Congregation Beth Israel
Of The Berkshires

CONGREGATION
Shir Ami

SoulSpa 3.12 • P. Vayehi
January 3, 2026 • 14 Tevet 5786

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, eternal sovereign, who sanctified us in God's *mitzvot* and commanded us to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Kabbalah: drawing blessing down from "top" to "bottom"
… through Rachel/Yosef (Malkhut) = SHEKHINAH

Genesis 48:11-29, 49:22-26

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֹה פָנֶיךָ לֹא
פִלָּלְתִּי וְהִנֵּה הֶרְאָה אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים גַּם
אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ׃ וַיּוֹצֵא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם מֵעִם בִּרְכָּיו
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְאַפָּיו אָרְצָה׃ וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף
אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם בִּימִינוֹ מִשְּׂמֹאל
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בִשְׂמֹאלוֹ מִימִין
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּגֶּשׁ אֵלָיו׃

11-13. Yisrael said to Yosef, "I never expected to see your face again, and here God showed me your children also." Yosef removed them from his knees and bowed with his face to the ground. Yosef took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand, to Yisrael's left, and Menasheh with his left hand, to Yisrael's right, and brought them close to him.

Angel that Yaakov wrestled, and became Yisrael

CONTINUING TROPE: Yitzhak::Yishmael, Ya'akov::Eisav, Yosef::Everyone Else

וַיְשַׁלַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְמִינוֹ וַיָּשֶׁת עַל־רֹאשׁ
אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא הַצָּעִיר וְאֶת־שְׂמֹאלוֹ עַל־
רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה שִׂכֵּל אֶת־יָדָיו כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה
הַבְּכוֹר׃ וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמַר הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְּכוּ אֲבֹתַי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק
הָאֱלֹהִים הָרֹעֶה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד־הַיּוֹם
הַזֶּה׃ הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגֹּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל־רָע יְבָרֵךְ
אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים וְיִקָּרֵא בָהֶם שְׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי
אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק וְיִדְגּוּ לָרֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ׃

14-16. Yisrael stretched his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger, and his left hand on Menasheh's head though Menasheh was the firstborn – thus crossing his hands. He blessed Yosef, saying: The God with whom my fathers Avraham and Yitzhak walked; the God who shepherded me from my birth to this day – the Messenger who redeemed me from all harm: Bless the lads! May my name be called on them, and the names of my fathers Avraham and Yitzhak. May they teem abundantly on the earth.

ANGEL? FAITH?

what is redemption?

… grandchildren of Rachel

Did Ephraim and Menasheh just become Yisrael's children?!
… the first boys who don't dust it up, battle, etc.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD (Ps. 23)

וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף כִּי־יָשִׁית אָבִיו יַד־יְמִינוֹ עַל־
רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמֹךְ יַד־אָבִיו
לְהָסִיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ
מְנַשֶּׁה׃ וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי
כִּי־זֶה הַבְּכֹר שִׂים יְמִינְךָ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ׃ וַיְמָאֵן
אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדַעְתִּי בְנִי יָדַעְתִּי גַּם־הוּא
יִהְיֶה־לְּעָם וְגַם־הוּא יִגְדָּל וְאוּלָם אָחִיו
הַקָּטֹן יִגְדַּל מִמֶּנּוּ וְזַרְעוֹ יִהְיֶה מְלֹא־הַגּוֹיִם

17-19. Yosef saw that his father placed his right hand on Ephraim's head; it was wrong in his eyes. He took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Menasheh's head. Yosef said to [him], "Not so, my father, for *this* is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." His father objected, saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will be great. Yet his younger brother will be greater than he; his offspring will fill peoples." …

TRANSFORM

DIFFERENT SETTING = POETIC / PROPHETIC:

