

Shiur L'Yom Sheni¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayechi:*** **Genesis 47:28 - 48:7**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 2:1-2**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Peter 1:1-2**

Al-na tikbereini b'Mitzrayim – i.e. Do not bury me in Egypt
[Genesis 47:29]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 137:1;

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

Vayechi Ya'akov b'ereetz Mitzrayim sh'va esreh shanah – And Ya'akov lived in Egypt seventeen years. Genesis 47:28a.

Seventeen long years have passed – and why exactly are we all still occupying space in Egypt? How did a pleasant reunion with long-lost Yosef morph into a decade-transcending sojourn in the land of idol-worship, fascination with the occult, and obsession over the *afterlife*? How did the hinterlands of Goshen become our new 'home'?

We Can't Blame it on Climate Change Anymore

The famine responsible for this little sojourning adventure lifted over a decade ago. Why, when that happened, did we not thank Pharaoh for his hospitality, pack up the babies, and go back where we belonged? Why are we not pasturing flocks and herds on the pleasant hills around Hebron and Be'er-Sheva where glorious vistas inspire us and the Voice of the Holy One seems to speak to us on every breeze? How did we get so thoroughly stuck in the dark, encroaching shadow of the pyramids? How did we subject a whole generation of covenant sons and daughters to spending their childhood as an outcast minority in a land of narcissistic entitlement, racial hatred, idolatry, human trafficking, cruelty and sexual perversion, and fixation on myths about the afterlife. How did we quietly assent to spending seventeen lambing and shearing seasons fighting mosquitos, pythons, and crocodiles in the marshlands of the northern Nile River Valley? How did we let eight hundred Sabbaths begin and end under the menacing glare of the Sphinx. How did we let seventeen anniversaries of the Holy One's *P'ru ur'vu u'milu et-ha-aretz* Blessing² pass without breaking out of 'famine mindset'. How did we ignore seventeen remembrances of the dispersion of nations after the tower of Babel

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² This is the Hebrew phrase the Creator spoke over Adam (and thus all mankind) on the day of his creation – i.e. the sixth day of Creation week. It translates roughly "Be Fruitful, and multiply/expand exponentially, and bring fulness to the earth."

episode; of the *Lech Lecha* call of Avraham Avinu; of the Holy One's promise of the land of Israel to Avraham's seed; of our ancestor hosting the Divine Presence in his tent by the oaks of Mamre; of the destruction of the cities of the plain; of the binding of Yitzchak on Moriyah; of Ya'akov's staircase vision at Beit-El; and of Yosef's strange odyssey. Seventeen complete circles around the sun. Seventeen seed times. Seventeen harvests. Whew!

Think of what all could happen – in the world, in relationships, and in one's personal walk with the Holy One - in a period like that. Think how much children grow up in 17 years. Think how adults age over 17 years. When one is *young, free*, and just leaping off into the life-stages of education, exploration, and acquisition, a period of seventeen years often seems to fly past like a cheetah chasing a gazelle. But when one has grown older, is living a life of exile in a strange land, is in the later life-stages of down-sizing, deteriorating health, and waning strength, ten years plus seven crawls along at the pace of a tortoise.

How do you think Ya'akov's last 17 years of life went? Careful now - the way you choose to answer that question will reveal a lot about your world view, your feeling about the Covenant, your awareness of your life mission, and the depth of your connection to – not to mention your love for - the Land.

If I Forget Thee

We are constantly reminded that where we are is not – and will never be - 'home'. We have to come to grips with the reality that we are strangers in a strange land. We are always in the minority. We are always treated as foreigners. Whether we are eating, sleeping, working, shopping, pasturing our livestock, and raising our kids, all we see around us is Pharaohs and pyramids, pagan practices³ and pleasant distractions. This is not the land promised by the Holy One to the patriarchs; this is the dark, sinister land known for fascination with death and obsession with the occult arts. This is not our home – but alas, it is where we have been deployed for such a time as this. So while we do not have to fall in love with this place, we had better get used to it – and begin to see and relate to it through the Holy One's eyes instead of our own. This pagan land is going to be where we teach our children Covenant lifestyle, and pull them close to bless them on *Erev Shabbat*, for quite some time. It is going to here that we gather together and sing ancient songs about our forefathers and our kind and wonderful God - songs of praise that our forefathers taught us when we were just children ourselves - for multiple generations. In some strange way we cannot fathom, and for reasons we do not understand, this is the incubator – or is it a crucible – in which the Holy One has chosen to make us into a 'great nation'.

