

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayechi:*** **Genesis 48:21- 49:12**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 2:4**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Peter 1:8-12**

Gather round, that I may tell you what will befall you in the aftertime of days.

[Genesis 49:1]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 137:4;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #10, *Tzaddikim* [Men Who Do God's Will]

Vayomer Yisra'el el-Yosef – Then Yisrael said to Yosef ... *Hineh anochi met* “Behold, I am dying ... *vehayah Elohim imachem* – May God will be with you ... *v'heshiv etchem el-eretz avoteichem* – and may he return you to the land of the patriarchs. **Genesis 48:21.**

Our journey through the opening *sefer* of Torah is almost over. One moment we were marveling at the deep ramifications of the opening phrase - ‘*B’reshit*’; now we are mourning patriarchs that left us far too soon and having haunting nightmares of a bitter season of captivity. One moment we were saying ‘hello’ to Adam and Chava; but then, in the twinkling of an eye, it seemed, we were saying ‘good-bye’ to epoch of the ancients. Goodbye Hevel! Goodbye Kayin! Goodbye Chanoch! Goodbye Metushelach! Goodbye Noach! Goodbye Cham, Shem, and Yafet! We have greeted – and all too soon witnessed the end of – the era of Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah. All these walked the earth. During their lives, hundreds of violent storms came - and went. Volcanos erupted. Earthquakes shook the planet. Meteors fell from the sky and left craters. Mass migrations occurred – then abruptly ceased. Ethnic groups blamed – and persecuted - other ethnic groups; then it was vice versa. Nations rose against nations. Wars raged for months or years – then the war machines fell strangely silent. Famines waxed heavy – then bumper crops returned. The climate changed dramatically, wreaking havoc. Ice caps melted – then refroze. Fires burned out of control – then went out. Floodwaters rose – then receded. Yet, Creation is still here - and so is humankind. Life goes on. The sun keeps shining; and the world keeps turning ... *l’dor v’dor* – from generation to generation. *Sunrise, sunset – swiftly fly the years! One season following the other, laden with happiness and tears!*²

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² The quoted words are the chorus of a famous song. The work of lyricist Sheldon Harnick, they were written circa 1964 for the Broadway play ‘*Fiddler on the Roof*’.

Ya'akov May Be Dying, but His Nish'mat Chayim's 'Yisrael' Impact on the World Has Barely Begun

The time has come for Ya'akov – or will it be Yisrael – to bid us farewell. The last patriarch in the great Avrahamic line is about to complete his tour of duty. Time and age are about to accomplish what neither the cruelty of jealous brothers or the witchcraft of Laban, or even the worst famine in world history could. But though the temporal body his sons know as *Ya'akov* is about to breathe its last breath, the eternal spirit we know as Yisrael is only beginning to impact the world.

As Ya'akov prepares to cross the mysterious bridge leading from mortal life to the realm beyond – the realm which mortal men know only as 'afterlife' - he knows that the world he is leaving behind is a frightening place for his children. Egypt – presently the world's lone superpower and cultural trendsetter - is a dark, dangerous, and highly volatile country. People who live in such world value things like ethnicity, gender-preference, sociological ideas, abstract concepts of political theory, ideology, philosophy, science, and religion, material possessions, and even their house pets over the health and welfare of their fellow human beings. The prevailing culture much prefers material possessions over spirituality, occult arts over virtues, tidbits of useless (especially scandalous or divisive) information over wisdom and understanding, entertainment over inspiration, leisure over labor, and ideas over people. Thinking themselves 'enlightened' the people of Egypt have had so much for so long that they came to trust in rhetoric over reality, propagandize over practical education, ideology over useful information, weaponized science over scholarship, sexual expression over marriage and family, power and prestige over piety, and physical form and appearance over substance. Yosef – the Messiah prototype of the Book of Genesis – caught and taught the Holy One's vision, instituted Divinely-inspired supply-management practices, and turned the land of sphinxes into by far the most affluent and powerful country of the world. Families of refugees from every other nation, tribe, culture, tongue, and ethnic group have relocated to cities and villages that sit in the shade of the pyramids. These refugees are presently economic bondservants of the Egyptian government, but at least they eat well – for now. So long as Yosef is leading the country it will be blessed. So long as Yosef is inspiring and overseeing the ecosystem, life here will be tolerable despite the sick perversions of the culture. Yosef is the beacon to which the nations have been drawn. But Yosef is only one candle burning in a very, very dark place. Yosef represents the thin *techelet* thread that separates hope from despair, order from chaos, the 'clean' from the 'unclean', the 'holy' from the 'profane', and light from darkness. There is only one reason that Egypt is prospering, and providing a safe haven for foreigners – and that reason is spelled *yod, vav, samech, feh sofit* – Yosef! The only reason Egypt is the world's breadbasket is that Yosef is being allowed to run everything from the palace to the granary to the social order. One of

these days, when Yosef is gone... well, let's just say *all hell is going to break loose*. When Yosef is gone the economy will tank. When Yosef is gone all decorum and restraint will be cast off. When Yosef is gone the nation's moral and ethical compass will dissolve into greed, gluttony, sloth, lust, covetousness, wrath, violence, and narcissism. When Yosef is gone all respect for life – indeed all facades of human decency - will disappear. When Yosef is gone the mantra of life in Egypt will revert to every man for himself – just as it was for centuries before Yosef arrived in Pharaoh's palace. When Yosef is gone a new, toxic form of racism will emerge; those who recently immigrated to Egypt because of the famine or in search of economic opportunity will find themselves slandered, hated, impoverished, and persecuted minorities. As Egypt's problems multiply in the vacuum left by Yosef's light, these minorities will see their best and strongest and their children rounded up and herded into work camps to serve as slaves of the state – while the old, the weak, the infirm, will be made victims of purges and holocausts. Pray that Yosef lives forever - or that Mashiach comes!

