

*Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah Vayigash:</i>	Genesis 46:1-27
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Ezekiel 37:20-23
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Luke 6:20-26

***“At tirah [Do not be afraid] of going down to Egypt,
for a great nation will I make of you there”***

[Genesis 46:3]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 111:9-10;

This Week's Featured Amidah Prayer is Petition # 8, *Mishpat* [Justice]

Upon their arrival in the patriarchal camp the excited brothers had *quite a story* to tell their father and family members. How should they break the news? Some parts of the story came easily. The finery Pharaoh had sent with them testified quite loudly of the high level of favor they had found in the eyes of the most powerful human being on the planet. But it was now up to the brothers to explain to the understandably puzzled Hebrews of Hebron – including their stunned father Ya'akov - the reason for all the favor they had been shown. Somehow they had to explain how underneath his Egyptian disguise, the strange and moody overlord they had talked about so derisively after their two previous trips to Mitzrayim, and whom they had called *Tzafanat-Paneach*, had turned out to be their long lost kinsman Yosef. The joyful good news that overshadowed it all was “*Od Yosef Chai [i.e. Joseph lives!]*”. With these glad tidings they hoped to awaken their father from his Van Winkle-esque season of deep mourning.

But there was, of course, a whole lot more to the story than just ‘*Od Yosef Chai!*’ Was this the appropriate time and circumstances for the whole sordid story of the darkest family secret in the history of the world – *the scarlet secret of Dotan* – to finally come out? Could these men – who had made a pact to keep the darkest family secret known to mankind a long, long time ago, and had abided by that pact for over twenty-five years - now really break protocol and reveal the whole truth? Could Ya'akov bear to hear it? Could the wives and children of men like Rueven and Levi and Y'hudah process and forgive their lifestyle of complete deception?

We are not told how much detail of what happened back at Dotan two and a half decades ago was actually revealed. So as we begin today's aliyah we do not really

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know if Ya'akov had full knowledge of what really happened that fateful day twenty-two years ago when he sent Yosef out to check on the status of the flocks in his brothers' care. Had the ones who said "***Let's kill him and cast him into some pit. We will say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' And we will see what will become of his dreams!***" [Genesis 37:20] really come clean about their part in the dastardly conspiracy? Had they told Ya'akov who countered with: "***Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness?***" Does the patriarch really know the same Y'hudah into whose care he had reluctantly entrusted Binyami had responded to the dastardly plot by saying: "***What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Yishmaeli . . . ?***" Genesis 37:26-27.

Is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth now really out in the open? Or did the *ten co-conspirators of human trafficking* conveniently decide that, at least for the time being, their father – and their wives and children – could not handle the truth? I suspect it was the latter, but we are not told. All we know for sure that Ya'akov was told is that, contrary to his worst fears long, long ago, Yosef was not devoured by wild beasts after all. He is instead very much alive, has somehow become *governor of all Egypt, and wants the entire family to move to Egypt to ride out the famine.*

But Should Sons of the Covenant Really Abandon the Land of Promise and Go Off to Live In A Foreign Land?

Ya'akov was duly impressed by the news that Yosef was still alive. But he was apprehensive about leaving the land of Divine Promise again after all these years. After all, the last time he left the land of promise – some 40 + years ago - he wound up spending 20 years in bondage.

In yesterday's aliyah therefore all Ya'akov committed to do in response to the invitation was to 'go see Yosef' – that is – to go *for a visit*. The nature of Ya'akov's commitment to the Egyptian-odyssey will change drastically today however. The old patriarch will, you see, have his heart changed by a *God-encounter*.

It has been a long, long time, between God-encounters for our ancestor Ya'akov, Dear Reader. I pray it is never so long for you and me.

Prophetic disconnects are *killing us*, are they not? Ah but I am getting ahead of myself. Let's go back to the narrative, shall we?

Before Egypt – Be’erah-Shava!

