Congregation Beth Israel
Of The Berkshires

CONGREGATION
Shir Ami

SoulSpa 3.11 • P. Vayigash
December 27, 2025 • 7 Tevet 5786

Blessing Before Learning

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהו״ה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה׃

Barukh Atah Adonai
eloheinu melekh ha'olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu
la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH our God, sovereign of the world, who made us holy in connecting-command, and commanded us to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Genesis 45:1-15

Intimate encounter, maybe sides with humility
(Not wielding authority with Egyptians…)

Shame?

Is Yosef humble, or humble-bragging? Torah unclear.
Yosef emotional —> functional / role / …

וְלֹא־יָכֹל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכֹל הַנִּצָּבִים
עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל־אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא־
עָמַד אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְוַדַּע יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו׃
... וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הַעוֹד
אָבִי חָי וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי
נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנָיו׃ וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו
גְּשׁוּ־נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף
אֲחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרָיְמָה׃

וְעַתָּה אַל־תֵּעָצְבוּ וְאַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
כִּי־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי לְמִחְיָה שְׁלָחַנִי
אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם׃ כִּי־זֶה שְׁנָתַיִם הָרָעָב
בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־
חָרִישׁ וְקָצִיר׃ וַיִּשְׁלָחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם
לָשׂוּם לָכֶם שְׁאֵרִית בָּאָרֶץ וּלְהַחֲיוֹת לָכֶם
לְפְלֵיטָה גְּדֹלָה׃ וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם
אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְשִׂימֵנִי לְאָב
לְפַרְעֹה וּלְאָדוֹן לְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ וּמֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

מַהֲרוּ וַעֲלוּ אֶל־אָבִי וַאֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָיו כֹּה
אָמַר בִּנְךָ יוֹסֵף שָׂמַנִי אֱלֹהִים לְאָדוֹן
לְכָל־מִצְרָיִם רְדָה אֵלַי אַל־תַּעֲמֹד׃ וְיָשַׁבְתָּ
בְּאֶרֶץ־גֹּשֶׁן וְהָיִיתָ קָרוֹב אֵלַי אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ
וּבְנֵי בָנֶיךָ וְצֹאנְךָ וּבְקָרְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃
וְכִלְכַּלְתִּי אֹתְךָ שָׁם כִּי־עוֹד חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים
רָעָב פֶּן־תִּוָּרֵשׁ אַתָּה וּבֵיתְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃
וְהִנֵּה עֵינֵיכֶם רֹאוֹת וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בִנְיָמִין
כִּי־פִי הַמְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם׃

וְהִגַּדְתֶּם לְאָבִי אֶת־כָּל־כְּבוֹדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם
וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם וּמִהַרְתֶּם וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם
אֶת־אָבִי הֵנָּה׃ וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְּארֵי בִנְיָמִן־
אָחִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ וּבִנְיָמִן בָּכָה עַל־צַוָּארָיו׃
וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְכָל־אֶחָיו וַיֵּבְךְּ עֲלֵהֶם וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן
דִּבְּרוּ אֶחָיו אִתּוֹ׃

1-4. Yosef could not control himself to everyone standing around. He cried, "Everyone go away from me!" so there was no one about when Yosef made himself known to his brothers… Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" His brothers could not answer him, for they were dumbstruck before him. Yosef said to his brothers, "Approach me." When they approached, he said, "I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

Yosef repeats - different aspects of himself?
Different roles.

5-8. "And now, do not be troubled and do not be angry at yourselves that you sold me here: it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It has been two years of famine in the land: five more years will have no yield in tilling. God sent me before you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in a great deliverance. So it was not you who sent me here, but God – who made me [like] a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler in all the land of Egypt.

God, not Yosef: tone of humility

Emotions: relief, awe, potentiality
Family reuniting
Face famine of food, spirit, humanity

compassion, forgiveness?

9-12. "Hurry! Go up to my father and say to him: 'Thus says your son Yosef, "God made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me: do not delay. You will dwell in the area of Goshen, and you will be near me – you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. There I will sustain you – for there are five more years of famine – so you and your house and all that is yours will not lack."' Here: see by your eyes and my brother Benjamin's eyes that it is I who speak to you.

13-15. "Tell my father all about Egypt's honor of me, and all you have seen; and speedily bring my father down here." He fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept on them: [only] then [could] his brothers speak to him.

