

Parashah Forty-Three

Genesis 46:28–47:31; 1Kings 2:1–4; John 19:28–30

notes by Tim Hegg

The Reunion

Our portion this week tells of the reunion of Jacob and his family with Joseph. At last Joseph's plan has been realized: Jacob and his family come to dwell in Egypt in order to be saved from the famine that ravished the Ancient Near East.

Judah leads the way, and the caravan comes to the region of Goshen. Having heard that his father had arrived there, Joseph chariots his way to meet him. The scene of reunion is given in short yet emotional tones in our text: "as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time" (46:29). The text is ambiguous: did Joseph fall upon Jacob's neck and weep, or *vice versa*? The majority of the Sages take it that Joseph is the one who wept for joy at the sight of his father, suggesting that Jacob was reciting the *Shema* at that time, and did not interrupt his prayers(!). Ramban, however, takes it to be Jacob who fell upon Joseph's neck and wept: "It is well known whose tears are more present, the aged parent who finds his long-lost son alive after having despaired and mourned for him, or the young son who rules." Indeed, the text continues with the statement of Jacob: "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." The love of the father for his son is clearly expressed, and equally so is the son's love for his father.

Joseph knew that the godless culture of the Egyptians was no place for his family to raise children and live. He further knew that as shepherds, they would be despised by the Egyptians who considered the task of the herdsman one for slaves or the lower stratum of society. Thus he instructs his brothers to make known their livelihood to Pharaoh, reasoning that as a result they would be offered a place to live that was isolated from the main stream of Egyptian society. The animal-worshipping Egyptians "loathed" herdsman as far too "earthly" for their lofty ideals. This points out an interesting distinction between the Egyptians and Jacob's clan. As shepherds, Jacob and his sons had learned kindness and generosity as they cared for dependent animals. They further had learned to depend upon God, for their very occupation required His blessing of rain upon the fields in order to give grazing land for their flocks. In distinction, the Egyptian agricultural society thrived through slavery and disregard for human dignity. The result was a society perverse and wanton.

The plan of Joseph to settle his family some distance from Egyptian culture worked perfectly, and Pharaoh gives him full authority to settle his family in the lush valleys of Goshen, perfect for raising flocks. He further offers to them the opportunity to pasture his own animals, which would bring financial blessing from the royal coffers.

Eventually (47:7), Joseph brings his father to meet Pharaoh. The scene presents the reader with various questions. Obviously, with Joseph being second-in-command, it was only proper that he should bring his father to meet Pharaoh. Interestingly, the first question the Pharaoh asks is “How long have you lived?” (47:8). Perhaps Pharaoh was curious as to whether Jacob had attained the ideal age from an Egyptian perspective, which was 110 years (cf. Sarna, *JPS Torah Comm., Genesis*, p. 320). If Jacob was aware of the Egyptian perspective, his answer is a subtle jibe: “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning” (47:9). In Jacob’s point of view, 130 years are “few,” trumping the Egyptian 110 year ideal! Abraham had lived 180 years, and Isaac, 175. And why not? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the God of life, while the Pharaoh and his people were religiously consumed with death.

One is also struck with the fact that Jacob blessed Pharaoh (47:10). What kind of blessing could the patriarch give this pagan ruler? Is it proper to ask the Almighty to bless a pagan Pharaoh? The answer is “yes.” God has shown throughout the history of Israel that He uses even pagan rulers to further His eternal plans. “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov 21:1). The Sages, in the Midrash (also cf. *t.Sota* 10:9), note that as a result of Jacob’s blessing, the famine, which was to last five more years (45:6), was shortened and lasted only two more years. Whatever the nature and outcome of Jacob’s blessings, we may derive from his example that it is never wrong to seek God’s blessing upon those who rule over us. We are reminded of Paul’s admonition that prayers should be offered “for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1Tim 2:2).

Joseph continued to administrate the Egyptian allocation of food. As the famine grew more and more severe, the wealth of the Egyptian populace was consumed in buying food. Eventually they were compelled to give up flocks and land in order to buy provisions. Our text notes that in this way, Joseph acquired wealth, including land, for Pharaoh. Those who owned the land were relocated to cities throughout Egypt in order to facili-

tate the allocation of food.

