

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

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

“Yosef is still alive!
[Genesis 45:26]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 111:6-8;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 8, *Mishpat* [Justice]

In the course of yesterday's aliyah of Torah a powerful beam of Divine Light pierced the heart of the tough-nosed Egyptian Prime Minister the world knows as *Tzafanat Paneach*. As this supernatural laser from Heaven struck its target the life of the second most powerful man on earth was shaken *to the core*. And we the reader stood in amazement as his '*man of fierce countenance*' persona began to fall apart. Thread-by-thread his Egyptian nobleman disguise unraveled right before our eyes.

The Tzafanat-Paneach Mask Comes Off

First *Tzafanat Paneach* had an emotional breakdown. Uncontrollable sobs poured forth from somewhere deep inside of him. Then the man did something even more inexplicable. He actually surrendered his advantage over the 11 desperate Hebrews that stood before him. He sent all the armed guards and faithful servants that stood at his beck-and-call out of the palace.

That meant that Y'hudah and crew now suddenly outnumbered him 11-to-1. He had made himself totally vulnerable. If the Hebrew wrecking crew who had decimated Shechem a few years previously wanted to overpower him, ransack the house, and escape with their condemned younger brother Binyamin, this was their opportunity. Compared to Shechem this would be a *piece of cake*.

But then *Tzafanat Paneach*, who had theretofore always communicated with them only through an interpreter, shocked them a third time - by addressing them in their native language of Hebrew. When this man finally spoke to the 10 oldest sons of Ya'akov in their native Hebrew language however the voice they heard coming from his mouth did not sound at all like the voice of the rich and powerful

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Egyptian nobleman they had thought the man to be. The voice which now came out of the mouth of the man they knew only as *Tzafanat Paneach* sounded more like *the voice of a frightened Hebrew boy of 17 crying for help*.

The sounds they now heard coming from the mouth of the second most powerful man in Egypt must have sounded amazingly like the garbled Hebrew cries they had heard many years ago coming from a hole in the earth near Dotan – in the hours after they assaulted, beat, and stripped their younger half-brother of the special robe his father had made for him and tossed him into a dry cistern with serpents and scorpions.

Could it *really be*? Could it *really be* that the voice that now spoke to the 11 stunned Hebrews from the mouth of *Tzafanat Paneach* was in fact the voice of '*that dreamer*', Rachel's firstborn son, their hated little brother, Yosef?

The last time ten of the Hebrews had heard that voice they had sat stone faced savoring their dinner, enjoying delicious revenge, and contemplating how many pieces of silver each would get when they sold him into slavery. Then it had been **a time to laugh** at the plight of the 'dreamer'; now it was **a time to weep**. Then it had been **a time to refrain from embracing** their brother the 'dreamer'; now it was **a time to embrace** him tenderly and joyfully. Much more importantly, then it had been **a time for hatred and violence** toward Rachel's son, the 'dreamer'; Now however it was a time for the true forgiveness and lasting reconciliation that would lead to real and meaningful *bayit shalom*. Then it had been a time for resisting the leadership of Yosef – the leadership they had resisted since he had dared to tell them the dreams he had dreamed; now it was a time for **voluntary surrender by all ten of them to the Divine Will**.

Oh, each of these 10 sons of Ya'akov had previously bowed before and had submitted to the will of the mighty *Tzafanat Paneach*, it is true. But that had been a **reluctant submission** under the compulsion of circumstances beyond their control, without full understanding of who it was they were really submitting to.

But now *Tzafanat Paneach* the Egyptian was *undone* - and so were the 10 oldest sons of Ya'akov. From this point forward the 10 older brothers would of their own free will, and not under compulsion of any kind, *gladly* bow before Yosef their younger brother. They could no longer have any doubt that he was indeed the one that the Holy One had chosen to lead the family toward its destiny.

At long last the brothers were finally at peace with that. For now, you see, it really was **harvest time**. And Yosef's sheath really did stand tall, while their sheathes all

bowed low before his. And so will it be again - in *the end of days*.

Pharaoh Issues a Magnanimous Invitation

That is all well and good – but this was, of course, still Egypt. Surely the thought must have occurred to someone ‘*Doesn’t Pharaoh have something to say about all this? And what about father Ya’akov – what on earth will the patriarch of the family say to Yosef’s proposal to move the whole covenant community, lock, stock, and barrel, to Egypt?*’ The Holy One has those little details covered as well, Dear Reader. The proof is in today’s aliyah.

