

*Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi*¹

[Tuesday's Study]

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

The angel who has delivered me from all harm - may he bless these boys.
[Genesis 47:16]

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

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

Torah has made no secret of the fact that the Divinely allotted days on the earth of our last patriarch, Ya'akov/Yisrael, are rapidly running out. Everyone should by now be acutely aware that the final individual torchbearer of the patriarchal trinity is about to be *gathered to his fathers*.

Ya'akov knows it as well. So how will this son of the Covenant deal with the rapid approach of his season of eternal rest? He has a little time to meditate on it. He has the presence of mind to prepare for it. He even has the means and the opportunity not only to choreograph but to both define the audience and set the mood for a grand exit befitting a true patriarch.

Prior to his death Ya'akov's illustrious grandfather Avraham divided his wealth and heritage among his children. **Genesis 25:6**. Then, before he passed away, Ya'akov's father Yitzchak of blessed memory reconnected and reconciled with his prodigal sons. **Genesis 35:27-29**. So what will their descendant Ya'akov/Yisrael do in contemplation of imminent death? We are *about to find out!*

Before he leaves his little 69-member band of progeny in the hands of the Pharaohs, the Philistines, the Amaleki, the Emori, the Magi and the Midyani of the world he has to wonder - *what can he say to his sons and grandsons that will uplift and empower them for the next phase of the journey of Covenant life?* How can he reach across generations and speak to us, wide-eyed readers of Torah, many millennia removed. How can he *honor the Holy One even in his death*.

What legacy will he bestow? What blessing will he *impart?* How will he redeem the little bit of time he has left on earth? How can he *go out – and charge his progeny not*

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to go out - as a victim, or even a mere survivor, but as an overcomer and a transcender?

The latter season of life is no time for a patriarch to go skydiving, rocky mountain climbing, or bull riding². The waning years are no time for a son of the Covenant to selfishly indulge in any private, self-centered ‘bucket list’. For a son of the Covenant and a patriarch, this is a time to summon all his strength, and finish strong. This is a time to allow no distractions, no competing loyalties or affections. This is a time to be exactly who he was created to be, and to do exactly what he was created to do – until there was no longer breath in his lungs, impulses entering and exiting his brain, and blood pulsing in and out of the chambers of his blessed and well cared-for heart.

Being on the Tip of the Spear When Worlds Collide

The relocation of Ya’akov and family from Kena’an to the Goshen region of Egypt changed many things. Two things the dramatic turn of events apparently did not significantly change, however, were *Yosef’s obligations to Pharaoh* and his *life-in-the-fast-lane Egyptian lifestyle*.

Yosef was no longer Ya’akov’s little dreamy-eyed young errand boy. He was now a full-grown man with an Egyptian wife and two Egyptian kids. And to top it all off he was the right-hand man of the richest and most powerful man on the planet. He was both Pharaoh’s second-in-command and in many ways a ‘father to him’.

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

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

² The reference is to the American country music song ‘Live Like You Were Dying’, released by Tim McGraw in c. 2004 by Curb Records. The subject of the song is what the lyricist wanted to do before dying.

But then one morning in the midst of the hustle and bustle of running the New World Order for Pharaoh, word somehow reached Yosef that his father had fallen ill. Yosef decided it was time for the two worlds to collide. Tearing himself away from his never-ending new responsibilities, Yosef grabbed his sons and took some time off and traveled up the Nile Delta to *pay his aged father a little visit*.

Of all the projects which Yosef could have found to work on this day he probably had no idea that this little excursion up to Goshen in the company of his two prince-of-Egypt sons would turn out to be by far the most important of all. What he was about to do would completely transform his sons' destinies.

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

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

Yosef had of course seen it all before. But I wonder what on earth went through the minds of the young palace dandies known to Yosef as *Menashe* and *Efrayim*, but almost certainly known in the courts of Pharaoh by Egyptian titles. I doubt they were particularly impressed. I have a feeling they looked at each other and rolled their eyes. To make things worse, upon arrival in Goshen Yosef and the boys quickly discovered that the person they came to see - Yosef's aged father Ya'akov – was confined to his sickbed. Oh well, the boys must have thought – Dad, let's *get this over with fast* . . . so we can get back to the palace where we belong.

Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me!

You should be aware that for purposes of Divine History the Writer of Torah has kindly arranged for all of us to be as proverbial *flies on the wall* in Ya'akov's tent for the series of conversations which are about to occur on Yosef's 'day off'. We are

apparently intended, expected, even *encouraged* by the Holy One to eavesdrop on these conversations to our hearts' delight.

So let us *get right to it*. The conversations in the old shepherd's tent kicked off in what must - to Menashe and Efrayim, at least - have seemed like a very strange way. There was no friendly greeting, no hugs, no exchange of pleasantries, no small talk. As Yosef was entering the room the old man sitting in the bed got right to the point, as if he had something he had been waiting a long time to get off of his chest. The first words out of the aging patriarch's mouth were:

“El Shaddai [the almighty God] appeared to me at Luz in the land of Kena'an and blessed me.”

“Wow”, Menashe and Efrayim must have thought, “*our grandfather is not only old and sick and dresses funny – he's a crackpot to boot!*” After all, these boys had never known anything but *palace life*. Their father was the prime minister of Egypt. Their mother was a high-ranking priestess of Egypt's polytheistic religion. These boys had always had the very best of everything Egyptian money and power could buy. And from all appearances it certainly must have seemed to them that their VIP father could buy and sell this old man and all he appeared to possess a hundred thousand times – no, probably more like a few hundred million times - over.

“*What does a crazy old man like this have to offer us?*” they must have wondered. “*Why on earth did dad bring us way out here in the boondocks to watch this old Hebrew embarrass himself?*” But then Ya'akov continued:

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

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

And then, to the amazement of the boys, they heard the old man say to their father:

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

Surely he was not *serious*. How could they be ‘his’? And why on earth would two of

the richest young men in Egypt even want to be ‘his’? It did not seem to make sense.

After all, as of yet the old man who spoke these words had not as of yet even so much as *acknowledged these young Egyptians’ presence in his tent*. All his remarks up to that stage had been directed to their father. They were not even sure the old fellow knew they were there. And even when he spoke their names just now, boldly declaring them to be ‘his’, it sounded like he was speaking of them not as physical, tangible, human beings but as some kind of *eternal sparks of life* he seemed to think he knew *in the Spirit*.

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

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

Suddenly as today’s readings begin Ya’akov appears to notice – perhaps for the first time - that Yosef *has not come to his sick bed alone*. Here is how Torah describes what happened when Ya’akov’s eyes fell upon the two young men dressed up like Egyptian princes-in-training that had come into the tent with Yosef:

V’yar Yisra’el et-b’nei Yosef

Then Yisrael saw Yosef’s sons

V’yomer mi-eleh

And he asked: ‘Who are these?’

[Genesis 48:8]

I do not think old Yisrael just *laid his eyes* upon the sons of Yosef in a physical sense; I think he *gazed right through their Egyptian facades* and *stared right into their Hebrew souls*. When he had looked them over Torah tells us that Yisrael posed the Hebrew question “*mi-eleh?*” – i.e. “*who are these?*”

It was *a legitimate question*. Who *were* these lads? Who indeed *were* these young men dressed in the finest robes of Egyptian society, living luxurious lives far away from Goshen in an Egyptian palace? Who did Egypt think they were? Who did Yosef think they were? Who did THEY think they were?

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

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

Mi eleh? [*Who are These?*]

When Ya'akov asked the question "***Mi-eleh?***" he was not by any means asking Yosef for an introduction. He knew the boys' *names* very well. He knew their *lineage*. He knew their *background*, their *education*, and their *exalted status in Egyptian society*.

