

Introduction to Parsha #12: Vayechi¹

Torah: Genesis 47:28 - 50:26
Haftarah: I Kings 2:1-12
B'rit Chadasha: I Peter 1:1 - 2:1



The Holy One will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land
[Genesis 50: 24(a)]

The Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #10, *Tzaddikim*
[*Men Whose Lives Conform to Divine Specifications*]

Vayechi Ya'akov b'ereetz Mitzrayim – *i.e. and Ya'akov lived in Egypt* **Genesis 47:28a.**

The famine-ravaged land of Israel lies desolate. Our ancestral camps have become ghost towns. The network of wells in the Negev that Avraham's servants dug - and which Yitzchak reopened in the face of great persecution - lie forsaken and untended. All of Avraham's grandchildren and great-grandchildren – all seventy of the world's Hebrew souls – have suddenly pulled up stakes and migrated to a whole other continent. The entire covenant nation has migrated to *Mitzrayim* (*i.e.* Egypt). They have set up makeshift *shtetels* in the swampy, backwater boondocks of Goshen². The heat, humidity, and mosquitos at their new place of abode are sometimes oppressive; and there is always a danger of catastrophic flooding from the Nile each year in the subequatorial summer season; but all in all, considering how heavy the great famine had been on the other nations of the world, the situation could definitely be worse for Ya'akov and his clan. Other ethnic groups forced by the famine to migrate to Egypt were required to assimilate, forsake their national identities, embrace Egyptian philosophy, political theory, and religion, and pledge allegiance to Pharaoh as a demigod king and to his darkness-infested plan

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² Except, of course, for Yosef, Menashe, and Efrayim, who hang out in a palace in Nopf (*i.e.* Memphis).

of One World Order domination.

Strangers In a Strange Land

At the very beginning of the Hebrews epic migration adventure, when their vagabond caravan had only made it as far as Be'er Sheva, the Holy One stepped out of the unseen, incorporeal realm and comforted Ya'akov about the great descent upon which he and his family had embarked. He promised Ya'akov that Egypt would serve as the incubation chamber from which the great nation He was creating from Avraham's seed would come forth. So, here we are, wrapped up in Yosef's strange, surreal bubble of protective custody/witness protection. It is a pleasant enough situation to be in at present. Yosef *a/k/a Tzafanat-Paneach* is still second-in-command to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh actually seems to be fine with the fact that we are here – at least as long as we stay to ourselves in our assigned territory. He has made it clear, however, that we are being tolerated as *guests* – not as *citizens*. We are not by any means considered equals of the Egyptian population. We have no 'rights' under Egyptian law. We do not even qualify as a minority – just as 'alien sojourners'. As long as we are in this country, we cannot own land - or anything except the flocks, the herds, and the Hebrew 'stuff' we brought with us. The Egyptians still consider us an *abomination*. They avoid us like the plague. In other words, it should not take a rocket scientist to envision how tentative our position is here – and how quickly the '*Goshen Protocol*' arrangement currently in place could go south. All it would take for this little adventure to turn ugly would be for something to happen to either Yosef or to the current Pharaoh. Then, if a *pestilence* came, if a *war* broke out, if a few of the many diverse migrant populations of the land began to turn on the entrenched locals, or on each other, or if the common people of Egypt just got tired of seeing our *tzit-tzit* at market or hearing us speak Hebrew ... well, you know exactly who is going to bear the blame and pay the price, don't you? So, sons and daughters of Ya'akov – let's be wise as serpents, harmless as doves! We should never give in to either paranoia of xenophobia, of course; but we should make sure that neither we nor our children get too comfortable in this or any land of exile.

Ah, but as the curtain rises on *Vayechi* no one save Ya'akov seems to be concerned about such things. Over a decade has passed since the famine lifted. The tent community Yehudah and his brothers set up in Goshen is flourishing. Meanwhile, the economy and culture of our neighbors in Egypt are enjoying an amazing comeback. Everybody is busy – and relatively happy – these days. Neither the Egyptian soldiers nor the local hoodlums bother us – and, of course, we have no interest whatsoever in bothering them. We are too busy shepherding our flocks, growing our herds, and raising a sudden supernatural superfluity of Hebrew babies. It will all be fine – right? Well, I guess we will see - won't we?

Stop! Hey, What's That Sound?³

Have you been hearing it, Beloved? Late at night, when the screaming hustle, bustle, and din going on around us starts to quiet down to a soft murmur, has it been speaking to you? You know what I am talking about, don't you? I am talking about THE VOICE. I am talking about the BEAUTIFUL, HAUNTING, MOTHERLY VOICE that seems to be emanating from a tomb just north of *Beit Lechem*. I am talking about **that passionate 'Prodigal children, remember who you are – and COME HOME!'** outcry that has of late been waking some of us up in the night. As Yirmayahu will later describe this phenomenon: *A voice is heard in Ramah. Lamentation and bitter weeping. It is Rachel weeping for her children – refusing to be comforted concerning her children – because they are no more.* Jeremiah 31:15.