בֵּן פֹּרָת יוֹסֵף בֵּן פֹּרָת עֲלֵי־עָיִן בָּנוֹת צָעֲדָה
עֲלֵי־שׁוּר׃ וַיְמָרְרֻהוּ וָרֹבּוּ
וַיִּשְׂטְמֻהוּ בַּעֲלֵי חִצִּים׃
וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵיתָן קַשְׁתּוֹ וַיָּפֻזוּ זְרֹעֵי יָדָיו
מִידֵי אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׁם רֹעֶה אֶבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל׃
מֵאֵל אָבִיךָ וְיַעְזְרֶךָּ וְאֵת שַׁדַּי
יְבָרְכֶךָּ בִּרְכֹת שָׁמַיִם
מֵעָל בִּרְכֹת תְּהוֹם רֹבֶצֶת תָּחַת
בִּרְכֹת שָׁדַיִם וָרָחַם׃
בִּרְכֹת אָבִיךָ גָּבְרוּ עַל־בִּרְכֹת הוֹרַי
עַד־תַּאֲוַת גִּבְעֹת עוֹלָם
תִּהְיֶיךָ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף
וּלְקָדְקֹד נְזִיר אֶחָיו׃

22-26. Yosef is a wild ass, wild ass by a spring, wild colts on a hill.
(was there an archer episode, or metaphor?)
Archers embittered and fought him, shot at him and harried him.
His bow stayed taut, his arms firmed by the Mighty One of Ya'akov.
There is the Shepherd of the Rock of Yisrael,
From the God of your father, Who helps you, and from Shaddai
God will bless you with blessings of heaven above,
Atop blessings of the deep couching below,
Blessings of breasts and womb.
Blessings of your father surpassing even blessings of my parents,
To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills.
May they rest on the head of Yosef,
On the brow of the elect of his brothers.