But that kind of superficial information was not what Yisrael needed. He wanted to know much, much more, about these young men than the things that were visible on the surface. Ya'akov/Yisrael wanted to know who these two young men *really were*, *deep down*, beneath the fine Egyptian robes and behind all the finely crafted Egyptian masks. He was inquiring of Yosef if Yosef recognized, and was ready to acknowledge, who these young men who accompanied him really were *in the eyes of the Holy One*.

In the Holy One's eyes you see these were not just *Yosef's sons*. They were *generations*. They were *tribes*. They were the two *roots of the holy tree* from which *Y'hoshua, son of Nun, the daughters of Tzelofechad*, and the great warrior *Gideon* were destined to come forth.

That is the way it is with covenant sons and daughters. We are each called upon to see our children and grandchildren not through eyes of the flesh but *through the Holy One's eyes*.

There is *much more in every son and daughter of the covenant than meets any natural eye*. Our young ones are much, much more than *just children*. There is *greatness* in them. The *power of the covenant* of the Holy One is in them. Sometimes that power is *nascent* and *hidden*. Sometimes it is *dormant*. Sometimes it is *deliberately repressed and suppressed*. Sometimes that power is mistaken for 'charisma', or 'talent', or 'creativity', and marketed to the takers and shakers of the world in measured doses

like any other worldly good, service or commodity. But in each child of the Covenant the **greatness factor** is *there*, somewhere – waiting for a prophetic voice to *call it forth* and *set it free*.

Each of our little ones – and not-so-little ones for that matter – has a series of *pre-ordained dates with destiny waiting for them*. Simple journeys of life are for our little ones oft-times pregnant with life-changing encounters waiting to happen. That is one reason why, every *Erev Shabbat* [Sabbath Eve, or Friday night³] since at least the time of the First Temple, Hebrew fathers have called their sons to them, have laid hands upon them tenderly, and have blessed each of them - concluding the blessing with the words “**May you be as Efrayim and Menashe**”. Next the fathers will call their daughters to them, lay hands upon them gently and lovingly, and bless each of them - concluding the daughters’ blessing with the words “**May you be as Sarah and Rivkah, and as Rachel and Leah**”.

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

Why Do We Do These Things?

If you ask the Hebrew father why he does these things - why he dares to interrupt the entertainment and social activities of his children on Friday night (or why he keeps them home on a night when others their age are going to concerts or movies or cruising the town – or at least the Mall - with their friends), he will probably say: “**Because Yitzchak blessed Ya’akov, and because Ya’akov blessed his sons.**”

In other words, because the pattern is clearly presented in the Torah, in the lives of the patriarchs – to declare regarding one’s children the answer to Ya’akov’s provocative question –***Mi-eleh?*** [*Who are these?*] Please understand - it is not a “commandment” of any ‘law of Moses’ to bless one’s children or grandchildren on Friday night. It is instead a *sublime privilege* - an immeasurable joy. It is a way to emulate and enter into partnership with the Holy One, and to “**be holy, as** [*He is*] **holy**”.

Why is the blessing of sons and daughters (and wives) done *every week on Erev*

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

Shabbat, rather than on some annual occasion like a birthday, Father's Day, Mother's Day? The Hebrew father would probably say: "Because the Holy One rested on the seventh day, and began that day by speaking a blessing on all that made up His Creation⁴. In imitation of the Holy One, and following His lead, I rest on the seventh day, and begin the day by speaking a blessing over all that makes up my world - my wife and my children, my wine and my bread."

At least a part of the Biblical foundation for this beautiful and family-restoring practice is found in today's aliyah. Ya'akov, old and weak of eyes, is preparing to bless – and pass on his tremendous spiritual inheritance to - his sons. Before doing so, he adopts, and engrafts into his own family, Yosef's two sons by his Egyptian wife, Menashe and Efrayim, as his own sons.

It will be the adopted/engrafted sons that will receive the first blessing.

