

*Introduction to*  
**RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH'S**  
**COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH**

*by*  
*RABBI DR. JOSEPH BREUER*

VOLUME II  
*The Second Part of Bereshit*  
(From Yizchak to the Death of Joseph)

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## YAAKOV AND ESAU

Ch. 25, 19. Yizchak and Rivka are to work in close harmony in the building of the Abrahamitic house. Before relating the story of the “descendants of Yizchak”, the Torah stresses the dissimilarity in descent of both parents: Yizchak was the worthy son of Abraham, while Rivka’s father and brother Laban were members of Aramaean tribes. True, Yizchak was a mature man when he married Rivka who was still in her early youth — yet was it not questionable whether Yizchak’s influence would succeed in bringing up his children in the Abrahamitic spirit? Is there not a principle of our Sages, based on experience, that most children tend to develop traits characteristic for the brothers of their mothers? Thus the Torah prepares us for what is to follow.

Yet for some time Rivka, like Sarah, did not bear children. Each stone in the building of the “House of Israel” was a gift presented as a symbol of Divine power. For twenty years Yizchak struggled in prayer before G’d “because of his wife” (21) — for, even though G’d had given assurances to his father that he would have “descendants by Yizchak” (21, 12), this did not necessarily mean that he would have these children by Rivka.

Yizchak’s prayer was answered and Rivka became mother. The yet unborn children struggled violently in her womb. Whenever this happened (לָמָּה זֶה) Rivka said to herself: “Why this to me?”, i. e. why does this have to happen to me? She could think of no explanation. And, the sages comment, she went to the Yeshiva of Shem and

Eber hoping to obtain an answer to her questions (22). Hers is a great revelation: the two children in her womb represent two nations (גוים) which, at the very outset, are destined to separate into two independent statehoods (לאומים), different if not opposite in character, ideals and aims. These two children symbolize the eternal conflict between the Divine Law and brutal force. It is a struggle which has stirred every generation and shaped the course of history. For long centuries the outcome of this struggle will remain uncertain. Eventually, however, the apparently more powerful opponent will submit and pay homage to his materially weaker foe (23).

The parents were not unprepared for the diverse traits and character of their children. The more surprising (והנה) that they were twins, after all looking very much alike, although the older one was physically more developed. They called him עשו (derived from עשה), "a complete, finished man". The second child followed, grasping firmly the heel of his brother — which, in view of the previous revelation, impressed Yizchak sufficiently ויקרא to call his son יעקב (24-26).

"As the boys were growing up" (27) it became more and more apparent how completely different they were in character and way of life. From a remark of our Sages we learn that this evergrowing conflict was partly due to a faulty education. "Bring up the lad according to *his way*" (Mish. 22, 6) is the important Jewish principle of education: it is true that the *aims* of Jewish education are the same for all children who are to be trained towards their G'd-willed Jewish vocation of life. The methods, however, which have to be employed to attain this goal, must necessarily vary in accordance with the natural talents, inclinations and general disposition of the child. What is appropriate for and to the benefit of one child, may be extremely harmful to another. Yaakov and Esau just do not fit on one school bench. If Esau's parents had come early to the sad

conclusion that their son was not at all inclined towards “boring spiritual” activities, they might have succeeded in developing his good traits to such an extent that he could still have been called a worthy grandson of Abraham. The situation became worse through the fact that Yizchak loved Esau while Rivkah preferred Yaakov, which certainly did not diminish the problems of education. And it was all so easy to understand: Yizchak was quiet by nature, unworldly, and was probably greatly attracted to Esau’s lively manner and unabashed joy of living. Rivkah, on the other hand, through the experiences of her own youth had long been familiar with the “Esau-type” and it was quite natural that she preferred Yaakov’s quiet, spiritually-minded way of life. The lesson: Parents must offer their children equal interest, equal love. Always the skilled hunter, Esau knew how to trap his father “with his mouth”.

At this point the Torah reports (29-34) an event which is characteristic for both youths: Esau returns from the hunt. He is very hungry. Yaakov is busy preparing a meal for himself. Esau demands it greedily. The “red” meal of lentils stimulates his appetite, he wants to swallow it (לעט), he can think of nothing else but satisfy his stomach. This then is to be the בכור, his will be the “spiritual” leadership of the Abrahamitic house! “Sell me your birthright!” — carelessly, full of disgust Esau throws it at his brother (34): When an Esau is hungry, his “birthright” means less to him than a dish of lentil soup. He will never even begin to understand Yaakov’s “hunger”. This was not a “business” deal — at no time did Yaakov derive any material advantage from it. — This incident clearly demonstrates the extent of the irreparable break, the wide gap between the brothers.