What About Yosef's Kinsmen – the Threescore and Eight Remaining Hebrews in the World?

Remember that for Yosef's kinsmen, the Hebrews, the plan was never to resettle in Egypt permanently. The initial plan was just to visit, reconnect with Yosef, and ride out the five years of the great famine that he said were coming. But something seems to have happened along the way. And what was not to like about a booming economy, eye-popping fashion styles, titillating entertainment, exquisite culture, fine wine, and truly gourmet cuisine? It did not take long, and we Hebrews – along with the other immigrants – really began to *like* Egypt. We started stuffing our faces with leeks, onions, and the fish of the Nile rather than the foods that our forefathers taught us to eat. We got comfortable. We got fat. Our hearts began to grow lukewarm toward the calling upon our lives. Our passion for the land the Holy One had promised to give Avraham's descendants began to wane. Where was it again? We forgot. What was so good about that land again? We lost any sense of it. Without us even noticing it our *temporary sojourn* upon foreign land morphed into an era of *exile*. What exactly is exile, you ask? Exile involves two things:

[1] you *live in a foreign country – under foreign laws, in a foreign culture, as an outsider, on someone else's 'turf' and therefore dependent upon someone else's good will*; and

[2] from either a legal, financial, practical or emotional reason, or some combination of same, no matter how much you might wish to, you *cannot go home*.

In the epic poem '*The Divine Comedy*' Dante Alighieri describes the process of going into exile as follows:

*... You will leave everything you love most:
this is the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first.
You will know how salty another's bread tastes,
and how hard it is to ascend and descend another's stairs ...*

Paradiso, Canto XVII: 55–60

Exile means you *leave everything you love most*? What exactly does that mean? What exactly do we ‘love most’? Most of us have to stop and think: what DO we really love most? What really does have our affection? Where is our treasure? The answer to these questions can always be answered more easily than you think. Follow the money. Follow the time. Follow the passion. Follow the default thought patterns. Follow the threads of conversation in which you participate. If you look at where you are spending these five denominations of Kingdom Currency, you will find what you love most.

What does a son of the Covenant love most? I am not talking about ice cream – or leeks, onions, fish, or even *challah*. I am not talking about anything of the flesh, or of its appetites. I am not talking about anything in the mind, and its self-indulgences of philosophy, ideology, schizophrenia, and religion. I am not talking about anything culture driven. I am talking about what a son of the Covenant hungers for at the deeper levels of his soul. At that level, what does a son of the Covenant love most? A son of the Covenant loves His Creator most. He loves His Creator with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength. He loves to converse with his King. He loves to walk with his Shepherd. He loves to interact with his Friend. He loves to learn from his Rabbi. He loves to serve his Master. He loves to co-labor with his God in the daily outworking of His Grand Redemptive Plan for mankind. This is why we were born. This is why we have been called. This is why we are sons of the Covenant.

The *arrow that the bow shoots*? So exile is like unto a *barrage of arrows*? So *galut* is unto like a gauntlet of armor-piercing insults? So exile is like unto an assembly line where we experience an endless series of rapid repetitive traumas? Yes, and it all starts with losing everything we love most.

What does exile do to us? It starts immediately to steal from us the elements of our true identity, of our mission, and of our destiny. It starts by enticing us – even seducing us – to love something it has to offer more than we love knowing and serving our King. While most of the world calls the land of prototypical exile by the name ‘Egypt’, therefore, we have learned to call it *Mitzrayim*. In the language of our King *Mitzrayim* means a place of *confinement*, of *bondage*, of *limitation*, of *restriction* – a *place of hedging in*, and a *chamber of compression*. *Mitzrayim* is therefore any place where we are *never really free to be who we were created to be*. It is any place where walls and ceilings seem to close in on us, and in which

dark forces conspire to rob from us the *means* of escape even as dark energy is stripping from us the *will* to leave.

Nevertheless, our exile in Egypt has been *more or less benign* thus far. As Tevye at the beginning of the play *Fiddler on the Roof* described the situation of the Jewish community in relation to the non-Jewish native population of Anatevka: “*So far, we don’t bother them ... and they don’t bother us.*” All of that, however, is destined to change. Egyptian bread is about to become increasingly salty to our taste in a few decades. And the stairway leading out is about to become very, very steep. Hence, the above quote from Dante’s ‘*The Divine Comedy*’ regarding exile continues as follows:

*And what will weigh down on your shoulders most
will be the bad and brainless company with whom you shall fall down into this ditch.
For all shall turn ungrateful, all insane and impious against you*
Paradiso, Canto XVII:61-64

Such a fate awaits us *b'acharit ha-yamim* [i.e. in the *aftertime of days*].

A Vision ... For the Aftertime of Days

Ya’akov knows – because he is now, as he prepares to enter the *olam ha ba* (the world to come) - flowing in a season of open prophetic vision – that *b'acharit ha-yamim* [i.e. in the *aftertime of days*] the seemingly friendly environs of Egypt will turn very, very unfriendly. Ya’akov – and perhaps *only* Ya’akov – knows that the sojourn of his descendants in Egypt ... and elsewhere ... will *gradually turn into an exile*, and that the exile will, year-by-year, bit-by-bit, turn uglier and uglier. Ya’akov knows that *the suspicions will come ...* in Egypt and everywhere else ... that those ‘Hebrews’ out there are ‘up to something’ and constitute a threat.