A caravan is once again winding its way from *Eretz Yisrael* toward *Mitzrayim*. This time the young dreamer Yosef is not being drug along behind it in chains. This time his family is riding in style in Pharaoh’s wagons. Our aliyah thus begins with the words:

Vayisa Yisra'el v'chol-asher-lo

Israel began the journey, taking all his possessions,

V'yavo Be'erah Shava

and he arrived in Be'er-sheva.

[Genesis 46:1(a)]

The route from Hebron to the land of the pyramids led the great *Caravan of Hebrew Souls* through some familiar territory. The first stop in the journey was at the oasis called *Be’erah-Shava*². The Covenant family had quite a history there. Avraham had once sojourned here, uncovered a spring for watering flocks there, and had given this place the Hebrew name that means “*seventh well*”, or “*well of an oath*”. **Genesis 21:22-31**. A generation later our father Yitzchak had visited the place as well. He reopened the ancient well here, and he reaffirmed its Hebrew name. **See Genesis 26:26-33**. This desert oasis had served as the point of departure for Ya’akov’s first journey into exile four decades ago. This was the place where Ya’akov had dressed up in Esav’s clothing, deceived Yitzchak, and received his father’s *b’racha* pursuant to a conspiracy with his mother Rivkah. Ya’akov’s life has, it seems, come full circle.

A place like *Be’erah-Shava* cannot just be ‘passed through’. Such a place holds both memories that need to be brought to the forefront of the mind and dealt with and the whispers of a Covenant Partner that need to be *sh’ma*-ed. So strike the tents! Drive in the tent pegs! Gather some wood! Draw some water! It looks like we are going to be here awhile.

Come – Now is the Time to Worship!

Three significant events will transpire while our band of exiles camp at *Be’erah-sheva*. Let’s examine each of these three events in its turn.

² This oasis was given the name Be’erah-Sheva [also called simply *Beersheva*] by Avraham in Genesis 21. It was the place where he and Avimilech of Gerar signed a mutual non-aggression pact. It was also where Hagar fled and met with an angel of the Holy One after running away from Sarai. After the taking of possession of the land under Y’hoshua and Kalev *Be’erah-sheva* was allotted to the Tribe of *Sh’mon* [Simeon] and served as the most southerly point of permanent habitation in the country, hence the familiar biblical expression “*From Dan to Beer-sheba*.” For general information concerning this location see <http://www.bibleplaces.com/beersheba.htm>.

First of all, upon reaching *Be'erah-sheva* our English translations of the Torah tell us that Ya'akov did something very interesting: Torah says he “*slaughtered animals unto/before the God of his father, Yitzchak*”.

v'yizbach zevachim l'Elohei aviv Yitzchak

And he slaughtered animals unto the God of his father Yitzchak
[Genesis 46:1(b)]

This statement is fraught with *emotion and passionate searching*. This will be the last *altar experience* of the sons of the Covenant for several generations. The Voice of the Unseen Shepherd did not tell Ya'akov in so many words to build an altar, start a fire, slaughter animals, arrange pieces for the fire to consume, create a pleasing aroma, and engage in the intimate posture of worship. So what did Ya'akov think he was doing?

The actions of Ya'akov in this matter had nothing to do with the performance of a perfunctory religious obligation. For a man who was responsible for the sustenance of a large family who was living in a land stricken by famine to slaughter animals for purposes other than food was an act of either degenerate folly or sublime faith.

Why would he do such a thing - a seemingly foolish, impulsive thing *that had not even been commanded*? Why further place at risk an already diminished food supply?

Ah, Dear Reader, *that is the precisely the point*. Ya'akov was - at great cost and potential disaster - *passionately re-connecting his family with the ways and the worship mentality of his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham*.

Ya'akov refused to go down to Egypt a sad, broken old man, shattered by circumstances and events. He refused to let his last testimony to the Promised Land be a testimony of mourning and grief. He would instead leave this land as he had the first time - *passionately seeking the Holy One, the God Who had made covenant with his grandfather and his father before him, and Who had declared covenant faithfulness to him and to all of his descendants after him, for all generations*. The last time he had left this testimony at Beit-El. He had then proclaimed “***Surely YHVH is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!***” This time he would leave his testimony of worship at Be'erah-Shava.