## FAMINE

Ch. 26. As in the days of Abraham (12, 10) the promised

land, supposedly "flowing of milk and honey", was ravished by famine. This was to give expression to the great truth in the life of our forefathers: Eretz Yisroel owes its successful progress to *Gd's nation*, "it vomits forth its inhabitants" once it ceases to be the nation of G'd and becomes again desert and wasteland. This admonition accompanied our people upon its entry into the land when it beheld the two mountains, the desolate Ebal and the fruitful Gerisim: upon Ebal the altar of the Torah was erected — it alone is able to transform Ebal into Gerisim. Land and nation belong together, to each other, none can flourish without the other.

Yizchak's intention to seek refuge in Mizraim is vetoed by the Divine Will. He is to remain in this land and faithfully guard the sacred heritage left to him by Abraham. G'd renews all the blessings that He once bestowed upon Abraham: these lands shall belong to his children, the nation of G'd — blessed by G'd they are to become a blessing to all the nations on the earth (3-5).

#### "GALUTH" IN THE LIFE OF THE FOREFATHERS

(V. 6-11, see Ch. 12, 10 on; also Ch. 20). "In this land" and "in this year", despite famine and privation, divine blessing favored the work of his hands; he did not greedily pile up the rich and plentiful produce but brought it to the market, thus providing "100 markets" (12). Soon, however, mistrust and jealousy were aroused — "the man (in the language of the Philistines) became too great for them" (13). The Galuth began with Yizchak. It is true that Abraham was also a stranger in the land, yet he enjoyed the respect and admiration of the people as the "Prince of G'd". Yizchak, on the other hand, was rebuffed by the jealousy, even undisguised hatred of the population: "Leave us" (16). Yaakov's position appears to be one of complete servitude; — we have here the three stages of the Galuth as represented in the lives



of our forefathers in which they had to prove themselves, and the Divine Covenant underwent its (most crucial) test. These are also the Galuth stages which our nation has to endure, except for a reverse order (s. 3. B. M. 26, 42). As slaves our people upheld the ברית יצחק. ברית יעקב and finally ברית אברהם are yet to stand their test: "emancipated", in the midst of the nations of the world, we are to realize and put into practice the ברית יצחק. To win the respect of the nations by abandoning the Divine Covenant has always resulted in complete disaster. Only our faithful adherence to the Divine Covenant may justify the hope that the nations of the world will learn to look upon us as the true descendants of Abraham deserving of their unreserved recognition and respect.

18-22. Even after the initial rebuttal Yizchak had to suffer from constant interference. The wells dug by his servants become the object of violent arguments — fighting (עשק) and attempts to hinder his activities (שטנה) at every step: "ours is the water" (20); you dug the well, the hole belongs to you, but the water is ours! And now a strange occurrence: at the time when his servants had dug the third well which remained uncontested and Yizchak, for the first time, saw a possibility of staying and living freely and undisturbed (22) — he broke camp *voluntarily* and returned to the place of his birth and childhood where Abraham had lived in fulfilment of his great task (21, 33). This self-imposed isolation resulted in the ensuing appearance of G'd who assures him of His blessing and protection; by reminding him of Abraham, "his servant", G'd indicates what he expects of Yizchak. At once Yizchak erects there Gd's altar and, following his father's example, proclaims in the name of G'd.

Rebuffed, Yizchak voluntarily shunned the Philistines. Now their king is eager to meet him to secure the avowed friendship of "the man whom G'd has blessed" (26-29). It is a climax in the life of Yizchak.

34-35. Significantly the ensuing events in the house of Yizchak are introduced by the following two sentences: Esau marries two Hittite women who offer defiant opposition (מרה) to the ideals of Yizchak and Rivkah and the spirit of the Abrahamic house. Here Esau demonstrated his flagrant inability to perpetuate the Abrahamic life-ideals. What a magnificent "hunter with the mouth" Esau must have been as he succeeded in deceiving his father so effectively that Yizchak was all but ready to bestow upon him the Abrahamic blessing!