In the first section of today’s aliyah Pharaoh hears that Yosef’s brothers have come from Kena’an in search of food, so he issues a generous and highly persuasive invitation for them to come to *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] to live. Here is the transliterated text of Pharaoh’s royal “invitation”:

Zot asu

'This is what you must do:

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

Load your beasts and go directly to Canaan.

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

Bring your father and your families and come to me.

v'etnah lachem et-tuv eretz Mitzrayim

I will give you good land in Egypt.

v'ichlu et-chelev ha-aretz

and you will eat the fat of the land.

[Genesis 45:17-18]

It was a *magnanimous offer*. It really was. After all Pharaoh had *no obligation* whatever to Yosef’s family. He certainly had no natural love in his heart for the Hebrews, whose occupation as herders of sheep he and all other Egyptians considered ‘abominable’. His offer was therefore very gracious indeed – and quite simply too good of an offer to refuse. Except, that is, for *one little detail*.

The One Little Detail

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

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

concluded as follows:

V'atah tzuveytah zot

Now you are instructed to do the following:

asu kechu-lachem me'erezt Mitzrayim agalot

Take wagons from Egypt

L'tapchem v'linsheychem

for your small children and for your wives,

unsatem et-avichem uvatem

and also use them for your father, and come

V'eynechem al-tachos al-kleychem

and do not be concerned with your belongings,

ki-tuv kol-erezt Mitzrayim lachem hu

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

[Genesis 45:20]

Pharaoh will, it seems, accept, even *welcome*, Ya'akov, his sons, their wives, and their children – **but** *But* he wants them to ride in *Egyptian wagons*, and he instructs them to leave their 'stuff' [Hebrew, *k'liy*] - all that makes them Hebrews - behind.

The Complete Jewish Bible translates Pharaoh's instructions like this:

"I will give you good property in Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Moreover – and **this is an order – do this: **take wagons from the land of Egypt to carry your little ones and your wives**, and bring your father, and come. **Don't worry about your stuff**, because everything good in the land of Egypt is yours."**

Why does Pharaoh insist Israel *ride in Egyptian wagons* and *leave all his Hebrew "stuff" behind*? Because, you see, Pharaoh wants Israel to be *Egyptian*, not Hebraic. He is not willing to accept the Hebrews as they are – they must leave their "stuff" behind. They must, he insists, *become like him*.

The Essence of Exile

So at the very beginning of the "exile" the issue is cast very clearly. It is not so much *whether* Yisrael will go to Egypt – you see, he really has very little choice. See Genesis 15:13-14 if you have any doubts about this. The pertinent question is, *when* Israel goes to Egypt, *will he take with him his "stuff" – the "stuff" of his Hebraic heritage?* Or will he *assimilate into the culture of Egypt and become like everyone else?*

Here are some of the questions to consider:

Will he and his sons *ride in Egyptian wagons/carts*?

Will his children *wear Egyptian clothes, play Egyptian games, and adopt Egyptian as their native language*?

Will they *adopt Egyptian hairstyles*?

Will they *get caught up in Egyptian politics, look at the world from an Egyptian worldview, and think from Egyptian mindsets*.

Will they *celebrate the Egyptian holidays*?

Will they *exchange their values and priorities in life for Egyptian values and priorities*?

Will they start *eating the same things the Egyptians eat*?

Will they *laugh at the same things at which Egyptians laugh and weep at the same things at which Egyptians weep*.

Will they *start getting intimidated by the things and people that intimidate Egyptians*?

Will they *start being impressed by the same things by which Egyptians are impressed*?

Will they *allow themselves to become outraged by the same things that outrage the Egyptians*?

Will they *trade their **sh'ma** lifestyle for scheduled services in Egyptian temples*?

Will they *bow their knee to Egyptian gods*?

These things are *the heart and soul of the challenge presented by any exile*.

Bringing It Home to You and Me

Look *over yon hill* to the horizon here in the 21st Century, Dear Reader. A modern-day Pharaoh's wagons are coming – to your place and to mine. They are coming *for our children*. They are coming *for our marriages*. They are coming *for*

our hearts, for our minds . . . and yes, they are coming for our souls.

The decree of the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, you see, does not really differ much at all from the decree of the Christian Pharaoh, or of the Muslim Pharaoh, or for that matter, of the secular/humanist one-world-order Anti-Messiah of the end times. In essence, the decree is always this: **“LEAVE ALL THAT HEBREW/COVENANT WITH GOD STUFF BEHIND!!”** For some reason, ‘Hebrew stuff’ seems to infuriate Pharaohs of all kinds, all nationalities, and all ages.