Ya’akov knows that an increasingly severe series of **official and unofficial pogroms** are going to be unleashed on us - and that few, if any, people will even care, much less take meaningful steps to stop them. Ya’akov knows over and over again the souls descended from him are going to be ‘**relocated**’ into **ghettos** where they can be *watched* – and *contained* – and *controlled* – and *deported* – and *slaughtered in great numbers* – more easily by suspicious foreign political and religious leaders. Ya’akov knows that *persecution is coming*, and will culminate in the **enslavement** of those among his descendants, male and female, who are strong enough to do backbreaking manual labor, and in the **systematic genocide** of those who are not – the old, the weak, the infirm. Ya’akov knows that *in the long run* the safest place on earth for a child [whether natural or adopted/engrafted] of the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham and renewed with Yitzchak and with him is *Eretz Yisrael*.

Immutable Truths

It is time we all learned two immutable truths from the patriarchs whose lives we have studied in the book of Genesis:

Immutable Truth #1: Life anywhere outside Israel is merely a part of a sojourn, exile, enslavement progression.

Immutable Truth #2: The same people who welcome us with open arms and smiles one day will in time come to hate us, enslave us, persecute us and then – as we discovered in Susa in the time of Haman, in the courts of the Spanish Inquisition, in Ghettos throughout Europe, and in “work camps” like Auschwitz - pleasant places of *exile* can all too quickly become for us *crucibles of annihilation*.

With this in mind, in verses 21-22 of Chapter 48 Ya’akov concludes his private conversation with Yosef with a *prophecy* and with a *bequest*. He makes it clear that Egypt – or Europe – or America, for that matter, is not “home” for his descendants. For any son of Ya’akov, home is “the land of your fathers.” Hence Ya’akov tells Yosef:

Hineh anochi met v’hayah Elohim imachem

Behold, I am dying, but Elohim will be with you,

v’heshiv etchem el-eretz avotechem

and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.

[Genesis 48:21]

Note that this prophetic declaration is two-fold: first, there is a promise/prophetic declaration *that* ‘God’ [Hebrew, *Elohim*] will ‘be with you’ [*i.e.* in context, with Yosef and his descendants], on the one hand, and secondly, there is a promise/prophetic declaration that *Elohim* will ‘bring you’ [*i.e.* in context, Yosef and his descendants] *again to the land of your fathers.*’

The first and foremost message Ya’akov wants to get across is that the Holy One is going to always *be with* Yosef and his descendants wherever they sojourn. There will always be a *WITH-NESS*. They will never be alone. As the mountains surround Jerusalem the Holy One is all around His People. And He who keeps watch over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. The people of the Holy One will never be forgotten. They will never be forsaken. They will never be left defenseless.

And there is a second message. The second message is that neither Egypt nor any other land of sojourn or exile is ever to become to Yosef and his descendants a ‘home’. Egypt – and other lands of exile - are not forever. By the power of His strong right Hand the Holy One will *bring* [them] *again to the land of* [their] *fathers.*’ He will not only make it possible for us to escape Egypt with our lives –

He will personally BRING us back to the land He promised to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Ya'akov's descendants forever.

The Holy One's promise is not that we can somehow work, or strive, fight, earn, or buy our way back to the homeland. His promise is that HE HIMSELF WILL EFFECTUATE OUR RETURN. He will send a prophet, or a deliverer, or a host of angels, or Messiah – or whatever and whoever - is necessary to make sure it happens just as He said it would. He will bankrupt Heaven, if that were possible – to return us to the land of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov. Bless the Holy One, His promise is irrevocable, and His Word is true.

Of course, only Yosef and his sons were present to hear this prophetic announcement. Yehudah was not present – nor was Reuven, or Sh'mon or Levi or even Benyamin. This message was, at this time, at least, for Yosef and his line alone. Yosef would later tell the rest of the brothers about this promise, but for now the announcement of Divine intention was integrally related to a personal bequest Ya'akov was making to Yosef through his adoption of Efrayim and Menashe. Ya'akov followed the declaration of ultimate return to the land with this bequest of the largest portion of inheritance there:

V'ani natati lecha Sh'chem achad al-acheicha

Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers,

asher lakachti miyad ha-Emori b'char'bi uvekashti

which I took out of the hand of the Amori with my sword and with my bow."

[Genesis 48:22]

At this point in the narrative the knowledgeable reader who is familiar with the account Torah gives of the lives of the *Avot* [fathers/patriarchs] will stop and ask himself or herself – *when, pray tell, did Ya'akov ever take anything out of the hand of the Amori [Amorites] with his sword and his bow?* The only reference in Torah to any warlike act that Ya'akov or his family was involved in was the massacre at Shechem in the wake of the rape and abduction of Dinah, and this massacre was accomplished without Ya'akov's approval, much less his participation. So *what on earth is Ya'akov talking about?* Of what parcel of land exactly is Ya'akov saying he is going to give to Ya'akov 'a portion above [his] brothers'?

The Mystery of Yosef's 'Portion Above His Brothers'

We know that Ya'akov inherited from his father Yitzchak the field and the cave at *Machpelah* near Hebron some *livestock* [sheep, goats, oxen, donkeys and/or camels], and some *grazing rights in Kena'an*. We know that he acquired by purchase a tract of land near *Shechem*. We know that a long time ago he acquired some livestock from Lavan, but we also know that he gave a good portion of that to Esav to appease and pacify his brother's anger. We know as well that the *Amori* [Amorites] – at least

those living near Hebron - were in a covenant with Ya'akov's grandfather, Avraham³. We therefore have a bit of a mystery. What exactly is Ya'akov *talking about*⁴? We do not know.