Why is Rachel crying? Because her dearly beloved Ya'akov, Yosef, and Binyamin – not to mention every one of her nieces and nephews – have departed the land. They have pulled up the ancestral tent pegs. They have piled all their belongings onto Egyptian wagons. They have left her bereaved. For over a decade now, both her burial place on *the road to Efrat* and the tomb in which the bones of Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Rivkah, and Leah are interred have been left untended, overgrown, and apparently forgotten. And what is worse, her kinsmen seem to be in no hurry whatever to return and remedy the situation. Hence, the weeping; hence, the outcry; hence, THE VOICE.

Rachel, dear mother of Israel, we on this side of history hear your cries - and we weep with you. But as for your kinsmen who left Kena'an over a decade ago, all they are hearing these days is the sound of haggling in the open air shuks along the Nile. *Sshhhhhhh*, says the announcer. Enough of that! Please direct your eyes to the stage now. The curtain on the next episode of the Yosef Chronicles is about to open. Act IV of the Prelude to the Great Redemption Drama that lies at the epicenter of Torah is about to begin. Just sit back, relax – and *enjoy the show!* And pretend, for now at least, that you do not hear – indeed, cannot hear – THE VOICE.

Welcome to the Reality of Avraham's Genesis 15 Prophetic Vision!

Before we know it, our pleasant little season of family reconciliation and reunification in the land of the pyramids is going to turn into a full-fledged *galut* – i.e. *exile*. And alas, it won't stop there. Before it is over, the exile will turn into an almost unbearable era of enslavement.

³ The reference is to the classic counter-culture anthem/protest song 'For What It's Worth'. The song, written by Stephen Stills and released by what was then his band - *Buffalo Springfield* - in December of 1966, features the chorus '*Stop! Hey, what's that sound? Everybody look what's goin' down!*'

The famine, as it turned out, was not the main event – it was just a *status quo* changer. It did not claim lives; it merely rearranged life priorities and radically disrupted lifestyles. The end result of the seven-year period in which there was nothing to harvest was exactly what the Holy One planned: refugees from every nation, ethnicity, and continent – together with all the gold and silver the mixed migrant multitude could scrape together to buy food and start a new life – came together to the country that He had selected to serve as the epicenter of the Grand Redemptive Drama that He intended to bring about. The great *population shift* and *wealth transfer* the years of famine begat has set the stage for an epic redemption story – a blockbuster saga of deliverance so inspirational that it will impact every tongue, tribe, and bloodline in the world, in every generation that will ever live.

That is the macro-vision – and it is glorious. But a multiplicity of micro-vision subplots still have to unfold before the grand macro-vision can come to pass. After all, at this point Egypt still looks like a place everyone wants to GO, not a place everyone is in a hurry to LEAVE. Furthermore, the sons and daughters of Avraham – i.e. the people group destined to be gloriously delivered from Egypt and sent into the world to model the Covenant lifestyle to all nations - still just number a few souls. The store cities of Pitom and Rameses? These torture chambers have not even been dreamed of, much less built. Pharaoh is still letting Yosef run Egypt for him, and as long as that continues, everything in Northeast Africa is going to keep turning to gold. The Egyptian economy is absolutely booming. Most of the immigrants from the nations of the world that rushed in during the great famine are assimilating nicely into Egyptian culture. Out in the remote delta area called Goshen, however, there is an old Wandering Aramean who is bucking the assimilation tide. He is doing everything he can to keep his family's lifestyle flowing according to the *sh'ma*, *sh'mar*, and *asah* 'blessed peacemaker' pattern that was established long ago by the first Wandering Aramean, Avraham. So far, it is working out just fine. There is a 'baby boom' of Biblical proportions underway in that tent village. Hebrew babies are being conceived virtually every day. It is pretty much 'here a Hebrew baby-bump', 'there a Hebrew baby-bump', and 'everywhere a Hebrew baby-bump'. A mere seventy Hebrew souls made the journey; but if this trend keeps up ... well, if this trend holds there will soon be no counting these folks. Indeed, at this rate, in a couple hundred years the sons and daughters of Avraham will become as numerous as the sands of the seashore and the stars in the night sky.

What does all this mean? It means that the Great Book of Beginnings – the first *sefer* of Torah - is about to draw to a close. It means that after revealing to us the end from the beginning, the glorious Heaven-touches-Earth drama sequences of *Sefer B'reshit* are going to yield the stage of revelation to the next supernatural

spectacular of the Holy One's special feature playlist - *Sefer Sh'mot*. With the changing of the books a dramatic shift in focus will occur. The scenery will not change, but the cast – and the 'mood' that dominates the prophetic wallpaper – most definitely will. Oh, the times, they are a-changin'! I therefore call the week we study *Vayechi* each year *the Week of Dramatic Transition*.