The wagons of the modern-day Pharaohs come loaded with *wealth*, and with *prestige*, and with all kinds of *exciting and entertaining new things*. But the one who offers all that wealth and prestige and excitement always adds one little detail to the offer: *“Come, partake, enjoy to your hearts desire – but leave behind that which marks you as a distinctive people, the people of God . . . or die.”*

The Maccabees, when faced with such a decree, considered death more palatable. What about you? Who will you become while in exile? Will you become a *Tzafanat-Paneach*? Or will you be able to remain a Yosef?

Look at yourself right now. Look *closely*. Look at the externals – look at how you dress, look at how you talk, look at what you eat. But do not by any means stop there. Look carefully as well at the following things which are perhaps the best barometers of where - and who - a person is spiritually.

Look at *what pursuits and activities you most frequently engage in when you have free time*. Look at *what you think about most frequently when you are just daydreaming*.

Look at *what you secretly wish for that you don’t have*. Look at *what non-essential things you spend most of your money on*.

Look at *what are the most frequent topics of conversation when you converse with your peers*. Look at *what efforts you have made since the last Sabbath to obtain counsel from the Holy One as to how to live your life*.

Look at *what is your most frequent areas of sinful thought, speech and behavior*. Look at *the areas of your life where you indulge and even enjoy what the Torah calls ‘uncleanness’ – and even abomination*.

Ask yourself candidly what non-essential ‘stuff’ [Hebrew, k’liy] you would be most

be inclined to want to take with you if you received a legal edict from the local authorities telling you that had to move out of where you live tomorrow.

These suggested self-inquiries are designed to reveal *how much in exile* you presently are. If you will take the answers to these inquiries seriously you will be able to see exactly *who you presently are*, and, perhaps more importantly, *who you are presently in the process of becoming*.

Use this self-examination process somewhat like an **altimeter** [to check how far you have migrated from the ‘ground zero’ of the Torah foundation] and as a **barometer** [to check how much you are fluctuating from the Torah standard expressed in the *Sh’ma*³ due to the atmospheric pressure from your place of exile].

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

Just What have you got in Those Wagons, Anyway?

The text of today’s aliyah contains a rather thorough discussion of the contents of the wagon train Pharaoh sends to bring Ya’akov and his family to live in Egypt. Pharaoh didn’t want Y’hudah and family to go back empty-handed. Oh no, that would not do at all. He makes sure they ‘put on the ritz’! As you read this description it may help to imagine the theme song from the “Beverly Hillbillies” playing in the background:

vayiten lahem Yosef agalot al-pi Par'oh

Yosef gave them wagons according to Pharaoh's instructions

V'yiten lahem tzedah l'darech

and he also provided them with food for the journey.

L'chulam natan l'ish chalifot smalot

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

Ul'Binyamin natan sh'losh me'ot kesef

To Benjamin, however, he gave 300 pieces of silver

V'chamesh chalifot smalot

and five outfits.

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

Don't you know Y'hudah and Levi and crew looked dashing in their new Egyptian outfits! And wait until Binyamin counts out for Ya'akov his **300** shiny new pieces of silver – *k'chink, k'chink, k'chink* – a wagonload of silver by my estimation.

Oh, but that's not all. Keep reading!

Ul'aviv shalach kezot

[Yosef] sent the following to his father

asarah chamorim nos'im mituv Mitzrayim

Ten male donkeys, loaded with Egypt's finest products

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

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

l'aviv l'darech

for his father's journey.

[Genesis 45:23]

Pharaoh has spared no expense. In today's society what he sent would be roughly equivalent to ten *Leer* jets and ten stretch limos packed to the gills with stuff from Niemen Marcus and Harry & David. Pharaoh does, it seems, intend to command Ya'akov's full attention. It just could be that someone's got something up his sleeve.

Meanwhile the brothers have more pressing things to worry about. Yosef has one last thing to say to them before they leave for home. Here is how Torah records Yosef's last word to his brothers before they left Egypt this second time:

Al-tirgezu b'darech

Do not get agitated/upset on the way!

[Genesis 45:24]

Commentators have long found Yosef's parting instructions, '***al-tirgezu b'darech***', fascinating⁴. This was much more, it seems, than a mere '*Bon voyage*' or '*have a nice trip*'. A literal reading of this phrase would seem to indicate that Ya'akov spoke the words after his brothers had already left – perhaps just as they were getting out of sight, or perhaps as a kind of spiritual blessing.

The Septuagint translators, joined by Rashi, interpreted this Hebrew phrase to mean '*Do not quarrel along the way*'.