³ 'Pagan', as used in this shiur, merely means pertaining to or arising from a polytheistic form of religion.

For the time being Egypt is nice enough, as nations of exile go. But no nation of exile will ever be our home. Even the rich delta-land of the Goshen region where we got permission to ride out the last five years of the great famine is at best a temporary refuge. All of our days here we are simply *wandering Arameans*. It will be centuries – and generations - before we hear the Voice of our Beloved calling out ‘*Arise, My Love, and Come Away With Me!*’ That day will come – but alas, it will not come any time soon. So, I guess we had better take a look around – and ask the Holy One what exactly it is we are supposed to see.

Looking Around at Our New Environment – Mah Zeh [What is this?]

Believe it or not, the Hebrew text of Torah does not ever call this country ‘Egypt’. Our Creator and King instead always refers to it simply as *Mitzrayim*. This word means *narrow, cramped straits*. It describes a place of *constriction, limitation, and confinement*. The Holy One wants us to understand that Egypt – and for that matter any place of exile - is a place we are significantly restricted and limited, if not completely prevented, from living as we have been created to live. In Mitzrayim, we can only dream of becoming all we were created to become, of doing all we are created to do, and of having the level and quality of influence on the world that we have been called and commissioned to have. We are like a photograph of the sun, freeze-frozen forever in a hazy still shot. We are like a fire, burning itself out rapidly in a metal trash can. We are like a lion roaring loudly in a six-by-six cage.

What causes this land to have that effect on us? It is a combination of factors.

1. Issues of Climate

First of all, there is the climate. The land we know as ‘Egypt’ is a vast desert. Rain almost never falls there. The average rainfall for the whole country is about 3.15 inches per year, and the vast majority of that falls right on the Mediterranean coastline. Cairo, located less than 200 kilometers from the coast, averages less than one half of an inch of rain annually.

Were it not for the annual flooding of the Nile River, Egypt would be unable to sustain any agriculture at all. From June through September of each year significant rains fall far to the south, in the highlands of Ethiopia. These rains swell the Nile River, and bring flooding and rich silt northward through the heart of Egypt. The ancient Egyptians called this annual inundation the *akhet*. They credited a fertility god, whom they called *Hapi*, for this precious gift of life. They would toss sacrifices and offerings of various kinds into the Nile to appease Hapi and induce him to provide the maximal amounts of floodwater and silt deposits to their fields.

2. Issues of Culture

Secondly, as alluded to in the preceding paragraph, the Egyptian people were highly paganized. Over centuries they developed a vast network of gods and goddesses whom they credited for everything that affected them that they considered good and whom they blamed for everything that they considered bad in their world. The sun was considered a ‘good’ god, and was called *Ra* [the Hebrew word for calamity]. The god of the desert, storms, war and general mayhem was a malevolent god they called *Seth*. This author of chaos was over the generations alternately associated in form with a pig, a donkey, a hippopotamus, and an aardvark. He was basically the Egyptians’ idea of evil incarnate. Seth had a family of nemeses, of course, namely the family of his ‘good’ brother Osiris, the god of the underworld and hence the fertility of the land. Osiris’ wife was called Isis, and she was considered the goddess of magic and trickery [which the Egyptians considered something to be highly desired in order to get what they wanted]. Osiris and Isis had a mythical son was called Horus, the god of the sky, who had the head of a hawk or falcon and one all-seeing eye. Horus was believed to take on the bodily form of whomever the ruling pharaoh happened to be. The pharaohs, as the embodiment of Horus, were believed to be gods themselves, and were believed to be protected by Sobek, the great crocodile god. When a pharaoh died he was believed to be reunited with Osiris, the god of the underworld, and was lavishly entombed in order that he would be inclined to make the soil fertile and be empowered to assist Osiris, Isis, and Horus [in the bodily form of the new Pharaoh, of course] to fight the evil god Seth.