## THE BLESSING OF YIZCHAK

### *Rivkah and Yaakov*

Ch. 27. As was emphasized repeatedly, the Torah makes no attempt to hide the weaknesses and mistakes of the great leaders of our people, men or women. They are not in need of defense. This story of Rivkah and Yaakov is the story of a deception and must therefore be accounted for as a "wicked deed". Honesty and straightness (ישׁוּרׁוּן), in firm opposition to any crooked deal, are to be the proud attributes of the Jewish people. G'd does not overlook the slightest transgression in the lives of His righteous ones, as expounded in the comment of the Midrash to this incident: "Father Yaakov caused Esau to cry out bitterly — Esau is revenged when Yaakov's descendants, in Susa, cried out just as bitterly over the descendants of Esau" — "Esau cried three tears: one rolled down from his right eye, another from his left one, and one tear he held back. It is this tear that has salted the bread of our exile with bitter tears". —

What was the motive for Rivkah's action? It is inconceivable that she would plan to obtain by falsehood and treachery the fatherly blessing for her beloved son. Moreover, the return of Esau would inevitably result in stamping

her action as a miserable betrayal. Yet this was Rivkah's very intention. For a long time she had known of Esau's complete unworthiness. Until now she had failed in her attempts to open Yizchak's eyes. Realizing that her husband was ready to bestow upon Esau the Abrahamitic blessing, she felt that the time had come to demonstrate to Yizchak by a drastic action how easy it was to deceive him. The inevitable discovery of the deception was actually part of a careful plan. The success was complete. As Yizchak realized that he had been deceived, his heart was struck with sudden terror; — he saw, as the Sages put it, the Gehinnom wide open before him, saw how he had been deceived all his life — and he proclaimed solemnly: "He shall also be blessed" (33).

Yizchak asks Esau to go on the hunt and to prepare food for his table — "that my *soul* may bless you" (4). This was the great moment when his son was to receive the Abrahamitic blessing. The Abrahamitic convocation of life culminates in the dedication of all talents and activities towards the perpetuation of the ethical and good in life. Even Esau's enjoyment of the hunt could and should serve a good purpose: "*for once* take the weapons of your daily occupation and hunt an animal for *me* and prepare, *yourself*, a tasty dish for me — ". For once Esau's occupation is to be devoted to charity and love because it is the way Yizchak desperately wants him to be, that his *soul* may be happy over him and the blessing bestowed.

Rivkah deems it necessary to act. As his mother she demands blind obedience from Yaakov (8), for she knows that his honesty and sincerity would not tolerate her action. Her only alternative is to make him obey. Whatever Yaakov is about to do is done solely in obedience to his mother. This explains the ever-recurring וַיִּשְׁמַע in the Verses 11-14.

The Abrahamitic blessing implies for the recipient material plenty from Gd's hand to be used in accordance with the Divine Will, dedicated to the service of G'd: He who receives the blessing is to become a source of blessing

for his fellow-men (28-29). Esau owes his material wealth "to the heaven and the earth". His sword is the secret of his power and the master of his fate. Esau conquers the world — but all his conquests "only benefit his brother". For the future does not belong to brutal force: it belongs to the G'd-willed aims, perpetuated by Israel. Only Esau's recognition of this fact and his subsequent voluntary subordination under his brother (יָרַד related to יָרַד to descend, humiliate oneself) can make him an equal "partner", for then Yaakov's demands will cease to be a "yoke upon his shoulder" (39-40).

## ESAU'S HATRED.

### THE MOTHER

Esau offers his brother unending hatred "because of the blessing the father bestowed upon him" (41). It is doubtful whether this refers to the blessing the father gave Yaakov or the one Esau himself received and in which Yizchak predicted Esau's inevitable subordination to his brother.

Esau plots bloody revenge. Rivkah is told of the plans of "her eldest son Esau". She calls immediately "her younger son Yaakov" (42). At the conclusion the following apparently superfluous words are added: "Rivkah was the mother of Yaakov and Esau" (28, 5). All this may refer to the unchanged position of Esau as the elder brother despite the previous events, and also to Rivkah who still considered herself Esau's mother. It motivates her moving plaint: If Esau becomes a murderer "why shall I lose both of you on one day?" (45). Yaakov is to leave the house at once until his brother's anger will have subsided (44). Yet he must never forget that he is "his brother". This trait clearly reveals the noble-mindedness of Rivkah: one could have expected her to report Esau's

plotting to Yizchak in order to justify her own action. Yet she merely explains to her husband that for obvious reasons she intends to send Yaakov away (46).