Did the brothers receive Yosef as kin before this?
Role reversals.

Multi-pareshah "threads" of narrative coming together:
The "A"uthor set Yosef up to be different from the start...

- "It all comes together"
- How we end up in Egypt
- Necessary to Exodus story

"IT WAS NOT YOU WHO SENT ME HERE, BUT GOD"

Sforno on Gen. 45:8

וְעַתָּה לֹא אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם. הִנֵּה בִּרְאוֹתְכֶם תַּכְלִית אֱלֹהִי שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה מֻשָּׂג בְּזוּלַת אֵלֶּה הַסִּבּוֹת הַקּוֹדְמוֹת, אֵין סָפֵק שֶׁהַסִּבּוֹת הַקּוֹדְמוֹת הָיוּ גַּם כֵּן בִּרְצוֹן אֱלֹהִי לְסַבֵּב זֶה הַתַּכְלִית.

And now, it is not you who sent [me] – Now that you see my God's purpose, which could not have been achieved without its preceding steps, there is no doubt that the preceding steps also were by my God's will, part of unrolling this purpose.

If *this* was God's will, then each step along the way was God's will(?)

Or HaHayyim, Gen. 45:8

וְעַתָּה לֹא אַתֶּם. פֵּרוּשׁ, לָתֵת טַעַם לְהָסִיר מִלִּבָּם חֲשַׁשׁ הַשִּׂנְאָה, לְבַל יַחְשְׁבוּ כִּי יוֹסֵף יִשְׂטֹם אוֹתָם וְיִשָּׁנֵאם עַל אֲשֶׁר נִתְאַכְזְרוּ עָלָיו, וְיִהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵיהֶם דָּבָר רָחוֹק שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לֵב יוֹסֵף נָכוֹן עִמָּם, לָזֶה אָמַר לָהֶם: הֵן אֱמֶת כִּי בִּשְׁעַת מַעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר מְכָרוּהוּ הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים זָרִים בְּעֵינָיו, אֵיךְ יִהְיֶה כָּל הָאַכְזָרִיּוּת בְּלֵב אַחִים עַל אֲחִיהֶם, וּרְאוּיִים הֵם לִהְיוֹת שְׂנוּאִים אֵצְלוֹ אָכֵן עַתָּה אַחַר רְאוֹתוֹ כָּל הַנִּמְשָׁךְ מִירִידָתוֹ מִצְרַיִם יָדַע כִּי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָיָה מֵאֵת ה׳ וְהֵם שְׁלִיחוּתוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ עָשׂוּ וְלֹא שְׁלִיחוּת עַצְמָם, וּבָזֶה אֵין מָקוֹם לִשְׂמֹר לָהֶם אֵיבָה וְלֹא לְהַרְחִיק מִדַּת הָאַחְוָה מֵהֶם.

And now, it is not you who sent [me] – Yosef [said this] to give them a reason to remove from their hearts the fear that [Yosef] hated them, for what they did to him and how cruelly they treated him. He implied that it was true at the time they sold him, he did not understand why they so resented him, and he had reason to hate them for that. But ***now*** things were clear.

Having reflected on all that transpired since the brothers sold him into Egyptian degradation, Yosef realized that it was from God – that the brothers were the Blessed One's agents though they themselves did not know it. And for this reason, there was no room for [Yosef] to harbor hostility against them or distance fraternal feelings for them.

"Thank you, difficult teacher!"

Midrash Tehillim 10:3

Spiritual teaching v. "Fate"
= AS-IF THINKING

אמר ר' יששכר ומה אם יוסף שמחל לאחיו דכתיב לא אתם שלחתם אותי הנה. ראה עד היכן מתוקנת להם. מי שאינו מוחל לחבירו על אחת כמה וכמה. א"ר חנין אמר הקב"ה לשבטים אתם אמרתם לעבד נמכר יוסף חייכם אתם קורין עצמכם בכל שנה ושנה עבדים היינו. ר' פינחס אמר בשם ר' הושעיה שבטים גרמו לקרע שמלת אביהם ונפרע להם במצרים שנאמר ויקרעו שמלותם.

R. Yissakhar said: What if Yosef had not forgiven his brothers, as in (Gen. 45:8), "It is not you who sent me here, but God"? See how this is corrected for them! One who does not forgive his friend is treated likewise.* R. Hanin said: The Holy Blessed One said to the [brothers], "You said, 'Let us sell Yosef as a slave.' On your lives, *you* will be called slaves for many years." R. Pinhas said in the name of R. Hoshayah: The [brothers] caused their father's coat to be torn, and they were punished in Egypt [in Yosef placing a goblet in Benyamin's food sack], as in (Gen. 44:13), "They tore their clothes."