Perhaps as some commentators have speculated after Ya'akov purchased the tract at Shechem⁵ a group of Amori dispossessed him, such that he had to retake it by force. The text is not specific. Talmudic commentators argue in regard to the meaning of this fascinating statement. Some understand that Ya'akov is, at the time of his deathbed speech, bequeathing the city Shechem to Yosef as an inheritance. Most, however, believe that 'sh'chem' [ridge, or 'shoulder'] in this passage refers instead to an extra portion of inheritance that will be given to Yosef AFTER the conquest of the land. If so, this means that Ya'akov is speaking *prophetically* instead of historically, and 'his' sword and bow are to be taken to mean the collective swords and bows of his descendants, who will make war against the Kena'ani under the leadership of Yosef's descendant Y'hoshua.

The Deathbed Prophet Speaks

In Chapter 49 of *Sefer B'reshit* Ya'akov/Yisrael gathers his sons around his sick bed and proceeds to prophesy over them one by one [or in some cases two by two]. Anyone who has been at the deathbed of a friend or loved one understands the sense of awe and reverence that naturally attended this gathering of Ya'akov's children. Ya'akov called his sons together and said:

he'aseifu v'agidah lachem et asher-yikra etchem

Gather⁶ yourselves together that I may tell you that which will happen to you

b'acharit ha-yamim

in the aftertime of days.

Hikavtzu v'shim'u

Assemble⁷, and sh'ma [listen and heed, and act accordingly],

³ See Genesis 14:13.

⁴ Talmudic commentators argue in regard the meaning of this statement. Some understand that Ya'akov is now giving the city *Shechem* to Yosef as an inheritance. Most, however, believe that the reference to 'sh'chem' in this passage refers to an extra portion of inheritance that will be given to Yosef AFTER the conquest of the land. If so, this means that Ya'akov is speaking prophetically, and 'his' sword and bow are to be taken to mean the collective swords and bows of his descendants, who will make war against the Kena'ani under the leadership of Yosef's descendant Y'hoshua.

⁵ From the apostolic writings, we can glean that the land Ya'akov is talking about is in the area which in the time of Yeshua was called Samaria, near a village called *Sychar* – where Yeshua encountered the 'woman at the well. See **John 4:5-6**.

⁶ The Hebrew verb root is *asaf*, *alef*, *samech*, *feh sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word #622, pronounced *aw-sawf'*. This verb root means to collect things that are scattered or pack them into a place or chest – as is done to store up food or supplies for a journey. See the first Biblical usage, at Genesis 6:21.

⁷ The Hebrew verb root is *qabatz*, *quf*, *beit*, *tzade sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word #6908, pronounced *kaw-bawtz'*. The word is rooted in the agricultural process of harvesting and storing grain. See the first

b'nei Ya'akov v'shim'u el-Yisra'el avichem
you sons of Ya'akov; Sh'ma [listen to] Yisra'el your father.

If the natural attitude of awe and reverence that attends a deathbed visitation did not attract the undivided attention of Ya'akov's children, surely this sober declaration did! Ya'akov is not, he promises, merely going to share a few last moments with his family members and say 'goodbye'. He is, he promises, going to *prophesy* over them. He calls his sons [and, we assume, his daughter, Dinah] to gather around him to declare over them what will happen ***b'acharit ha-yamim*** [in the aftertime of days]. There is only one problem. When Ya'akov's children heed the call and anxiously gather around him and Ya'akov opens his mouth to speak, the words that come out sound - at least to our untrained ears - like *the farthest thing in the world from the end-times prophecy he had caused us to expect*.

The declarations which follow Ya'akov's 'deathbed call' to his children do not as we might expect them to speak to us of *weeks of years*, or *beasts* arising from tumultuous seas, or horns, or marks, or Armageddons or anti-Messiahs. Nowhere does Ya'akov reference *famines*, or *earthquakes*, or *wars*, or *rumors of wars*. Nowhere does he speak of a great 'falling away', of the 'time of Jacob's trouble', of the coming 'day of the Lord', or concerning either the glorious appearing or the establishment of the coming kingdom of the Messiah.

What a *letdown* [or so we might think]! I mean, after all the build-up the words Ya'akov winds up speaking to his children about what will befall them ***b'acharit ha-yamim*** [in the aftertime of days] will not even mention Pharaoh or the *coming enslavement* – much less Moshe, Miryam, Aharon, or the great deliverance that we all know will occur a few generations later. In fact, Ya'akov's final words are going to seem to the modern reader to be far more cryptic, personal, and emotional than prophetic. He will look at his sons one by one before he speaks to them - but *through whose eyes will he see them?* Will Ya'akov, as his gaze falls upon each of the sons he has sired, gathered around his deathbed, simply speak the thoughts that come forth from his heart concerning them? Or will the words he speaks emanate from the throne of the Most High God he has come to know so well since that night long ago when he laid his head upon a stone and dreamed of a stairway to Heaven.

And one wonders how much Ya'akov will understand, how much his sons will understand – and, for that matter, how much we will understand - about the words

Biblical usage, in Genesis 41:35. see also 41:48, and Deuteronomy 30:3-4. ***Qabatz*** does not mean 'assemble' or 'gather' in the context of having a meeting with each other, or engage in activities, but in the sense of collecting into one place – as grain is collected and stored into one place – in order that it can be readied for use or distribution.

he is about to speak in these precious moments. If we look at Ya'akov's words merely as *history*, we can assume he – and the sons he had called to his bedside – all knew everything he was talking about, even if we do not. If, however, we see Ya'akov's words as he promised they would be – *prophetic declarations concerning future generations* – particularly of 'the days to come' or 'aftertime of days', to coin Ya'akov's own phraseology – the answer of who knew – or knows – most becomes far from clear.

A Prophetic Vision Concerning Reuven

Ya'akov starts this round of prophecy with words relative to Reuven⁸. Can you imagine the sense of expectation Reuven had as his father turned his gaze upon him, and began to speak his final message? What did Reuven *hope for* as his father turned to him in the course of his deathbed blessing? What did he *fear* his father might say?