Since their pagan religion was strongly influenced by superstition, propagated by a strong priest cult expert in the magic arts, and enforced by generations of tradition, the people of Egypt were extremely resistant to new ideas of any kind. They would never mix well with any outsiders – particularly Hebrews. Since Hebrews were shepherds and herdsmen, whose nomadic vocation threatened to interfere with the orderly production of crops, they were automatically disliked and distrusted.

3. Issues of Government and the Exercise of Political Power and Influence

Thirdly, the political climate of Egypt made it difficult for any real Hebrew influence to develop in that land. The Pharaohs ruled with an iron hand, and except for Yosef, no Hebrew was accorded any influence in the land. We are not citizens. We have no land or property. We have no rights under Egyptian law. We are here by permission, and that permission can be revoked at any time. We are outsiders. We do not belong. Our future here is shaky – as shaky, it might be said, as *a fiddler on the roof*.

4. Issues of Faith and Family

Fourthly, the people of the Covenant themselves experienced some very real internal issues while in Egypt that prevented them from having any significant positive effect on their new environment. The most glaring of these internal issues has to do with the most important relationship of all – *i.e.* the relationship of the Covenant People with the Holy One. From the moment they set foot on Egyptian soil until Moshe returned from the land of Midyan generations later there is not a single report in the Torah of any Hebrew – including Ya’akov, Yosef, and Y’hudah – having any kind or form of God-encounter. That is astounding. And it would prove crippling. Without the inspiration, empowerment, and specific direction of strategically timed God-encounters people of Covenant tend to lose their connection to their Covenant Partner, to the Covenant Lifestyle, and to the Covenant Mission. Their heart begins to grow cold toward the Holy One. Their mind begins to absorb the philosophies and worldview of their pagan neighbors. Their fleshly appetites, urges, affections, and desires go unchecked. They slowly, unconsciously, begin to adopt the mindset and priorities of the people around them. These developments do not bode well for either the sons and daughters of the Covenant or the people groups with whom they come in contact.

A related internal issue for the People of the Covenant is the absence of any matriarchal figure. Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah have all left us by the time we got to Egypt. Dinah has been compromised. Though she has twelve sisters-in-law, and though Ya’akov now has several granddaughters [See Genesis 46:7, 17], it does not appear any of these is ready – or able – to assume a truly matriarchal role.

Who would arise and become a mother of Yisrael now? Alas, no one did. The era of prototypical matriarchs had apparently, for the time being at least, passed. And since matriarchs constitute the glue which holds families – and people groups – together and the inspiration that keeps them moving toward their highest and greatest destiny, the absence of matriarchal figures from the Hebrew nation during the early years of exile in Egypt is going to prove to be devastating for the Covenant People.

To make things worse, the period of the patriarchal leadership is getting ready to end as well. Avraham and Yitzchak are already gone – buried in the cave of Machpelah. Ya’akov is the last of the patriarchs. As the curtain opens on *Vayechi* the most storied man of Torah thus far – a man who began life sharing a war-torn womb with Esav, and who acquired the latter’s birthright for a pot of lentil stew and the blessing intended for him by stealth, finds himself *staring death in the face*.

He who had been forced by Esav’s wrath to seek refuge in the house of Lavan in Charan, and who had once there been manipulated by Lavan so badly that the

refuge proved to be an exile of over 20 years duration, is *approaching the threshold of eternity*.

The pen of the ready writer is at work. The final chapter of life lessons from the patriarchal period is being written. *Yisrael* must increase, so *Ya'akov* must decrease. Two things remain to be decided.

[1] precisely *when our last patriarch's frail mortal body will breathe its last breath*, and

[2] *where that body will be buried* when the inevitable occurs.