Maimonides, Moreh Nevuhim • Guide for the Perplexed II.48:5

וכן נאמר על מה שסיבתו היא בחירות אנושיות, כמו מלחמה של עם המשתלט על עם, או אדם שקם להזיק לאדם אחר, אפילו רק גידף אותו... ויוסף הצדיק אמר: לֹא אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים.

Events of human freewill, such as war, the dominion of one nation over another, a person's attempt to hurt another or insult them [are ascribed to God]... for righteousness, such as Yosef saying (Gen. 45:8), "And now, it is not you who sent me but God."

The Torah: A Women's Commentary

Don't be troubled… God sent me ahead of you. The assurance that God sent Joseph is so important here that it is repeated twice. The arc that spans the stories of Joseph and his brothers serves to explain the will of God to bring about good for the people. The story perpetuates the idea that faithfulness results in divine action and ultimate relief for the people. Moreover, it affirms that God works through ordinary human beings to accomplish salvation for the people of Israel, as represented by the family of Jacob and his children… Rather than be angry at his brothers for what they did to him in the past, Joseph is now grateful for their presence in his life.

So it was not you who sent me here, but God – who made me [like] a father to Pharaoh – Joseph uses the language of family relations as a way to explain to them his power over and ability to counsel Pharaoh. Although in the ancient Near East people expressed all interpersonal and political relationships in household terms, here such usage is poignant because another "father" (Jacob) is so much on the mind of his sons.

Maki L. Boulakia-Bourtnik, Autistic Musings and Neuroqueer Torah

Joseph stands before those who left him for dead and tried to kill him. He doesn't say, "You hurt me." He doesn't say, "You left me to die." He doesn't say, "I'm not okay." Instead, he immediately pivots to reassurance for his brothers. "Don't be distressed." "Don't be angry with yourselves." "It was the Divine who sent me." This is someone who has learned that his feelings are dangerous unless they are immediately neutralised for others.

Joseph unmasks – and then immediately starts caretaking. This isn't a healing moment…. Joseph's speech in Genesis 45 is often read as forgiveness. But if you read carefully, it's not forgiveness in any meaningful sense. It's theological reframing used as a stabilising mechanism. He attributes everything to God.

- emotional labor
- spiritual bypassing

AND WHEN THEY TOLD DAD…

Genesis 45:24-28

"Do I need to pull this car over?"

וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיֵּלֵכוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַל תִּרְגְּזוּ בַּדָּרֶךְ׃ וַיַּעֲלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֶל־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃

24-25. [Yosef] sent his brothers off on their way and told them, "Do not quarrel en route." They went up from Egypt and came to the land of Canaan, to Ya'akov their father.

וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי־הוּא מֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיָּפָג לִבּוֹ כִּי לֹא־הֶאֱמִין לָהֶם׃ וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃

26-27. They told him, "Yosef is still alive! He even rules over all the land of Egypt!" His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. They told him all that Yosef said to them, and when he saw the wagons [laden with gifts] that Yosef sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Ya'akov revived.

what changed?

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד־יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חָי אֵלְכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת׃

28. Israel said, "Enough! My son Yosef is still alive! I must go and see him before I die."

Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Vayeshev 8

יעקב אבינו יודע ברוח הקדש שהיה יוסף חי, לפיכך לא קיבל עליו תנחומין, שאין מקבלין תנחומין על החי.

Our father Ya'akov knew by the Holy Spirit that Yosef was alive. Therefore he did not accept consolation for him. After all, one does not accept consolation over one who is alive.

Midrash HaGadol, Gen. 45:26

אם אנו אומרים לו תחלה יוסף קים שמא תפרח נשמתו. מה עשו? אמרו לשרח בת אשר, "אמרי לאבינו יעקב שיוסף קים והוא במצרים."

[The brothers said], "If we tell [dad] upfront, 'Yosef is alive!,'" maybe his soul will fly away." What did they do? They said to Serah, daughter of Asher, "Tell our father Ya'akov that Yosef is alive and he is in Egypt."

(she was a poet and didn't know it)

מה עשתה? המתינה לא עד שהוא עומד בתפלה. ואמרה בלשון תימה: יוסף במצרים/ יולדו לו על ברכים / מנשה ואפרים. פג לבו כשהוא עומד בתפלה. כיון שהשלים ראה העגלות, מיד ותחי רוח יעקב.