He who has an ear, let him hear!

When Ya'akov went to Egypt, you see, by the grace of the Holy One, he was determined not to go *in defeat, or in subjection to Pharaoh's might*, begging for

bread. As the prince of God that he was he would go instead *in submission to the will of God* - not the decree or even the invitation - of some Pharaoh.

The hunger which would compel Ya'akov/Yisrael to leave Kena'an would not be the hunger of an empty belly - but *the cry of a heart determined to follow the instructions and the leading of the Holy One*.

Yisrael would not go to Egypt to see his long, lost son Yosef. Now would he go to find refuge from the horrible famine afflicting his homeland. He would go for one reason, and one reason alone: *because the Holy One instructed him to do so*. He had, after all, committed long ago to **sh'ma** [i.e. *listen for, listen to, hear, pay close attention to, meditate upon, struggle with, then submit to, fully follow and obey, and teach his children and all within his household*] the Holy One's voice.

A Closer Look at the 'Altar-Ministry' Of Ya'akov

The first thing that Torah tells us Ya'akov/Yisrael did upon arrival at *Be'erah-Shava* was to *offer sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzchak*. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translates as 'offer sacrifices' in this passage is **zevach**. This verb ordinarily refers to the making of **korban sholem**, or 'peace offering'. This is a special means of drawing near to the Holy One³ through a surrogate is the type of presentation made by one who has just *received good news or wishes to give heartfelt thanks, credit the Holy One with the blessing received, and worship Him publicly in the course of a joyful celebration*.

This particular form of 'sacrifice' is the kind of presentation referenced by Y'shua in the famous *Parable of the Prodigal Son* when he spoke of the father 'killing the fatted calf'. The *korban shelem* consists of a worshipper who wishes to express thanks to the Holy One for a joyful event [in the case of the father of the prodigal, as in Ya'akov's case, *a son who was lost being found again*] bringing a fatted calf, kid, or lamb to the altar, slitting its throat, draining its blood, and then placing specified portions of the slain animal on the altar to be consumed by fire. As this occurred a sweet-smelling savor would rise toward heaven. The worshipper would then share the rest of the meat of the slaughtered animal with all those who came to join him in the celebration.

Truly there was for Ya'akov reason to kill a fatted calf – even in a time of famine.

³ The verb root of the Hebrew noun *korban* is **karav**, meaning to *draw near; to approach intimately*. Every so-called 'offering' made by those in Covenant with YHVH is the farthest thing in the world from the kind of appeasement sacrifices made by pagans. The offerings presented by the patriarchs, and at the altar of the Mish'kan and Temple, instead constituted gifts of love and appreciation to the beloved Covenant Partner we adore, and with whom we long to spend precious hours engaging in intimate communion and fellowship.

After all, his beloved son Yosef had been lost - and now was found.

Learning New Lessons About How to See in the Dark

The second significant event that occurred in connection with Ya'akov's return to Be'er-sheva is that it was there that Ya'akov finally experienced another "God encounter" - the fifth of his life. The form of this encounter is described as a "night vision" [Hebrew *marah layil*]. The terminology is reminiscent of Ya'akov's first God-encounter, back when he was a young fugitive, laying his weary head down on a stone at a place he ultimately called ***Beit-El***.

As Ya'akov and his family were contemplating leaving Kena'an to enter the darkness of Egyptian exile the Holy One appeared to the patriarch one last time - to shine a light ahead of Ya'akov as it were, enabling him to see a little ways into the era of spiritual darkness that was looming before him.

Torah does not tell us what exactly it was that Ya'akov saw in this night vision [unlike Genesis 28]. But we can be confident that whatever Ya'akov saw was exactly what he needed to see to know that he was, in going down to Egypt at that time, right in step with the Greater Plan of the Creator for bringing about the redemption of mankind.