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

Yosef was clearly expressing serious concern for his brothers' peace of mind. The operative verb in the phrase Yosef used is a form of the verb root *ragaz*, *resh*, *gimel*, *zayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #7244, pronounced *raw-gawz*'. Strong's translates this verb as '*tremble, quake, rage, quiver, be agitated, be excited, be perturbed.*' In the only other two instances in Torah when this verb root is used it is going to be translated to mean to *tremble*, or *shake violently in fear or rage*. See Exodus 15:14, and Deuteronomy 2:25.

And hence Yosef's parting words literally meant something like "*Do not tremble, or shake violently, in fear or in rage.*" Why all the concern? Why on earth would the prospect of delivering to their father, their wives, and their children the good news that their long lost kinsman Yosef was alive and well in Egypt make brothers *tremble or shake violently in fear or in rage?*

Once in a Lifetime News!

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

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

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

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

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

Yosef saw it all. He knew what a humbling experience the trip back home to report to Ya'akov and to their families all that had transpired was going to be for Yosef's brothers. He knew this trip was going to be traumatic for them. So, realizing how emotionally disturbing the trip home would be, and how the tendency would be for each to try to point the finger of blame for Yosef's disappearance at someone else, he wanted to make sure they stayed focused on the positives, and on the future – not be overwhelmed by the negatives and paralyzed with shame about the past.

And hence he said to them – or perhaps spoke over them as they walked out of sight – “*al-tirgezu b'darech*” [*Do not tremble or shake in fear or rage along the way.*]

Breaking the News to Ya'akov

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

Vaya'alu mi-Mitzrayim

[The brothers] headed north from Egypt,

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

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

V'yagidu lo l'emor

They broke the news to him:

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

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

v'yafag libo ki lo-he'emin lahem

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

[Genesis 45:27]

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

First, the idea that Yosef was *od chai* [still alive] did not fit with the tangible evidence he had seen. He had personally seen Yosef's *coat of many colors* torn to shreds and covered with blood. The logical deduction was that Yosef had been torn limb from limb by a lion, or bear, or pack of wolves. That evidence, especially when combined with the lad's brothers' silence and their failure to even go out looking for Yosef, all these years had convinced him Yosef had to be dead.

It should therefore not have surprised the brothers one whit if Ya'akov played the part of a '*doubting Thomas*'. And the second part of the story, that not only was Yosef '*od chai*' [still alive], but was '*moshel b'chol erez Mitzrayim*' [ruler of all the land of Egypt], was even more difficult to imagine.

The Yosef whom Ya'akov had known was, after all, no Egyptian. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. No Egyptian ruler Ya'akov had ever heard of had been a Hebrew. Hebrews, after all, were an abomination to the Egyptians. How, Ya'akov must have wondered, could Yosef have become ruler over a people who considered him an abomination? And what is more, if what the boys were saying was true WHY WAS YOSEF NOT HERE WITH THEM RIGHT NOW!!!!!! It simply did not compute.

Ya'akov Has a 'Melt-Down'

Our text describes Ya'akov's initial response to the report of the boys as *vyafag libo* - '*and his heart became numb*'. The verb root of this phrase is *pug*, *peh/feh vav, gimel*, Strong's Hebrew word #6313, pronounced *poog*. It means to *interrupt or cease an ongoing process*. In connection with a person's heart [Hebrew *leb*] the clear implication is that Ya'akov's heart function became erratic – or perhaps stopped. We might, thus, interpret *vyafag libo* to mean '*his heart skipped a beat*', or perhaps even 'he flat-lined'.

In Hebraic thought however a person's *leb* [heart] is much more than the 4-chambered muscular organ that pumps blood to the body. A man's *leb* is the *seat of all his emotions* as well as *the source of all his thoughts*. This means that what happened when Ya'akov heard that Yosef was *od chai* and *moshel b'chol erez Mitzrayim* is that he suffered a type of nervous breakdown.

It means that he suffered a *dissociation from reality*. It means his already strained emotional state completely overloaded, and his intellectual circuits simply blew.

It means Ya'akov *took leave of his senses*. It means he had a veritable *melt down*.

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

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

V'yedabru elav et kol-divrei Yosef asher diber alehem

They told him all the words of Yosef, which he had said to them.

vayar et ha-agalot asher-shalach Yosef laset oto

When he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him,

vatechi ruach Ya'akov avihem

the spirit of Ya'akov, their father, revived.

Vayomer Yisra'el rav

'This is [a] big [deal]!' said Israel.

od-Yosef beni chay elchah v'er'enu beterem amut

'My son Yosef is alive! I must go and see him before I die!'