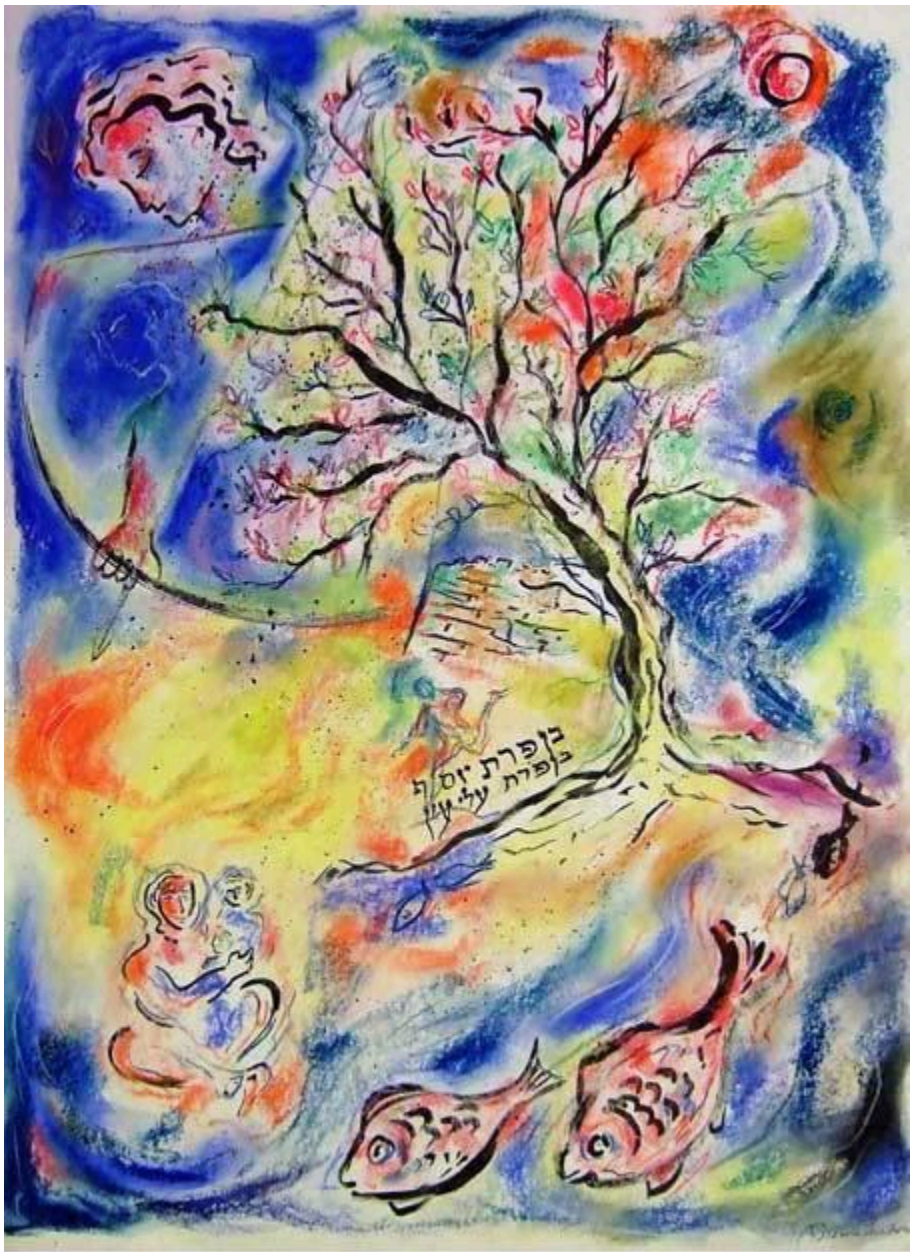
Yosef's

haven't seen name in a long while

Yosef intersex?
Divine feminine

oh, so many images.

THE BLESSING FOR EPHRAIM & MENASHEH



בֶּן-פֹּרָת יוֹסֵף
בֶּן-פֹּרָת עֲלֵי-עָיִן

Yosef is a wild ass,
wild ass by a spring

וַיִּדְגּוּ לָרוֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ.

May they teem
abundantly on the earth

"Jacob's Blessing for Joseph" by Shoshannah Brombacher; pastel and ink on paper, 24 x 18 inches, 2008

Steinsaltz, Gen. 48:16

הַמַּלְאָךְ, שליחו של האלוקים, הַגּוֹאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל רָע, ששמר עלי עד כה, הוא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים מכוחו של ה׳, שולחו. הברכה הראשונה: וְיִקָּרֵא בָהֶם בבנים האלה גם שֵׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק. קודם לכן אימץ אותם כבניו ועתה הוא מוסיף שהם יהיו המשך שמו ושם אבותיו וכשם שאלוקיו הוליך את אבותיו ואותו כל ימיהם כך יוליך את נכדיו.

The Messenger – A messenger of God, ***who redeemed me from all harm*** and protected me until now, ***bless the lads,*** from the power of God, its sender. The first blessing is: ***May my name be called on them***, these children, ***and the name of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzhak***. Before, he adopted them as his own sons; now he adds that they will *continue* his and his fathers' names. Just as his God guided him and his fathers all the days of their lives, so too God will lead his grandchildren.

Sforno, Gen. 48:16

הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגֹּאֵל אוֹתִי מִכָּל רָע יְבָרֵךְ. צִוָּה שֶׁהַמַּלְאָךְ הַגּוֹאֵל אוֹתִי יְבָרֵךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים אִם אֵינָם רְאוּיִים לְבִרְכָתְךָ בִּלְתִּי אֶמְצָעִי׃

The Messenger who redeemed me from all harm: Bless [the lads]! [Yisrael] commanded the angel who redeemed [him] to bless the lads if it was not suitable [for *their* angels] to bless them from themselves [=their own merit].