Who *was* Reuven to Ya'akov? Who was he to his brothers? Who was he to his wife and children? We know him primarily as Ya'akov's firstborn son. We know the name his mother, Leah, gave him, means '**Behold – a son!**' But who was he REALLY? Who was he SPIRITUALLY? And who **is** he PROPHETICALLY? Who is Reuven in the eyes of the Holy One, who formed him in his mother's womb? Who will Reuven be in the end of days? [See **Revelation 7:5; Ezekiel 48:6-7 and 31.**] What part was he – and were those who received and carry his DNA – created to play in the Holy One's Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan? And hence who is Reuven – or who should he be – **to US?**

What do we know of Leah's firstborn? Ya'akov is about to freeze-frame him into one defining moment – the worst moment of his life – when he tried unsuccessfully to usurp his father's place of authority in the covenant household by taking Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant as a concubine. **Genesis 35:22.** Reuven was guilty as charged. He 'uncovered his father's skirt'. He dishonored not only his father, his mother, his stepmother, his half-brothers, and Bilhah – he dishonored himself. In a single, fleeting but defining moment he fell in his father's eyes from being ***kochi v'reshit oni*** – *my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength ... yeter set veyeter az* – *the pre-eminence of dignity, and the pre-eminence of power, to pachaz kamayim* – *unstable as water*. Wow! What fleeting but defining moments in your life are freeze-framed in someone else's opinion of you? What fleeting but defining moments of another person are you holding freeze-framed in your opinion of them? What unforgiven offenses are others carrying toward you? And what unforgiven offenses are you carrying towards others? May we all let emotional Ya'akov's deathbed declaration concerning Reuven's worst moment in life teach

⁸ In Hebrew Reuven's name is written רֵאוּבֵן [resh, alef, vav, veit, nun sofit].

us all a valuable lesson about what we allow to remember about others, and what we choose to transcend, overcome, learn from, and forgive?

Are There Not Other Things About Reuven Written in Heaven's Books of Remembrance?

We know that in connection with the Yosef-enslavement incident, Reuven had a plan that differed radically from his brothers. We read in Torah that Reuven actually had devised *a plan in mind to rescue Yosef* from the pit. **Genesis 37:21-22**. Perhaps he genuinely desired to rescue the young dreamer, or perhaps he just wanted to 'play the hero' to get back in his father's good graces. But alas, whatever his motivation, he never put feet to his plan. He got distracted, apparently, and failed to keep watch over his brother after he was thrown in the pit, and hence his plan to rescue the young man came to naught. **Genesis 37:29-30**.

We know that when Reuven's plan to rescue Yosef did not come to fruition he did not seek to undo the sale his brothers had made of Yosef by redeeming him, but instead willingly participated in the brothers' conspiracy of deception and strategic silence and cover-up whereby for over 20 years Ya'akov was made to believe, that Yosef had been torn to pieces by wild animals. We also know that once Yosef in the guise of an Egyptian viceroy Tzafanat-Paneach had demanded that Binyamin be brought to Egypt, Reuven offered the lives of his own sons as surety for Benjamin's safety. **Genesis 42:37**. He actually made the ridiculous statement to Ya'akov that Ya'akov could ***put both of my sons*** [who were, of course, Ya'akov's grandchildren] to ***death if I do not bring him back to you.*** That was *a rash, totally irrational, and completely useless vow* – which Ya'akov appropriately ignored. Why would Ya'akov want to kill two of his own grandchildren?

And so, with this being the history of relationship between Ya'akov and Reuven, here are both a transliteration and a translation of Ya'akov's deathbed statements to Reuven:

Bechori atah kochi v'reshit oni

You are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength;

yeter set veyeter az

The pre-eminence of dignity, and the pre-eminence of power.

Reuven must have been feeling pretty good up to this point. But alas, the joy was to be short-lived. Ya'akov paused, then continued:

Pachaz kamayim al-totar

Unstable as water, you shall not have the pre-eminence;

ki alita mish'kevei avicha

Because you went up to your father's bed;

Then, turning perhaps to the other children gathered there, perhaps heavenward, Ya'akov declared: *az chilalta yetzu'i alah* – i.e. *He defiled my bed!*

Ouch! Keep in mind as you read this that Reuven was a *real person* – and was *right there*. Can you imagine how it had to hurt to hear these words from the mouth of the one who sired you – and to know that *the rebuke they represented was completely deserved?* Despite all that has happened after the ‘worst moment’ of Reuven’s life, Ya’akov apparently never forgave Reuven for the trespass of Genesis 35:22. That horrible moment became all that Ya’akov could think of when he looked at Reuven.

But perhaps the past history of Reuven – who has truly been ‘*as unstable as water*’ in his dealings – is only a part of the story. Perhaps Ya’akov not only looked back into Reuven’s past, but also looked forward into his descendants’ future. Perhaps Ya’akov was prophetically seeing ahead to the events of Numbers 16, and what is commonly referred to as the ‘**Rebellion of Korach**’? Korach and his largely Reuvenite followers effectively deposed – for a time period – Moshe and Aharon, much as Reuven had sought to depose Ya’akov. Following the Levite Korach’s lead, the Reuveni would attempt to take the Bride of the Holy One unto themselves, and declare themselves the new leaders/patriarchs, much as Reuven had done. The followers of Korach are clearly identified in Numbers 16:1, as ‘*certain Reuveni* [descendants of Reuven] – *Datan and Aviram – and On son of Pelet* ...’