Where Do Patriarchs Go When They Die?

All the previous patriarchs and matriarchs drew their last breath and were '*gathered to their people*' in the holy soil of *Eretz Yisrael*. An eternal inheritance in the *Beautiful Land* has always been a part of the covenant. And yet as we begin this week's readings in the Torah, we find that 17 years have passed since the climactic events covered in parsha *Vayigash* – meaning *12 full years after the great famine ended* – and for some reason *Ya'akov* and family are still in Egypt. Why, when the famine ended, did the family with an eternal connection with the Land not just pack up their Hebrew belongings and return to the Promised Land? Why as the curtain opens on today's aliyah do we still see *Ya'akov*, his sons, daughters and grandchildren all living quite contently in the *land of the pyramids* instead of the *land of the patriarchs*?

It appears that *Ya'akov avinu* is about to be the first patriarch to die outside the holy land. Is this a fitting way for *the patriarchal story of Yisrael* – and the patriarchal era in general - to end? Is it really with this in mind that the Holy One issued His *lech lecha* call to Avram son of Terach? Were all the God-encounters and Divinely ordained life experiences we have been reading about really designed to culminate in *Ya'akov* and all his sons, daughters, and grandchildren growing old and dying in a *self-imposed exile* in the pagan land of *Mitzrayim*? Did the Holy One protect *Ya'akov* from the hatred of Esav, from the greed of Lavan, from the hostility of the Emori, and from the ravages of famine for fourteen decades just so he could live his final seventeen years, and breathe his last breath of this world's air, on soil *lent by Pharaoh*, watching his children tend *Pharaoh's sheep and goats*? Is he who was willing to risk everything for the inheritance of *Eretz Yisrael*, who bought land in *Shechem*, who saw angels ascend and descend and met the Holy One at *Beit-El*, and who buried his father and mother in Hebron in the ancestral burial plot of Avraham going to be content to end his days in the land of sphinx's and cuneiforms and in the shadow of the temples of *Amon* and *Ra*? Is he who taught his sons *t'shuvah* for "making his name a stench" in *HaEretz Yisrael* just going to *watch passively* as his children and grandchildren become assimilated

into Egyptian culture and values? Is the ‘prince’ who wrestled a long night with the angel of the Holy One in order to re-enter the land of promise and possess it as a birthright satisfied to close out the race of life dressed in Egyptian robes, eating Egyptian food, and ‘walking like an Egyptian’ for *seventeen years*?

That’s what it appears from the opening lines of this week’s parsha⁴. Oh but do not be deceived, Dear Reader. Be assured that deep within the heart of this Hebrew prince there still burns *a fire*. The fire within this prince is a *fire that cannot be quenched* by all the waters of the Nile - a *passion that cannot be slaked* by the pleasures of Pharaoh’s palace or anesthetized by the serenity of Goshen’s pastures. And in the throat of the patriarch who grieved for a son for over twenty years, and who once considered it “enough” that the son was found alive, there is now *no language but a cry*. What is the *substance of Ya’akov’s cry*? Here is how Torah records it:

asita imadi chesed

“ ... Show me this kindness ...

... al-na tikbereini b’Mitzrayim

... DO NOT BURY ME IN EGYPT!”

V’shachavti im-avotai

Let me lie in state with my fathers.

unesatani mi-Mitzrayim ukvartani bikeviuratam

Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their tomb.’

[Genesis 47:29-30]

What *sustained* Ya’akov in the darkness of Mitzrayim? It wasn’t leeks and onions. It wasn’t fish from the Nile. It wasn’t tilting at Egyptian windmills or waging war on the perversions of Egyptian religion and culture. It was *the promise*, Dear Reader. What promise? *THE* promise. The promise that is eternally whispered on the wind by the *Ruach HaQodesh*. You know the promise – *don’t you?*

Some, of course, heard only the rustling of the bulrushes and mothers humming lullabies to their babies. But not this old man. On every breeze, at every sunrise, with every sunset, what Ya’akov heard was *the promise*. Ya’akov heard the Voice of the Compassionate One whispering:

“I will send a Redeemer...