Hunters and military organizations in our day use "night vision" goggles to see into the darkness. To people in covenant with the Holy One this is nothing new - it is *a way of life*. We too are called and empowered by the Holy One to look beyond the realm of ***tachat ha-shemesh*** [that which is 'under the sun'], and thus visible to the human eye, to *the realm of spirit and truth* that lies behind the veil.

The Holy One wants to give His Covenant Partners supernaturally empowered vision – so they can *see what He is doing* even in the darkest days of exile. He is an Unseen Shepherd, but He moves like the wind. We may not see His Form, but we should always be able to see *where He has been*, in what *direction and for what purpose He is moving*, and *what pace He is setting*.

Are you learning to see in the dark, Dear Reader?

The Beauty and Majesty of the Divine Voice

The third significant event that took place at Be'erah-Shava was *the return of the sound of the Voice of the Holy One*. In the course of the ***marah layil*** [night vision] Ya'akov heard the Most Beautiful Voice known to man speak to him as a man speaks to a friend. For the Holy One to speak in a way audible to human beings is always wonderful - an awe-inspiring testimony to His amazing love and concern

for His people. When, as here, however, *His Words are recorded word for word for all generations to read and sh'ma*, it is even more fantastic.

We have been granted the privilege of eavesdropping on this glorious conversation between the most unlikely of companions – the conversation through which the Creator of the Universe intends to prophetically empower a nation to survive and prosper through what was destined to become the darkest season of exile the world had ever known. Here is how the delicious conversation unfolded:

[The Holy One's Voice called out]:

“Ya’akov! Ya’akov!”

Ya’akov replies: “Hineni!” [“Here I am”].

The Holy One continued:

“I am Ha-El, Elohei Avicha [i.e. the Omnipotent One, the God of your father]

Al-tira [i.e. do not be afraid] ***to go down to Egypt,***

for I will make you into a goy gadol [i.e. a great nation] ***there.***

I will go down to Egypt with you,

and I will surely bring you back again.

And Yosef's own hand will close your eyes.

[Genesis 46:2-5]

May we all come to know the Voice Ya’akov heard that day very well, Dear Reader. And may we never, ever incline our ears toward or follow after the voice of any other - no matter how seductive or how intimidating that voice may be.

The Four Promises of the Holy One

After prophetically speaking forth a Divine empowerment to make Ya’akov overcome fear at what lay before him the Holy One made four specific promises to his covenant partner.

1. The ‘Great Nation’ Promise

First the Holy One told Ya’akov ***‘I will make you into a goy gadol*** [i.e. a great nation] ***there.***’

The promise that the Holy One would make the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov/Yisrael a ‘great nation’ was, of course, nothing new. In Genesis 12:2 the first promise the Holy One had made to Avraham was: ***“I will make of you a great nation, and bless you, and make your name great . . .”***

What was new however in this particular Divine pronouncement was the

revelation as to where the long-promised *nation building* was going to take place. The building of the promised ‘great nation’ from Avraham’s seed would take place not in Eretz Yisrael but in . . . of all places . . . *the pagan land of Egypt!!*

At Be’erah-sheva therefore the purpose of the upcoming trip to Egypt was clearly revealed to Ya’akov in advance. Before this Divine announcement Ya’akov had thought that he and his family were making the journey to the land of the Pyramids merely to be reunited with Yosef, to find better pastureland and/or more grain, and to possibly ride out the famine in an area not so adversely affected.

But now Ya’akov knew the truth. He, his children, and his children’s children were going to Egypt pursuant to a Divine plan. While there their little band would become the great nation he had been hearing about since he was dandied on his grandfather Avraham’s knee.

2. The ‘With-ness’ Promise

Secondly the Holy One promised Ya’akov ***“I will go down to Egypt with you.”***

This was also not a new concept. The night long, long ago when a much younger, far more impetuous lad named Ya’akov heard the voice of the Almighty for the first time that Voice had spoken the following Divine declaration:

***“Behold, I am with you,
and will keep you in all [places] you go . . . ;
for I will not leave you,
until I have done [that] which I have promised for you.”***

[Genesis 28:15]

Even so, at Be’erah-Sheva Ya’akov desperately needed to hear the Holy One’s promise of *with-ness* again. He needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt not only that he would not be going to Egypt with Divine Protection but also that *the work the Holy One had begun in Ya’akov decades previously was still going to go forward* – even in Egypt!