Now consider that both the events described in Genesis 35 and Numbers 16 are merely prophetic of yet future events – events which are described in such prospective-looking books as Daniel and Revelation. Many think of Reuven as a ‘lost tribe’⁹. But whatever you believe about where or who the descendants of Reuven are today, one thing is certain - ***the Holy One knows where every descendant of Reuven is*** – physically and spiritually. And He knows exactly what Reuven’s descendants are destined to do. It is all recorded in Torah.

Lest you give up on Reuven however, consider that both the prophetic book of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation see Reuven’s descendants as being restored to full tribal position alongside *Yehudah* [Judah], Levi, and Efrayim in the ‘end of

⁹ There is, of course, and has been for centuries, an often heated debate going on among sages and theologians as to whether there are – or are not – any ‘lost tribes’ still extant, i.e., whether all the descendants of the tribes which made up the Northern Kingdom were or were not killed by the Assyrians and/or did or did not migrate to the Southern Kingdom to re-unite with Yehudah, Levi, and Sh’mon. The author is not expressing an opinion on this debate, but merely acknowledging that some consider Reuven to be a ‘lost tribe’.

days'. See Revelation 7:5; Ezekiel 48:6-7, 31.

A Vision Concerning Sh'mon and Levi

The next subjects of Ya'akov's deathbed prophecy are sons number 2 and 3 – *Sh'mon* [Simeon] and Levi. Both of these sons were born to Ya'akov by Leah, and were whole brothers of Reuven and Yehudah. Here are the words Ya'akov/Yisrael declares concerning Sh'mon and Levi:

Shim'on v'Levi achim

Sh'mon and Levi are brothers;

k'lei chamas mecheroteihem

Weapons of violence are their swords.

B'sodam al-tavo nafshi

My soul, don't come into their council;

B'k'halam al-techad k'vodi

My glory, don't be united to their assembly;

ki v'apam hargu ish

For in their anger they killed a man,

uvirtzonam ikru-shor

In their self-will they hamstrung an ox.

Arur apam ki az

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce;

v'evratam ki kashatah

And their wrath, for it was cruel.

achalkem b'Ya'akov v'afitzem b'Yisra'el

I will divide¹⁰ them in Ya'akov, scatter¹¹ them in Yisra'el.

Historically we understand what Ya'akov is talking about. With Ya'akov, we relive with horror the events that transpired at Shechem in the aftermath of the rape of Dinah. Those events are described in Genesis 34. In that situation, Sh'mon and Levi plotted and executed revenge on not only the rapist himself but on all every

¹⁰ The Hebrew verb root utilized by the Divine Writer to describe the process our English Bibles calls 'dividing' is *chalaq*, *chet*, *lamed*, *qof*, Strong's Hebrew word #2505, pronounced *khaw-lawk*'. This verb root pictures an intentional act of separating out portions, and assigning them different tasks. The first instance of the use of this verb root is found in Genesis 14, where the Divine Writer tells us that, in preparation for the rescue of Lot and his family, Avram 'divided' himself against [the armies of Cherdalaomer and his allies].

¹¹ The Hebrew verb root utilized by the Divine Writer to describe the process our English Bibles calls 'scattering' is *putz*, *peh*, *vav*, *tzade sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word #6327, pronounced *pootz*. This verb root is the same one used in Genesis 11 to describe what the residents of the plain of Shinar did not want to do [i.e. disperse, scatter, go in different directions], the resistance to which caused them to build first the city of Bavel [Babel] and ultimately its 'tower reaching to heaven'.

man, woman, and children of the city. It was definitely *ugly*. As we have discussed, it was not that Shechem did not deserve judgment. The issue was whether the judgment would be inflicted by the Holy One, in *His timing*, and in *His manner*, or would be inflicted *by Sh'mon and Levi* as their flesh dictated was appropriate. Sh'mon and Levi decided to take judgment into their own hands and shed blood that was the Holy One's alone to shed - if, when, and how He so desired.

Is there a prophetic aspect to this episode? What happened in connection with the Exodus, specifically, that is analogous? Consider the aftermath of the golden calf. Remember who strapped sword to thigh and went throughout the camp slaying '*every man his brother*'? Do you recall anywhere in the narrative where the Holy One ever told Moshe - or the Levi'im - to do such a thing?

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy have a regularly repeated formula according to which when the Holy One initiates something the text clearly tells us "*And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying: ...*" That formula is conspicuously absent in the story of the slaughter that occurred after the sin of the golden calf. Moshe - a descendant of Levi - and his brethren, did all that on their own, just as Moshe had taken it on himself to slay the Egyptian overseer, and Levi, conspiring with Sh'mon, had taken it on himself to inflict judgment on the *Shechemi*. In each case, men assumed the right to inflict judgment that rightfully belonged only to the Holy One. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel*, says Ya'akov.

And now, let us look even further beyond. Have you read the books of the Maccabees? Do you know from what tribe the Maccabees were descended? Have you read of what they did to people - fellow Jews - who had *Hellenized* [adopted Greek/pagan customs]? They savagely *butchered them*. They *burned their houses and their towns*. Of course those persons deserved judgment. But *when did the Holy One authorize the Maccabees to inflict that judgment on His behalf*? They were raised up to cast off the Syrian oppression - not to *judge the faithless of Israel*. The Holy One is more than capable of doing that without anyone's help. And *until He is allowed to do that, Israel will not be purged of her sin and return to Torah*.

Consider also, dear Reader, that as the events outlined in the narratives of Daniel and Revelation unfold Sh'mon and Levi will be found conspiring for violence again. History is prophecy. In other words, what happened before, in the lives of the patriarchs, will *repeat itself* time and again - until Messiah establishes His kingdom, and judges the world in righteousness.