Buckle your seat belts tightly - the wild, rapid descent of this roller coaster ride is about to begin.

Something Truly Earth-Shaking Is Happening Here – Just Beyond the Realm of Ordinary Human Vision

The foundational era of the *Sh'ma-ing Patriarchs* is winding down; the era of an arising, overcoming nation of *sh'ma-ing Souls* is ready to begin. In this new season *Covenant life* is going to be about much more than personal devotions. It is going to be about more than establishing a framework of *halakah*. Those are rudimentary things. We are about to become part of something *much, much bigger*.

In the coming era we are going to discover that the reason the Holy One cut covenants with our forefathers was not to guarantee *our personal comfort*, nor to ensure our *happiness*, nor to turn us soft with *material wealth*. The purposes for which the Holy One cut Covenants with our ancestors and renewed them with us, and for which we are called to live Covenant lives, are much more glorious and grand. Our Covenant with the Glorious Creator-God is primarily about the privilege of knowing, counseling, and co-laboring with HIM. It is about establishing and propagating *His Kingdom*. It is about seeking and learning - and then abiding in and performing - *His Will*. It is about investing time, energy, and passion in *His Immediate and Eternal Purposes*. It is about revealing *His Glory* to the world in real time. Covenant life is about *becoming the earthly ambassadors of the Creator of the Universe*. It is about becoming part of a counterculture that *survives all threats against it through following His Leadership and walking in His Ways*. *It is about becoming a nation that overcomes all obstacles thrown into its path through clinging to and trusting in Him*. *It is about learning to transcend all challenges we face in Him*, and it is about *shifting the atmosphere of whatever sphere[s] of influence into which He may see fit to introduce us back toward the direction of the Creator's Wise Plan*.

In the Wisdom of our Covenant Partner, more of His Plan tends to get accomplished as we allow Him to process us through states of discomfort than when we self-medicate ourselves with things, thought patterns, food and drink, and activities that we foolishly deceive ourselves into thinking will bring us 'comfort'. But no matter what challenges and difficulties we encounter in life, the honor and

sheer joy of knowing, walking with, and serving Him is *more than worth it*.

Covenant life is about learning to seek, embrace, and exude joy from Heaven's Favor in times of opposition, oppression, lack, and persecution, instead of deluding ourselves and our children with vain, self-centered illusions of 'happiness' attained through material possessions we do not need and the affirmation of other human beings we do not really even know. But no matter what the cost of knowing, walking with, and serving Him turns out to be, the privilege and delight of doing so are *far more than worth it*.

Covenant life is about seeking, learning, and surrendering to the Will, the Ways, the Instructions, and the Timing of our Covenant Partner in Heaven as we go through life, instead of running after the folly factories of self-obsession, self-promotion, self-preservation, and self-improvement. But no matter what personal dreams, self-centered desires, and self-indulgent plans we are called upon to joyfully throw aside as rubbish along the way, the wonder and glory and pleasure of His Companionship, and the pleasure of seeing His Will done on earth in real time as it is in Heaven, will be *worth everything we have left behind along the way a thousand times over*.

Our Covenant Life Assignment at such a time as this is to learn from the *Immaculate Master Craftsman of Life* Himself how to live well-lived lives over the course of challenging decade after challenging decade instead of rebelling against His Calling, seeking our own way, and pursuing activities conceived by men promising of financial reward, leisure, entertainment, thrill, social acceptance, or sensual pleasure. But we are also going to learn that His Will and His Plan are light years more fulfilling and beneficial - for us, our families, and for the world in which we live - than any plan or program we could have come up with on our own.

We are about to discover that we are called to be much more than blessed and highly favored. We are called to share with billions of other individuals and families a collective *mission* and a *destiny* which is trans-generational, cross-cultural, pan-millennial – and will just as likely result in us and our children suffering the wrath and violence in the countries of exile in which we are dispersed as with us basking in blessing and prosperity of the Patriarchal Land of Promise.

Our presence in the world – whether we wind up being personally *loved and admired by the world* or *blackballed, blamed for problems we had nothing to do with, expelled, persecuted, tortured and targeted for Holocaust* - is a critical component of the Grand Long-term Plan of the Holy One to bring about the redemption of mankind and the restoration of all Creation.

We are obviously loved and cherished by Him Who created and called us His Covenant People – but by *the people of the world*? Well, let’s just say “*not so much*”. We *as a people* are destined to gloriously overcome the darkness that presently hold sway over the fallen world. On an *individual basis* however we are called to just to walk out our Covenant identities in real time, in the real world, with humility and love ... and let the chips – and stones, arrows, nails, bullets, and rockets – *fall where they may*. Knowing Him and His Ways is *worth it* – a *thousand times over*. There is *no more glorious adventure*. There is *no other hand*⁴. There is *no more exhilarating or fulfilling reason to live*. And there is likewise *no greater or more worthy reason to die*. Be strong! Be Strong! And may we all be strengthened together!