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

Tonic/Defibrillator #1: Kol Divrei Yosef

The first tonic/defibrillator - ***Kol divrei Yosef*** – literally meaning *all the words of Yosef* – included some pretty significant things. One thing we know the phrase included was Yosef's instruction "***Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You will dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have."***"

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

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

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

The second thing that Torah tells us brought Ya’akov back from his melt down was the sight of *ha agalot* - the wagons, or carts, or chariots – which Yosef had sent for him and his family, to carry them back to Egypt. What was the big deal about *the wagons*, we may ask⁵? Why did seeing the wagons/carts/chariots cause Ya’akov’s spirit to revive?

In English it just doesn’t make sense. But as we have pointed out several times in the course of these studies, the Torah was not written in English – it was written in Hebrew. It is thus to Hebrew that we must look to get an understanding of things we find in the Torah which seem to make no sense in English.

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘wagon’, ‘cart’, or ‘chariot’ is *agalah*⁶. This verb root means to *go in a circle*. The most obvious reference is to the wheels of the wagon, cart, and/or chariot, which are circular in shape, and go round and round. To get the noun *agalah* from the verb root *agal*, all you do is add the suffix *hey* at the end. The letter *hey* is a Hebrew pictograph, a picture of a window, or opening, in a shepherd’s tent - the place where the tent receives both *life-giving fresh air* and *daylight*.

When you make the noun *agalah* plural you do so by changing the *hey* at the end to a *tav*, which makes what we in English associate with the ‘t’ sound⁷. The word then becomes *agalot*. The *tav* ending on this word is a Hebraic word picture as well – a picture of a *covenant sign [ot]* – i.e. a confirmation of, and down payment on, the promises of a covenant.

⁵ Among the sages a *midrash* developed which said that Ya’akov took these wagons to be a coded message from Yosef – as they bore some relation to the last Torah topic that Ya’akov had taught Yosef before Yosef’s disappearance. The reasoning goes that only Yosef and Ya’akov could have known that the topic of the last Torah discussion between the father and son had to do with wagons, and thus the presentation of wagons was intended as a secret confirmation, to the mind of Ya’akov, that his son Yosef was indeed alive.

⁶ *Agalah* is *ayin, gimel, lamed, hey*. It is a noun derived from the verb root *agal, ayin, gimel, lamed*, Strong’s Hebrew word #5696.

⁷ Ashkenazim call this same letter a *sav*, and pronounce it as an ‘s’ sound instead of a ‘t’ sound.

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

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

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

With that prophetic insight Ya'akov's spirit revived.

Vayomer Yisra'el rav
"It is enough", said Yisrael.

Od-Yosef beni chai
'My son Yosef is alive!'

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

Questions For Today's Study

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

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

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

[C] According to Pharaoh's offer what was Yosef's family to do with their possessions – their "stuff"?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V'cha'asher yomeru eleycha b'nei amecha
When the children of your people shall speak to you,

l'emor halo-tagid lanu mah-eleh lach
saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these?

Daber alehem koh-amar Adonai Elohim
tell them, Thus says the Holy One, GOD:

hineh ani loke'ach et-etz Yosef
Behold, I will take the stick of Yosef,

asher b'yad-Efrayim v'shivtei-Yisra'el chaverav
which is in the hand of Efrayim, and the tribes of Yisra'el his companions;

v'natati otam alav et-etz Y'hudah
and I will put them with it, [even] with the stick of Y'hudah,

v'asitim l'etz echad v'hayu echad b'yad
and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand.

[Ezekiel 37:18-19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

[B] Did the people who came to see Messiah include descendants of Y’hudah?

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

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

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

[F] Why did people try to touch Y’shua?

[G] In Strong’s, look up the words translated as “power”. Write the Greek word and its meaning. What Hebrew word expresses the same concept?

*May the Holy One quickly reunite Y’hudah and Yosef in our day,
and may they not “fall out” on the way.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 111:6-8

*He has shown his people the power⁸ of his works,
In giving them the heritage of the nations.*

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

⁸ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘power’ in this passage is ***koach***, *kaf, chet* Strong’s Hebrew word #3581, pronounced ***ko’-akh***. The first Biblical usage of this word, which is derived from an unused verb root meaning ‘he is firm, or solid’, is found in Genesis 4:12. There the Holy One told Adam that from henceforth [after his partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] the earth would not yield unto him its ‘strength’ [***koach***]. The word is also used by Ya’akov in Genesis 31:6 to describe to Rachel and Leah how diligently he worked for their father Lavan – “*with all my power* [***koach***] *I have served your father.*” Likewise, in the Exodus story, when the Holy One warns Pharaoh of the final plagues, He says to him ‘***I have raised you up to show you My Power*** [***koach***].’