### YAAKOV LEAVES HIS HOME

Once again Yizchak blesses Yaakov, this time in the full knowledge of his son's responsibility towards the Abrahamic way of life and the future of his people (28, 3-4). In the house of Bethuel he will find the fitting wife to help him build his Jewish house: it is the family which, in spite of Laban, produced a Rivkah — "your mother" (2), as twice repeated in this verse!

In spite of the blessing Yaakov leaves his father's house — a home that combines material and spiritual wealth — a poor and destitute refugee. Esau was to understand fully that his mother's action was not inspired by economic considerations. This chapter concludes on a significant note (6-9): When Esau discovered that his father had blessed Yaakov and then sent him to Padan Aram that he may find a wife there and not among the daughters of Canaan, the realization dawned upon him that "the daughters of Canaan were bad in the eyes of his father" (8). He had never tried to understand the mental anguish (26, 35) that his marriages had brought to his parents. Instead of separating from his Canaanite wives he adds "the daughter of Yishmael to his wives" (9). This very step demonstrated Esau's total lack of ability required for the guidance of the "Abrahamic house".

### YAAKOV'S DREAM. "THE HOUSE OF G'D". HIS VOW

Yaakov leaves his home to found his Jewish house. All

subsequent incidents and events center around this founding of a family from which the tribes of a people are to grow which will proudly bear Yaakov's name. His great heritage: The Jewish home must be the house of G'd where He is to be sought and found. This is not only the G'd of nature or the G'd of history: it is G'd in the house which men erect for Him and His Divine Will.

Wandering along, Yaakov "meets *the place*" (במקום) not (במקום) which commands his attention. The sun had disappeared beyond the horizon and he decides to stay there overnight. He protects his head by building a low wall of stones around it (11) — the first home that he builds for himself. He falls asleep and dreams. A ladder is shown to him, placed "upon the earth" by a supreme power: "its top reached unto heaven" — it is to rise from the earth to the heaven, signifying the close harmony between heaven and earth and the rise of earthly life towards heavenly heights from where it receives its destiny. (Thus the Midrash sees in this ladder "the incline towards the altar", the Sinai, whose breadth extends over the whole earth).

Each new והנה (12-13) introduces a new series of thoughts and ideas. Yaakov sees angels, Divine messengers, executors of the Divine Will on earth. He watches them ascend from the earth to receive Divine directions. He sees them descend בו, against him: according to the Sages they saw in heaven the ideal picture of man as he should be — and now they find him on earth, asleep. They want to meet him in a hostile approach — והנה (a third group of thoughts), "and behold, G'd stands at his side"; it is not אלקים, G'd of the creation who masters all forces and also His angels, it is ה' who is close to His men whom He educated towards the G'd-willed goal.

"I am G'd, the G'd of your father Abraham and the G'd of Yizchak" (13). The grandfather is called "father" and the actual father stands aside like a stranger: The

Torah does not emphasize Yaakov's physical ancestry. It is the implication that counts: Abraham is to be your father — Yizchak is but the link in the chain — you are to become the son and heir to the Abrahamitic convocation of life. Yaakov's house and the Jewish nation are to tackle the task, assisted and reassured by the Divine promise to secure this land for him and for his descendants. From the shining example of Yaakov with his house and his descendants (בֵּן וּבְנוֹתָיו) as a nation, demonstrating G'd in the domestic life and in the life of an entire nation — blessing is to emanate "for all families of the earth" (14). As a final promise G'd assures the first Golus-Jew of His assistance and protection and the certainty of his eventual return; G'd will never leave him, His help is ever-present as long as Yaakov and his descendants are able to live up to the Divine expectations (15).

The immediate impression of the dream-vision is formulated by Yaakov in these words (16-17): *Here* then is G'd, not in heaven — wherever a man without guilt finds rest and peace — *there* is G'd! Gd's glory is not to be found in heaven — its place is in the lives of men. That mortal men should be the bearers of Gd's glory on earth — we understand only too well how this idea with its implied tasks and demands must have filled Yaakov with apprehension: for must not the house of man become a house of G'd "wherein G'd dwells", a house that is to become the "gateway to heaven", — demonstrating the intimate relationship between heaven and earth?