HaK'tav V'HaKabbalah, Gen. 48:16

ויקרא בהם שמי. לפי שכל האבות ובניהם ובני בניהם נקראו בשם עברים לפי תולדותם בעבר הנהר ונתיירא יוסף פן לא יקראו בניו בשם זה רק בשם מצרים אחר שנולדו שם לכן ברכם שיקראו בשם עברים כשאר השבטים. ולדעת הסוברים כי אסנת אשת יוסף היא בת דינה שילדה משכם בן חמור החוי* אשר לפי שרש גזעם ישנו פגם גדול במנשה ואפרים עד שהיה אפשר לפקפק ביחוסם אם יחשוב אותם תוך שבטי ישראל, לכן ברכם יעקב ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבותי, שלא יהיו נופלים מלהחשב בכלל שבטי ישרון, אבל יחשבו כאחד מבני יעקב גם אם אסנת אמם בת פוטיפרע ממש היתה׃

May my name be called on them – So that all of the patriarchs and their sons, and the sons of their sons, would be called by the name *Ivrim* [=Hebrews], for their origin was *ever ha-nahar* [=across the river]. Yosef feared that they would be called Egyptians, for they were born there. That is why [Yisrael] blessed them to be called by the name *Ivrim*, like the tribes [=Ya'akov's sons]. And to those who believe that Osnat, Yosef's wife, was daughter of Dinah, whom she bore to Shekhem son of Hamor the Hivite,* there would be a great defect in Menasheh and Ephraim such that some might doubt their lineage if he included them among the tribes of Israel. Therefore Ya'akov blessed them and called them by "my name and the name of my fathers," so they would be counted as Ya'akov's sons and not excluded from the tribes of Israel, even if Osnat their mother was actually the daughter of Potiphera.

*Genesis 41:45

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צָפְנַת פַּעְנֵחַ וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

Pharaoh called Yosef by the name Tzafnat-Pa'neiah [=revealer of secrets] and gave him for wife Osnat daughter of Potiphera, priest of On: thus Yosef emerged [as ruler of] the land of Egypt.

*Hizkuni, Gen. 41:45 • Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 38

בת דינה משכם היתה ובקשו להרגה בני יעקב אבינו, בא יעקב אבינו ותלה לה קמיע בצוארה וגירשה מביתו והחביאה עצמה בין הקוצים והברקנים ועל שם הסנה נקראת אסנת ובא גבריאל והביאה למצרים לפני אשת פוטיפר וגדלתה וכשבא יוסף למצרים יצאו כל הנשים לראותו מחמת יופיו כדכתיב בנות צעדה עלי שור וכל אחת זורקת לו חפץ או תכשיט וזו לא היה לה מה לזרוק וזרקה לו הקמיע שבצוארה ונסתכל בו יוסף שהיתה בת בתו של יעקב ונשאה לו לאשה.

She was the daughter of Dinah from Shekhem [who raped her] and whom our patriarch Ya'akov's children murdered. [After the birth], Ya'akov placed a *kamei'a* [=charm] around her neck, expelled her from his house, and hid her among cacti and thornbush [=*sneh*], so when found she would be named Osnat [="of thornbush"]. Gavriel brought her to Egypt and presented her to the wife of Potiphar, who raised her. When Yosef was paraded after his rise to power, all the young women of Egypt crowded around him to admire his beauty (Gen. 49:22), throwing garlands at him. Osnat, who had no garlands, took the *kamei'a* from around her neck and threw it to him. When Yosef look at its inscription, he saw that she was the daughter of his half sister [Dinah], and took her as his wife.

THE WOMEN MADE IT WORK

THE BLESSING FOR YOSEF

Ellen Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam

BERURIAH THE SCHOLAR TEACHES: Jacob's blessing of Joseph, Rachel's elder son, is brimming with female imagery. Joseph is associated with a spring, an image frequently linked to Biblical women. God is characterized not only as *powerful* – "the mighty one of Jacob," Rock of Israel" ([Gen.] 49:24) – but also as *caring* – "the shepherd," "the God of your father who helps you" (49:24-25). And the blessings promised to Joseph will emanate from many sources: "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches below, blessings of the breast and womb" (49:25).

