/Defibrillator #1: Kol Divrei Yosef

The first tonic/defibrillator - *Kol divrei Yosef* – literally meaning *all the words of Yosef* – included some pretty significant things. One thing we know the phrase

⁶ Pug is *peh/feh vav, gimel*. Strong’s Hebrew word #6313, it is pronounced *poog*.

included was Yosef's instruction "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You will dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have."

Did *kol divrei Yosef* also include words spoken by Yosef like "**You sold me into Egypt**" [Genesis 45:4], **God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance** [Genesis 45:7] and **so now [it was] not you [that] sent me hither, but God.** [Genesis 45:8]?

How much information of what happened all those years ago did it take to stop Ya'akov's melt down and enable him to go on?

Tonic/Defibrillator #2: Ha-agalot [i.e. the wagons]

The second thing that Torah tells us brought Ya'akov back from his melt down was the sight of *ha agalot* - the wagons, or carts, or chariots – which Yosef had sent for him and his family, to carry them back to Egypt. What was the big deal about *the wagons*, we may ask? Why did seeing the wagons/carts/chariots cause Ya'akov's spirit to revive? In English it just doesn't make sense. But as we have pointed out several times in the course of these studies, the Torah was not written in English – it was written in Hebrew. It is thus to Hebrew that we must look to get an understanding of things we find in the Torah which seem to make no sense in English.

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'wagon', 'cart', or 'chariot' is *agalah*⁸. This verb root means to *go in a circle*. The most obvious reference is to the wheels of the wagon, cart, and/or chariot, which are circular in shape, and go round and round. To get the noun *agalah* from the verb root *agal*, all you do is add the suffix *hey* at the end. The letter *hey* is a Hebrew pictograph, a picture of a window, or opening, in a shepherd's tent - the place where the tent receives both *life-giving fresh air* and *daylight*. When you make the noun *agalah* plural you do so by changing the *hey* at the end to a *tav*, which makes what we in English associate with the 't' sound⁹. The word then becomes *agalot*. The *tav* ending on

⁷ Among the sages a *midrash* developed suggesting that Ya'akov interpreted these wagons as a coded message from Yosef – as they bore some relation to the last Torah topic that Ya'akov had taught Yosef before Yosef's disappearance. The reasoning goes that only Yosef and Ya'akov could have known that the topic of the last Torah discussion between the father and son had to do with wagons, and thus the presentation of wagons was intended as a secret confirmation, to the mind of Ya'akov, that his son Yosef was indeed alive.

⁸ *Agalah* is *ayin, gimel, lamed, hey*. It is a noun derived from the verb root *agal, ayin, gimel, lamed*, Strong's Hebrew word #5696.

⁹ Ashkenazim call this same letter a *sav*, and pronounce it as an 's' sound instead of a 't' sound.

this word is a Hebraic word picture as well – a picture of a *covenant sign* [ot] – i.e. a confirmation of, and down payment on, the promises of a covenant.

The Hebraic message of the word *agalot* that was communicated to Ya’akov was thus that the spinning of the wheel brings *revelation* [agalah] and when multiple wheels [such as the wheels of a wagon, cart or chariot] spin, the process is one of *covenant fulfillment* [agalot]. In other words, perhaps when Ya’akov saw the wagon wheels he finally understood that everything that had happened to Yosef – and thus to him - was directly connected to the revelation the Holy One had given to his grandfather Avraham, when the Holy One told him:

***Know for sure that your seed will live as foreigners
in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them.
They will afflict them four hundred years.
I will also judge that nation, whom they will serve.
Afterward they will come out with great substance.***
[Genesis 15:13-14]

The prophetic secret that revived Ya’akov’s spirit is this: Wagon wheels from Egyptian wagons will not only take Ya’akov and his children to Egypt. By the Holy One’s covenant, wagon wheels from Egyptian wagons will also one day carry Ya’akov’s descendants back home – ‘with great substance’. With that prophetic insight Ya’akov’s spirit revived.

Vayomer Yisra’el rav
“It is enough”, said Yisrael.

Od-Yosef beni chai
‘My son Yosef is alive!’

elchah v’er’ienu beterem amut
‘I must go and see him before I die!’
[Genesis 45:28]

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Let us look more closely at this passage that reveals the attitude and thought process of those who do not understand the unique relationship between the natural descendants of Avraham and our God.