Getting our Bearings Before Stepping Off Into the Brave New World of Increasing Visibility, Vulnerability, and Covenant Responsibility

The sages have divided the Book of Genesis into twelve separate *parshot* [i.e. sections for study]. Week-by-week for the past 11 weeks we have studied the first 11 of those 12 *parshot*. What have we learned in these last 11 weeks? Let’s recap.

In the first two weeks of what I call our *inspired pursuit* we marveled at the *details* and *sequences* and *methodologies* and *personalities* of such important Biblical narratives as Creation Week, the Garden experience, the Flood episode, and of the Tower of Babel incident. Then beginning with parsha number three of the Book our Divine Guide to the human experience launched us into a something even more *worldview shaking* and *life changing*. Week three is when the Master Storyteller of Heaven began to regale us with the inspired chronicles of *the Patriarchal era*. In the course of the chronicles of the lives of Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’akov and Yosef the Divine Author has taught us to *listen for, recognize, and let our hearts, minds, wills and thoughts be transfixed and transformed by* both the intoxicating sound of His *Beautiful Voice* and the awesome power of His *Creative, Prophetic Words*. But it is more than that. Through the course of our studies related to the lives of the Patriarchs the Holy One has introduced to us the *concept* of the *GOD/MAN*

⁴ This is a quote of declaration made by Tevye the milkman in the screenplay of ‘Fiddler on the Roof’. Tevye, a Jew of the Anatevka Ghetto of rural Russia during the days preceding the Bolshevik Revolution is a kind and loving father of five daughters. He, more than most men, is willing to consider what factors is on ‘the other hand’ when one of his daughters disagree with what he has planned for or believes is right for them. When his favorite daughter Chava rebels against all he holds dear about life and elopes with a boy outside the Covenant, Tevye reaches a place where he cannot compromise, i.e. when he can no longer consider ‘the other hand’ as a viable alternative. “*Accept them? How can I accept them?*” Tevye asks. “*Can I deny everything I believe in? On the other hand, can I deny my own child? On the other hand, how can I turn my back on my faith, my people? If I try to bend that far, I will break. On the other hand ... NO! There is no other hand!*” See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkiWlpiQibQ>

COVENANT.

Of course, the Holy One has no interest in teaching anyone the fundamentals of Covenant Life just to satisfy some theoretical, theological abstract thirst for information. What He wants is for us to merely *believe in or even teach Covenant doctrines*; He wants us to *Live Covenant lives*. That is why the Holy One has used the Patriarchal narratives to meticulously *train us to walk in the essential elements of COVENANT LIFESTYLE*. By walking us through the highs and lows, ups and downs of the lives of the Patriarchs our Covenant Partner has taught us the essential building blocks of Covenant-relationship. He has been letting the Patriarchs model for us Covenantal realities like *reverence*, and *trust*, and *gradually increasing holiness*, and *ever-deepening levels of prayer*, and *worship on HIS terms instead of ours*, and *abandoning fleshly dreams birthed in the human mind in exchange for the prophetic destiny designed for us by Him in His Wise and Compassionate Heart*.

Our forefathers' experiences taught us how important it is for us to *sh'ma* the Creator's Voice – even when we do not understand why or how. But the Holy One has also made sure we understand very clearly, before we get the first 'Commandment', that *perfection in response to His directions has never been and will never be* a requirement for humans to live in vibrant relationship with Him.

Before He to Whom we owe the very Breath of Life gives us a single commandment to obey He wants to make sure that we understand the indispensable keys of establishing, maintaining, and building our lives upon a firm foundation of intimate personal relationship with Him. He has taught us that a covenant relationship with Him guarantees access to abundant supplies of such things as *chesed* [*i.e.* covenant faithfulness], *chen* [*i.e.* grace, empowering favor], *shalom* [*i.e.* a sense of wholeness, wellness, protection, provision and peace], *nacham* [*i.e.* comforting, refreshing, defending, vindicating], and *racham* [*i.e.* compassion, loving-kindness].

Through the Holy One's infinitely patient dealings with generation-by-generation of patriarchs He has built a tremendous database of Divinely breathed memories upon which to base a walk of faith in all generations⁵.

Our Patriarchs' Eleventh Hour

⁵ Without us even realizing it the Holy One has also been simultaneously *stirring in our hearts a passionate longing for* and *established firmly in our minds an eternal connection with* a specific piece of real estate – the strategic land bridge between Babylon and Egypt which some call Kena'an and others think of as Palestine, but which we know as *Eretz Yisrael* – the land of Israel.

