

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayechi:*** **Genesis 48:8-20**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 2:3**
 Brit Chadasha: **I Peter 1:3-7**

Bring them to me now ... and I will bless them.

[Genesis 48:9]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 137:2-3;

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

Vayar Yisra'el et-b'nei Yosef – Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons ... *vayomer mi-eleh* – and he said: *Who are these?* Genesis 48:8.

Shhhh! Quiet on the set, Beloved! This is an important moment in the Holy One's great drama of redemption and restoration. Lower stage lights ... and ... ACTION!

Being on the Tip of the Spear When Worlds Collide

Despite the great reconciliation of the Covenant family about which we have been reading, Yosef did not get to move to Goshen and live a quiet life with his father and brothers, and Hebrew kinsmen. He had responsibilities in Pharaoh's court. He had been strategically embedded in the 'belly of the Beast'. His assigned lot was to remain forever a servant of Pharaoh – albeit at the highest levels of government. His life was consumed with the stewardship and administration of the food supply for the known world. He kept the great machine running. He modeled to the world the Messianic 'Wonderful Counselor/Prince of Peace' style of governance - one where the *greatest man voluntarily takes on the role of a slave to serve all men* instead of demanding to be served after the manner of most who rule. He proved that for a man who walks with the Holy One power does not have to corrupt; that wisdom does not have to breed arrogance; that wealth does not have to harden the heart; and that kindness and compassion make a strong house or nation stronger, not weaker. See **Proverbs 29:2 & 4**.

The relocation of Ya'akov and family from Kena'an to the Goshen region of Egypt changed many things. Two things the dramatic turn of events apparently did not significantly change, however, were *Yosef's obligations to Pharaoh* and his *life-in-the-fast-lane Egyptian lifestyle*. Yosef was no longer Ya'akov's little dreamy-eyed young errand boy. He was now a full-grown man with an Egyptian wife and two Egyptian kids. And to top it all off he was the right-hand man of the richest and most powerful man on the planet. He was both Pharaoh's second-in-command and in many ways a 'father to him'. As a result Yosef now had far more *important things to do*

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than run to and fro at his father's direction showing off his dashing coat of many colors. Indeed Yosef now had *quite a kingdom* to run. With chief responsibility to oversee the recent confiscation of all money, property and wealth in and around Egypt [see **Genesis 47:14-17**], the management of all the newly government-owned lands [see **Genesis 47:20**], and the oversight of Pharaoh's now exponentially expanded slave population [see **Genesis 47:21**], Yosef was now more than ever a busy, busy man. He had great responsibilities in *Memphis* and *Thebes* and *Aswan* and *Naqada* and *Nubia* ... and so on and so forth *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*.

The one place in Egypt Yosef hardly ever had any reason or time to go, it appears, was the land of *Goshen*. Yosef, Asenat and their two sons had *their world* and Ya'akov and his extended Hebrew family had theirs. While these two worlds were now physically located in the same country, just a short camel ride or Nile River barge outing away - they were still *worlds apart* in just about every other way.

One day as Yosef was performing his duties in Pharaoh's service, however, a disturbing message reached his ears: ***Hineh, avicha choleh!*** *Behold – your father is sick*. So Yosef took an unscheduled leave of absence from his administrative responsibilities. He had to check on the father he loved more than life. He decided to take his sons, Menashe and Efrayim, with him for a visit.

The Life-Changing Power of a Grandchild's Visit – and a Patriarch's Blessing

Yosef wanted his sons to get to know their *saba* before he died. Tearing himself away from his never-ending new responsibilities, Yosef grabbed his boys and traveled up the Nile Delta to *pay his aged father a little visit*. Of all the projects which Yosef could have found to work on this day he probably had no idea that this little excursion up to Goshen in the company of his two prince-of-Egypt sons would turn out to be by far the most important of all - and that the events of this day would completely transform his sons' destinies.

We do not know if the little entourage walked, rode camels, floated a barge, drove flashy chariots, or were carried by slaves in stylish royal *palanquins* to Goshen. Contrary to popular opinion you see the mode of transportation a man or woman takes to an appointment with destiny really does not really matter much in the long run. What really matters is *how one responds when the appointment with destiny threatens to bring about dramatic changes in one's worldview, priorities in life, and dreams for the future*.

Menashe, Efrayim ... meet your grandfather! Father ... meet your grandsons!

The Ya'akov persona was indeed gravely ill when news of the arrival of Yosef's entourage reached the patriarch's tent, but the news of Yosef's impending visit – and the opportunity to spend some meaningful time with his grandsons – refreshed the Yisrael persona. Yisrael understood that his window of opportunity to impact these boys' lives was closing rapidly. He therefore skipped right past the expected small talk – *i.e.* asking the children about their studies, the kinds of activities they enjoyed, and what they each wanted to be when they grew up. He knew he did not have time for polite grandfatherly chitchat. He was determined to awaken the boys to their destinies. He decided to cut through all the nonsense and go right to the Hebrew patriarchal *blessing!* He brought the boys very near – one on his right, the other on his left. He paused a moment looked them both in the eyes. Then he took a deep breath, and looked deep into their souls - the way only a seasoned, selfless Hebrew patriarch can. He saw their strengths ... but he also saw their weaknesses. He saw their potential ... but he also saw their trigger points of fleshly and pseudo-intellectual vulnerability. He smiled at them with great kindness. He let the light of his own countenance fall on them. In that light he began to truly see them - not as they were, or as they thought of themselves, or as they were thought of by Yosef or Asenat or Pharaoh - but as the Holy One ordained for them to become. Then, he stretched forth his hands toward the boys. He did not touch them immediately, however; first he let one hand hover in the air over each boy's head for a brief moment. When he finally made gentle, affirming contact with each boy's forehead it felt like they had reconnected with their root source – the rock from which they were hewn. That touch made them feel, for just a moment, what it is like to be whole, healthy, and holy – even though one is anything but those things. Their breath mingled with his breath. The rhythm of their beating hearts adjusted to the rhythm of his heartbeat. A window of Heaven opened. A staircase descended. Angels came and went. Time stood still. Then Ya'akov turned his gaze heavenward as he had many times since that life-changing morning at the place called *Beit-El*. He opened his mouth, and from his trembling lips began to pour beautiful words – words that had not been formed in his or any other man's brain, but which emanated from another source, and another realm, and another Spirit, altogether. Grab your children, Dear Ones, and gather round. A *kedusha* empowerment from the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth is about to be released over these boys' lives and destinies. Draw as close as possible - this is bound to be good. Savor the moment – and bask in the overspray!