We are also told that Jacob and his family acquired land themselves (47:27), in distinction from the Egyptians who had to give up land for food. God was blessing Jacob just as He had promised.

Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt (47:28). He was 130 when he came, and died at the age of 147. Our text contains the final request of Jacob as he nears the end of his life: “Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place” (47:29–30). Why is Jacob so intent upon being buried in the same place as his ancestors were buried? The meaning is obvious: Jacob placed his hope on the promise of God, which included the promise of the Land. Jacob still had the covenant promises of God well in mind. His having settled in the land of Egypt had not eclipsed the hope of a covenant fully realized in the future. Moreover, the desire to be buried with his forefathers also emphasizes Jacob’s belief in the future resurrection. For him, burial was not merely a cultural thing, but it bespoke a hope in God’s eternal faithfulness.

Like Abraham, who had his servant Eliezer take an oath by placing his hand under the thigh, so Jacob requires Joseph to take a similar oath. This may seem very foreign to us, but this manner of oath-taking was no doubt tied to the sign of the covenant, i.e., circumcision. Placing the hand under the thigh was an oath taken in the proximity of the covenant sign. Thus, the oath that Joseph took would be the persuasive factor in gaining Pharaoh’s approval to bury his father outside of the land of Egypt (50:4f).

Our *parashah* ends with Israel prostrating himself toward the head of his bed (47:31). The Hebrew word for “bed” is מִטָּה, *mitah*. Another Hebrew word with exactly the same consonants, but with different vowels, means “tribe” or “staff” (מַטֵּה, *mateh*). The Lxx read “staff” instead of “bed,” and thus in the quote of our verse in Hebrews 11:21, which is from the Lxx, we read: “By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.” Did he lean on his bed (מִטָּה, *mitah*) or on his staff (מַטֵּה, *mateh*)? One cannot be certain. But the point is that he was leaning, or prostrating himself, and the writer to the Hebrews understands this as an act of worship. The proud, perhaps arrogant Jacob, who had wrestled with God and been wounded in his hip, comes to the end of his life as one who leans—who recognizes his dependence upon God. Indeed, Israel would be called *Yeshurun*, meaning “upright.” Only those who recognize their own weakness, and who willingly prostrate themselves before the Almighty, attain the status of “upright.” To stand tall, we must bow.

The *haftarah* passage for this Torah section is linked through obvious thematic as well as verbal similarities. It records the time of King David's death and his charge to his son Solomon, just as our Torah portion speaks of the death of Jacob and his request that his remains be carried to the Land. Likewise, in Gen 47:29 the words are: "When the time for Israel to die drew near..." (וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת), and the exact phrase is found in the opening line of the *haftarah*, "As David's time to die drew near..." (וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי־דָוִד לָמוּת). Moreover, in the same manner that Israel had the promise of the covenant well in mind, so David admonishes Solomon on the basis of the covenant made with him, that his "house" (dynasty) would remain as his sons walked in the Torah of Adonai. God's covenant with David was eternal, as we read in Psalm 89—

My lovingkindness I will keep for him [David] forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish his descendants forever and his throne as the days of heaven. (vv. 28–29).

But as pertains to each generation, the throne of David would be occupied by his descendants only as they walked in the ways of Adonai:

If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, If they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, Then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful. Selah. (vv. 30–37)

The Apostolic Scripture portion we have chosen records the fifth and sixth utterances of Yeshua upon the cross: "I thirst" (διψῶ, *dispo*) and "It is finished" (τετέλεσται, *tetelestai*). If we combine the record of all of the Gospels, we discover that Yeshua spoke seven times from the cross: **1)** "Father, forgive them..." (Lk 23:34); **2)** "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Lk 23:43); **3)** "Woman, behold your son..." Behold your mother" (Jn 19:26); **4)** "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46); **5)** "I thirst" (Jn 19:28); **6)** "It is finished" (Jn 19:30); **7)** "Into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk 23:46). As with Israel and David, so the final words of Yeshua before His death carry supreme significance for the generations that would follow.