THE RABBIS ADD: And so greatly does Jacob love Rachel that he blesses her son Joseph as though he were only an appendage to her, saying, "Blessed be the breasts that suckled you and the womb from which you came forth." Indeed, since everything depended on Rachel, her descendants are called not only by her name but also by the name of Joseph, her son; and by the name of her grandson Ephraim.

SARAH THE ANCIENT ONE REMARKS: Given how difficult it was for Rachel to conceive, these final blessings are especially poignant.

Ibn Ezra, Gen. 49:25

ברכת תהום כאשר אמר משה וממגד ארץ גם תהום לשון נקבה וכן "תהום רוממתהו," וכן טעמו שירדו גשמים ממעל בארצו, וירבו המעיינות והנחלים מתהום שהיא רובצת מתחת לארץ׃

Blessings of the deep – Much as [a dying] Moshe said [in blessing Yosef's descendants (Deut. 33:13) "with excellence of the land" [=masculine] and also "[the bounty of] the deep [below]," which is feminine. So too (Ezek. 31:14), "The deep made it grow." Its meaning: Rain will fall on the land, and springs and rivers will multiply from the deep, which are (Gen. 45:8), "[the blessings] of the deep couching below."

Sforno, Gen. 49:25

וְברכת שדים ורחם דימה שמים לשדים, וארץ לרחם. ד״א ברכת שדים שלא יהי צומקים ולא ימותו הילדים מחוסר חלב. ורחם אף בתוך הרחם לא ימות העובר כאן הקדים שדים לרחם לפי שדרך החלב לבוא בשדי האשה לפני לידתה אבל הושע אמר תן להם רחם משכיל קודם שאמר ושדים צומקים. כלומר תן להם שלא ילדו ואם ילדו יצמקו שדיהן ולא יוכלו להניק.

Blessings of breasts and womb – "Breasts" exemplify heaven[ly blessing] and "womb" the earth[ly blessing]. Another thing: "blessings of breasts" so children should not thirst and die for lack of milk; and "[blessings of the] womb" so the fetus should not die. Here, "breasts" precede "womb": though [breasts] are not needed until after the baby is born, milk comes in the mother's breasts. But Hosea says (Hos. 9:14), "Give them a miscarrying womb and shriveled breasts" in that order [to lambast the people for disloyalty to God] – to say that [God] should not let them procreate, and if they procreate, they should not be able to nurse.

Steinsaltz, Gen. 49:26

מֵאֵל אָבִיךָ וְיַעְזְרֶךָּ, וְאֵת שַׁדַּי וִיבָרְכֶךָּ. ברכות ה׳ לא רק הצילו אותך בשעותיך הקשות, הן ימשיכו להרעיף עליך ועל צאצאיך שפע והצלחה.

From the God of your father, and [God] will help you, and from Shaddai God will bless you – God's blessings will not only save you in your difficult times [=the past], but will continue to shower you and your descendants with *shefa* [=flow] and success.

Rabbeinu Bahyah, Gen. 49:26

מאל אביך. ע"ד הפשט ממנו יבא הרצון שיעזרך ומשדי המשדד מערכת הכוכבים תבא לך הברכה ברכות שמים וברכות תהום שתהיה מבורך בשמים ובארץ, וכן

From the God of your father – Simply, God's will to help you will come to us, and from *Shaddai* – the One who greatly suffices, who continues the stars – will come to you in the blessing: blessings of heaven and blessings of the deep. So:

ברכת שדים ורחם כלומר שיגיעו לך ברכות שברכוך אביך ואמך ... וע"ד הקבלה

Blessings of breasts and womb – That is, blessings will come to you like the blessings of your father and mother…. And so from Kabbalah:

DIVINE "GENDER," DIVINE QUALITIES

מאל אביך אביך הוא אביר יעקב יבא לך העזר אחר קבלתו השפע מן השמים שהזכיר והוא השמים המקבל מעל, ועם שדי תהיה ברכתך והיא התהום שהיא רובצת תחת והם הם שדים ורחם כתרגומו ברכתא דאבוך ודאמך כענין כבד את אביך ואת אמך ע"ד הסוד כי האב והאם כנגדם.