Yaakov dedicates the place and the stone that served as his first home during this memorable night as a monument which he calls "the house of G'd", symbolizing the future role of a place which heretofore lacked significance and derived its name from a hazelnut tree (18-19) — and he pronounces a solemn vow (20-21). He prays for Gd's Divine protection "on the road upon which he is about to embark". As he begins to erect his own house he embarks

upon the road of פרנסה which — according to the Sages — has caused many a struggling man to renounce G'd, lose his morality and become thief and murderer. Yaakov prays that G'd may help him to preserve his moral integrity, to attain a modest position in life, and to let him return peacefully to his parental home. With G'd at his side as (מדת הרחמים) he promises to dedicate all that Divine love bestows upon him to G'd and the perpetuation of His Will; that is the meaning of the giving of "maasser". G'd is also to be אלקימ, the Law-Giver whose demands must be faithfully met. Thus this stone is to be the founding stone for his coming "house of G'd". Here the great truth is eloquently expressed: Jewish houses are to rise as houses of G'd. The so-called "houses of G'd" deserve their sacred character as מקדש only as long as the sanctification of all spheres of Jewish life emanates from them.

## AT THE WELL.

### RACHEL

Ch. 29. This night with its experiences brought about a profound change in Yaakov. While earlier it says "Yaakov went" (28, 10), it is now: "Yaakov lifted up his feet and went": his legs do not carry him -- it is his spirit, aroused by G'd, that guides him towards the goal of his journey. Arriving in Choron he comes upon a well in the midst of a field, surrounded by three flocks of sheep. The mouth of the well was covered by a heavy stone which only the pooled strength of all shepherds managed to remove. They did not trust one another in the land of the Arameans, these shepherds were fearful lest one of them draw more water and more frequently than the others. Yaakov inquires about Laban. Driven by his sense of righteousness he admonishes the strange shepherds to refrain from letting



the "possessions" (צאן not מִקְנֵה) rest aimlessly in broad daylight. In the course of their conversation the shepherds inform him that the girl approaching the well with her flock was Rachel, the daughter of Laban. When he saw the daughter of Laban, "the brother of his mother", and the sheep of "the brother of his mother", he went to the well and ויגל (not ויגלל) pushed (with ease) the stone off the mouth of the well. Then he watered the sheep of "the brother of his mother", (10). — Three times it is emphasized that Laban was the brother of his mother. At this moment Yaakov is guided solely by the thought of his mother. What he did was not a gallant gesture towards a pretty girl. The thought of his mother, the intensity of his devotion to her, combined in creating in his soul an emotional impact that led him to a spontaneous and wholly unforeseen action: He kissed Rachel. That his action was motivated by his close relationship with his mother is borne out by the fact that the kiss was accompanied by tears. At the same time he realized that Rachel must have thought him out of his mind as he embraced and kissed her under tears. At once he withdraws from his cousin and explains his unusual behaviour. (12). — This scene paints a vivid picture of Yaakov's inborn sense of righteousness and responsibility for his fellow-men. It also illustrates his healthy physical condition, the sheer strength of his muscles, qualities which his descendants were to inherit from him and which — aside from spiritual values — were the lone possessions that he took along on his journey.

## LABAN.

### RACHEL AND LEAH

Laban expected to meet in Yaakov the rich heir of his sister's wealthy family. He is disappointed when his nephew relates "all these happenings" (13) and explains the reasons

for his sudden arrival without money or resources. Thus the stunned and somewhat embarrassed יצא in Laban's reply: Although poor, you are welcome here as a relative of the family (14).

From the very beginning of his stay it becomes evident that Yaakov is a skilled and valuable worker (15). For Laban, in an attempt to secure Yaakov's services, offers to reward him in addition to full board in his house. Yaakov loves the beautiful Rachel. As to Leah, the Verse accords her the flattering words: she had soft and tender eyes. Yaakov is ready to work seven years for Rachel. At the end of these years of servitude Rachel had already become his wife. Thus **הבנה את אשתו** (21) — these seven years constituted the **קדושין**.

Laban breaks his promise, feebly attempting to justify his betrayal by pointing to the local custom of taking it for granted that a man who asks for the hand of a younger daughter is also thinking of the older one; for the custom did not permit the younger daughter to marry before her older sister. Leah must be married before "we" can give Rachel to you. This "we" embodies Laban's feeble attempt at justification of a flagrant betrayal. Needless to add: You must serve me for another seven years! (26-27).

