

BS"D

Excerpt from Living Each Week,
by RABBI ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI, M.D.



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYIGASH - 5764

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From: torahweb@zeus.host4u.net
Sent: Dec 31, 2003 To: weekly1@torahweb.org
http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2003/parsha/mneu_vayigash.html
RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER

FURTHERING THE VISION

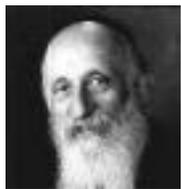
Yaakov would finally see his son after eleven years of painful separation. Consequently, he would advance the oppression of his children and the murder of his grandchildren, as promised to Avraham. Can one imagine the struggle that tormented every step Yaakov took towards Mitzrayim? It is in this light that Ramban explains Yaakov's time in Be'er Sheva (46:1) on his way down to Mitzrayim. Be'er Sheva, according to the Ramban, was the place from which Yitschok was going to take leave of Israel as he wished to escape the famine that gripped his homeland (26:13). Hashem demanded that Yitschok stay in Israel, assuring him protection and great prosperity. In many ways, Yaakov wished that Hashem would also ask him to stay in Israel, and perhaps fulfill his dream of a united family at home. Maybe this would indeed happen if he prayed the same way his father prayed. That is why the Torah stresses that Yaakov sacrificed to the G-d of his father Yitschok and does not mention Avraham (46:1).

Though Hashem insists that Yaakov continue on his way, He assures Yaakov that he will become a great nation in Mitzrayim and that He will accompany them there and bring the Jewish people out. In reassuring Yaakov of what lies ahead, Hashem says that Yosef will place his hands on your eyes. (46:4). What reassurance was Hashem offering to Yaakov? Many commentaries ponder these words, leading some to find in this phrase the beginnings of the chevrá kadisha's practice of closing the eyes of a niftar or having a child of the deceased close them. Yet it is hard to imagine that this or similar ideas would be comforting to Yaakov.

As I try to imagine the thoughts plaguing Yaakov while traveling, it would seem that he had to be concerned that his life's dreams and accomplishments may not endure. No doubt he would question, as he did on his death bed, that perhaps Egyptian culture and religion, as well as recently acquired power, would severely challenge the supreme concern of obedience to Hashem. To this Hashem responds that that too need not frighten Yaakov, for Yosef's hands, i.e. his actions, will truly realize Yaakov's eyes, i.e. Yaakov's vision for his children's future.

Though Yaakov brought his family to reside in galus, he received the most coveted blessing: his vision of life's purpose would be furthered by his children throughout the most unfriendly situations.

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Parashah Talk
Parshas Vayigash

Joseph said unto his brothers, "I am Joseph!" (Genesis 45:3).

From the moment the brothers set foot in Egypt they were bewildered by the inexplicable events that were occurring: Why is the viceroy accusing us of being spies? Where in the world did he get that absurd notion? Why is he insisting on our bringing our younger brother? Why did he take Shimon hostage? How did the money we paid for the grain get into our sacks? How does the viceroy know our birth order so precisely? Why the plot to accuse Benjamin of thievery? In their anguish the brothers cried, "What is this that G-d has done to us?" (42:28).

When Joseph uttered the two simple words, "Ani Yosef (I am Joseph)," all their questions were suddenly answered. Everything became crystal clear, everything made perfect sense, and not even the smallest item remained unexplained. No elaborate explanations were needed, and indeed, not a single explanatory word was said. "Ani Yosef" accounted for everything.

"We, too," said the Chofetz Chaim, "are bewildered. We have many vexing questions. 'What is this that G-d is doing to us?' we have so often asked. There are so many unfathomable mysteries. Not even the wisest among us has been able to shed any light on the repetitious suffering and the tragedies we have experienced throughout history. How can any of this make sense?"

The Chofetz Chaim states that one day G-d will reveal Himself to us and say, "Ani Hashem (I am G-d)," and suddenly everything will make sense. Everything that had heretofore been totally inexplicable will be understood by all. Everything will fall neatly into place, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

We have every right to request an accounting, and indeed, we will receive a full accounting. But there will be no need for long dissertations and complex explanations. As with Joseph and his brothers, when two words were sufficient, the two words "Ani Hashem" will, at that time, explain everything.

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent Jan 01, 2004 To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYigash

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayigash

Kingship Equals Responsibility

The parsha begins with Yehudah's plea to Yosef, in which Yehudah said, "For you are like Pharaoh" [Bereshis 44:18]. The Medrash comments that at this moment, "the kings joined in battle". It was a clash of titans: Yehudah and Yosef. We understand why the Medrash considers Yosef a king. After all, he was the de facto ruler of the land of Egypt. But in what sense was Yehudah considered a king?

It is true that later on, in Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov designates Yehudah as the tribe of kingship. But at this point in time, nothing has really transpired that would make Yehudah into the king. Why then does the Medrash refer to him as a king?

Perhaps the answer is that the king is ultimately the person who is responsible for the decisions and destiny of his nation. The bottom line is that responsibility resides with the leader of a nation. He must decide when to send the nation into war and when to sue for peace. Kingship equals responsibility.

When Yehudah came forth and committed to his father Yaakov, "I will be responsible for him (Binyamin), from my hand you may seek him..." [43:9], he became the king. At the point in time when he put his life on the line, by personally guaranteeing his brother's safety, there was a metamorphosis. He changed from being just another brother to being the king.

This explains another difficulty. Only two pasukim [verses] earlier, at the end of Parshas Miketz, when it was thought that Binyamin was 'guilty', Yehudah seemed to act quite differently. He acted meekly, prostrated himself in front of Yosef, confessed to the brother's guilt, and offered himself and all his other brothers into slavery. Suddenly, two pasukim later, Yehudah spoke with confidence and even arrogance towards Yosef [See Rashi Bereshis 44:18].

What suddenly happened to Yehudah? Only two pasukim earlier, he was this weak little fellow, begging to be Pharaoh's slave. Now he is suddenly on the attack. He is aggressive and assertive, standing up for what is right. What suddenly happened to gentle, mild mannered, and servile Yehudah?

Rav Yosef Leb Bloch explains that Yehudah had remembered his acceptance of responsibility. Once he remembered the commitment of "I will be his guarantor," he underwent a metamorphosis. He could no longer play the role of the weak, gentle, and servile brother. "I'm in charge. The buck stops here. It is my responsibility." Yehudah experienced a personality change. He was now a different person. "I accepted responsibility and I must do what I must do to live up to that responsibility."

We see this many times. The fact that a person accepts responsibility changes him. "Some people are born great; some people achieve greatness; and some people have greatness thrust upon them." [Winston Churchill]. Yehudah had greatness thrust upon him and he rose to the challenge.