v'yitchazeik Yisrael

and Israel was strengthened/aroused

[Genesis 48:2b]

If you have ever been in the room when a Hebrew man who walks intimately with the Holy One releases a blessing, you probably understand what I am talking about. The atmospheric pressure in the room – in the world, for that matter – changes. Divine energy breaches the parapets of stagnant inertia. Heaven touches earth. Waves of light

pour onto and inundate fortified coastlines of darkness. Aimlessly floating sparks of holiness begin to reunite with the one true flame that gave them birth. The *status quo* evaporates like morning dew in sunlight. Perfect love casts out fear. Vast reservoirs of long-hidden potential are tapped, defined, awakened, energized, empowered, and commissioned to burst forth at their appointed time. Hope displaces despair. Rays of beauty start to shine forth from what looked like heaps of ashes. For a son of the covenant, you see, speaking blessings is our reason to be alive – and it comes as naturally as breathing. That is because the Holy One, Who is our All-in-All, is a fountain of blessing that never runs dry. Walking, talking, and co-laboring with Him, *sh'ma*-ing His Voice, pulsing with His love, absorbing His joy, and basking in His shalom, as we let Him teach us His Ways of seeing the potential for good in people and bloodlines, times and seasons, places and situations, means that blessings are constantly welling up in our hearts. Blessings are constantly causing our faces, hands, and feet to become flushed. Blessings are ever bubbling forth from our lips. Blessings *in*; blessings out; *rinse and repeat* – that is the life blood of the Avrahamic Covenant lifestyle. Freely we have received; freely we must give – on and on, over and over, again and again, until our mortal lungs are spent, and our mortal tongues can bless no more.

If sons of the Covenant ever cease, even for a moment, to receive and release blessings ... and if they instead allow curses, complaints, accusations, condemnations, sarcasm, scorn, cynicism, profanity, divisive political/ideological rhetoric, or abstract disputations of morality, ideology, or theology to spew forth from our mouths instead of releasing the blessings and good news the Holy One has given us to share ... well, Heaven forbid that the world – or even one household in it - would ever suffer such a catastrophe, endure such a famine, or be sold into such a dark season of captivity!

Ah, but once again I digress. We were speaking of Yisrael, a Mighty Prince of the Kingdom of Heaven, and his grandsons, weren't we? So back to our story we go!

Vayar Yisra'el et-b'nei Yosef vayomer mi-eleh

Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and said: Who are these?

vayomar kachem-na elay va'avarachem

And he said 'Bring them to me now ... and I will bless them!

[Genesis 48:8, 9b]

Following this patriarchal example, the Master said: ***Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.*** And then, as Yisrael did with Menashe and Efrayim, the Master took the children up into His arms, laid His Hands upon them, and blessed them. **Mark 10:14, 16.**

Ya'akov is not just being nice to Menashe and Efrayim, any more than Yeshua will just be being nice to the children He takes into his arms and blesses. This is not about

‘niceness’; it is about *calling, purpose, destiny, inspiration, empowerment* and *activation*.

Ya’akov Must Decrease; Yisrael Must Increase; the Way of Mashiach Must Be Modeled

Long ago Yitzchak’s youngest son was told ‘*your name will no longer be called ‘Ya’akov’, but Yisrael – for you have wrestled with God and with men, and you have prevailed/overcome*. **Genesis 32:28**; see also **Genesis 35:10**. Even after this name change, however, most of the time Torah has continued to depict our third-generation patriarch as acting primarily in the ‘old man’ name and character - *Ya’akov*². Only on rare occasions has Ya’akov been depicted as ascending to his ‘new man’ identity, and actually thinking, speaking, and interacting with the people, places, and kingdoms he encountered on earth in the prophetic name and character of the overcomer - *Yisrael*. The incident we are about to study is one of the latter type. It will be Yisrael – not Ya’akov – who blesses Menashe and Efrayim.

Ya’akov, it turns out, tends to have somewhat of a *martyr complex*. He tends to see himself as a victim of life – a scrappy under-dog who has somehow managed, when he had to, to summon his wits and strength, draw upon his intellect, ingenuity, and defense mechanisms, and survive life’s slings and arrows by the sweat of his brow and the skin of his teeth. Of course, the real reason he has survived everything he has faced has a lot more to do with the host of guardian angels the Holy One has placed around him and the unseen Divine assistance he has received every step of the way. But Ya’akov has never really understood that. He would therefore probably describe his life experiences thus far as ‘*I did the best I could*’, or ‘*I followed my heart*’, or ‘*I always tried to do what I thought was right*’, or ‘*I did whatever I had to do to survive*’, or maybe even ‘*I did it my way*’. Yisrael knew better; but Ya’akov is trapped in a flesh-colored prism. Every time he has survived some insult, therefore, Ya’akov has embraced all the pain like it was some kind of cross he had to bear. He has internalized all the wounds he sustained in the course of his struggles, and carried them away like a yoke of outrageous fortune, a mark of injustice, and a heavy burden of raw sentiments and emotions. He has taken every blow life has thrown at him, and he has not succumbed; but survival is all he has managed. He has never, as Ya’akov, even come close to *prevailing*, or *overcoming*, or *conquering*, or *transcending*. As Ya’akov, though he has managed to survive every drama and trauma the world has thus far thrown at him, more often than not he has lost the most important battle in every phase of Covenant Life – which is to maintain *shalom* [inner serenity and sense of well-being], *simchah* [deep, abiding sense of joyfulness and thankfulness for life], *tikvah*

² See for instance, **Genesis 32:29-30**; **Genesis 33:1, 10, 13, 17, 18**; **34:5-7, 30**; **Genesis 35:1-6, 9-10, 14-15, 27-29**; **Genesis 37:1-2, 34**; **Genesis 42:1-4**; **29, 36**; **Genesis 45:25-27**; **Genesis 46:2-8, 26**; **Genesis 47:7-10, 28**; and **Genesis 48:2-3**.