3. The Promise of Ultimate Choreographed Return

Thirdly the Holy One promised Ya’akov in this final God-encounter of his life ***“I will surely bring you back again.”***

This concept represented *a blast back to the past* as well. In connection with the first God-encounter of Ya’akov’s life years ago, in the same breath that the Holy One had promised to ‘*be with*’ Ya’akov and *not to leave him until He had done what He promised for him* the Holy One had also told Ya’akov ***“. . . and I will***

bring you again into this land”

In the instant case of course the Holy One will only bring Ya’akov as an *individual* back to the land of Eretz in *death*. A mere seventeen years after he arrives in Egypt Ya’akov will breathe his *last physical breath* prior to the resurrection. But the Holy One has arranged it so that Ya’akov will know it is not his destiny to be buried in foreign soil, but will instead be interred in his beloved *Eretz Kena’an*, and will find rest alongside his forefathers and beloved wife Leah in the cave of *Machpelah*.

4. A Promise Pertaining to Yosef’s Hand

Finally the Holy One promised Ya’akov something that sounds strange and mysterious to our ears. The very last words the Holy One said to Ya’akov were: *And Yosef’s hand will be on your eyes*. In Hebrew, the phrase reads: “***v’Yosef yashit yado al-eyneycha***”.

What does this strange Hebrew phrase mean? The usual suggested explanation of most commentators – Jewish and Christian - is that the Holy One was telling Ya’akov that when the time came for Ya’akov to breathe his last physical breath Yosef would be there with him and would be the one to take his hand and close Ya’akov’s eyes in preparation for burial.

That is possible, of course. We will subsequently be told that Yosef – as well as all Ya’akov’s sons – will indeed be present at Ya’akov’s death. But while we will be told that Yosef would in grief *fall on his father’s face*, would weep upon him, and would kiss his body [Genesis 50:1], what we are definitely not told is that Yosef ever physically took his hand and closed Ya’akov’s eyes.

So is it possible the mysterious last Divine promise “***v’Yosef yashit yado al-eyneycha***” [*And Yosef’s hand will be on your eyes*] could mean something different than the commentators have speculatively told us?

Could it be that the phrase does not really apply to Ya’akov’s death at all – but to *a future event to take place in the end of days*?

Hmmm. Perhaps Beloved, if this is so, the phrase could even have reference to something spoken of in this week’s haftarah. After all, in Ezekiel 37, after the Holy One tells *Yechezkiel* to bring two sticks together in his hand as a prophetic message to the Holy One’s people, it is written:

*This is the word of the Holy One God:
"Surely I will take the stick of Yosef, which is in the hand of Efrayim,*

*and the tribes of Israel, his companions;
and I will join them with it, with the stick of Y'hudah, and make them one stick,
and they will be one in My hand."*
And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand upon, or before, their eyes.
[Ezekiel 37:20]

The Covenant Nation's First Great Descent For the Sake of A Much Greater and More Glorious Ascent

Empowered by the Holy One's prophetic commissioning of him and his family, Ya'akov was now ready to make his 'final descent' into Egypt. Why is this trip called a 'descent', you ask?

The trip to Egypt is probably referred to as a 'descent' by some simply because Egypt lies to the South of Kena'an. To others this journey is referred to as a 'descent' because the point of departure is part of the Promised Land of the Holy One, and the place of special manifestations and blessings. Ya'akov and his family are leaving *eretz ha-kodesh* [the holy land] – and going to . . . well, to a place which is and has always been a *nightmarish land of pagans and paganism*.

The journey to Egypt is therefore accurately characterized as a descent both from a physical and a spiritual standpoint. Here is how Torah describes it:

V'yakom Ya'akov mi-Be'er Shava

Ya'akov set out from Be'er-sheba.

vayis'u b'nei Yisra'el et-Ya'akov avihem

Israel's sons transported their father,

v'et-tapam v'et-nesheyhem b'agalot

along with their children and wives, on the wagons

asher-shalach Pharaoh laset oto

that Pharaoh had sent to carry them.