... I will send a Redeemer...

... I will send a Redeemer...

⁴ For as discussed earlier, the first verse of this parsha reads: *Vayechi Ya’akov b’eretz Mitzrayim sheva esreh shanah* [And Ya’akov lived in Egypt for 7 and 10 years]. **Genesis 47:28(a)**.

... I will send a Redeemer...

The promise was a sound more real to Ya'akov than the bleating of goats, the hawking of merchants, the groaning of slaves, or the wailing of bereaved mothers. Sometimes it rang out loud and clear; often, however, Ya'akov had to strain his failing ears to barely make out a whisper, or maybe just a faint echo, lost to most in the din of daily life or the roar of Pharaoh's voice. But Ya'akov *listened*. And he *heard it*. And it was *life to him*. If you listen carefully, even today, *you* can hear it too. And if you hear it, what it will say to you is the same things it said to Ya'akov⁵:

Do not get too comfortable in Mitzrayim, my Beloved!

“Do not throw in your lot with Rameses, or measure your inheritance by the number of chariots you own, by how much land you have purchased, by how much grain you have stored, or by your status in Pharaoh's court.”

“Pause and meditate, with great expectation, at every new moon, at every sunrise, at every Shabbat eve, at every Divine Appointment with the Creator, at every B'rit Milah, at every wedding, at every birth, and even at every funeral.”

“He has not forgotten you; you must never forget Him.”

A Redeemer is coming.

A Redeemer ...

Redeemer ...

Redeemer ...

Redeemer

Oh, at times it may seem like only a whisper. But *keep listening*, Dear Reader. Keep *believing*. And whatever else you do in the meantime, do not, by any means or under any circumstances, let them bury you in the slime-pits of Egypt.

Even Unto Your Children's Children

Before Ya'akov/Yisrael actually dies, we are about to discover, he still has *a lot to do*. Even as his health begins to fail he is given an opportunity that is truly a blessing of the Holy One – the opportunity to see and have an impact upon the life of his children's children. For Torah tells us that a short time after this:

Vayomer l'Yosef hineh avicha choleh

It was told to Yosef that his father was sick.

vayikach et-shnei vanav imo et-Menasheh v'et-Efrayim

And he [Yosef] took to him [Ya'akov] his sons, Manasseh and Efrayim.

Vayaged l'Ya'akov vayomer hineh bincha Yosef ba eleicha

⁵ The words that follow are but a literary paraphrase of the overall message which this author envisions the Holy One communicating to Ya'akov in his later years, that led Ya'akov to be so passionate in his request that he 'not be buried in Egypt'. The author does not mean to imply that the words that follow are a part of the formal record of the Torah.

And it was told to Ya'akov: 'Behold, your son Yosef is coming to you'

vayitchazek Yisra'el vayeshev al ha-mitah

And then Yisrael summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

[Genesis 48:1-2]

Ya'akov may be old, tired, and sick, but he has some *unfinished business* to which he must attend. There are *matters of the covenant* to deal with. And there is the matter of *preparing for the coming transition*. Ya'akov must, as did his father before him, designate his successor as 'covenant partner of the Holy One' under the *B'rit* the Holy One cut with Avraham. In reality, you see, however pleasant it was for Ya'akov to be reunited with his son and live peacefully and prosperously - for the time being - in Goshen, Ya'akov knows his purpose and his destiny – and that of his family – are tied inextricably with the Covenant.

Egypt would change. All the circumstances would change. The names and faces of his descendants would change. But the Covenant would remain forever.