As we begin our study this week however we find ourselves in *the 'eleventh hour'* of the Patriarchal era. *Oh Avraham! Oh Yitzchak! Oh Ya'akov! Oh Yosef. It is way past 11 o'clock. Dear patriarchs of blessed memory - do you know where your children are? Oh Yisrael – land of the patriarchs, terra firma of the Promises of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth for His beloved prodigy 'man' - You will see the prodigals that sprang forth from the patriarchal loins again, and the homecoming will be sweet. But alas, it will not take place any time soon!*

The curtain is going to open on the twelfth parsha of Torah to find Ya'akov and his entire family peacefully sojourning not in the promised land of Kena'an but in *the pagan land of Egypt*. The recently transplanted Hebrew souls we will see living in the land of Pharaohs and pyramids went there to ride out the final five years of worldwide famine that Yosef prophesied. But there was obviously *much, much more to their journey to Egypt than that*. If our ancestors had known why the Holy One **really** brought them to the land of sphinxes they would still have come, I suppose. After all, the Great Seven-year Famine really left them no other viable option. But had they known even *one tenth* of what awaits their progeny in the land of pyramids, I suspect they would have had to have been dragged *kicking and screaming all the way*. Unbeknownst to them, you see, by reason of the presence of these 70 souls in Egypt at such a time as this in history a *new era of God-man relations* is about to dawn. As a result of the Egyptian sojourn they are about to experience, a totally new dimension of the Divine Plan of Redemption for mankind is about to become manifest upon on the earth. A beautiful new *paradigm of the Holy One's personality* is about to be revealed to the world. By reason of the trials they and their children and children's children are about to face *a vast exponential expansion of the scope of participation by the species of man in covenant relationship with the Creator of the Universe is about to occur*. But let us not get too far ahead of ourselves. Let us begin at the beginning of the parsha, and walk and talk together through the long process of revelation.

The Name of the Parsha of Dramatic Transition

The final parsha of the book of Genesis begins with the Hebrew phrase '*Vayechi*' – hence the sages chose this as the parsha's name. *Vayechi* is usually translated into the English language as '*and [he] lived ...*' Here are the opening lines:

Vayechi Ya'akov b'ere'tz Mitzrayim

And Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt

sh'va esreh shanah

for 17 years

vayehi yemei-Ya'akov sh'nei chayav

and Ya'akov's days, the years of life,

sheva shanim v'arba'im ume'at shanah

were 7 years, 40 years, and 100 years.

[Genesis 47:28]

By now those of you who have been studying Torah with the *Rabbi's son* should recognize that this is Torah's way of announcing to us *that another patriarch is just about to leave the building – er, I mean the planet!*"

Before the week is over we will find ourselves saying “goodbye” to both Ya'akov and Yosef. The impact of the departure of patriarchs from our midst will be stunning. This is very, very significant - because as soon as our patriarch Ya'akov is dead and gone things are going to begin to change dramatically for the covenant family ... and *for the world*. And the minute Yosef's bones are laid in their coffin a *spiritual curtain of silence and darkness* will start to descend. We will not hear one word from or concerning the Holy One's people, nor indeed from or concerning the Holy One, for a long, long time thereafter. In fact the next God-encounter recorded in Torah – the famous ‘burning bush’ incident involving an 80-year-old fugitive-from-Egyptian-justice on the ‘mountain of God’ called *Horeb* – is not scheduled to occur for *several generations*.

***It's Been A Long, Long Time Coming,
But I Know A Change is Gonna Come!*⁶**

Shemot [Exodus], the next book we are going to study, is not going to be about encounters between God and sojourning patriarchs with strong-willed wives and troublesome children, but about the trauma surrounding *the birthing of a nation* and *the establishing of communal interaction between man and God*. Instead of focusing on the relationship of the Holy One with the *avot* [i.e. *Phase I of the Holy One's redemptive plan for mankind after the Tower of Bavel*] we will in *Sefer Sh'mot* find ourselves focusing on the courtship, betrothal of the Holy One to a people/Bride - a vast multitude of called-out ones who will, as a community, walk in the footsteps of the *avot*, will live solely by *sh'ma*-ing His Voice, and will thereby become His ‘*kingdom of priests*’, His ‘*special treasured possession*’, and His ‘*holy nation*’ on earth [i.e. *Phase II of the Holy One's redemptive plan*].

There is no way of getting around it – READY OR NOT, TRANSITION IS COMING. Be forewarned. By the grace and mercy of the Holy One however those with ears to hear what the Spirit is saying – and yes, I am talking about in the Torah - will have an opportunity to *prepare for the transition*. The Holy One our God knows all about the changes that are coming. He is, in fact, the One Who is orchestrating and choreographing them. And He told His servant Avraham about most of them a long, long time ago. Our assigned job, as Avraham's descendants,

⁶ This is the tag line of a song written by Sam Cooke in c. 1963 called ‘*A Change Is Gonna Come*’.

is to walk these things out in REAL TIME.