What did she do? She waited until he was standing in prayer. And she said in a tone of wonder: "Yosef is in Mitzrayim! / Born on his knees [*birkayim*] / [are] Menashe and Ephraim!" His heart failed while he was standing in prayer. When he finished his prayer, he saw the wagons [that Yosef sent] and immediately (Gen. 45:27), "The spirit of Ya'akov revived."

Alphabet of Ben Sira

סרח בת אשר בעבור שאמרה ליעקב יוסף חי אמר לה יעקב זה הפה שבשרני על יוסף שהוא חי לא יטעום טעם מות

Serah bat Asher – Because she told Ya'akov, "Yosef lives," Ya'akov said to her, "This mouth that told me the good news that Yosef was alive will never taste death."

R. Sylvia Rothschild

THE FEMININE IS THE SOURCE OF JUDAISM'S ORAL TRADITION?!

Serah bat Asher... [holds] memory. She links the generation of the ancestors to the generation of the exodus, from the "family" of Israel to the post-Sinai "people" of Israel. She is the original "oral tradition," and the midrash has her validating Moses as the man who will redeem the Israelites from Egypt, as she knew the secret sign given by Joseph to his brothers to signify that divine deliverance was imminent.

Ellen Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam

THE RABBIS POINT OUT: Of Jacob's many grandchildren, only one granddaughter is mentioned by name – Serah, the daughter of Asher, the granddaughter of Leah's handmaid, Zilpah, as it is written, "*And their sister Serah*" (Gen. 46:17)

SERAH BAT ASHER ELABORATES: I deserved this singular mention because of the extraordinary circumstances of my history. I was Asher's adopted daughter, the three-year-old child of his second wife, Hadorah. Even as a child, I was beautiful, bright, and wise, skilled in singing and playing the harp, the apple of my grandfather Jacob's eye. When my father and uncles returned from Egypt after learning that my uncle Joseph was still alive, they feared that my old grandfather would not survive the shock, so they asked me to play my harp for him and sing, "Joseph is not dead but rules over Egypt." So gently informed, Jacob regained his former joy and spirit of prophecy.

To thank me, my grandfather blessed me with eternal life. Four hundred years later, when Moses declared himself the redeemer of Israel, the elders did not believe him until I verified that his words precisely matched those prophesied long ago to my grandfather Jacob and handed down through his sons.

When the Children of Israel were finally ready to leave Egypt, Moses did not know how to locate Joseph's coffin, without which the people could not depart. So he came to me, and I led him to the place on the Nile where the Egyptian magicians had sunk it to block Israel's exodus. Only then could my people leave Egypt. For these many centuries, I have continued to live among my people, guardian of their memories. And when I have finally had enough of this world, I will become one of a handful of mortals (among them Pharaoh's daughter Batyah and Elijah the Prophet) privileged to enter Paradise alive.

Ramban, Gen. 45:26

וַיָּפָג לִבּוֹ: נֶחְלַף לִבּוֹ וְהָלַךְ מִלְּהַאֲמִין לֹא הָיָה לִבּוֹ פּוֹנֶה אֶל הַדְּבָרִים.... וְגַם זֶה וַיָּפָג לִבּוֹ, שֶׁנִּתְבַּטֵּל לִבּוֹ וּפָסְקָה נְשִׁימָתוֹ, כִּי פָּסְקָה תְּנוּעַת הַלֵּב וְהָיָה כְּמֵת. וְזֶה הָעִנְיָן יָדוּעַ בְּבוֹא הַשִּׂמְחָה פִּתְאוֹם, וְהֶזֵּכֶר ... שֶׁיִּתְעַלְּפוּ רַבִּים מֵהֶם בְּבוֹא לָהֶם שִׂמְחָה בְּפֶתַע פִּתְאוֹם, כִּי יִהְיֶה הַלֵּב נִרְחָב וְנִפְתָּח פִּתְאוֹם וְהַחֹם הַתּוֹלָדִי יוֹצֵא וּמִתְפַּזֵּר בְּחִיצוֹנִי הַגּוּף וְיֵאָפֵס הַלֵּב... כִּי הַיָּדוּעַ בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שֶׁיִּצְעֲקוּ לוֹ וְיַרְגִּילוּ אוֹתוֹ בַּשִּׂמְחָה הַהִיא עַד שֶׁתִּקָּבַע בּוֹ בְּנַחַת רוּחַ. וְזֶה טַעַם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֵת כָּל דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיַּרְא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת", כִּי הָיוּ צוֹעֲקִים בְּאָזְנָיו דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף וּמְבִיאִים לְפָנָיו הָעֲגָלוֹת, אָז שָׁבָה רוּחוֹ אֵלָיו וְחָזְרָה נְשִׁימָתוֹ וְחָיָה, וְזֶהוּ "וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם".