The Covenant Remembered, and Passed On

And so Ya'akov prepares to meet with Yosef and 'pass the torch' of the Covenant. But will it be Yosef – the Viceroy of Egypt - who is designated as the 'torch bearer'/light carrier of the Covenant? Or will it perhaps be one of his sons, instead? We will see, Dear Reader. But look yonder. Yosef is approaching, and Ya'akov is preparing to speak of important, life-changing matters – matters of God-encounters years ago. Ya'akov said to his son:

El Shaddai nir'ah-elay b'Luz b'erezt Kena'an

'God Almighty once appeared to me in Luz, in the land of Canaan.

vayevarech oti vayomer elay

And He blessed me, and he said to me,

Hineni mafreicha v'hirbiticha

Behold, it is I Who will make you fruitful and numerous,

unetatcha l'k'hal amim

and Who will cause you to bring forth called-out peoples/nations,

v'natati et ha-arezt hazot

And I will give this land

l'zar'acha achareicha achuzat olam

to your seed, as their inheritance forever.

It should come as no surprise that Ya'akov/Yisrael remembers very well this the second dramatic God-encounter he had at the place he renamed *Beit-el*. He remembers the *details* – and I suspect the *circumstances* – of this intimate interaction with the Creator of the Universe as crisply as if it had just happened.

He has hidden the Word of the Holy One in his heart. He has *meditated upon it*, and has *commemorated it*, and it remains vibrant and alive in his soul.

The substance of the Word however must have presented something of a challenge to Ya'akov/Yisrael's faith. First the Holy One had promised *to make Ya'akov 'fruitful and numerous'*. Since these words were spoken by the Holy One at Beit-El however, do you know how many more children had Ya'akov sired? The answer is ZERO. And the prospects of that number changing were definitely not good⁶.

Secondly, the Holy One had said He would cause Ya'akov to *'bring forth called-out peoples/nations'*. Several decades later Ya'akov must have privately wondered *where are all the called-out ones I was promised?* The only thing Ya'akov's progeny had been 'called out' of so far was the famine.

Thirdly, the Holy One had promised Ya'akov that He would give the land of Kena'an to his seed as an ***achuzat olam*** [i.e. an *inheritance forever*]. So, Ya'akov must have wondered, *why, as I near death, are all my children and grandchildren living on borrowed land in Egypt at the whim of Pharaoh while the land of their inheritance lies fallow?* Perhaps it was these questions that drove Ya'akov to the stunning decision he was about to announce to Yosef. You see, after recounting in Yosef's ears the prophetic oracle that he received directly from the Mouth of the Holy One at Beit-El Ya'akov took the opportunity to give voice to a startling oracle of his own.

The Introduction of the Spiritual Act of Engrafting

Ya'akov/Yisrael is, by his own admission, *a tired old man*. But he is apparently not too tired to pioneer one last spiritual practice – the spiritual act of *adoption*. He said to Yosef:

V'atah shnei-v'neicha ha-noladim lecha b'erezt Mitzrayim

'Now, the two sons who were born to you in Egypt

ad-bo'i eleicha Mitzraymah li-hem

before I came to Egypt shall be considered as mine.

Efrayim uMenasheh kiR'uven v'Shim'on yihyu-li

Efrayim and Menashe shall be just like Reuven and Sh'mon to me.

Umoladeteicha asher-holadeita achareihem

Any children that you have after them, however, shall be considered yours.

lecha yihyu al shem acheihem yikarei'u b'nachalatam

⁶ Rachel and Leah were dead and buried in Kena'an. Apparently Bilhah and Zilpah were dead as well, as they were not mentioned in the listing of the names of those who accompanied Ya'akov to Egypt.

They shall inherit only through their [older] brothers.

Ya'akov is going to adopt Menashe and Efrayim. From this day forward they are going to be considered as if he rather than Yosef had sired them. They will be tribes equal in rank with the natural sons. Indeed, unbeknownst to Ya'akov or Yosef, a few generations hence it will be one of their descendants [*Y'hoshua ben Nun*] who will lead all the tribes into the inheritance the Holy One has promised.