Vayomar kachem-na elay v'avarachem

And he [Ya'akov] said: Bring them here and I will bless them.'
[Genesis 48:9]

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

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

I find very interesting the fact that the events of this aliyah take place 17 years after Ya'akov and his sons moved to Egypt. The reconciliation of Yosef and his brothers, which we read about last week in parsha *Vayigash*, had it seems⁵ not resulted in a resumption of day-to-day contact, or even regular interaction, between the brothers.

Yosef had his life you see (and a very busy one at that), and Y'hudah, Reuven, Levi, and the others had their lives as well. Yosef had remained in Pharaoh's government. He had raised his sons in the courts of Pharaoh - not in the fields of Goshen, where their grandfather, uncles, and cousins, on their father's side, lived and worked.

From the Torah readings, it appears, in fact, to have been an extraordinary circumstance for Yosef to personally visit Goshen. The government of Egypt was indeed 'on his shoulders', and it was a heavy and time-consuming responsibility. The oversight of governmental affairs for Pharaoh occupied his every waking hour. Indeed, it appears it is only hearing of his father's illness that moves him to lay aside

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

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

the business of Pharaoh's government for a day or so to re-establish contact with his Hebrew family.

This is so much the case that, although Ya'akov, the grandfather of Menashe and Efrayim, has been in Egypt for 17 years prior to today's aliyah, Torah does not indicate that these boys had ever once during that time met, or even seen, their grandfather. It certainly appears from today's aliyah that Ya'akov had never met or laid eyes on them. One wonders what these boys had been told about their father's side of the family (the stories could make them shiver, no?), and what kind of spiritual training they had undergone in Pharaoh's courts.

These boys were not shepherds like their kinsmen - they were *princes* and *statesmen* - and they were fully one-half Egyptian. Their maternal grandfather was none other than *Potifera*, Priest of *On*, whom some believe was Potifar, Yosef's former boss. Clearly, up to this day at least, these young men knew far, far more of Potifera/Potifar and of his ways than they knew of the ways of the nomadic Hebrew family living a simple life way out in the fields of Goshen.

Adoption, Engrafting, and Hebrew Roots

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

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

It seems *ludicrous*, doesn't it? But Yosef agrees. And to the glory of the

Compassionate One of Israel, Menashe and Efrayim agree as well.

And that as much as anything is why every Friday night when Hebrew fathers lovingly lay their hands upon the heads of their sons they conclude their blessing with the words: “*May you be as Efrayim and Menashe*”.

Choosing the Ancient Paths – Every Day

Each of us, like Efrayim and Menashe, must choose what will be our lifestyle and our inheritance. We can adopt *the lifestyle of whatever culture we find ourselves living in* - and pass on that lifestyle to our children and children’s children as an inheritance. Many – indeed most of the people in the world – do exactly that.

But that is not our only option. If we just set our sights a little higher we can adopt *the lifestyle for which the Holy One created us* - and pass on that lifestyle to our children and children’s children as an inheritance. It is all *up to us*. Each choice however requires giving up something the world around us (the Egyptian world) considers valuable and important in exchange for something the world around us considers silly and meaningless.

Each of us is confronted with such choices every day. How we *dress*. How we *eat*. How we *spend our time*. How we *respond to our parents*. How we *spend our money*. How we *look at the world*. How we *think about, and act toward, other people*. How we *marry*. How we *educate and discipline children*. What we *consider important*. What we *talk about*. Even *how we will die*.

In every area of life we choose one way – or the other. What will it be - the wisdom of our age and society? Or the ancient paths of the Holy One, His patriarchs, and His Torah?

May you always make the *right choice*. And may you indeed be like Efrayim and Menashe, who overcame immersion in an environment of paganism and immorality, and the distractions of wealth and position among the gentiles, to claim an inheritance into which they were by the grace of the Holy One engrafted and adopted.

Ya’akov’s Blessing of His Newly Adopted Sons

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

Considering the way in which Ya'akov *received* the firstborn blessing, though he was not the firstborn, it can be expected that the way in which he *passes on* the firstborn's blessing to the next generation will be anything but conventional.