[A] According to verse 16 what emotional reaction did Pharaoh and his court have to the news that the long-lost brothers of the second-in-command in the country had “come calling”?

[B] List the various things that made up the seemingly very generous offer Par’oh extended to Yosef’s family.

[C] According to Pharaoh’s offer what was Yosef’s family to do with their possessions – their “stuff”?

[D] List the things that Yosef gave to his family as they left.

[E] What were Yosef's parting words with his brothers?

[F] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated as "fall out" [KJV] in verse 24. Write the Hebrew word and describe its word picture. What do you think Yosef was saying?

2. Laden with gifts from Yosef and provisions from Pharaoh's storehouses the brothers return home to a very skeptical Ya'akov.

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated as "fainted" in verse 26. Write the Hebrew word and describe its Hebraic word picture.

[B] Why do you think Yosef had this reaction to the brothers' report?

[C] What part of the story told by the brothers did Ya'akov say was "enough"?

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as 'enough'. Write the Hebrew word and describe its Hebraic word picture.

[E] Did Ya'akov agree at this point to go to Mitzrayim *to live*? Explain.

3. In today's Haftarah Ezekiel is told what to say when people ask him what he is doing with the two "sticks" the Holy One gave him.

V'cha'asher yomeiru eleicha b'nei ameicha

When the children of your people shall speak to you,

l'emor halo-tagid lanu mah-eleh lach

saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these?

Daber alehem koh-amar Adonai Elohim

tell them, Thus says the Holy One, GOD:

hineh ani loke'ach et-etz Yosef

Behold, I will take the stick of Yosef,

asher b'yad-Efrayim v'shivtei-Yisra'el chaverav

which is in the hand of Efrayim, and the tribes of Yisra'el his companions;

v'natati otam alav et-etz Yehudah

and I will put them with it, [even] with the stick of Yehudah,

v'asitim l'etz echad v'hayu echad b'yad

and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand.

[Ezekiel 37:18-19]

[A] How was Ezekiel to get the Holy One's message out? (How was he to go about getting an audience together?)

[B] What was the prophetic message Ezekiel was told to speak?

[C] What do you think Ezekiel's prophetic message means to us today?

[D] Do you think the 'two sticks' in the Ezekiel narrative have already been united? If so, when and how? If not, what do you think will happen physically in the world when the two sticks *are* united?

4. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha *Lukas* [Luke] recounts the circumstances under which Messiah taught a multitude of Jewish people from the Torah in what has been called "the Sermon on the Plain".

[A] From what different places did Jewish people come to see the Messiah?

[B] Did the people who came to see Messiah include descendants of Yehudah?

[C] Did the people who came to see Messiah include descendants of Yosef?

[D] Why did all these Jewish people come? List as many reasons as you can, to the extent these verses clue us in.

[E] Which of these reasons is listed first, and was therefore 'primary' - most common and first in the minds of the Jewish people?

[F] Why did people try to touch Yeshua?

[G] Using Strong's Concordance look up at least two Greek words that have been translated as "power". Write the Greek words and their meaning. What Hebrew word or words expresses the same thing(s)?

*May the Holy One quickly reunite Yehudah and Yosef in our day,
and may they not "fall out" on the way.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 111:6-8

*He has shown his people the power¹⁰ of his works,
In giving them the heritage of the nations.*

*The works of his hands are truth and justice.
All his precepts are sure. They are established forever and ever.
They are done in truth and uprightness.*

¹⁰ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'power' in this passage is *koach*, *kaf*, *chet* Strong's Hebrew word #3581, pronounced *ko'-akh*. The first Biblical usage of this word, which is derived from an unused verb root meaning 'he is firm, or solid', is found in Genesis 4:12. There the Holy One told Adam that from henceforth [after his partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] the earth would not yield unto him its 'strength' [*koach*]. The word is also used by Ya'akov in Genesis 31:6 to describe to Rachel and Leah how diligently he worked for their father Lavan – "with all my power [*koach*] I have served your father." Likewise, in the Exodus story, when the Holy One warns Pharaoh of the final plagues, He says to him 'I have raised you up to show you My Power [*koach*].'