How Far Have We Drifted From The Way of Truth

Pharaoh instructed Yosef to bring his father and family down to Egypt. "Do this: Take for yourselves from the land of Egypt, wagons for your small children and for your wives; transport your father (u'nesasem es avichem) and come." [45:19]. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baale HaTosfos infers that the wagons were only provided for the purpose of transporting the women and children. However the brothers were supposed to carry their father on their shoulders. Why? This is part of honoring one's father (Kibud Av).

But who was talking here and who was showing concern for the laws of Kibud Av? It is Pharaoh. Pharaoh was instructing Yosef in proper manners (derech erez) towards one's father!

Rav Gifter comments "how far have we gone from that which seemed obvious". In those days, it was even self-evident to Pharaoh that this is how one should treat a father. To us, this is not merely a novelty -- it is something that we would not even dream of doing! And yet, Pharaoh held it to be self-evident that one treats his father with far greater reverence than one gives to one's wife and children. Pharaoh did not consider it proper for Yosef's brothers to merely provide a wagon ride for their father.

Our values and way of living have drifted so far from the self-evident truths of Biblical times that this seems foreign to us. Rabbi Wein points out that the Public School in Chicago (built circa 1920) where he was a student had two entrances -- one for boys and one for girls. The purpose of each entrance was engraved in stone over the doorways. The need for separate entrances was obvious back then. Even though it was a co-educational institution, everybody knew that there had to be separation of the sexes. Sixty, seventy, and eighty years ago, it was even understood in a public school that there need be certain guidelines of propriety and of tznius [modesty/privacy]. Today, you might find separate entrances for the men and women in some religious congregations. Anywhere else, the concept is totally foreign.

How far have we drifted from the ideas of truth! Concepts that were self-evident in previous generations are novel ideas today. We must learn from a Pharaoh the proper way to treat a father. Today, it is something that we barely aspire to fulfill. But that nevertheless is the way of truth.

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Jan 01, 2004 To: yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il Subject: Asara B'Tevet Journal Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) ASARA BE-TEVET 5764

[The Tenth of Tevet (which falls this coming Sunday) has traditionally been observed as Yom Ha-Kaddish Ha-kelali, the day we recite Kaddish for people whose date of death is unknown. Consequently, many rabbis have

designated it as a day of remembrance for the Holocaust. We therefore present here some of Harav Amital's reflections on the Holocaust. Also see our webpage: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/10Tevet.htm> May we merit seeing this fast day turned into a day of joy, as prophesied by Zekharia.]

CONFRONTING THE HOLOCAUST AS A RELIGIOUS AND A HISTORICAL PHENOMENON By HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL

"On the Ninth of Av, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed" (Mishna Ta'anit 4:6). Indeed, our mourning for the burning of G-d's House stands at the center of the fast day of Tisha Be-av. Yet there is a tragedy worse than the destruction of the Temple. We read in Tehillim (79:1-3):

A psalm of Assaf: G-d, foreigners have come to Your inheritance; they have defiled Your holy sanctuary - they have made Jerusalem into ruins! They have given the corpses of Your servants as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your pious to the beasts of the land. They have spilled blood like water around Jerusalem; but no one buries.

Concerning the heading of this psalm, the Sages comment (as cited by Rashi, Kiddushin 31b, s.v. Istaya):

"A psalm of Assaf?" It should be "a dirge of Assaf!" Rather, interpret it thus: Assaf sang over the fact that G-d spent his fury on the sticks and stones of His House, and thereby He left a remnant of Israel; otherwise, there would not be a survivor left. Thus it says: "G-d has spent his fury, for he has ignited a fire in Zion" (Eikha 4:11). To

add any explanation to this midrash would merely detract from it. A short time ago, someone said to me, "I have gone through a great deal of Holocaust literature, and I now find it difficult to recite the Kinot of Tisha Be-av or to read the book of Eikha. Everything described there pales in comparison to the Shoah!" I replied to him: "Is this a problem? On the contrary, this is exactly how Tisha Be-av should be. If one does not feel that Eikha and the Kinot pale in comparison to the Shoah, the only explanation is that he is suppressing the memory of the Shoah."

To our great distress, we are witness today to the widespread suppression of the Holocaust from our religious consciousness. Admittedly, it is difficult to deal with the Shoah. One of the ways of dealing with it, which certain people have employed, is simply removing it from our minds, ignoring it - not in the historical sense, but in the religious and spiritual sense. I am not speaking of the pernicious

phenomenon of Holocaust denial, which maintains that the Shoah never happened. Rather, I am referring to the absencing of the Shoah from the public memory and from our religious awareness, whether consciously or unconsciously - particularly here in Israel.

BELITTLING THE HOLOCAUST AND THE DEGRADATION OF LANGUAGE

When people use loaded words like "Auschwitz," "Majdanek," "Nazis," etc., to describe other phenomena - serious though they may be - we find a belittling of the Shoah. Using terms derived from the Shoah to describe acts of terrorism will cause future generations to come to a point where only the historians among them will be able to differentiate between the Holocaust and Israel's wars. The carelessness of such speech is bound to bring us to a future where the term "Shoah" itself will come to be a general term for a disaster to the Jewish people, and perhaps "World War II" will be a synonym for the German destruction of our people.

When Jews use against Jews terms borrowed from the world of Holocaust images, they too belittle the Shoah. Whether it is leftists calling Israeli soldiers "Judeo-Nazis," or rightists shouting "S.S." and "Gestapo" at police officers - both belittle the Shoah, even if the ultimate intent of their protests is good and their aim is for the sake of Heaven.

THE OMISSION OF THE SHOAH FROM OUR RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

A more serious phenomenon is the suppression of the Shoah from our religious consciousness. We stand silent before the enormity of the Shoah, and we have no answer. "And Your faithfulness in the nights" (Tehillim 92:3) - even when it is darkest, we believe that G-d is faithful to us. This is one of the tests with which G-d tries us. Despite everything, we continue to cling to G-d, echoing the ironic lament: "We fled from You to You." But as for a reply, there is none.

Certain groups and certain rabbinical authorities presume to provide an explanation for every tragedy and disaster; they know how to answer, for example, why a certain number of children were killed in an accident. Many times, they attribute this to the sins of others. Let us imagine: if we asked one of those rabbis, "You have before you two scenarios: here a million and a half children were killed, and here ten; now explain this" - what would he say? "I have an answer for the ten, but none for the 1,500,000?" Hardly. Thus, the compulsion to provide an answer for the deaths of ten children compels us to remove the Shoah, a tragedy on a scale that we cannot begin to comprehend, from our collective religious memory - for one who has not done so can never claim, for any tragedy, "I have an answer!" I do not even speak of the educational implications of such an approach - if there is an "explanation" or a pat "answer" for everything, what will you tell your child when he or she asks: "Why did the Shoah happen?"