### THE MOTHER OF THE JEWISH TRIBES

"He *also* loved Rachel" (30) indicates that Yaakov also loved Leah and never let her feel his disappointment over her father's betrayal. She was undoubtedly the less loved one — yet it was she whom G'd chose to become the ancestress of our people. As bride and wife she fought for the love of her husband — but only as mother did she fully succeed. With calm confidence in Gd's protective closeness she receives her children in whose names she

immortalized the longing and happiness of the Jewish marriage. Leah, the sad one, experienced the pleasant and peaceful aspects of married life, while Rachel, the "lucky" wife, was confronted with more serious prospects. The happiness of Leah's marriage grew steadily with each child. "G'd has looked upon my affliction" (32); — until now Rachel's preferred position was clearly evident (הַרְרָה). The situation changed somewhat with Reuben's birth, but it was obvious that Leah had still not succeeded in gaining her husband's undivided love (שָׂמֵעַ). Thus she calls her second son Shimon (33). It was the birth of her third son which restored in her the feeling of complete equality as she expresses the hope that henceforth the longed for, intimate companionship with Yaakov would become reality. It is not she but Yaakov who names this third son, vividly illustrating their newly won close relationship (34). After the birth of the fourth child, she no longer required manifestations of Yaakov's increased love — she devotes herself wholeheartedly and filled with gratitude towards G'd to the happy duties of a mother (35).

Ch. 30. Rachel remained childless. She ascribes her fate to the apathy of Yaakov who appeared to be happy with Leah's children and failed to plead with G'd on Rachel's behalf, since she knew quite well that Yaakov's mother had become mother only as a result of Yizchak's fervent plea. (1). In her passionate longing for children, her only possible contribution to the erection of the Yaakov-house, she takes drastic action (as once Sarah before her, Ch. 16): she gives him her maid as a wife. She realizes that G'd has dealt harshly with her by denying her children; yet she feels richly rewarded at the birth of "her" first child whose spiritual mother she is (6). The arrival of the second child strengthens her conviction that it is a "Divine contest" between her and her sister, fought for a Divine and sacred goal: the building of the future nation of G'd (8).

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Driven by the same desire, Leah follows the example set by her sister: she also feels richly rewarded by the child her maid bore for her (13). She expresses this feeling clearly at the birth of the next son (13): "my happiness increases", "the women will praise my continuing happiness" (אִשׁוּרָה is the step, אִשְׂרָי means: to advance, "step ahead" in joy and happiness).

### THE WIVES.

Leah's whole life, in its serious moments and also in its intimate relationship to Rachel, is dominated by the great idea of her contribution to the future of her people. This is clearly demonstrated by the ensuing story (14-18). While Yaakov works on the field, the two wives sit together. In the evenings he alternates between them. During the harvest-time, Reuben, still a small boy, returns from the field with flowers. Rachel asks for them. "What impudence"! is Leah's joking reply, followed by the remark: "You have got my husband — now you also want to have my flowers?". It is inconceivable that these words were meant to be serious, for what do cheap field flowers count as compared to the love of a husband! Leah gives her some of the flowers. Now, decides Rachel, because you were so kind to me I will relinquish my right and let you have my husband this evening. G'd acceded to Leah's plea for more children. And finally Rachel's great moment also comes when G'd "removes the blemish" from her (23).

### YEARS OF SERVITUDE.

#### PROMISE — AND BETRAYAL

For fourteen hard years Yaakov served and worked, not to support a family — but to win two wives, both

poor, without dowry. The fruit of these fourteen years of servitude which saw the establishment of Yaakov's house, was the most precious gift that mankind was to receive from Yaakov: the Jewish family life. These fourteen years demonstrate clearly the position of the Jewish wife in her relationship to the Jewish man. The end of the fourteen years found Yaakov as poor as ever. He wants to return home **אל מקומי ולארצי**: Although he had a place to live, it was not a place of his own, for the land was but a promised one, the land of the future. That is why he says **לארצי** (not **אל ארצי**): he wants to return in order to build his own independent house where he may bring up the children "for the land" which was destined to become the homeland for his descendants.