Vayikchu et-mikneyhem v'et-rechusham

They took their livestock and all the possessions

asher rachshu b'eretz Kena'an

that they had acquired in Kena'an.

vayavo'u Mitzraymah Ya'akov v'chol-zar'o ito

Ya'akov came to Egypt with all his descendants.

Take note that the journey itself presented the first episode and aspect of *compromise with Egypt*. Our ancestors *ignored* Pharaoh's instruction not to bring their 'stuff' – that which marked them as Hebrews rather than Egyptians. But they

did consent to travel *in Pharaoh's wagons*.

Even then they recognized the difference between *taking what Egypt* [or any pagan nation] *offers*, on the one hand, and *giving up that which marks them as separate and different*, on the other. This principle needs to be remembered in our places of exile today.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah from parsha ***Vayigash*** [meaning "*and he drew very near*"], who drew near to whom?

2. Where did Yaakov/Yisrael's last recorded encounter with the Holy One take place?

[A] Look up that place in the Bible Dictionary and the Bible Atlas.

[B] Tell what the Hebrew name means,

[C] Write a "history" of that place as if you were the angel assigned to that city/location and had seen everything that took place there during Bible times.

3. What four promises did the Holy One make to Ya'akov/Yisrael at this last recorded God-encounter of Ya'akov's life?

4. Today's aliyah indicates that Ya'akov/Yisrael and his family acted immediately upon the ***marah layil*** [night vision] of Ya'akov/Yisrael and in response to the Voice of God.

[A] How many descendants of Avraham does the Torah tell us went down to Egypt with Ya'akov/Yisrael (that is, in his caravan)?

[B] How many of Avraham's descendants participated in the journey to Egypt in all?

[C] According to verse 6 what did Ya'akov and his family decide to take with them - in direct disobedience to the directive of Pharaoh as set forth in Genesis 45:20?

5. In the 37th chapter of Ezekiel the Holy One promises some glorious things to and concerning "Yisrael" - things which are yet to be accomplished in their fullness.

*The sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand before their eyes.
Say to them, "Thus says the Holy One, GOD: **Behold, I will take the children of Yisra'el from among the nations, where they are gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Yisra'el; and one king will be king to them all; and they will be no more two nations,***

*neither will they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all;
neither will they defile themselves any more with their idols,
nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions;
but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places,
in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them:
so will they be my people, and I will be their God.*

[A] List the promises the Holy One makes to Yisrael in this passage from Ezekiel.

[B] Write at least a sentence with regard to each such promise explaining how you believe the Holy One will fulfill that promise.

6. In the B'rit Chadasha aliyah Messiah prophesies blessings and curses which will fall upon people depending upon the condition of their hearts as evidenced by their degree of assimilation into the darkness of the world of Roman decadence - *i.e.* how well they fit in and how content they are with things as they are.

*He lifted up his eyes to his talmidim, and said,
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of the Holy One.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when men shall hate you,
and when they shall exclude and mock you,
and throw out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.
Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven,
for their fathers did the same thing to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation.
Woe to you, you who are full now! For you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now! For you will mourn and weep.
Woe, when men speak well of you! For their fathers did the same thing to the false prophets.
[Luke 6:20-26]*

[A] Upon what groups does Y'shua prophesy a ***b'racha*** [blessing]?

[B] Upon what groups does Y'shua prophesy a 'curse'?

[C] For each group blessed by Y'shua describe the blessing Y'shua prophesies will come upon that group.

[D] For each group cursed by Y'shua describe the curse which Y'shua prophesies will fall upon that group.

*May your name and the names of your
children be found in the Scroll of those Mashiach has blessed,*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 111:9-10

He has sent redemption to his people.

He has ordained his covenant forever.

His name is holy and awesome!

The fear of the Holy One is the beginning of wisdom.

All those who do his work have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever!