

Vayechi—And he lived  
Genesis 47:28-57:26  
December 18, 2010  
Temple Sinai

***This portion, Vayechi, describes the end of both Jacob's and Joseph's lives. It features Jacob on his deathbed giving blessings and warnings to his children, foreseeing their future in history. Prime importance is given to Judah, who will be the line of kings in generations to come. After Jacob blesses his children he dies, leaving Joseph's brothers terrified he will exact revenge upon them. He does not and he finally dies after making his family promise that they will eventually bring his and Jacob's bones back up to Canaan, the Promised Land.***

## **Niggun**

This parsha begins hidden in the middle of a paragraph, "And he lived." Jacob lives. And in the second sentence, Israel speaks of his death and his desire to be taken out of Egypt. He lives within exile and desires to leave exile. And this is a collective desire, our desire. And freedom is hidden within exile. This is the living truth and the mystery.

This is a contemplation in three parts, which really creates a circle. Jacob knew the truth of liberation even in exile. He was connected to the truth of the hidden source of life. Part one. He could tell his children their end according to their natures and their strengths and weaknesses, but his work is not transferrable. He could tell them of their truth, but the way is theirs to find. Part two. They know, and we know, there is a way out of exile if we use our freedom that exists even within exile. And this is part three which leads us back to part one. This is the circle--the continuous circle of the faith to seek truth even as we are in the pain of separation, perhaps because of the pain of separation. Hiddenness is finite and the seeking of truth with faith is infinite.

## **Part I**

"Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt..." (Gen 47:28) In exile he was alive. Fully alive.

And Israel says, "...When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." (Gen 47:30) Take me out of Egypt. This is Joseph's commitment.

What is it to live, to be truly alive?

From the Sefat Emet:

“‘Life’ here means being attached to the root and source from which the life-force ever flows...It seems to me that this ‘life’ is the same as that in the phrase ‘living waters.’ The soul’s joy arouses the source of life, and more of the life-force flows forth....‘Soul’ refers to desire; it is the innermost soul that constantly draws forth life....Even though he was in the Land of Egypt, he knew that all of ‘Egypt’ was just a hiding ‘shell,’ inside which there was nothing but that divine life-force. That is why the sages say that ‘the wicked are called dead in their lifetimes,’ because they are separated from the source of life.” ( p. 73-4, Sefat Emet, translated by Arthur Green)

This is a possibility of a kind of sovereignty even in Egypt, a vision of a transcending self—a soul pure, inviolable, at the core of our being, beyond all the vicissitudes, in flashes of truth when it is revealed to us. Those moments give us faith and an understanding of attachment to our root, however temporary. It gives us the faith to seek truth.

Jacob is truly alive even as he is in exile.

The more the soul’s intrinsic joy arouses the source of life, the more life force flows.

It is the soul’s innermost desire that constantly draws forth life.

When we attach ourselves to worldly things, we remain strangers in exile.

“When humans attach themselves to the root of life, this-worldly things are drawn near to God along with them.” (p. 74 SE)

## **Chant**

Silence

## **Part II**

Jacob wanted to reveal the end, “when the end is known, exile is made easier.” (p. 74 SE)

From the Sefat Emet:

“Revealing the end means knowing there is an end to exile, and that shows it to be but a matter of hiding, not a force of its own. Inwardness is truth and that is endless, only the hiding has an end. Jacob wanted to reveal this, but then there would have been no exile at all, so it remained hidden...By the faith Jews have that there is no power other than God, even if it is all hidden, even if you can’t see it with your eyes, you can still come to see truth within faith. Jacob our Father just wanted there to be no mistake about this, that it all be obvious, but that goal eluded him. You need to struggle to find truth. This is the quality of King David, who has nothing of his own. He achieves truth only by self-negation. And that is the difference between truth and faith.” (p. 75 SE)

“This means that by faith you can find the truth, and it can become clear that it’s all a matter of hiding.” (p. 74)

The light of Jacob, truth, lives within the hiding.

From the Sefat Emet:

“This was Jacob’s way: he was always putting himself into places where there was danger. He wanted to open them up for his descendants. He hinted at this when he said: ‘The angel who redeemed me from all evil, may he bless the lads.’ [Gen. 48:16] This shows that he had gone down into all the evil places and been saved from them. He wanted to teach this way to his children, but it was closed to him.” (p. 77, SE)

“And Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob, /Hearken to Israel your father.’” (Gen 49:1-2)

Listen to Israel your father.

He tells each of them their lot in life, as it derives from how they live their lives. What happens when we are tripped up in our usual ways, habits, according to our disposition?

The struggle with our environment, our habits, our behavior patterns, passions of our divided hearts.

We have not full mastery, but we do have freedom to choose how we live, to what we attach ourselves.

Our lives can be life at its fullest, most productive as we seek the wholesome within our natures.

What if we do? What if we don’t seek the wholesome? What would Israel say about us, what would befall us in our days to come? What do we do with our freedom?

## **Chant**

silence

## **Part III**

There is an end to exile, and this is a period of subjugation.

Powerlessness, subordination.

These times can be negotiated with wisdom, dignity, and integrity.

As we hope and work toward freedom from exile.

Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And now I give you one more portion than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and my bow." (Gen 48:21-2)

Rebbe of Kotzk—Why is prayer like a bow, the more a person draws the bow string to himself, the further the arrow flies, so it is with prayer: the deeper one delves into one's own heart, the higher one's prayer ascends..."

Through the resonance of the soul, the soul's longing and desire for truth, one contacts faith.

Faith to pursue truth.

The more the living waters flow.

The more one knows truth.

Increasing faith.

Increasing the capacity for self-negation and the more truth is revealed.

Hiding has an end. The pursuit of truth is endless.

From the Sefat Emet:

"Every day the children of Israel have to seek out the truth and it will be revealed to them. Thus Scripture says: 'Give truth unto Jacob'—in the present. [Jacob lives.] Every day, by the power of calling out the Shema. The way is not forgotten even as we are in exile. Israel, "Listen, Father Israel!" we call out, as we continuously proclaim that God is One." (p. 78, SE)

## **Chant**

Silence

Joseph speaks to his brothers: "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land which He promised on Oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying 'When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry my bones out of here.'" (Gen 50:24)

The end of exile is promised. It is ours to pursue.

## **Niggun**

Rhonda.k.rosen@gmail.com