A Vision Concerning Yehudah

The final prophecy about which we will read in today's aliyah pertains to Ya'akov's fourth son – *Yehudah*. The name *Yehudah* is derived from the Hebrew verb root *hoda*, sometimes translated 'he praises', but as a relative of the verb *yada* [he knows intimately and has intimate relations with] is more particularly rendered '*he acknowledges*', '*he appreciates*', or '*he admits*'. *Chiddushei HaRim*, a 19th century Chasidic sage, posited that the Jewish people are aptly named after Yehudah, because 'it is a distinctly 'Jewish' trait *to be appreciative of the good that God does for us, and to acknowledge all that he has given us*. Our lives are full of blessings and gifts from God, and we must learn from Leah [who bore and chose the name of Yehudah] to notice the gifts of the Holy One and be appreciative of them.

The Hebrew root word *hoda*, in the sense of 'he admits', was also an apt description of the man we know as Yehudah, for when he was confronted by Tamar with his sin [see **Genesis 38:1-30**], he humbled himself and *admitted it*, and dealt with it as a repentant sinner rather than sweeping it under the rug, denying his culpability, and blaming someone else for the situation. This action, of course, turned his life completely around. It was his capacity to acknowledge, admit, confess, and deal with his sin that placed him above his brothers, and qualified him to take the lead in the Divine Mission of the Jew – to *reflect the Holy One's Divine Light* among the nations.

This is beautifully pictured in the Hebrew spelling of Yehudah's name. Yehudah consists of the letters *yod*, *hey*, *vav*, *dalet*, and *hey*. The first two letters of his name are *yod*, *hey*. The third and fifth letters of his name are *vav*, *hey*. Put those letters together [i.e. remove the *dalet* from Yehudah's name] and do you know what you have? *Yod*, *hey*, *vav*, *hey* – the Divine Name. In between the *vav* and the *hey* at the end of Yehudah's name is a *dalet* ['d' sound], which is a Hebrew pictograph of a door, or portal, or passageway. Yehudah was Divinely commissioned to be the door/portal/passageway of the Holy One, and His Divine Light [including, of course, Messiah, the Light of the World], into all the world.

Here are the first beautiful prophetic words with which Ya'akov/Yisrael blessed Yehudah – this bearer of Divine Light, and carrier of the *Sh'kinah*:

Atah yoducha acheicha

Your brothers will praise you:

yadeicha b'oref oyveycha

Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;

yishtachavu lecha b'nei avicha

Your father's sons will bow down before you.

These prophetic words of encouragement all have to do with the level of influence that Yehudah is destined have in relation to his brothers. Yehudah is the forerunner tribe – the ‘bell-cow’ that others follow. Yehudah will set the example in the area of personal devotion. He will set the standard in the area of *halakah*. He will set the course – and lead the charge - of the Covenant Community in relation to its enemies.

Sometimes the Lion; Sometimes the Prey

Ya'akov describes Yehudah as a *lion's cub*. And he indicates this lion's cub/son of his has ‘gone up [*Hebrew alita*] from the prey’. What meaneth this? The ‘prey’ referenced in Ya'akov's prophecy over Yehudah may well be a reference to *Yosef* [the brothers led Ya'akov to believe Yosef had fallen ‘prey’ to wild animals and been torn asunder]. He then ‘stooped down’, walking the Kena'ani lifestyle, consorting with Kena'ani women, and sleeping with prostitutes. But he did not stay in that situation. He **rose up**. And he did so as a *lioness* – because a cub [Binyamin] was in danger. Ya'akov sees in Yehudah the imagery of a lion – providing the seedbed for all future references to the ‘*lion of the tribe of Yehudah*’.

Gur aryeh Yehudah

Yehudah is a lion's cub.

miteref beni alita

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

kara ravatz ke'aryeh uchelavi

He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, as a lioness.

mi yekimeinu

Who will rouse him up?

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘lion’ is *aryeh*. The verb root of this word is *arah*, meaning to *pluck* and to *gather* – i.e. to *harvest*. Yehudah is destined to become the appointed *harvester* of the Holy One. As Yosef was once ‘lord of the harvest’ in Egypt, so will a descendent of Yehudah become ‘lord of the harvest’ in the latter days. Ya'akov then continues:

Lo-yasur shevet mi-Yehudah

A scepter will not depart from Yehudah,

umechokek mibeyn raglav

Nor a scribe/lawgiver from between his feet,

ad ki-yavo shiloh

Until he comes to whom it belongs.

v'lo yikhat amim

To him will the obedience of the peoples be.

Until Shiloh comes ...

Ya'akov sees in Yehudah a “*scepter-bearer*”. This is one of the clearest and most obvious prophecies of Mashiach in the Torah. Ya'akov sees Yehudah wielding the *shevet* – i.e. the sign of royal authority and the most recognizable instrument of shepherding. Surely the House of David in general, and Mashiach Ben David in particular, are what Ya'akov envisioned. In the first instance, Ya'akov's prophecy of the scepter may refer to *Kalev* [Caleb], who will in a few generations become the original *lion of the tribe of Yehudah*. In a more distant sense, however, it obviously refers to *David*, the great King, and founder of the Davidic dynasty. *But Ya'akov is not through yet. He continues:*

Osri l'gefen iroh

Binding his foal to the vine,

V'lasoreikah beni atono kibes

His donkey's colt to the choice vine;

B'yayin levusho

He has washed his garments in wine,

Uv'dam anavim sutoh

His robes in the blood of grapes:

Chachlili eynayim miyayin

his eyes are more sparkling than the wine,

ulven-shinayim mechalav

his teeth whiter than milk.