In the National-Religious camp as well, which sees the rebirth of the Jewish people in its land as part of a process of redemption, there are those who disregard the Shoah. The claims are familiar: "The redemption process began in the time of the aliya of the students of the Gaon of Vilna and continues to our day, like the morning star's light shines forth and grows ever brighter." They thus ignore, in pragmatic terms, the Shoah.

Is redemption expressed only by the blossoming of the Land of Israel and measured only by the extent of our control over it? And what about the Nation of Israel? Is what happens to the Jewish People not tied to the concept of redemption?

Such a destruction never happened before to the Nation of Israel. Can this destruction truly be made to fit into the redemption process? Seeing the redemption process as continuous and unwavering, constantly gaining strength and progressing, implies ignoring the Shoah.

In 1996, I was asked to participate in a panel discussion. At one point, one of the participants asked me: "Is it still possible to refer to the

State of Israel as 'the dawn of our redemption' now, after four cities were given over to the Palestinians as part of the Oslo Accords?" Immediately, a rabbi, one of the leaders of the National-Religious camp, stood up and replied, "It is an a fortiori argument: if, seventy years ago, Rav Kook in his correspondence could refer to the embryonic State of Israel as 'the dawn of our redemption,' certainly we can, all the more so, do likewise today!"

Yet, in my mind, a question remained: "All the more so?" Is that really true? Was not our world destroyed in the intervening seventy years? Did the most terrifying event not happen in the meantime?

This approach, found among some members of the National-Religious community, also ignores the Shoah, springing from a personal inability to deal with it. In the past, very grave opinions were expounded regarding the Holocaust: there were those who claimed that the Holocaust was a sort of price that the Jewish People had to pay in order that the Jewish State could be established. There are those that claimed that the State of Israel is the divine compensation for the destruction of the Holocaust. There were even those who claimed that the Shoah was the only way - or, at least in practical terms, became the impetus - to compel the Jews of Europe to make aliya to the Land of Israel. These are very difclams, approaches that I find hard to countenance at all. Moreover, these sorts of claims inspire a gut reaction, a natural aversion that causes me to worry less about them than about the historical and religious view that ignores the Shoah, disregards and omits it absolutely from our collective memory - which is infinitely more dangerous.

THE ABSENCE OF THE SHOAH FROM OUR SERVICE OF GOD

A third point that I wish to address relates to the basis for our divine worship at the present time.

In "Chovot Ha-levavot" (Duties of the Heart), Rabbenu Bachya ibn Pekuda develops the notion that our service of G-d is based on gratitude to Him. "The Gate of Unity" and "The Gate of Distinction" precede "The Gate of Divine Service." In "The Gate of Distinction," Rabbeinu Bachya expands on the need to constantly think about G-d's kindness; the obligation of divine service thus springs from belief in His unity and recognition of His good. Rabbeinu Bachya addresses this at the opening of "The Gate of Divine Service" as well.

More than a few modern rabbis and preachers have continued to espouse the idea of gratitude as a basis for worshipping G-d. Such, for example, was Rav Dessler's approach, in the years preceding the Shoah (Mikhtav Me-elياهو, Vol. I, p. 50). The question is, understandably: after the awesome devastation of the Jewish People in the Holocaust, how - if at all - can we still talk about our worship of G-d being based on gratitude or recognition of G-d's grace?

On my first Yom Kippur after being liberated from a Nazi labor camp, I prayed with other survivors in a cramped cellar. I cannot fully describe the storm of emotion that I felt then, but I will try to reconstruct some of that feeling.

I was young then. I had no children. My parents had been murdered along with most of the population of our town. Among the survivors in that small room, there were people who had lost their children, parents, spouses and siblings. They prayed, and I with them. Was their worship of G-d based on gratitude? Can a Jew who has lost his wife and children possibly serve G-d on the basis of recognition of His kindness? Can a Jew whose job was the removal of the charred remains of corpses from the crematoria of Auschwitz be capable of serving G-d on the basis of gratitude?

No, not in any way, shape, or form! But where, then, does that leave us?

"EVEN IF HE KILLS ME, I WILL STILL TRUST IN HIM!"

The Talmud records (Yoma 69b):

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: Why were they called "The Men of the Great Assembly?" Because they returned the [divine] crown to

its ancient glory. Moshe came and referred to G-d as "The Great, Mighty, and Awesome G-d" (Devarim 10:17). Yirmiyahu came and said, "Foreigners are prancing in His sanctuary; where is His awesomeness?" - so he did not call Him "The Awesome" (Yirmiyahu 32:18). Daniel came and said, "Foreigners subjugate His children; where is His might?" - so he did not call Him "The Mighty" (Daniel 9:4). [The Men of the Great Assembly] came and said, "On the contrary! This is His might, that he subdues His inclination and shows patience to evildoers; this is His awesomeness, for if G-d were not awesome, how could one nation [i.e. the Jews] survive in the midst of all the others?" How then could [those prophets] have acted so and uprooted a Mosaic decree? Rabbi Elazar said: Since they knew that G-d is truthful, they would not lie to Him.

The parallel passage in the Yerushalmi (Megilla 3:7) cites an even more strongly-worded answer to the final question:

Rabbi Yitzchak bar Lazar said: These prophets knew that their G-d is truthful, therefore they would not [hypocritically] flatter Him. The term used here is particularly harsh - "chanufa," which refers to insincere flattery designed to ingratiate oneself with someone more powerful. This behavior is abhorrent to G-d, as the Korban Ha-eda (ibid.) notes:

They told the truth, "for a flatterer will not be allowed to come before Him" (Iyov 13:16).

Divine service must be built on truth, not on falsehood or fawning flattery. Therefore, the prophets who felt that attributes such as "The Great," "The Mighty," or "The Awesome" could not in their times be used accurately to describe G-d, refrained from using such terms - despite the fact that they realized that they were deviating from the Torah's language and from the text that Moshe had instituted.

This is true also of our issue. Within the era that saw the greatest destruction in the history of the Jewish People, it is impossible to base our divine worship on the foundation of "recognition of His good." Of course, we must always remain aware of G-d's daily acts of kindness, and must sincerely pray, "Modim anachnu Lakh" - "We thank You ... for Your wonders and kindnesses at all times, evening, morning and afternoon." But while gratitude should certainly constitute one component of our divine service, it cannot serve as the entire foundation of our worship.

Rabbeinu Bachya, in the tenth section of his Chovot Ha-levavot, "The Gate of Love of G-d," sets out a different path of divine service:

... One of the pious men would rise in the middle of night and declare: "My G-d, You have starved me, You have left me naked, You have set me to dwell in the gloom of night; and You have taught me Your strength and Your greatness. If You incinerate me in flame, I will continue only to love You and rejoice in You." It is as Iyov (13:15) said, "Even if He kills me, I will still trust in Him," and to this idea [Shelomo] the wise man hinted when he said, "A bundle of myrrh (tzeror ha-mor) is my beloved to me, and he will sleep between my breasts" (Shir Ha-shirim 1:13). Our sages said, by way of derivation, "Though He constricts and embitters me (meitzer li u-meimer li), He will sleep between my breasts." At the highest rung of religious development depicted in Chovot Ha-levavot, "The Gate of Love of G-d," Rabbeinu Bachya bases divine love not on gratitude but on faith, which persists even in an era of divine concealment.

The Mishna (Sota 5:5) states:

On that very day, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hyrcanus preached: Iyov served G-d solely out of love, as it says: "Even if He kills me, I will still trust in Him."

The gemara (Sota 31a) adds that it is only possible to explain the verse the way it is read, not according to the way it is written. Thus, the word "lo" in the verse "Hen yikteleini, lo ayachel" is to be spelled lamed-vav, yielding the translation above. It is impossible to

interpret the verse as it is written, with the word "lo" spelled lamed-alef, yielding the translation, "If He kills me, I will no longer trust in Him."

This is also the explanation of the verse "Were Your Torah not my delight, I would have perished in my misery" (Tehillim 119:92). The verse is not directed only to the "delight" of Torah study in particular, but rather to the whole concept of clinging to G-d (deveikut). We do not know how to explain this deveikut, but it is a bond that lies at the core of our very being.

In the wake of the Shoah, to whom can we still flee? To where can we flee? The answer is clear: "We have fled from You to You."

I have recounted the following story many times. Shortly after I arrived in Eretz Yisrael, I visited Kfar Etzion and chanced upon a friend whom I had known during those dark days. When he saw me, he cried out, "Yehuda - is it you? You were saved? You, who always preached to us that we have no hope and should prepare to die as martyrs sanctifying G-d's Name - you were saved!?" His next question was: "Did you remain religious?" I replied, "Had I not stayed religious, would all of the questions have been answered? Would the whole phenomenon then be understandable?"

I once had a conversation with Abba Kovner, may he rest in peace. He was a leader of the revolt in the Vilna Ghetto and an important Hebrew poet. I said to him, "I don't know whose test was greater, mine or yours. Your banner was faith in man. After the Shoah, can you still believe in man? I believe in G-d, Whom I cannot understand. But man should be fathomable - so what do you believe in now?"

The v"v" "Were Your Torah not my delight, I would have perished in my misery" has a broader meaning. Knesset Yisrael wonders, "How could I ever have persevered without G-d?" How can anyone survive without G-d? Without G-d, one simply could not cope with all the problems besetting him. It is not in spite of undergoing a test of this magnitude, but rather because of it, that we need our faith in order to survive.

"A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall rest between my breasts" - although He constricts and embitters me, He shall rest between my breasts. (Shabbat 88b)

(Based on a sicha delivered in Av 5758 [1998]. Transcribed by Roni Goldenberg; translated by Yoseif Bloch; adapted by Rav Reuven Ziegler.)

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Jan 01, 2004 To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT64 -11: Parashat Vayigash

yeshivat har etzion israel koschitzky virtual beit midrash (vbm) student summaries of sichot of the roshei yeshiva parashat vayigash
SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A
YA'AKOV WAS RECITING THE SHEMA

Adapted by Dov Karoll
The Torah describes the meeting of Ya'akov and Yosef as follows: "He [Yosef] presented himself to him [Ya'akov], and threw himself on his shoulders, weeping on his shoulders for a long time" (46:29). Since the pronouns are unclear, Rashi (s.v. va-yevk) explains that that Yosef cried on Ya'akov's shoulders (and not vice versa), and then explains Ya'akov's actions: Ya'akov, however, did not fall upon Yosef's shoulders, nor did he kiss him. Our Rabbis say: the reason was that he was reciting the shema. I am not sure what Rashi's source is for the notion that Ya'akov recited the shema. (Perhaps it is from certain versions of Massekhet Derekh Eretz Zuta, 1:10, or Midrash Bereishit Zuta; see Rav M. Kasher, Torah Sheleima, Bereishit chapter 46, note 177.) But I do know that this is a very surprising idea. There is a well-known and well-based (see, e.g., the mishna in Kiddushin 82a) approach in Chazal that the avot, the patriarchs, kept the mitzvot of the

Torah. But earlier in Bereishit, when G-d tells Yitzchak of the fact that Avraham "kept My charge, My commandments, My decrees and My laws" (26:5), Rashi explains that this verse refers to all of the negative commandments, with each phrase referring to different prohibitions. According to this idea, the avot did not violate the prohibitions the Torah, but that is not to say that Avraham put on tefillin. Why is it that Rashi mentions that Ya'akov was reciting the shema?

The Ramban (26:5, s.v. va-yishmor, at the end) offers an alternate interpretation. He explains, "in accordance with the literal meaning of Scripture, that the "charge" that Avraham kept was guarding his belief in G-d in his heart, the "commandments" were G-d's directives to him to leave his land, etc., "My statutes" refers to Avraham's performance of kindness and charity, while "My laws" refers to the observance of circumcision and the seven Noahide laws. If we take this approach, we can understand what Rashi is speaking about here. The avot did not observe the mitzvot in the sense in which we observe them. They did not put on tefillin or shake the lulav. But they understood and appreciated the underlying messages of the mitzvot. What is the underlying theme of the recitation of the shema? It is twofold. First, the shema proclaims G-d's oneness. Secondly, it entails recognition of G-d's dominion over the world. This second theme can be seen from the fact that we cite this verse in the prayer of Malkhuyot on Rosh Hashana, where the theme is G-d's Kingship or dominion. If so, what is the meaning of the claim that Ya'akov was reciting the shema when he first saw Yosef? After all the years of not understanding Yosef's true fate, after all the suffering and hardship, Ya'akov finally realizes that G-d's Hand had been guiding the process all along. He sees G-d's great role and Providence, and his first reaction on seeing Yosef is to turn to G-d in recognition and thanks.

This is a crucial lesson for us as well. It is important to remember that mitzvot contain these underlying themes. Of course, after Sinai we are obligated to observe the commandments in practice as well, but that does not come to negate these basic notions. Mitzvot need to be performed physically, but that does not mean that they should be performed mechanically. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were able to intuit these basic notions, which Chazal understand as being comparable to performing the mitzvot in the time before the Torah was given. In the time after the giving of the Torah, these underlying ideas need to be integrated with practice.

Let me give you an example of this notion. Rashi's comment cited above (26:5) mentions that Avraham observed even the rabbinic requirement of eiruv tavshilin, which enables cooking on Yom Tov in preparation for Shabbat. What is the message behind eiruv tavshilin? I heard in the name of Rav Kook that the underlying notion of eiruv tavshilin is the distinction between a lesser level of sanctity and a greater level of sanctity (kedusha chamura and kedusha kalla). If so, Rashi is telling us that Avraham was so sensitive to sanctity that he could sense the difference between varying levels of sanctity (kedusha). Throughout the generations, there have been detractors who have claimed that the only thing that is important is the message behind the mitzvot, and they have correspondingly downplayed the significance of the actual performance of mitzvot. This was true of Christianity, and it was true in a more moderate form with more recent reformers within Judaism. We unequivocally reject such an approach. However, in our battle to preserve mitzva observance, we often go too far to the opposite extreme, emphasizing performance of mitzvot to the exclusion of sensitivity to their underlying messages. We need to bear in mind that proper mitzva performance integrates both of these aspects.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Jan 01, 2004 To: Peninim Parsha - Parshas Vayigash

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

PARSHAS VAYIGASH And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef"...But his brothers could not answer him. (45:3) The episode of Yosef and his brothers finally reached its conclusion when Yosef revealed his identity with the words, "I am Yosef." Everything that had occurred during the past twenty-two years the ambiguities and paradoxes, the strange, unexplained, unreasonable happenings suddenly all had rationale and meaning. It had all come together. Yosef was truly a Navi, prophet, whose dreams were spiritual visions foreshadowing the future, not mere images of grandeur.

There is an important lesson to be derived from this twenty-two year incident. Nothing stands in the path of the Divine. Hashem has a plan, and it will reach fruition at its designated time. It was Hashem's will that Yosef become the viceroy of Egypt and that his father and brothers come down to Egypt and bow down to him. It happened - regardless of the brothers' machinations to thwart the plan. Not only did it materialize, but the brothers themselves provided the medium by which it became a reality.

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei (21:30), "There is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against Hashem." Ralbag cites the episode of Yosef and his brothers as a paradigm of this idea. We conjure up ideas and prepare all kinds of plans, to no avail. Against Hashem's plan, our schemes are meaningless.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, suggests that this concept has many practical applications. He cites one that is truly meaningful. An elderly parent becomes seriously ill. The children consult with a specialist to determine which course of treatment would be most beneficial. Two options are presented, each with its own risk and benefit potential. The family deliberates and makes a decision to follow one of the two approaches. Regrettably, the treatment fails, and the parent dies. The family is now besieged with guilt. They blame themselves for choosing the wrong treatment, the wrong doctor, the wrong hospital. They begin to blame one another, imposing the onus of guilt on anyone but themselves.

This scenario is not unusual. In fact, it is common. What we fail to realize is that the doctor, the hospital, the therapy - nothing - would have made a difference, because it was not part of Hashem's plan. The family should do whatever is in line with their best understanding of the situation, with the awareness that ultimately - if it does not coincide with Hashem's plan - it will not succeed.

Throughout the millennia, more than one wicked enemy has arisen to wipe us off the face of the earth. We are here today because it is part of Hashem's plan. It is a principle of our faith that this Divine protection will endure until the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)

Rashi explains that the two brothers wept over the future destructions of the Bais Hamikdash, which was to be situated on their portion in Eretz Yisrael. The two Batei Mikdash were to be built in Binyamin's territory, and the Mishkon Shiloh was to be erected in the territory of Yosef's son, Efraim. This commentary is enigmatic. In the very next pasuk, Yosef kisses his other brothers and also cries over them. Why does Rashi not explain over here that Yosef also cried over the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash? If the weeping was for the future, what does the crying over his brothers represent?

The Piazesner Rebbe, zl, cites the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 28a that says, Mitzvos laav l'hen'os nitnu, "Commandments were not given to provide enjoyment." They were given to us as a yoke around our necks. The mitzvos engender a sense of discipline. This explains why the brothers cried on each other's neck. They each were lamenting the yoke of the mitzvos that would be shrugged off at the time of the destruction of the Holy Temple.

Each and every Jew has a yoke around his neck - mitzvos. He has responsibilities and obligations that he has to perform and fulfill as a Jew. Moreover, his thoughts and his speech must be holy. Even when he is physically prevented from carrying out the mitzvos, he must brace himself and remember that he has a yoke, a pending obligation to fulfill the Divine mandate. In periods of catastrophe, when calamity and tragedy are a way of life, when suffering and pain overwhelm, and everything holy and Jewish is destroyed, people do not simply revoke their responsibilities due to the difficulty of observing the commandments. They even shrug off the yoke in response to all of the pain and degradation that they endure. Yosef and Binyamin cried, each on the neck of the other, because they lamented shrugging off the yoke

of mitzvos which was a result of the destruction of the Batei Mikdash. Yosef did not fall on his brothers' necks; he merely cried over them.

With this idea in mind, the Piazesner explains another anomaly. In the subsequent text, the Torah relates that when Yosef met his father, Yaakov Avinu, he fell upon his father's neck and cried, whereas Yaakov did not fall on Yosef's neck. Rashi explains that Yaakov, instead of falling upon Yosef's neck, was reciting Krias Shma. The famous questions echoed by all the commentators are: Why did Yaakov choose that particular moment to recite Krias Shma? And why did Yosef not also recite Krias Shma?

Considering that which has been suggested above, we can now understand the text. When Yosef met his father, he once again became cognizant of the spiritual calamity that would befall Klal Yisrael with the destruction of the Temple. He once again wept over the future shedding of the yoke of mitzvos associated with the catastrophe. This is the reason that the Torah refers to Yosef's weeping on his father's neck. The Jewish people were now entering the Egyptian galus, exile. Yosef wondered how, under these circumstances, they would be able to maintain the yoke of mitzvos around their necks.

Yaakov responded by reciting the Shma, the symbol of self-sacrifice. With mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, we will endure the trials and tribulations, the pain and persecution, that has so much been a part of our long exile. When we recite Shma Yisrael, we return our souls back to Hashem, unconditionally and without reservation. The Shma recited in the morning sets the tone for the entire day. No one suggested that the exile would be easy, but, with mesiras nefesh, we can and will triumph over the many challenges that arise.