The Prophetic Pattern That is Developing:

Sojourn leads to Exile leads to Enslavement leads to Deliverance

Vayechi is an inspired instruction manual on the subject of preparing for the coming transition that will affect us all. Our oft-times pleasant but mind- and spirit-numbing *sojourn* in Egypt [feel free to substitute *America*, or *Great Britain*, or *South Africa*, or the *Philippines*, or *Mexico* or *Canada*, or wherever you happen to live] is going to gradually and almost imperceptibly to turn into a full-fledged *galut* [*exile*]. And then one day our suddenly uncomfortable exile will turn overnight into an almost unbearable *enslavement*. Much like the proverbial frog who relaxed contently in the first container of warm water he found, not realizing that container was a saucepan on an open stove, just beginning to cook, we will, if we are not on our guard, find ourselves *in quite a stew!* I will therefore say it again - *be forewarned*, Dear Reader. What happened in the lives of the patriarchs *is destined to recur* in the lives of their descendants over and over again until Mashiach [Messiah] comes in the clouds of Heaven with power and glory. This '*recurrence principle*' is a spiritual fact of life – an *integral part of the covenant* the Holy One made with Avraham. *Embrace* the histories of Avraham, of Yitzchak, of Ya'akov and of all Ya'akov's sons and daughters. In those histories, you see, you will find the keys to *your destiny* – and to the destiny of your children and your children's children forever. That is a large part of the reason the Holy One's instruction manual for life on planet earth begins with the *lengthy accounts of the patriarchs*, rather than a list of things He wants us to do and not to do.

Sitting in A Saucepan – With Our Friend the Frog

In *Vayigash* we read of the dramatic events which led up to Ya'akov and his family leaving *Eretz Yisrael* and taking up a *sojourn* in the Goshen region of Egypt. What is a *sojourn*? It is *a season of time when a traveler or guest abides in a place not his own with the permission or tacit approval of his host*. The key factor to remember about a *sojourn* is that while the host may welcome you to stay for awhile in his home or domain, or at least tolerate your presence there, *you do not belong there, and you cannot stay there permanently as a guest*. If you stay beyond your welcome as a guest, either you have to *enslave the host and take over*, or he will *enslave you and take away your freedom to leave*.

This *sojourn* had to do with a long-lost son [Yosef] found alive in Egypt and elevated to second in command there, on the one hand, and the small matter of a life-threatening famine in Kena'an, on the other hand.

Sixty-seven displaced Hebrew souls have settled in the Goshen region of Egypt to

ride out the famine with what is left of their flocks, their herds, and their fragile, fractured *shalom*. What awaits them - and their offspring - there? They have a kinsman-redeemer in Pharaoh's palace to intercede for them. And *the whole little adventure is only scheduled to last for five years*, right? What could go wrong?

This is just a detour. We'll be back in the Promised Land before you know it – won't we? Alas, we find out early in *Vayechi* that it is not going to be anywhere near that simple. The first line of the text tells us *Vayechi Ya'akov b'ereetz Mitzrayim sheva esreh shanah* [i.e. and Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt for 7 and 10 years.] *Seven* and *ten* years? Really? What happened to the idea of going home after the famine was over? Five years of famine went by and concluded ... and then *twelve* more years went by ... and apparently going back home to *Eretz Yisrael* was the farthest thing from anyone's mind.

One might have assumed from the narrative of *Vayigash* that Ya'akov and family went to Egypt for only two purposes: a big '*family reunion*' *bash*, and *an opportunity to 'ride out' the next 5 years of famine* in an idyllic place of safe haven. Once the famine was over there seemed to be no logical reason for Yisrael's 70 souls [Ya'akov, his sons, grandsons, and one granddaughter] to 'stick around' in the foreign land. So ... why did the Covenant family not go back home when the famine was over? What on earth were they *doing* in Egypt for 7 and 10 years? Was life in Goshen really that mesmerizingly sweet? It deserves a closer look.

Living the Chai Life

The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as *lived*" in the passage that tells us Ya'akov '*lived in the land of Egypt for 7 and 10 years*' is a form of *chaya*⁷. This verb means:

- to remain alive,
- to sustain life,
- to live prosperously,
- to be quickened,
- to be alive,
- to be restored to life or health,
- to live forever.

So that is what Ya'akov was doing in Egypt – he was suddenly alive again, and prospering, and being restored to health - after all those years of grief and heartache!

But between the close of *Vayigash* and the beginning of *Vayechi* 17 years of pure *chai* – prosperous, enjoyable *living* – have elapsed. The *chai* was so good in fact

⁷ Chaya is Strong's Hebrew word #2421. It is pronounced *khaw-yaw'*.

that the end of the famine 5 years ago simply went unnoticed. For the last 12 years Ya'akov and his family have just 'hung around' in Goshen. Contrary to what we might have expected, they seem to be in no rush whatever to get back 'home'. So as we start this week's parsha here we are, 7 and 10 years into the season of sojourning, sitting in nice warm water with our new good friend the frog. It all seems so *pleasant*, so *cozy*, so *safe* and so tantalizingly *warm*. Egypt may not be the 'promised land' – but it undeniably is a *land of incredible opportunity*.