וְאַנְקְלוֹס תִּרְגֵּם וּשְׁרָת רוּחַ נְבוּאָה, בַּעֲבוּר.

His heart went numb – It flipped and [fled] from belief. His heart could not turn to these words… [as if] his heart itself was nullified: his breathing stopped, as if his heart stopped, and he was as if dead. This condition, it is known, comes when joy is sudden: … Many faint when such joy comes this suddenly. The heart widens and opens suddenly, and its natural heat goes out and scatters throughout the outer parts of the body, and the heart thus ceases to function…. It is known that people shout to a fainting person to accustom them to that joyful event gradually until they accept it with tranquil spirit. This is the meaning of, "They told him all that Yosef said to them, and when he saw the wagons, the spirit of Yaakov their father revived], for they shouted into his ears Yosef's words and brought the wagons before him. Then his spirit returned to him, his breathing began and he was revived. Thus Torah says, "The *spirit* of Ya'akov their father revived." Onkelos translated: "The Spirit of Prophecy [=Divine Presence, which departed him as long as he mourned Yosef] again rested upon him."

Genesis 45:28

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד־יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חָי אֵלְכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת׃

28. Israel said, "Enough! My son Yosef is still alive! I must go and see ~~him~~ us before I die."

Seeing himself with Yosef
Seeing himself with Shekhinah
Seeing himself with family, as a family
Seeing himself as a FUTURE - an "us"
Seeing both parts of himself - JACOB AND ISRAEL

BONUS MATERIALS

Jacob's heart

וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי־הוּא מֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיָּפָג לִבּוֹ כִּי לֹא־הֶאֱמִין לָהֶם׃
And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt."
His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. (Gen. 45:26)

Jacob's heart went numb like bare fingers on an icy day.
His heart stopped beating and wasn't sure it could start again.
His heart had been singing a song of mourning and now it lost its words.
His heart said: wait, what?
His heart sailed away like an arrow until Noah's dove brought it back.

No: his heart was rocked by the lilt of his granddaughter's voice.
She waited until he was praying, rocking gently on the waves of Shekhinah.
She sang Joseph back into Jacob's world.
Her melody tethered his soul
and he followed her song back to shore.

Barenblat, 2025

TEACHING ABOUT SERAH

@ **The Song of Serach: A Jewish Lore Reactions Passover Special** Miriam Anzovin, 11.5 min

R. Shefa Gold, *Torah Journeys*

WHEN JOSEPH'S BROTHERS LEARN that he is still alive, they must go and tell their father, but they are afraid that he will die of shock upon learning the truth. They are afraid that this news will be too great a blessing, and that Jacob's soul will fly out of him upon hearing it. They argue with each other about who will deliver the news.

There is a legend that recounts the solution to their problem. Jacob had a favorite grand-daughter, Serach, who was the daughter of his son Asher. Serach was a musician with a gentle voice and a powerful spirit. Her songs were a healing balm for Jacob during his dark nights of wrestling. Whenever he called for Serach, she sang for him and he was comforted.

It was agreed that only Serach would be able to reveal this great news, because when Jacob's soul, overcome by blessing, flew out, Serach would be able to sing a song that would call his soul back to this world.

THE SONG THAT SERACH SANG to Jacob was the most beautiful melody she had ever sung. Everyone that heard it wept with joy because in it Joseph's spirit was revealed. The melody carried Joseph's beauty, pain, longing, love and devotion. Her words told the story of his journey and it was woven with his dreams. Serach's song also told the truth about the whole family, a truth that would have been hard to hear if it were not delivered with such purity.

When Jacob heard Serach's song, his soul indeed flew out and left this world… but it was called back by the beauty of her song. For this gift, Serach was rewarded with a very long life. It is said that she sang through 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

When the people were about to leave Egypt, they were at first held back by their promise to bring Joseph's bones along with them. Fortunately, having lived long enough to both witness Joseph's burial *and* be present at the time of the Exodus, Serach located exactly where Joseph was buried, and the liberation could begin.