When we think of mesiras nefesh for mitzvah observance, when we associate total dedication to mitzvah performance during the most difficult moments in Jewish history, we think of those who served Hashem during the most devastating and painful period of our history - the Holocaust years. One individual whose mesiras nefesh for mitzvos comes to the fore is the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, who was the paradigm of total dedication to mitzvah observance - regardless of the danger and pain inflicted upon him. His devotion went beyond mitzvah observance. Indeed, any custom or tradition had to be maintained in the ghetto under the most trying conditions. This was Yiddishkeit - it could never be forgotten!

One incident that stands out among the many is the Rebbe's devotion to observing the Festival of Shemini Atzeres. This day, when Hashem communes exclusively with the Jewish People, is the crowning jewel of all the Festivals. It is the climax of the Yamim Nora'im, High Holy Days, the zenith of the festival of Succos. It is the day when Hashem says to the Jewish People, "Come, let us celebrate together."

Although the Rebbe was a prisoner and, therefore, subject to the work detail, the camp doctor, Dr. Greenbaum, a Jew by birth, had agreed to grant the Rebbe an exemption, so that he could rest. In this way, the Rebbe did not have to work on Succos. Shemini Atzeres would be no different.

The Nazi oberfuhrer, senior commander, had different plans. He decided to visit the camp together with Dr. Plukan, an evil woman, who was infamous for her selections, in which she would "weed out" the sick and infirm, immediately sending them to the crematorium in Dachau. Anyone missing at roll call was immediately sentenced to death. Word spread throughout the camp, and everyone immediately became concerned for the welfare of the Rebbe. Dr. Greenbaum was asked to change the Rebbe's dispensation. He would have to report for work, after all.

The Rebbe, however, had other plans. "Regardless of what happens to me, I will not work on Shemini Atzeres," he firmly declared. He remained in the barracks and celebrated Shemini Atzeres in the spirit of the day, with Torah and Tefillah. The prisoners were counted, and it became apparent that one prisoner was missing. Guards were immediately dispatched to the barracks to see who the missing person was. They found the Rebbe standing in the barracks immersed in prayer, oblivious to anything going on around him. The guards proceeded to handcuff the Rebbe and drag him to the lineup. Then two guards beat him mercilessly in front of the prisoners. They first beat him with truncheons, and then they kicked him fiercely with their metal-tipped boots. The Rebbe just lay in a pool of his own blood, hardly breathing, barely alive. A few broken prisoners picked up their beloved Rebbe and took him to the camp infirmary for immediate medical attention.

The prisoners who witnessed the beating were distraught, certain that the Rebbe would not survive. When they returned at night, they were shocked to see that not only had the Rebbe survived, but he was back in his barracks. He was limping around a small stool, which served as a makeshift Bimah, holding onto a few pages from a torn Mishnayos in his hand. This was the Rebbe's Hakofos in honor of Simchas Torah! The sheer joy that illuminated the Rebbe's bruised face seemed to light up the room. This man epitomized a form of mesiras nefesh that our enemies could not destroy. This is specifically why we have endured and triumphed over every one of them.

Sponsored in memory of our dear Mother and Grandmother GIZI WEISS Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss, and Grandchildren Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, and Brian "Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"

From: MICHAEL HOENIG, ESQ. MHoenig@herzfeld-rubin.com
THE MYSTERY OF PAROH'S AGOLOS

A segment of Vayigash (45:16 to 46:5) has some mysterious aspects not fully explained by the traditional commentators. One major curiosity is the text's repeated mention of "Agolos," i.e., wagons commanded by Paroh to be provided for Yaakov and his family's journey, without delay, from Canaan to Mitzraim. The reference to Agolos is mentioned no less than four times in a very short span of Pesukim. (See 45:19, 21, 27; 46:5). Moreover, the Agolos, strangely, were the subject of Paroh's personal imperial command and are uniquely described as Agolos "out of the land of Mitzraim" (45:19, MeEretz Mitzraim).

Obviously, this is not a mere report regarding transport logistics. Why would the Torah mention the Agolos on four separate occasions? Why would Paroh go out of his way to command their use? Why must they have been "Mitzraim Agolos," specifically? Clearly, Agolos were available in Canaan. Indeed, why did Paroh take such a personal interest in the mode of transport? And why the seeming haste in arranging such logistics?

When Torah text repeats a matter four times in a short span, it is a clue to something important. There is much more here than initially meets the eye. Moreover, other curious textual references coincide to heighten the foregoing questions. One plausible thesis is that the multiple references to the Agolos, Paroh's personal hand in ordering their use and the related surrounding circumstances are a Remez, a clue to something portentous, of major significance. What is it? First, some additional background references seem pertinent.

Posuk 45:16 says the arrival of Yosef's brothers was "good in the eyes of Paroh and in the eyes of his servants" (Vayitav BeAynay Paroh U'vaynay Avadav). The statement and language used are strange. Why would the lord of the realm care to express such an opinion? Why would Torah record it? And, stranger still, why should the text refer to Paroh's Avadav in the same vein? Obviously, there is major significance here as well. Does it connect with and bear upon the Agolos references?

With respect to the "Vayitav BeAynay" language, the commentators offer some remarks. Or Hachayim says "Vayitav BeAynay" refers to Paroh's and his servants' gladness that Yosef was not really an Eved (slave) because, before the brothers' arrival, it was embarrassing that an Eved was a Moshel (ruler) over them. (But that would not necessarily explain Paroh's personal gladness. After all, he was pre-eminent over Yosef, who clearly was not a Moshel over Paroh).

Ramban says similarly. It was a Cherpah that an alien-slave from prison would come to rule. When the "honorable" brothers came ("Nechbadim"), Yosef thereby was deemed more worthy to stand before royalty. Thus, Paroh and his Avadav were happy. (But this, too, would seem to apply to the Avadav, not Paroh, who indisputably was lord over all).

Seforno says that it was "good" in their eyes because, earlier, Yosef was a supervisor who was a "Ger" whereas, from now forward, he would be considered as a citizen supervisor ("Ezrach"), who would full-heartedly better the lot of the land and its inhabitants. (But Yosef had not acted as a mere "Ger" nor did he signal that his stay was transitory. On the contrary, he stayed until death. Indeed, he traversed the length and breadth of the land as a nobleman, loyally acquiring all riches for his master Paroh. After Yosef's promotion there is no hint that he acted any differently than a full-fledged "Ezrach".)

With respect, the foregoing rationales, though plausible, seem to have difficulties. First, Paroh had consciously elevated Yosef out of prison with full knowledge of his lowly status. He did not have to make him Viceroy. He could have rewarded him differently. Moreover, Yosef's results were astoundingly successful. Immediately after Yosef interprets the dreams, the text uses virtually the same exact "Vayitav BeAynay" language (41:37): "Vayitav Hadavar BeAynay Paroh U'vaynay Kol Avadav." Actually, the latter text is even stronger because it says "**Kol** Avadav" whereas later (45:16) it does not say "all" the servants. In fact, Yosef earlier was lauded by Paroh himself (41:38), specifically designated as Viceroy, second only to Paroh and also honored, dressed, given a royal carriage and a wife, etc. There is no intimation whatsoever that he was regarded as a second-class pretender, upstart or transient "Ger," as opposed to an eminent "citizen" of the realm.

Further, the Meforshim's thesis that Paroh and his Avadav were so elated at the "honorable" or "first-class" status of the brothers is inconsistent with the earlier reference that the Egyptians would not even eat together with them because it was

an abomination (43:22). In addition, the premise is somewhat belied when, later, the Torah advises that the Egyptians had disdain for these aliens because they were "abominable" shepherds and herdsmen (46:32-34), so much so, that they had to live outside the metropolitan precincts in Goshen. How "honorable" could the brothers really have been perceived when Torah records that they were viewed as "abominations" on two separate counts? Did the regal Yosef really gain "status" by affiliation with the brothers? Or was it the other way around? Was not all that was done for the brothers (providing food, transport, a haven, etc.) attributable to their relationship to Yosef? Surely, they would have received no grace or "honor" without him.

Moreover, a later Posuk says that Yosef made the Mitzrim pass into cities from one extremity of Mitzraim's boundaries to the other (47:21, VeEs HaAm HeEvir Oso LeArim Miktze Gevul Mitzraim VeAd Katzehu). Citing the Gemara in Chulin, Rashi explains that the Torah records how Yosef resettled the people of one city to another in order to record Yosef's merit. By making the Mitzrim change cities, Yosef intended to remove a reproach (Cherpah) from his brothers who ordinarily would be viewed by the Mitzrim as "strangers" (Golim). [See Rashi on 47:21: Lehodiacha Shivcho Shel Yosef SheNiskaven Letosir Cherpah MeAl Achiv Shelo Korin Osam Golim.]

Thus, Rashi points out that the Mitzrim earlier viewed, and would have continued but for Yosef's intervention, to regard the brothers as a Cherpah (a reproach), as Golim (strangers). The latter word connotes exile (Galus). Rashi's and the Gemara's sharp language hardly signals that the brothers' status in the eyes of the Mitzrim was so "honorable" or "first-class" that it elevated Yosef's status. To the contrary, it is Yosef who removes their Cherpah by radical means. And, it is Yosef who the Mitzrim later applaud as having saved their lives and with whom they plead to find favor. (47:25, Nimitza Chen BeAynay Adoni). It is Yosef who, earlier, is respectfully addressed as "Avrech," for which Rashi cites several different meanings, all very honorable. [41:43]

With respect, it appears that there may be more to the "Vayitav BeAynay" language in 45:16. And perhaps it may be linked to the Agolos question.

In the next few pesukim Paroh calls for Yaakov's entire family to come to Mitzraim, promptly. Why the hurry? Curiously, Paroh does not suggest, he commands, imperatively and in very strong language, that "you should take wagons out of the land of Mitzraim" for the family members. (45:19) (VeAta Tzuvesa, Zos Asu, Kechu Lachem MeEretz Mitzraim Agolos ...). He even specifies from where the wagons must originate. Why? He additionally specifies whom they are for. Why not simply command that Yaakov's family come? Why does Paroh care how they are transported? Why should the text find it important to record this?

Then the Torah says Yosef gave them Agolos "according to the command of Paroh" (Al Pi Paroh, 45:21). Why should this reference to the Agolos and Paroh's edict be repeated?

The Agolos are mentioned a few Pesukim later upon the brothers' return to Yaakov. (45:27) When the Patriarch sees the Agolos "that Yosef sent to bear him," his "spirit revived" [Vatechi Ruach Yaakov Avihem]. Note the Posuk's reference to Yosef as having sent them. It does not mention Paroh as do the other three references.

Of course, we are familiar with Rashi's comment, based on the Midrash, that the Agolos were a clue to the Eglah Arufah subject Yaakov had been learning with Yosef just prior to his disappearance; that is why Paroh is not mentioned; Agolos refers not to wagons but the Eglah Arufah; hence, it was a confirmation to Yaakov of the brothers' report that Yosef was alive. [Rashi on 45:27] But, while significant, this Midrashic explanation does not fully answer the two earlier references to Paroh's command that the Agolos be sent. Nor does it square entirely with the later reference to "the wagons which Paroh had sent to carry him (Yaakov)." [46:5, B'Agolos Asher Shalach Paroh LaSes Oso].

On the contrary, the symmetry of language using "Agolos" in the three other proximate locations suggests that the term Agolos, when juxtaposed with Yaakov's seeing them and having his spirit revived instantly, is similar - actual wagons. At least, that is Al Derech Hapeshat. The text should be harmonized, if feasible, with the Midrashic suggestion of the wagons as an "Eglah Arufah" clue. With respect, perhaps it can.

As indicated, the Agolos are later mentioned a fourth time, after Yaakov has had his vision at Beer Sheva specifying the advent of the Mitzraim exile. Resignedly, Yaakov "arose" from there; the sons carry him and their little ones in the wagons Paroh sent to carry him. [46:5] The immediate next Posuk juxtaposes their arrival in Mitzraim "and all his seed with him." [46:6, VaYavou Mitzrayma Yaakov Vechol Zaro Ito]. This juxtaposition seems important. Why does the text elaborate that the wagons held everyone? (Although some say Yaakov was carried and did not personally use the wagons). And why should it indicate in the very next Posuk

that "Vechol Zaro Ito." This would seem evident without the specification, especially in light of the detailed enumeration of persons that follows.

Following the enumeration of names, the text records the number of arrivals as 66 [46:26] and the total number in Mitzraim as 70 persons. [46:27, Kol Hanefesh LeBais Yaakov Habaah Mitzrayma Shivim]. Specification of the two numbers also seems significant.

When Yaakov met Paroh he "blessed" him [47:7], which Rashi explains was not a B'racha as it commonly might be understood but, rather, a "blessing of peace," a salutation. When Yaakov departs, he again "blessed Paroh" [47:10], which Rashi describes as a "salutation of peace" but, alternatively, also quotes the Midrashic meaning of a blessing that the waters of the Nile should rise upon Paroh's approach, signifying abundant irrigation of the land by the river's overflow. It seems that Rashi's preference, Al Hapeshat, is that Yaakov did little more than provide a salutation of peace. [See Rashi on 47:7 and 47:10]. Why not a more copious blessing? After all Paroh had sent wagons for him, cordially allowed his family a haven in Goshen, and allowed provisions at a time of famine.