[hopefulness and expectation of the Holy One making something good happen out of even the worst situations], and *emunah* [drawing perspective from the ‘seed’ of the Word of the Holy One which is alive and active within] in the face of life challenges. Ya’akov has enthusiastically embraced the Seed of the Word every time he has heard it, and has thereby experienced the ‘conception’ phase of the *emunah development process* many times; but on each occasion he has aborted the budding Divine life force growing within him, and reverted to his own fleshly defense mechanisms, the moment he found himself confronted with a difficult circumstance.

But, thanks to the King of Heaven, Ya’akov has an ascendant *alter ego*. Along with, and arising from Ya’akov, is *Yisrael*. Yisrael is Ya’akov’s *higher self* – the *nishmat chayim* that is seated with Mashiach in Heavenly places. Yisrael is the patient, persevering *prevailer*. Yisrael is the *wise, compassionate overcomer*. Yisrael is the humble, meek, merciful, self-transcending *more-than-conqueror*. Yisrael is ‘*all Covenant, all Kingdom, all the Time*’. Yisrael is therefore always joyful, always *grateful, always gracious*. *Am Yisrael chai! Od avinu chai!* Yisrael is connected at the hip to the God of his fathers. By maintaining this abiding union, Yisrael always keeps his mind and heart ‘*beyond the veil of the flesh*’. He looks past the tyranny of whatever immediate challenge or crisis faces him, and accesses what I call the ‘*neshama flow*’. That is the ‘*river whose streams make glad the city of God.*’ **Psalm 46:6**. This river consists of four streams or channels - *shalom, simchah, tikvah, and emunah*.

The four streams of living water in which Yisrael lives inspire, invigorate, empower, uplift, and carry him through every situation, enabling him to pass through it all without internalizing pain or offense, without feeling the least bit victimized, and without taking on onerous burdens of martyrdom. Hence, while Ya’akov deals with threats, insults, challenges, and crises in the flesh, by relying upon his own intelligence, experiences, moral compass, and instincts, Yisrael walks with, and is led, directed, empowered, and comforted by the Holy One. Hence, while Ya’akov survives life’s challenges; Yisrael prevails, overcomes, *more-than-conquers*, and transcends them. While Ya’akov judges everything he sees by the sight of his natural eyes and the hearing of his itching fleshly ears; Yisrael sees through the lens of the Creator’s Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and hears through the amplifier of the Holy One’s Plan for the Restoration of Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and harmony.

Ya’akov and Yisrael have been abiding for years – and generations - in the same physical body. Much as Ya’akov and Esav once dwelt together in Rivkah’s womb, Ya’akov and Yisrael now abide together in a shared housing of human organs and tissue. Thus, while Ya’akov was struggling with so many traumas in life, the ‘new

man/overcomer' identity *Yisrael* dealt with Reuven's betrayal and rebellion. **Genesis 35:22 ff.** It was in this 'new man/overcomer' identity that excellence and royalty was seen in Yosef, and that he was dressed in the infamous prophetic *k'tonet passim* - i.e. *coat of many colors*. See **Genesis 37:3**. It was in this 'new man/overcomer' identity of *Yisrael* that Yosef was sent on the fateful trip to *Sh'chem*. **Genesis 37:13**. It was also in the name and character of *Yisrael* that Binyamin was, at long last, sent to Mitzrayim in the protective custody of Yehudah. See **Genesis 43:6-11**. It was in the name and character of *Yisrael*, the overcomer, that a positive response was made to the news of what had really happened to Yosef [**Genesis 45:28**: *It is enough that Yosef is alive!*]; that the ancestral camp at Hebron was dismantled; that the journey from the Land of Promise to Mitzrayim was undertaken [**Genesis 46:1-2**]; that a glorious prophetic reunion with Yosef occurred [**Genesis 46:29-30**]; and that the patriarch remained in Mitzrayim even after the famine was over [**Genesis 47:27**].

Between Ya'akov and Yisrael, Who Will Come Forth In the Latter Days?

Yisrael's spirit is strong; but *Ya'akov's* body grows weak. *Ya'akov's* remaining time on earth is short – but *Yisrael* knows that he has not yet done everything he was put on earth to do. The *Ya'akov* in us must therefore rapidly learn what the *Yisrael* in us already knows - what it means – and entails – to *redeem the time, for the days are evil*. See **Ephesians 5:15-21**. The latter days - whether of a patriarch's life or the age of the gentiles - is not a time to get self-indulgent. The waning years are no time for selfishly indulging oneself in a private, personal, self-centered 'bucket list'. For a son of the Covenant and a patriarch, the last few 'living years' – as men think of 'living' - are a time for *digging deep, summoning all one's inner strength, and finishing strong*. The last few years of mortality are designed to be a season of no distractions, no competing loyalties or affections, and no compromise. This is to be a time of 'being' – i.e. a season of being exactly who one was created to be, and doing exactly what one was created to do – until there was no longer breath in his lungs, or impulses entering and exiting his brain, or blood pulsing in and out of the chambers of his heart. The latter days are a time for the *Ya'akov* persona and approach to life – the way of the warrior - to decrease, and for the *Yisrael* persona and approach to life – the way of the wise Kingdom diplomat - to increase. Both are necessary for the Kingdom; but the warrior must be disciplined, and at all times under the authority of the wise diplomat who knows both the heart and the mind of the King. Shall we speak of Avraham? He was quite a warrior in his prime – ask the four kings of Mesopotamia who sacked the cities of the plain and took Lot and his family captive! But after walking with the Holy One for a few more decades this father of *emunah* became an even greater diplomat. Prior to his death Avraham divided his wealth and heritage among his children. **Genesis 25:6**.