What meaneth all this strange late-in-life adoption talk? Oh, Dear Reader - something strange and unexpected is happening. It is not that the inheritance of Avrahamic-covenant partner-privileges and responsibilities is for the first time *bypassing a generation*. No, that is not it at all. What is happening instead is that, for the first time, someone foreign born is being *grafted into full covenant status*. *Menashe and Efrayim*, the sons of *Tzafanat-Paneach* the assimilated Hebrew who became Egyptian Viceroy and his gentile wife, the priestess of *On*, are being made *equal partners in the covenant with the natural sons of Ya'akov*. The inheritance their father Yosef did not ever quite walk in, due to circumstances on the one hand and choices on the other, was going to be made available to his children. The sons Yosef sired by the Egyptian priestess were about to become 'children of Israel', with every bit as much claim to the blessings of the covenant as *Reuven, Sh'mon, Y'hudah* [Judah], *Binyamin* [Benjamin], and the others.

The Poignant Remembrance of Mother Rachel

The opening aliyah of parsha Vayechi ends with a very touching and poignant moment of remembrance shared between father and son. Now that Ya'akov and Yosef were reunited, what is about to be touched upon was the most painful memory of Ya'akov's life - the memory of the untimely death of his beloved *Rachel*, Yosef's mother.

Ya'akov explains to Yosef why Rachel, though very much beloved by him, was not buried with the rest of the patriarchs and matriarchs in the cave at *Machpelah*, near Hebron.

V'ani bevo'i mi-Padan metah alay Rachel

'And when I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me.

b'ereetz Kena'an b'derech b'od kiv'rat-eretz lavo Efratah

It was in Kena'an, on the road, still a little ways from Efratah

v'ekbereiha sham b'derech Efrat

I buried her there along the road to Efrat

hi Beit-Lachem

It was [in/at] Bethlehem.'

[Genesis 48:7]

Ya'akov has asked a very hard thing of Yosef - he has asked Yosef to bury him not at Beit-Lechem alongside Rachel, but instead at Hebron alongside Leah, the lad's stepmother. Leah was, of course, the mother of the very half-brothers who had played the leading roles in the drama that wound up with Yosef being sold into slavery in Egypt.

Ah Ya'akov. Ah Yosef. We share your grief. But we know that though your beloved Rachel is long since dead and buried on the road to Efrat, near the village of Beit-Lechem, her voice is not silent. She weeps for her children, and refuses to be comforted. And the Holy One hears her wails from Heaven, and responds:

*Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears,
For your work will be rewarded, declares the Holy One.
They will return from the land of the enemy.
So there is hope for your future, declares the Holy One.
For your children will return to their own land.*

[See Jeremiah 31:15-17]

Even the fleeting memory of a matriarch holds a promise of blessing for those in Covenant with the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov. So Beloved children – do you know where your matriarchs are?

Questions for Today's Study

1. As we prepare to say goodbye to Ya'akov, let us recount the experiences of the life of this beloved ancestor - the one for whom Israel is named.

[A] Discuss each of the “God-encounters” of Ya'akov/Israel's life, providing references to the passages of *Sefer B'reshit* [the Book of Genesis] that contain the narration of those encounters.

[B] In connection with each God-encounter, summarize the promises that the Holy One made to Ya'akov/Yisrael and to his descendants.

2. Which of the “God-encounters” of Ya'akov/Israel does he call to memory in the conversation with *Yosef* [Joseph] that forms the basis for today's Torah aliyah?

[A] Where did this “God-encounter” take place?

[B] What two specific things does Ya'akov indicate that the Holy One promised him at that place and at that time?

[C] What other things did the Holy One promise Ya'akov at the same time (that Ya'akov does not mention in this discussion with Yosef)?

3. In his final days Ya'akov insists on adopting Efrayim and *Menashe*.

*Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Mitzrayim
before I came to you into Mitzrayim, are mine;
Efrayim and Menashe, even as Reuven and Shim'on, will be mine.*

*Your issue, who you become the father of after them, will be yours.
They will be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance.*

[A] Why do you think Ya'akov insists of adopting Yosef's two sons?

[B] What difference do you think being adopted by Yosef will make in the lives of *Efrayim* and *Menashe*?