Moreover, the Midrashic version of Yaakov's "blessing" to Paroh cited by Rashi [47:10] possibly may conflict with a later Rashi explaining why the Mitzrim wept upon Yaakov's death for 70 days [50:3]. Citing Sotah 10, Rashi says that the Mitzrim wept so long a period because, upon Yaakov's arrival, the famine ceased "and the waters of the Nile again increased." [Vehayu May Nilus Misborchin] If Yaakov's arrival were the responsible agent, as recognized by the Mitzrim, why should Paroh have been blessed by Yaakov that the monarch should raise the Nile's overflow? Why would it be necessary? Or is the apparent "conflict" harmonized by saying that Paroh could raise the water level by his own approach because of Yaakov's blessing, rendered upon Yaakov's arrival?

In any event, whatever the reason, it is to be noted that the Mitzrim "wept" for Yaakov for 70 days. [Vayivku Oso Mitzraim Shivim Yom] The specific number may be significant.

Yosef's exploits as Viceroy gained immense commercial advantage directly for Paroh: "all the money in the land" [47:14]; all the livestock [47:17]; all the land [47:10] (except that of the priests); a fifth of the Mitzrim's produce as "Avadim" to Paroh [47:25, 26]. Despite catastrophic famine, Paroh personally prospered, indeed, owned virtually everything. Yosef's relationship with Paroh and his with Yosef is essentially economic, financial, business-oriented and wealth-acquisitive.

9. On the Posuk in which Paroh commands the taking of Agolos [45:19], Ramban says that Paroh used a "command" because he knew that Yosef would not, by himself, take any of Paroh's property. Thus, thought Paroh, out of overriding honesty, perhaps Yosef will not send anything to his father. With the command, however, Yosef would do so.

Rashbam says that a royal command was necessary because no person was permitted to take Agolos out of the kingdom without Paroh's permission.

Seforno says that the "command" mechanism and the Agolos were devised by Paroh to prevent or minimize Yaakov's refusal or any hesitation to come to Mitzraim. Thus, when Yaakov sees the Agolos Mitzri designated specifically for him and his family, he would find no reason for concern, hesitation or refusal. And, Seforno says, "VeChen Haya," that is what happened. Yaakov saw the Agolos that Yosef sent and said, "Elcha VeErenu," I will go and see Yosef.

Rabbi Hirsch's commentary seems to tend towards Seforno's. Thus, on the Posuk where Yaakov sees the Agolos and his spirit revives, the commentator suggests that seeing the royally-sent Agolos from Yosef confirmed that the latter was alive.

10. The "Agolos Hypothesis"

How can the foregoing curiosities be explained? How can most of the commentaries be accommodated and harmonized? How can some of the surrounding circumstances fit together with the Agolos episode and the repeated references? One plausible possibility is what might be called the "Agolos Hypothesis."

First, it must be recognized that Mitzraim was a land of extreme unholiness (Tumah). It was a place where deviant practices prevailed - indeed, a site very appropriate to Yosef's Nisayon (test or ordeal) with Eshes Potiphar (Potiphar's wife). Paroh clearly was no angel or saint. He presided over a land of Tumah. He had certain Kochos, for example, receiving the prophetic dreams that Yosef interpreted. And Mitzraim may have had certain temporal Zechus, allowing it to survive the famine and become the "breadbasket" for that part of the world. But these temporary strengths do not contraindicate that Paroh, his Avadav and the Mitzrim were far from righteous. Indeed, Paroh adroitly monopolizes wealth and indentures everyone to himself.

Against this backdrop, it seems awkward to ascribe the best intentions to Paroh for his purported elation that Yosef's brothers had arrived and in commanding that Agolos from Mitzraim hasten Yaakov's arrival.

The more plausible thesis is that Paroh selfishly saw what Yosef alone could accomplish. The brothers represented "more where that came from." The family was blessed. Paroh's economic eye recognized that having Yaakov and the brothers in Mitzraim represented importation of exceptional talent, persons with Zechuyos and knowhow to achieve, to contribute even more wealth. Thus, for example, when Yosef later introduces five of his brothers to Paroh [47:1-6], and explains their livelihood as shepherds, Paroh says to Yosef:

"If you know any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle." [47:6, VeYesh Bam Anshay Chayil VeSamtom Saray Mikneh Al Asher Li]

Indisputably, we can say that money and wealth-acquisition is on Paroh's mind. He wants to use the B'nai Yisrael. He is not altruistic or benevolent; he is purposeful, devious and scheming. Regard what he does to his own people, the Mitzrim; he turns them into serfs.

We might go further and say that Paroh's actual intent was to use whatever skills the B'nai Yisrael had and, eventually, to make them slaves! The Agolos episode and the emphasis of that word four times is thus a clue, a remez to what will occur.

What does the Ksiv of Agolos comprise? The answer in Hebrew is the letter, "Ayin," and the word "Golus." "Ayin" means 70. "Golus" means exile. The meaning of the word as a clue is the Golus of the 70 Nefesh of Yaakov's family and, eventually, the 210 year shibud of the people as Avadim.

The foregoing hypothesis explains the textual repetition and emphasis of Agolos from Mitzraim. It explains the haste with which Yaakov and family are directed to come to Egypt. It explains the use of the royal command. It explains why the brothers' arrival was deemed "good" in Paroh's eyes and in those of his Avadav. The proposed exploitation of B'nai Yisrael through a Golus starting with 70 Nefesh and an eventual Shibud (enslavement) fits uniquely with the circumstances.

The hypothesis also explains why Yaakov's spirit was revived when he saw the Agolos. The number 70 signified that Yosef indeed was alive, that he had two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, that what had been reported by Yosef's brothers was true. (It will be recalled that the text enumerates the number of persons coming into Mitzraim as 66. Counting Yocheved, Yosef and his sons the later number, in Mitzraim, is listed as 70). The Agolos, however, also were a Remez (hint or clue) to the impending Golus, to the prophesied Shibud. That may be why Yaakov journeys first to Beer Sheva, thankful that Yosef is alive (he brings Zevachim) but nevertheless prayerfully pleading not to go to a Golus in Mitzraim (he explicitly prays to the "Hashem of his father Yitzchak" who in a time of famine did not have to go to Mitzraim).

The "Agolos Hypothesis" seems to account for the many textual curiosities described above and also is in harmony with the commentaries on the relevant Pesukim. The repetitive references to Paroh's Agolos is a purposeful message of the King's intent to exploit B'nai Yisrael. Torah text is a meaningful code in which each word must be scrutinized.