From the God of your father – "Father" is [God's masculine attribute] of nobility [flowing through] Ya'akov, that will come to you as help after receiving *shefa* [=flow] from heaven – a reminder that blessings are *received* from heaven. And with *Shaddai* [God's feminine attribute of nourishing] will come blessings, which are the "deep couching below" (Gen. 49:26), which are "breasts" and "womb" – which [Onkelos] translates as "blessing from your father and from your mother," like the matter of (Ex. 20:12), "Honor your father and your mother. From this [comes] the secret: Father and Mother correspond to [above and below]. 10C

The Torah: A Women's Commentary

"My parents' blessings." The blessing on Joseph, says Jacob, will surpass the blessing he received from his own parents; that is to say, the blessing of Joseph will surpass the promise to the patriarchs. Interestingly, Jacob does not use the Hebrew word *avot* ("ancestors") but *horai* – here translated as "my parents" – a term related to pregnancy.

"Shaddai." One of God's names, often associated with fertility.

"Heaven above…deep…below." The entire cosmos, from the heavens above to the primeval waters below, participates in the blessing.

"Blessings of breasts and womb." This unusual reference signals fertility.

R. Irwin Keller, "Joseph's Womb"

Does Jacob know something about Joseph's gender or even Joseph's physical body that others don't know? Does Jacob know that there is some way in which Joseph is a woman or like a woman? Does Jacob know that Joseph's body is non-conforming and that Joseph was forced (by him? by circumstance?) to live in a gender that did not perfectly suit? And if so, might this be a prayer for wholeness?

Maybe Jacob's blundering and backfiring attempt to accommodate Joseph's unusual gender as a child by giving him the [fancy coat] is now getting its *tikkun*, its correction. Jacob belatedly blesses Joseph in the name of Shaddai, the breast-nurturing deity, so that Joseph might at last find fulfillment and freedom in the body he was given; that Joseph may at last rest easy in "his" womanhood, or in his more-than-just-manhood.

And presto, maybe the blessing comes true. In Genesis 50, we get a last look at Joseph in old age. He has lived to be 110, and, in verse 23 we learn:

"Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim, also the children of Makhir son of Menasheh were born upon Joseph's knees.

חזק חזק

Let us be strong, be strong,
and strengthen each other.

ונתחזק

BONUS MATERIALS

R. Irwin Keller – May the Angel

Link to recording and sheet music.

Rabbi Yael Levy: A Blessing for the Turn of the Year & The Turn of the Scroll

As we begin [a new year]
The book of Beresheet comes to a close.

Jacob has died and the brothers are frightened that Joseph
Will now take his revenge.
They turn to him pleading.

With tears in his eyes, Joseph says to his brothers,
Do not be afraid.
Do not be afraid, I am not all-powerful.
Do not be afraid, our actions often generate results
That are different from what we intended.
Life unfolds in mystery.
And the Infinite Presence is always with us.
Joseph spoke these words with kindness, right to their hearts. (Genesis 50:19-21)

The first book of the Torah ends with a choice to turn toward love and healing.
And with a bow to the Infinite Mystery that is always present.

As we come to the end of this book of creation,
Beginning another turn of the year,
Let us remember that we are here together,
Beautiful and tender beings,
Doing our best to weave lives of goodness and blessing.
And let us ask for help from those with whom we share this journey:

Ancient ones and all of you yet to be born,
Trees, earth, waters and sky,
Creatures of land and seas and the heavens above,
Please share your wisdom with us.
Help us see the delicate harmony,
The intricate weaving,
The infinite interconnection of all life.
Help bow into the mystery
And rise together for healing and love.