Seeing his beloved Yosef again has obviously revitalized Ya'akov/Yisrael. The Covenant-family's badly fractured *bayit shalom* is enjoying a little rest and rehabilitation. The Nile Delta has lots of water. The flocks are prospering. There's all the fish and leeks and onions a body wants to eat. Nobody much bothers us. And hey – we are free agents! We can go back to Kena'an *anytime we want*, right? Of course right. So meanwhile let's just kick our shoes off, sit a spell, soak up some Egyptian sun - and enjoy just a little more of the Egyptian *chai* life. I mean, before we head back North into the desert and all.

A Vayechi Travelogue

What lies in store for us this week? *Vayechi* details the dramatic end of the PATRIARCHAL PERIOD - the season in which the Holy One teaches us the essentials, blessings, and delights of Covenant Relationship. But it also opens the door to the COVENANT NATION-BUILDING period, in which the Holy One will take us beyond blessing and delight to the realm of individual and collective COVENANT RESPONSIBILITY. It is one thing to enjoy fellowship and communion with the Creator of the Universe, and reap the benefits of His protection and provision. It is something wholly different to embrace His call to live lives of humble service to Him, to widows, to the fatherless, to foreigners, to the poor, to 'neighbors', to enemies, and to Creation itself. It is time to grow up, Beloved. It is time to die to the Ya'akov in us, and put on the renewed mind of Yisrael.

To that end, the first thing that we find in our *Vayechi* travelogue is that a 'book-end' is going to be put on Ya'akov and Yosef's relationship. At the beginning of his life Yosef spent 17 years in Ya'akov's camp, fed and nurtured and doted upon by his father. Now at the end of the Patriarchal era there it is time for a little *quid-pro-quo*; hence we will find *Ya'akov* spending 17 years in *Yosef's dominion*, being fed and nurtured and doted over by his son.

We will find that a matter in the forefront of Ya'akov's mind in his latter years will be *where he is going to be buried* when he dies. Ya'akov does not want to be entombed an Egyptian crypt or pyramid. Like his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak he wants to be laid to rest in *Eretz Yisrael*, in the cave of

Machpelah. He wants to await the Shofar Blast of Mashiach there alongside his grandparents, his parents, and Leah.

We will, through the Torah, be right with Ya'akov when he *falls ill*. We will eavesdrop on his sickbed conversations with *Yosef*, Menashe and Efrayim. Shortly thereafter we will see Ya'akov's health fail even further, and will join him and all his sons in a special gathering around his deathbed. We will hear Ya'akov impart his final *b'rachot* [blessings] to his sons. We will then be present as Ya'akov breathes his last breath. We will also participate in mourning him – first in the style of the Egyptians [for 70 days] and then in the style of the Hebrews, as we accompany his body back to Israel for interment at *Machpelah*.

Torah will then fast-forward us to the latter years of Yosef's life. As was the case with Ya'akov, we will see that as death approaches it becomes of great importance to Yosef where he will – and will not – be buried. We will see 'that dreamer' wax prophetic again near the end of his life, as he prophesies that the Holy One plans to accomplish a great deliverance for the Covenant Household in times to come. And he believes so strongly in this prophesy that he extracts from his brothers a pledge – a solemn vow that when that great deliverance occurs, and they all go home to the land of the Patriarchs, they will remember him, and carry his bones with them as they leave.

We will then bid farewell to Yosef, and with the following statement we will whisper a bittersweet goodbye to the great Book of Covenantal Beginnings:

Vayamot Yosef ben-me'ah va'eser shanim

Yosef died at the age of 110 years.

vayachantu oto vayisem b'aron b'Mitzrayim

He was embalmed and placed in a sarcophagus in Egypt.

[Genesis 50:26]

When at the conclusion of parsha *Vayechi* we nail shut the sarcophagus that holds the bones of Yosef, we will also close the back cover of the book of Genesis. Turn the page. Seal up the book. Until next year. Or perhaps the end of days. Whichever shall happen first.

Just one more thing you should know, Dear Reader. When we next look up, we will find to our dismay that we are no longer exalted guests of a great leader of Egypt. We will find that we are instead *slaves* - commodities to be bought and sold, much like the bushels of grain in Pharaoh's granaries.

A Brief Look at Haftarah Vayechi

'Then the days drew near that David would die, and he charged his son Sh'lomo....'
I Kings 2:1-12

In the Haftarah readings that go with *Vayechi* David the great king of Israel is also going to be preparing for the change of an era. The prophetic readings applicable to this coming week are from the first 12 verses of I Kings chapter 2. The essential message is this: *A new era is dawning. The era of Davidic worship and warfare is about to give way to a new the of exponentially expanding the Kingdom through wisdom and sowing the seeds of shalom!*

The prophetic messages of the hour involve practical things the representatives of the expanding Kingdom of Heaven must do - and do quickly – in order to assure that the torch of the Covenant is carried forth to all Kingdom-minded people the Holy One is presently rising up in the land.