[C] What difference will the adoption of *Efrayim* and *Menashe* make to their descendants?

4. Ya'akov discusses with tenderness the death of *Rachel*, his most loved wife.

*As for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me
in the land of Kana'an in the way, when there was still some distance to come to Efrat,
and I buried her there in the way to Efrat (the same is Beit-Lechem)."*

[A] Where did Ya'akov bury Rachel?

[B] Why do you think he did not bury Rachel in the family burial plot at Hebron [Mamre]?

5. In haftarah *Vayechi* we drop in on King David's last days. Much as his ancestor Ya'akov did in this week's Torah readings, David calls one of his sons to his side to discuss past, present, and future.

*Now the days of David drew near that he should die;
and he charged Shlomo his son, saying, "I am going the way of all the erez:
be you strong therefore, and show yourself a man ..."*

[A] Which son does David call to his side for his final instructions?

[B] Who was that son's mother?

[C] In the last part of verse two, our English translations tell us that David instructed his son to "**be strong**". Do a study on this verb, as follows:

[i] In Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Lexicon look up the Hebrew word translated as "strong" in this verse.

[ii] Write the Hebrew word, in Hebrew letters, with vowel points.

[iii] Write the transliteration and pronunciation of this word.

[iv] In Gesenius, find the *pa'al/qal* form of this verb (or as close to it as you can get), and write the primary definition of that verb.

[v] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding this verb, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing what you think David was telling his son 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.

6. In the introduction to this week's B'rit Chadasha passage *Sh'mon Kefa* [KJV 'Simon Peter'] writes on the subjects of *who we are* and *what our relationship is to the Holy One, to the world, and to each other*.

*Kefa [Rock], an apostle of Yeshua the Messiah,
to the chosen ones who are living as strangers in the Diaspora
in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit,
that you may obey [Hebrew, sh'ma] Yeshua the Messiah and be sprinkled in his blood:
Grace to you, and **shalom rav** [peace be multiplied].*

Let us not pass too quickly over Kefa's introductory verses, particularly in this era when both the raging nations and the institutions of organized religion are "jamming the frequencies" on which we receive truth about our identities, our allegiances, our purposes, and our destinies.

[A] How does Kefa describe himself?

[B] In Strong's and in Richard's Expository Dictionary (or other word study guide), look up the word which our English Bibles translate as *apostle*. Write the Greek word actually used in the text, and write a descriptive and functional definition for that word.

[C] What do you think was the Hebrew word Kefa would actually employed (instead of the Greek word you just looked up) when he wrote this letter?

[D] Write an essay (no less than one half a page in length) on what an *apostle* [1] is and [2] is commissioned to do. Try not to use familiar Christian catch phrases in this essay. Write it as if it were going to be read by someone who has never been to nor heard of "church".

[E] Kefa next uses 4 descriptive phrases to define and describe persons who, like him, had found, and followed, the Messiah promised in the Torah and by the prophets. Write each of the four descriptive phrases he uses to describe who you are.

[F] In Strong's, look up the word that our English Bibles translate as *strangers*. Write the Greek word actually used in the text, and write a descriptive and functional definition for that word.

[G] What Hebrew word do you think Kefa actually employed (instead of the Greek word you just wrote about), to convey the meaning?

[H] In Strong's or other source, look for a couple of passages using the Hebrew word for "stranger", and write down the references (book, chapter, verse). Try to find at least 3 such passages.

[I] Write an essay (no less than one half a page in length) on [1] what a *stranger* is (from a Hebraic standpoint) and [2] how a *stranger* should relate to the local surroundings and people.

[J] In his description of followers of Messiah Kefa mentions that we have been *chosen*. For what two things does he say we were *chosen*, and what does each of these things mean?

*May you learn to truly live as strangers in this twisted world
and in this confused time.*

And may your eyes be moistened and your heart softened by the ever-present thought of home.

The Rabbi's son
Meditation for Today's Study
Psalm 137:1

*By the rivers of Bavel, there we sat down.
Yes, and we wept ...
when we remembered Tziyon.*