To refer to Ya'akov's impartation of the patriarchal blessing as 'unconventional' may however actually be an understatement. As it turns out Ya'akov does not pass the firstborn's blessing on to any of the sons he sired – but to a son whom he **adopted** late in life. The blessing usually reserved for the firstborn will go to Efrayim, the younger of Ya'akov's two adopted sons. As Ya'akov as the youngest received the blessing of primacy usually reserved for the firstborn, so will Efrayim as the youngest receive the blessing of primacy usually reserved for the firstborn. Here is how Torah records Ya'akov's blessing of Efrayim as the son who will have primacy, and of Menashe as the son who will walk beside, but slightly behind.

V'yevarech et-Yosef v'yomar

[Ya'akov] gave them Yosef's blessing, saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And like fish may they increase in the land.'

Please note that Ya'akov's blessing of Efrayim [and Menashe] is quite different than the blessing spoken over him by Yitzchak years ago. Then, Yitzchak had blessed his son with ***mital ha-shamayim*** [the dew of heaven] ***umish'manei ha-aretz*** [and the fat of the earth], with 'much grain and wine', as well as primacy over his sibling [in that case, Esav] and over all nations and governments. **Genesis 27:28-29.**

The blessing Ya'akov received from Yitzchak was primarily *physical* – wealth, prosperity, influence, etc. But the blessing – and inheritance – that Ya'akov gave to Efrayim [and Menashe] was primarily *spiritual* – a relationship with the Almighty in connection with which they would come to know Him as ***Ro'eh*** [Shepherd/guide] and as the ***Goel*** [Deliverer].

Doin' That Crazy Hand Jive

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

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

Israel reached out with his right hand and placed it on Efrayim's head

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

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

sikel et-yadav ki Menasheh ha-bechor

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

* * *

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

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

vayera b'eynav vayitmoach yad-aviv

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

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

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

V'yomer Yosef el-aviv lo-chen avi

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

ki-zeh ha-bechor sim yemincha al-rosho

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

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

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

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

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

v'ulam achiv ha-katon yigdal mimenu

But his younger brother will become even greater⁶,

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

V'zar'o yihyeh melo ha-goyim
and his descendants will become full-fledged nations⁷.'

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

V'yevarechem b'yom hahu l'emor
And in the day [Ya'akov] blessed them. He said,

becha yevarech Yisra'el l'emor
'[In time to come] Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say,

yesimcha Elohim ke'Efrayim vechi Menasheh
'May God make you like Efrayim and Menashe.'

vayasem et-Efrayim lifnei Menasheh
He [deliberately] put Efrayim before Menashe.

Questions For Today's Study

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

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

[B] Why do you think Ya'akov had to ask "*Who are these?*" when he saw Efrayim and Menashe?

[C] What did Yosef say when Ya'akov asked "*Who are these?*"? What does this reveal to you about Yosef?

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

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

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

4. Ya'akov/Yisrael blesses Menashe by saying he will become a *l'am*, and will become great. He then blesses Efrayim by saying he will become something that in

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

Hebrew is represented by the phrase *melo ha-goyim*.

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

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

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

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

V'shamarta et-mish'meret Adonai Elohecha
and [may you] keep the charge of the Holy One your God,

lalechet bid'rachav lish'mor chukotav mitzvotav
to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, [and] his mitzvot,

umishpatav v'edotav kakatuv b'torat Moshe
and his ordinances, and his testimonies, as written in the Torah of Moshe

l'ma'an taskil et kol-asher ta'aseh
In order that you may prosper in all that you do,

v'et kol-asher tifneh sham
Whatever turns your life takes.

[I Kings 2:3]

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

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

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

[ii] Write the Hebrew word, 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 Shlomo to do in this verse, considering what the verb really means, and the shades of meaning and usage that pertain to the *pa'al/qal*

form of the verb.

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

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

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

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

[I Peter 1:3-7]

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

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

[C] Where is this inheritance kept?

[D] By what are we “shielded”?

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

*May the Holy One establish you like Efrayim
and Menashe.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 137:2-3

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