In the Haftarah we find this typified for us, in that we see the era of David the Sweet Psalmist/Shepherd-King about to become the era of Shlomo the Wise King of Peace. We will be given prophetic ears with which to eavesdrop on David's last address to his son Sh'lomo. We will marvel at the things David counsels Sh'lomo that he must do, and do quickly, in order to assure that the torch of the Covenant is carried forth into the generation that the Holy One is causing to arise in the land.

David's charge will consist of two parts. First of all, in verses 1-4 of the passage under study David will address weighty *spiritual matters*, telling his son:

*... Chazakta [be strong]! V'hayita l'ish [and show yourself a man]!
Diligently keep the charge of the Holy One Your God, to walk in His ways,
and sh'mar [cherish and diligently guard and keep inviolate]
His statutes, His commandments,
His judgments and His testimonies,
as it is written in the Torah of Moshe.
As you do this you will prosper in all you do and wherever you turn,
in order that the Holy One may establish his word
that He spoke concerning me, saying,
"If your children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth
with all their heart and with all their soul,
there shall not fail you (said he) a man on the throne of Yisra'el."
[I Kings 2:2-4]*

The second part of David's charge to Sh'lomo will be intensely *practical* – indeed, will seem downright *pragmatic*. David will advise Sh'lomo that there are three men in the world who need to be dealt with, and dealt with in wisdom. The King must know who is a trustworthy friend, who is a harmless pretender, and who is malevolent force whose very existence represents a clear and present danger to the kingdom.

The first man David insists that Sh'lomo absolutely must deal with is *Yoav* [Joab]. Yoav fits in the latter category. Though Yoav is a mighty warrior, he is a man of violence, cannot be trusted, and indeed will sooner or later simply have to be *eliminated* for the good of the kingdom. Second, there is a man named Barzillai, from Gilead. This man was a trusted ally of David in the area East of the Yarden [Jordan]. David makes it clear that Barzillai is a trustworthy friend, who is due a great kindness and a true friend's reward. And finally there is a treacherous Benyamani named Shimei, a pretender whom David wanted Sh'lomo to watch very, very closely, and to be prepared to deal with harshly when the need arose - as David felt absolutely certain it would.

The message of this haftarah is thus that in the course of living out a Torah life in fulfillment of one's destiny, doing the will of the Holy One, one will make many *friends* - but alas will make *many more enemies*. The secret of success, for Sh'lomo and for us, is to *know the difference between those who are our enemies and those who are our friends* – and to 'know what you ought to do' with regard to each. The key is to deal with all people according to the Holy One's perfect blend of *wisdom* and *compassion*. We are to regard each person He places in our life as a test of our ability – and willingness - to *sh'ma* His Voice, instead of our natural instincts. We are to do in regard to all people what we see the Holy One doing – not that which our human thirst for vengeance would cry out or what the patronizing behavior of the other person sought to manipulate us into doing.

Navigating uncomfortable aspects of relationships with very real people –such is the crucible of Covenant testing.

Apostolic Readings Corresponding to the Week of Vayechi

I Peter 1:1 - 2:1 - "*To the Holy One's elect, sojourners, scattered*"

In the portion of the Apostolic Writings that I have selected to go with this week's parsha *Kefa* [Peter] will write to Jewish believers - and to the gentiles who have attached themselves to those Messianics - regarding the inheritance they share in this world *and* in the heavenlies. Kefa will summarize it all by saying: ***Live your lives as sojourners here, in reverent fear.***

Ya'akov would have been proud of such instructions. In them lies the secret of dealing with every sojourn, with every exile, and with every enslavement.

Go thou, and do likewise.

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

*Petition #10: **Ha-Tzaddikim** [Men Whose Lives Conform to Divine Specifications]*

Al ha-tzaddikim v'al ha-chasidim

Upon/for/on behalf of the men who do God's will, and those who love You

v'al zik'nei amcha beit Yisrael

and on behalf of the elders of your people the House of Israel

v'al p'leitast sof'reihem

and on behalf of the remnant of their scholar/scribes

v'al gerei ha-tzedek v'oleinu

and upon the righteous sojourners and upon ourselves as well –

yeheimu rachameicha, Adonai Eloheinu

May your Compassion be aroused, O Holy One our God

Viten sochar tov l'chol ha-bot'chim b'shemecha b'emet

And reward with good things all who sincerely trust in Your Name,

Vesim chel'keinu imahem l'olam

And establish our lot with them forever,

V'lo nevosh ki v'cha batachnu

And we will not be ashamed, for our trust is in You

Baruch Atah Adonai mish'an u'mivtach l'tzaddikim

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Anchor and Stronghold of the righteous.