And what of Yitzchak? The battles he fought were spiritual battles. Remember when he *atar*-ed on behalf of his barren wife Rivkah? But later in life, Yitzchak learned the

ways of the diplomat well – calmly handling the hatred and persecution of the Ph'lishtim of Gerar, and negotiating a covenant of shalom with Avimelech and his warlord, Pichol in the face of all kinds of intimidation and oppression.

Can Ya'akov – or should I say Yisrael – leave a diplomat's legacy for his family as well?

Setting Things – and Priorities - In Place for the Next Generation

Both Avraham and Yitzchak found a way to reconnect and reconcile with their prodigal and/or rebellious sons before they died. Will Ya'akov/Yisrael? We are *about to find out!* Now, you see, the Divinely allotted days of our last patriarch on the earth are running out. The final individual torchbearer of the patriarchal trinity is about to be *gathered to his fathers*. Ya'akov knows it as well. So how will this son of the Covenant deal with the rapid approach of eternal rest? He has a little time to meditate on it. He has the presence of mind to prepare for it. He even has the means and the opportunity not only to choreograph but to both define the audience and set the mood for a grand exit befitting a true patriarch. Before he leaves his little 69-member band of progeny in the hands of the Pharaohs, the Philistines, the Amaleki, the Emori, the Magi and the Midyani of the world he has to wonder - *what can he say to his sons and grandsons that will uplift and empower them for the next phase of the journey of Covenant life?* How can he reach across generations and speak to us, wide-eyed readers of Torah, many millennia removed. How can he *honor the Holy One even in his death*. What legacy will he bestow? What blessing will he *impart*? How will he redeem the little bit of time he has left on earth? How can he *go out – and charge his progeny not to go out - as a victim, or even a mere survivor, but as an overcomer and a transcender?*

I do not know if you have ever thought about it, but *what a culture shock* Yosef's sons much have experienced when they arrived in the Hebrew camp at Goshen. There were *no palaces* here. There were no *ornate temples* to Amon or Ra or Nat or any other of the other gods of the Egyptian pantheon. There were no *finely decorated houses* or *stately halls of government* or *bustling centers of commerce*. All there was to be seen in Goshen was *a collection of humble shepherd's tents* – and the unmistakable sights and sounds and smells that accompany the presence of multitudes of sheep and goats and oxen and donkeys.

Yosef had of course seen it all before. But I wonder what on earth went through the minds of the young palace dandies known to Yosef as *Menashe* and *Efrayim*, but almost certainly known in the courts of Pharaoh by Egyptian titles. They had not grown up in a Hebrew tent, being taught the beautiful Hebrew language – and the wonderful ways of the Creator of the Universe – by a Hebrew patriarch and matriarch.

I doubt they were particularly impressed by what they saw – either in the humble pasture or in the crude collection of tents that dotted the landscape around it. I have a feeling they looked at each other and rolled their eyes. To make things worse, upon entering the tent village the boys quickly discovered that the person they came to see - Yosef's father Ya'akov – was confined to a sickbed. Oh well, the boys must have thought – Dad, let's *get this over with fast* ... so we can get back to the palace where we belong. My, how all that is about to change!

Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me!

For purposes of Divine History the Writer of Torah has kindly arranged for all of us to be as proverbial *flies on the wall* in Ya'akov's tent for the series of conversations which are about to occur on Yosef's 'day off'. We are apparently intended, expected, even *encouraged* by the Holy One to eavesdrop on these conversations to our hearts' delight. So let us *get right to it*. The conversations in the old shepherd's tent kicked off in what must - to Menashe and Efrayim, at least - have seemed like a very strange way. There was no friendly greeting, no hugs, no exchange of pleasantries, no small talk. As Yosef was entering the room the old man sitting in the bed got right to the point, as if he had something he had been waiting a long time to get off of his chest. The first words out of the aging patriarch's mouth were: *El Shaddai* [i.e. the almighty God] *appeared to me at Luz in the land of Kena'an, and blessed me.*

"Wow", Menashe and Efrayim must have thought, "*our grandfather is not only old and sick and dresses funny – he's a crackpot to boot!*" After all, these boys had never known anything but *palace life*. Their father was the prime minister of Egypt. Their mother was a high-ranking priestess of Egypt's polytheistic religion. These boys had always had the very best of everything Egyptian money and power could buy. And from all appearances it certainly must have seemed to them that their VIP father could buy and sell this old man and all he appeared to possess a hundred thousand times – no, probably more like a few hundred million times - over. "*What does a crazy old man like this have to offer us?*" they must have wondered. "*Why on earth did dad bring us way out here in the boondocks to watch this old Hebrew embarrass himself?*" But then Ya'akov continued:

"... and my God said to me: "I am going to make you fruitful and greatly increase your numbers. I will establish you as a called-out people, And I will give these lands as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you."

Well, at least the old man's story was somewhat interesting. Did he really just say 'fruitful'? That was perhaps the only Hebrew word Yosef's youngest son knew – because that was *his name*. He was *Efrayim* – meaning *fruitful*. And what was that the old shepherd was saying about a 'called-out people'? And what exactly was this 'everlasting possession' he says his God promised him? Was there possibly more to this old man than they had thought?

Then, to the amazement of the boys, the old man turned to their father and said:

*... your two sons, Efrayim and Manashe,
who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt,
are mine; as Reuven and Sh'mon are mine, so shall they be mine.*

His? *Them – little courtiers of Egypt?* Surely the old man was not *serious*. How could these sons of Tzafanat-Paneach and Asenat, Egyptian nobility, be ‘his’? And why on earth would two of the richest young men in Egypt even want to be ‘his’? It did not make sense. After all, as of yet the old man who spoke these words had not as of yet even so much as *acknowledged these young Egyptians’ presence in his tent*. All his remarks up to that stage had been directed to their father. They were not even sure the old fellow knew they were there. And even when he spoke their names just now, boldly declaring them to be ‘his’, it sounded like he was speaking of them not as physical, tangible, human beings but as some kind of *eternal sparks of life* he seemed to think he knew *in the Spirit*.

The young Egyptians must have breathed a sigh of relief when just as quickly as Ya’akov had declared Menashe and Efrayim ‘his’ he changed the subject and started reminiscing with their father about their long-lost grandmother Rachel. That is exactly where yesterday’s aliyah of Torah had ended - with a poignant discussion between Ya’akov and Yosef concerning how Rachel had ‘died on’ Ya’akov on *the way to Efrat*.

If the young Egyptian noblemen thought they had dodged a bullet and escaped the attention of the old Hebrew in his sick bed, however, they are about to discover how wrong they were. In today’s aliyah you see Ya’akov’s intimate conversations will take yet another fascinating turn from the *reminiscences of the sorrow of the past* to *planning for the hope for the future*. And they – and all us ‘flies on the wall’ who are there in the tent with them - are about to find out what the ‘*his-ness*’ concept the old man had mentioned before he drifted off subject and started talking about Rachel was all about.

Suddenly as today’s readings begin the Yisrael persona notices that Yosef *has not come to Ya’akov’s sick bed alone*. Here is how Torah describes what happened when Yisrael’s Covenant-enlightened eyes fell upon the two young men dressed up like Egyptian princes-in-training that had come into the tent with Yosef. Yisrael did not just lay his eyes upon the sons of Yosef in a physical sense; he *gazed right through their Egyptian facades and stared right into their Hebrew souls*. When he had looked them over he posed the Hebrew question “*mi-eleh?*” – i.e. “*who are these?*” It was like the Holy One’s question to Adam in the Garden: *Eiyeicha* – where are you? Who indeed *were* these young men dressed in the finest robes of Egyptian society, living luxurious lives far away from Goshen in an Egyptian palace? Who did Egypt think

they were? Who did Yosef think they were? Who did THEY think they were? Were these well-dressed young men *princes of Egypt* - destined to be advisers to and confidantes of future Pharaohs? Or were they *Hebrew tribal-leaders-in-training*? Were they royal chariot racers and palace dandies? Or were they, by some chance or providence, sons of the Holy One's covenant with their paternal great-grandfather Avraham?

Who, indeed, *are* Menashe and Efrayim? Yisrael is about to *make sure*.

Mi eleh? [Who are These?]

When Yisrael asked the question "*Mi-eleh?*" he was not by any means asking Yosef for an introduction. He knew the boys' *names* very well – indeed, he knew them far better than Yosef did. He knew the *bloodline and heritage* from which they came. He knew their *background*, their *education*, and their *exalted status in Egyptian society*. But that kind of superficial information was not what Yisrael wanted to talk about. He wanted to draw Yosef's attention – and the attention of the boys themselves – to something much deeper and more significant than what was visible on the surface. Yisrael wanted to talk about who these two young men *really were, deep down* - beneath the fine Egyptian robes and behind all the finely crafted Egyptian masks. He was inquiring of Yosef if Yosef recognized, and was ready to acknowledge, who these young men who accompanied him really were *in the eyes of the Holy One*.

In the Holy One's eyes you see these were not just *Yosef's sons*. They were *generations*. They were *tribes*. They were the two *roots of the holy tree* from which *Y'hoshua, son of Nun, the daughters of Tzelofechad*, and the great warrior *Gideon* were destined to come forth. That is the way it is with covenant sons and daughters. We are each called upon to see our children and grandchildren not through eyes of the flesh but *through the Holy One's eyes*. There is *much more in every son and daughter of the covenant than meets any natural eye*. Our young ones are much, much more than *just children*. There is *greatness* in them. The *power of the covenant* of the Holy One is in them. Sometimes that power is *nascent and hidden*. Sometimes it is *dormant*. Sometimes it is *deliberately repressed and suppressed*. Sometimes that power is mistaken for '*charisma*', or '*talent*', or '*creativity*', and marketed to the takers and shakers of the world in measured doses like any other worldly good, service or commodity. But in each child of the Covenant the *greatness factor* is *there*, somewhere – waiting for a prophetic voice to *call it forth and set it free*. Each of our little ones – and not-so-little ones for that matter – has a series of *pre-ordained dates with destiny waiting for them*. Simple journeys of life are for our little ones oft-times pregnant with life-changing encounters waiting to happen. That is one reason why,

every *Erev Shabbat* [Sabbath Eve, or Friday night³] since at least the time of the First Temple, Hebrew fathers have called their sons to them, have laid hands upon them tenderly, and have blessed each of them - concluding the blessing with the words “*May you be as Efrayim and Menashe*”. Next the fathers will call their daughters to them, lay hands upon them gently and lovingly, and bless each of them - concluding the daughters’ blessing with the words “*May you be as Sarah and Rivkah, and as Rachel and Leah*”.

The sons and daughters so blessed may be living profligate, prodigal lives when these blessings are spoken - but *they are spoken any way*. Why, you ask?

Why Do We Do These Things?

If you ask the Hebrew father why he does these things - why he dares to interrupt the entertainment and social activities of his children on Friday night (or why he keeps them home on a night when others their age are going to concerts or movies or cruising the town – or at least the Mall - with their friends), he will probably say: “*Because Yitzchak blessed Ya’akov, and because Yisrael blessed his sons.*” In other words, because the pattern is clearly presented in the Torah, in the lives of the patriarchs – to declare regarding one’s children the answer to Yisrael’s provocative question –*Mi-eleh?* [*Who are these?*] Please understand - it is not a “commandment” of any ‘law of Moses’ to bless one’s children or grandchildren on Friday night. It is instead a *sublime privilege* - an immeasurable joy. It is a way to emulate and enter into partnership with the Holy One, and to “*be holy, as [He is] holy*”.

Why is the blessing of sons and daughters (and wives) done *every week on Erev Shabbat, rather than on some annual occasion like a birthday, Father’s Day, Mother’s Day?* The Hebrew father would probably say: “***Because the Holy One rested on the seventh day, and began that day by speaking a blessing on all that made up His Creation⁴. In imitation of the Holy One, and following His lead, I rest on the seventh day, and begin the day by speaking a blessing over all that makes up my world - my wife and my children, my wine and my bread.***”

At least a part of the Biblical foundation for this beautiful and family-restoring practice is found in today’s aliyah. Yisrael was ultimately preparing Ya’akov, who

³ The Sabbath mentioned by the Bible is the recurring anniversary of the 7th day of Creation. Since the Creation account in Torah specifies that evening came before morning [i.e. *and there was evening, and there was morning, it was the first day*], the Hebrew calendar reckons Yom Rishon [the first day] from sundown on Saturday to sundown on Sunday, Yom Sheni [the second day] from sundown on Sunday to sundown on Monday, Yom Sh’lishi [the third day] from sundown on Monday to sundown on Tuesday, Yom Revi’i [the fourth day] from sundown on Tuesday to sundown on Wednesday, Yom Chamishi [the fifth day] from sundown on Wednesday to sundown on Thursday, Yom Shishi [the 6th day] from sundown on Thursday to sundown on Friday], and *Ha-Shabbat* [the 7th day] from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

⁴ This is clearly stated in Genesis 2:2-4.

was old and weak of eyes, to bless – and pass on his tremendous spiritual inheritance to - his sons. Before doing so, he saw that he needed to adopt, and engraft into his own family, Menashe and Efrayim - Yosef's two sons by his Egyptian wife. It will even turn out to be the adopted/engrafted sons that will receive the first blessing.

Vayomar kachem-na elay v'avarachem

And he [Yisrael] said: Bring them to me now, and I will bless them.'

[Genesis 48:9]

The blessing that follows is not something they have earned. It is not something they, at this point in their life, can even understand. It is the sovereignty and the grace of the Holy One, their soon-to-be adopted father's God. Let me explain what I mean.

***What Has Life Been Like – Up to Now –
For Menashe and Efrayim?***

I find very interesting the fact that the events of this aliyah take place 17 years after Yisrael and his sons moved to Egypt. The reconciliation of Yosef and his brothers, which we read about last week in parsha *Vayigash* had, it seems⁵, not resulted in a resumption of day-to-day contact, or even regular interaction, between the brothers. Yosef had his life you see (and a very busy one at that), and Y'hudah, Reuven, Levi, and the others had their lives as well. Yosef had remained in Pharaoh's government. He had raised his sons in the courts of Pharaoh - not in the fields of Goshen, where their grandfather, uncles, and cousins, on their father's side, lived and worked.

From the Torah readings, it appears, in fact, to have been an extraordinary circumstance for Yosef to personally visit Goshen. The government of Egypt was indeed 'on his shoulders', and it was a heavy and time-consuming responsibility. The oversight of governmental affairs for Pharaoh occupied his every waking hour. Indeed, it appears it is only hearing of his father's illness that moves him to lay aside the business of Pharaoh's government for a day or so to re-establish contact with his Hebrew family. This is so much the case that, although Yisrael/Ya'akov, the grandfather of Menashe and Efrayim, has been in Egypt for 17 years prior to today's aliyah, Torah does not indicate that these boys had ever once during that time met, or even seen, their grandfather. It certainly appears from today's aliyah that Ya'akov had never met or laid eyes on them. One wonders what these boys had been told about their father's side of the family (the stories could make them shiver, no?), and what kind of spiritual training they had undergone in Pharaoh's courts.

These boys were not shepherds like their kinsmen - they were *princes* and *statesmen* - and they were fully one-half Egyptian. Their maternal grandfather was none other than *Potifera*, Priest of *On*, whom some believe was Potifar, Yosef's former boss.

⁵ From the plain reading of the text of Torah, that is. There are, of course, *midrashim* to the contrary.

Clearly, up to this day at least, these young men knew far, far more of Potifera/Potifar and of his ways than they knew of the ways of the nomadic Hebrew family living a simple life way out in the fields of Goshen.

Adoption, Engrafting, Tapping into Hebrew Roots, and Learning to Bear Hebrew Fruit

Now let's talk about adoption - which is what happens in today's aliyah. Adoption is a very interesting concept. When an adoption occurs there is not *just* the establishment of a new relationship between the adoptive father and the child - there must also be a *termination* of the relationship between the natural, biological father, and the child. In other words, the man who *was* the father is no longer the father - and he no longer has any relationship with the child other than what the adoptive father may allow. Custody is given over from the biological father *to the adoptive father*. All decisions about the child's life become the decision of the adoptive father; the biological father loses all rights, and all control.

So when Yisrael proposed to adopt Menashe and Efrayim - these two "city boys" of Yosef - it was not just a "sweet" thought. If Yosef agreed he was going to have to *give up his sons*. If they agreed - after all, they were old enough to refuse - they would have to give up the lives they know and come to live among the lowly shepherds in Goshen. No more life in Pharaoh's courts, wearing Egyptian finery, doing what rich Egyptian boys do. No longer would their father be Yosef/*Tzafanat Paneach*, the rich and powerful Viceroy of Egypt. Their father would instead be this old man they have apparently never met - an old man who smells like sheep and goats and claims to *have a covenant with and talk regularly to* a deity not known to their maternal grandparents nor anyone else in the Egyptian society in which they live.

It seems *ludicrous*, doesn't it? But Yosef agrees - and to the glory of the Compassionate One of Israel, Menashe and Efrayim agree as well. And that as much as anything is why every Friday night when Hebrew fathers lovingly lay their hands upon the heads of their sons they conclude their blessing with the words: "***May you be as Efrayim and Menashe***".

Choosing the Ancient Paths – Every Day

Each of us, like Efrayim and Menashe, must choose what will be our lifestyle and our inheritance. We can adopt *the lifestyle of whatever culture we find ourselves living in* - and pass on that lifestyle to our children and children's children as an inheritance. Many - indeed most of the people in the world - do exactly that. But that is not our only option. If we just set our sights a little higher we can adopt *the lifestyle for which the Holy One created us* - and pass on that lifestyle to our children and children's children as an inheritance. It is all *up to us*. Each choice however requires giving up

something the world around us (the Egyptian world) considers valuable and important in exchange for something the world around us considers silly and meaningless.

Each of us is confronted with such choices every day. How we *dress*. How we *eat*. How we *spend our time*. How we *respond to our parents*. How we *spend our money*. How we *look at the world*. How we *think about, and act toward, other people*. How we *marry*. How we *educate and discipline children*. What we *consider important*. What we *talk about*. Even *how we will die*. In every area of life we choose one way – or the other. What will it be - the wisdom of our age and society? Or the ancient paths of the Holy One, His patriarchs, and His Torah? May you always make the *right choice*. And may you indeed be like Efrayim and Menashe, who overcame immersion in an environment of paganism and immorality, and the distractions of wealth and position among the gentiles, to claim an inheritance into which they were by the grace of the Holy One engrafted and adopted.

Yisrael's Blessing of His Newly Adopted Sons

I am sure that you remember what happened in connection with the patriarchal 'firstborn's blessing' when same was acquired by Ya'akov. Genesis 27 tells the story of how at his mother Rivkah's instruction Ya'akov shamelessly dressed himself in Esav's garments and presented himself to his father Yitzchak with a bowl of artificially flavored wild game tasting stew as if he were Esav. It was thus that Ya'akov the younger son received the blessing as if he were the firstborn.

Considering the way in which Ya'akov *received* the firstborn blessing, though he was not the firstborn, it can be expected that the way in which Yisrael *passes on* the firstborn's blessing to the next generation will be anything but conventional. To refer to Yisrael's impartation of the patriarchal blessing as 'unconventional' may however actually be an understatement. As it turns out Yisrael does not pass the firstborn's blessing on to any of the sons he sired – but to a son whom he *adopted* late in life. The blessing usually reserved for the firstborn will go to Efrayim, the younger of Yisrael's two adopted sons. As Ya'akov, the youngest, received the blessing of primacy usually reserved for the firstborn, so will Efrayim as the youngest receive the blessing of primacy usually reserved for the firstborn. Here is how Torah records Yisrael's blessing of Efrayim as the son who will have primacy, and of Menashe as the son who will walk beside, but slightly behind. It starts with Yisrael imparting the empowerment of Hebrew covenant worldview to the boys. Yisrael declared:

Ha-Elohim asher hithaleichu avotai l'fanav Avraham v'Yitzchak

The God before whom my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, walked,

ha-Elohim ha-Ro'eh oti me'odi ad ha-yom hazeh

is the God who has been my Shepherd up to this day,

Ha-mal'ach ha-go'el oti mikol-ra yevarech et ha-ne'arim

The angel Who delivered me from all evil - May He bless the lads,

v'yikarei v'hem shemi v'shem avotai Avraham v'Yitzchak

and let them carry my name and the names of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak.

V'yidgu l'rov b'kerev ha-aretz

And like His fish may He cause them to increase in the land.'

Please note that Yisrael's blessing of Efrayim [and Menashe] is quite different than the blessing spoken over him by Yitzchak years ago. Then, Yitzchak had merely blessed his son with ***mital ha-shamayim*** [the dew of heaven] ***umish'manei ha-aretz*** [and the fat of the earth], with 'much grain and wine', as well as primacy over his sibling [in that case, Esav] and over all nations and governments. **Genesis 27:28-29**. Because Ya'akov had grown up in a Hebrew tent, and had been immersed in the Covenant worldview from his mother's womb, the blessing Yitzchak proclaimed over him was primarily *physical* – a matter of wealth, prosperity, influence, etc. But the blessing – and inheritance – that Yisrael gave to Efrayim [and Menashe], on the other hand, had to start at the beginning, with an impartation of Covenant worldview and history. It had to start out firmly anchored in the *spiritual realm* – to activate in them a hunger for a relationship with the Almighty like unto that of Yisrael – a lifelong relationship in connection with which they would come to know the One True God as *Ro'eh* [Shepherd/guide] and as the ***Goel*** [Deliverer].

Doin' That Crazy Hand Jive

Perhaps the strangest aspect of Yisrael's blessing of Efrayim and Menashe is the trick he performed with his hands as he imparted this blessing. Yosef had presented the boys for Yisrael's blessing in such a way that Menashe, the oldest son, would be on Yisrael's right and Efrayim, the youngest, would be on Yisrael's left. But Yisrael 'crossed him up', literally crossing his arms in front of him, so that his right hand, representing his strength and dominance, would be upon Efrayim instead of Menashe. Here is the way Torah describes what I call the first 'hand jive' in history:

Vayishlach Yisra'el et-yemino v'yashet al-rosh Efrayim

Israel reached out with his right hand and placed it on the head of Efrayim,

v'hu ha-tza'ir v'et-smolo al-rosh Menashe

[even though] he was the younger son. He [placed] his left hand on Menashe's head.

sikel et-yadav ki Menasheh ha-bechor

He deliberately crossed his hands, even though Menashe was the firstborn.

Vayar Yosef ki-yashit aviv yad-yemino al-rosh Efrayim

When Yosef saw that his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim's head,

vayeira b'eynav vayitmoch yad-aviv

he was displeased. He tried to lift his father's hand

l'hasir otah me'al rosh-Efrayim al-rosh Menasheh

from Ephraim's head and place it on Menashe's.

V'yomer Yosef el-aviv lo-chen avi

That's not the way it should be done, Father,' said Yosef.

ki-zeh ha-bechor sim yemincha al-rosho

'The other one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head.'

Vayema'en aviv v'yomer yadati b'ni yadati

His father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know.'

gam-hu yihyeh-l'am v'gam-hu yig'dal

[The older one] will also become a nation. He too will attain greatness.

v'ulam achiv ha-katon yigdal mimeinu

But his younger brother will become even greater⁶,

V'zar'o yihyeh melo ha-goyim

and his descendants will become full-fledged nations⁷.'

Yosef no longer controls the destiny of these two young men. His parental rights were severed at their adoption. Their father is now Yisrael, and the one who will determine the destiny of each, is now Yisrael's God.

V'yevarechem b'yom hahu l'emor

And in the day [Yisrael] blessed them. He said,

becha yevarech Yisra'el l'emor

'[In time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say,

yesimcha Elohim ke'Efrayim vechi Menasheh

'May God make you like Efrayim and Menashe.'

vayasem et-Efrayim lifnei Menasheh

He [deliberately] put Efrayim before Menashe.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah Yisrael/Ya'akov, in his old age and nearly blind, asks Yosef to bring his sons Efrayim and Menashe to him in order that he may adopt and bless them.

[A] How old are Efrayim and Menashe at the time this happens? [Hint: See Genesis 41:50-52, 45:9-11, 47:28-30 and 48:1 for clues!]

[B] Why do you think Yisrael had to/chose to ask, "Who are these?" when he saw Efrayim and Menashe?

⁶ From Efrayim would come Y'hoshua [Joshua], son of Nun, who would *lead all the tribes in taking possession of the land*, and who would *teach Torah to Israel*. A devout servant to and student of Moshe, Y'hoshua provided the crucial leadership link between Moshe the prophet and the *Shoftim* [Judges] of Israel, which the Holy One raised up once Israel took possession of the land.

⁷ The sages have differing interpretations of the clause ***melo ha-goyim***. The phrase is interpreted as 'famous nations' in *Targum Yonathan*' as 'many nations' by Ibn Ezra; as 'world-filling nations' by Rashi; as 'rulers of nations' by Onkelos; and as 'destroyers of nations' by *Lekach Tov*).

[C] What did Yosef say when Yisrael asked “*Who are these*”? What does this reveal to you about Yosef?

[D] In verse 12, Yosef did a strange thing for the second in command under Pharaoh of Egypt. What did he do, and what do you think stirred him to do it?

2. Which hand did Yisrael place on Efrayim? Which hand did he place on Menashe? Did it make a difference? If so, why?

3. In verses 15 and 16 of the Torah aliyah for today Yisrael describes the Holy One for/to his new sons. Read carefully the description Yisrael gives of his dearest “acquaintance”, the Holy One. Then, in your own words, write what the Holy One was to Yisrael after all the “God-encounters” and God-ordained life experiences of Ya’akov’s life.

4. Ya’akov/Yisrael blesses Menashe by saying he will become *l’am*, and will become great. He then blesses Efrayim by saying he will become something that in Hebrew is represented by the phrase *melo ha-goyim*.

[A] Re-read carefully the promise the Holy One made to Yisrael in Genesis 35:11. What three things did the Holy One say would “come from” Yisrael?

[B] What is the difference between *l’am* [what Menashe would become] and *melo ha-goyim* [what Efrayim would become]? [Hint: it may help if you look up, in Strong’s or a Hebrew lexicon, the word which our English Bibles translate as nation, “community” or “group”, and the root word from which that word comes].

[C] Imagine you were Efrayim on that day. Write a diary entry for the events that transpired, being careful to express your feelings, questions, and thoughts about those events. [Remember also that Efrayim and Menashe apparently lived in Egyptian palaces, not having much to do with Ya’akov and the Hebrew families in Goshen].

5. In the Haftarah verse for today the aging David “blesses” his son Shlomo. He gives him the secret(s) to being able to prosper in everything he does and wherever he goes.

V’shamarta et-mish’meret Adonai Eloheicha
and [may you] keep the charge of the Holy One your God,
lalechet bid’rachav lish’mor chukotav mitzvotav
to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, [and] His mitzvot,
umishpatav v’edotav kakatuv b’torat Moshe
and His ordinances, and His testimonies, as written in the Torah of Moshe
l’ma’an taskil et kol-asher ta’aseh
In order that you may prosper in all that you do,
v’et kol-asher tifneh sham
Whatever turns your life takes.
[I Kings 2:3]

[A] What does he say is/are the secret(s)?

[B] Do a study on the verb that our English versions translate as “keep”, as follows:

[i] In Strong’s Concordance look up the Hebrew word translated as “keep” in this verse.

[ii] Write the Hebrew word, first as it transliterates into English, then in Hebrew letters with vowel points.

[iii] In Gesenius, look for the *pa’al/qal* (verb root) form of this verb (or as close to it as you can get). Review and summarize what you see in Gesenius’ notes as being the primary definition of that verb.

[iv] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding this verb, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing what you think David was telling Shlomo to do in this verse, considering what the verb really means, and the shades of meaning and usage that pertain to the *pa’al/qal* form of the verb.

[C] There are 4 things that David charges Shlomo to “keep”. In Strong’s, look up each of the four words David employs to describe what Shlomo is to “keep”, then write the Hebrew words in Hebrew letters, with vowel points, and go to Gesenius and find, and write on your paper, the appropriate meanings for each of those four words.

6. In the B’rit Chadasha reading for today, Kefa [Peter] blesses the Holy One.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah,
who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah from the dead,
to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that doesn't fade away,
reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded
through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*Wherein you greatly rejoice,
though now for a little while, if need be, you have been put to grief in various trials,
that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes
even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor
at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah*

[I Peter 1:3-7]

[A] For what does Kefa *bless* [NIV says “praise”] the Holy One?

[B] What “inheritance” do you think Kefa is talking about in this aliyah? [Hint: Before answering, read Mt. 6:19-21]

[C] Where is this inheritance kept?

[D] By what are we “shielded”?

[E] Why are we subject to “trials” and why do we “suffer grief”?

May the Holy One establish you like Efrayim and Menashe.

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 137:2-3

*On the willows in the midst of it we hung up our harps.
For there, those who led us captive asked us for songs.
Those who tormented us demanded songs of joy:
Saying: "Sing us one of the songs of Tziyon!"*