Yehudah's part of the great redemption story is very, very important. His is *the story of an overcomer and transcender*. Yehudah was not perfect – nor will the ordinary men descended from him be perfect. Yehudah had many flaws and trod many foolish paths; so will his biological progeny. But Yehudah did not accept his flaws as ‘just the way I am’, and wallow in them forever. He refused to lay down and die in his foolish paths. He got up, and moved on – and the world was better for it.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this prophecy is the reference Ya'akov makes to the coming of ‘*Shiloh*’¹². This is a noun derived from the Hebrew verb root *shalah*¹³. This verb root, which is also the verb root of the word *shalom*, means ‘*to prosper*’, or ‘*to be secure*’. The Hebraic word picture underlying the

¹² *Shiloh* is *shin, yod, lamed, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #7886, it is pronounced *shee-lo'*.

¹³ *Shalah* is *shin, lamed, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #7952, it is pronounced *shaw-law'*.

verb root **shalah** is that of *ascending flames of fire* [*shin*], representing the manifestation of the Holy One, providing the ox goad, or *teaching/disciplining rod* [*lamed*] that leads to the window [*hey*] of *revelation and understanding*.

The word **Shiloh** represents a slight modification of the picture described above. Between the ascending flames of fire [*shin*] and the ox goad [*lamed*], is interjected a *Divine hand* [the pictograph of the letter *yod*]. Shiloh refers to one who represents a manifestation of the Presence of the Holy One, and whose Divine Hand the scepter¹⁴ [referred to in the same phrase] will be used as an ox goad [instrument of teaching and discipline] to lead people to revelation and understanding. This is the perfect picture of Messiah and of His Biblical function.

May *Shiloh* come quickly, Dear Reader. In *my heart*. In *my home*. In *my world*. And in *yours*.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In Chapter 48, verses 21-22, of Genesis Ya'akov concludes his private conversation with Yosef with a *prophecy* and with a *bequest*.

[A] What did he prophesy about Yosef [or Yosef's descendants]?

[B] What did he bequeath to Yosef [or Yosef's descendants]?

[C] When did Yisra'el/Ya'akov take any land from the hand of the Amori with sword and bow?

2. In Chapter 49 Ya'akov gathers his sons around his sick bed and prophesies over each of them.

[A] After reading verses 1-12 of Chapter 49 make a list of the four sons Ya'akov blesses.

[B] Beside the name of each of the sons, write a summary of what Ya'akov prophesies over that son.

[C] With regard to Reuven, what event did Ya'akov call to mind?

[D] With regard to Sh'mon and Levi, what event did Ya'akov call to mind?

[E] With regard to Yehudah, what things were said that refers to Messiah?

Explain.

[F] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words translated as "*scepter*" and "*rod*" in the blessing of Yehudah. Write the Hebrew words and their meanings.

3. As you know when B'nei Yisrael comes out of Egypt several generations later

¹⁴ The word which our English Bibles translate as scepter in this verse is *shevet*, *shin*, *beit*, *tet*, Strong's Hebrew word #7626, pronounced ***shay'-vet***. It refers to a rod, club, or scepter – something held in the hand and wielded as an instrument of authority and power. See **Numbers 24:17** for the next Messianic reference involving a scepter. See also **Psalms 45:6**, and **Hebrews 1:8**.

the tribe of Levi [from which Moshe and Aharon were to come forth] is going to be appointed as the priestly tribe. Look at the prophecy of Ya'akov over his son Levi.

[A] Was Levi selected by the Holy One because of worthiness?

[B] What does that say to you about the Holy One's ways of *selecting people/groups to do His work*?

[C] Based upon Ya'akov's prophecy, what kind of work do you think Levi was best qualified to do?

4. In the Haftarah verse assigned for reading today David charges his son Sh'lomo to so live and to so reign as to qualify David's descendants for one of the Holy One's promises, first made to Yehudah in B'reshit 49, then restated to David through the prophet *Natan* [Nathan] in II Samuel 7:12-16.

L'ma'an yakim Adonai et-devaro
That the Holy One may establish his word

asher diber alay l'emor
which he spoke concerning me, saying,

im-yishmeiru vaneicha et-darkam
"If your children take heed to their way,

l'lechet l'fanai b'emet
to walk before me in truth

b'chol-levavam uv'chol-nafsham
with all their heart and with all their soul,

l'emor lo-yikaret lecha ish me'al kise Yisra'el
there shall not fail you (said he) a man on the throne of Yisra'el.

[I Kings 2:4]

[A] What do you think that promise means?

[B] How do you think it will be fulfilled?

5. In the B'rit Chadasha aliyah assigned for today Kefa [Peter] continues blessing all those who base their lives upon the Torah teaching of Messiah Yeshua:

*... whom not having known you love; in whom, though now you don't see him, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with **joy unspeakable and full of glory** - receiving the result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching for who or **what kind of time the Spirit of Messiah, which was in them, pointed to**, when he predicted **the sufferings** of Messiah, and **the glories** that would follow them.*

To them it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you, did they minister these things that now have been announced to you through those who preached the Good News to you

by the Ruach HaKodesh sent out from heaven; which things angels desire to look into.

[A] Why do we “love” Yeshua the Messiah?

[B] What does it mean that we “love” Him? Since we have not seen Him, how can we love Him?

[C] Look up the Greek word translated as “love” in Strongs and write a definition of it that fits with this passage. [Hint: It might help to read John 21:15-22 and then chapter 13 of I Corinthians.]

[D] What is supposed to be the inward emotion we experience as we “love” and believe in Yeshua?

[E] Why do you think angels “long to look into” the mysteries of the salvation of the creatures known as ‘man’?

*May you meet Messiah everywhere you turn this day.
May Shiloh come indeed – and soon!*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Wednesday's Study

Psalm 137:4

*How can we sing the Holy One's song
in a foreign land?*