Laban would like to keep Yaakov, preferably under the same conditions. He approaches Yaakov in the best tradition of the "pious" crook. Of course he would never admit that he wants to continue Yaakov in his service because he is an excellent worker. Too much praise, he feels, would result in "undue" demands for increased pay. He talks slyly, "piously" (as do many even in our "enlightened" time who seek to substitute **נהו"ש**, superstition, for true piety): There is no actual reason for my desire to have you stay with me, except for a sort of **נהו"ש**; it almost appears as though 'ה, the G'd whom you worship, has blessed me for your sake, since you are such a pious man! I would hate to have such a pious man leave my house (27). **ויאמר** Laban had hoped to flatter the "pious man" into changing his mind. Yaakov makes no reply. The disappointed "master" resorts to more attractive arguments: "You may determine your own wages and I will gladly pay them" (28). Whereupon Yaakov replies: You know very well that I am not your "lucky charm". G'd has certainly not blessed your house on my account. He has blessed my zeal, my hard work ("my way") — do you not think it is time for me to start building my own house? (30); — "What shall I give you?" — You need not *give* me anything. Yaakov knows

Laban the senselessness of maintaining idols as protectors that could not even protect themselves (19).

The fact that Laban, in full pursuit, is accompanied by his "gang" (3) indicates his intention to use brutal force. The "Aramean" held that Yaakov had no right to leave and to take things along without the master's permission! G'd warns Laban in a dream-vision not to talk to Yaakov "of good or evil" (24): the good of Laban could be certain to be evil; his conception of the difference between good and evil was the choice between cunning or open force.

### THE JEWISH WORKER

The ensuing scene (25 ff.) reveals Laban's evil nature which is attacked by Yaakov in flaming words. That he did not leave poor as he arrived, he owes to the merit of his fathers. (פחד יצחק), the "fear" of Yizchak, refers to the frightful moment of the Akeda when Yizchak felt at his throat the sharp edge of the knife; it defines the climax of moral perfection; Yaakov thinks of this moment when he speaks of (פחד יצחק). But he knew that the work of his hands would find the recognition of G'd (42). Significant is the comment of the Sages: Work is more precious than the good deeds (זכות) of parents: the latter saved but material goods; the former rescued human souls.

### THE RETURN

Ch. 32, 2-3. At Yaakov's departure from his parental home twenty years before the Torah says: ויפגע במקום (28, 11), *he* met the place. While the angels seek G'd in heaven, Yaakov experienced the great revelation that G'd wants to find His Shechina-proximity on earth in the "house of G'd" that he expects men to erect. Now as he returns

the “angels of G’d met *him*”: his appearance was an event for them as for the first time they beheld a “house” (family), a group of people in whose midst there dwelled the Shechina of G’d. The “camp” of the angels seeks the camp of men wherein dwells the Divine Shechina: they found it in the “camp” of Yaakov. Thus he names this place significantly: Machanaim (double camp).

## YAAKOV’S MESSAGE TO ESAU.

### ANXIETY

After a separation of more than twenty years Yaakov steadies himself for the meeting with Esau. We have traced the reasons for his poverty as he left the parental home. Now he returns a rich man. He feels that he has to tell Esau how he came to acquire his wealth. “As a stranger I stayed with Laban” (32, 5) — these words mirror the bitterness of the past years. It is hard enough to be a foreigner without rights — to be a *stranger* with *Laban* was the worst possible lot. “I was held there until now” — I would have liked to come earlier — but until six years ago I had only my wives and children, no possessions of my own. Under such adverse circumstances I attained what I now own. All this he tells his brother as he adds the hope that his long suffering and his painful rise to prosperity may serve to atone for past incidents. How different is Yaakov’s attitude towards Esau as compared to his procedure against a Laban: What power lies in the realization of one’s own innocence — how depressing is it to confront a man of whom you know that he has taken offense at something you have done and who cannot understand the reasons that motivated your actions, however justified they may be!

Thus “Yaakov feared” for, despite assurances of Divine protection, there is, according to the Sages, “no absolute assurance for the righteous in this world”. Every promise,

every assurance may become void through one wrong step — this is a worry that never leaves the righteous ones. Thus Yaakov worried as he dreaded the approaching meeting with Esau who marched towards him at the head of a heavily armed band. To save what could be saved — “he divided” (8). Similarly the dispersion of the Jewish people in the Galuth was also a means of preservation and rescue — “it was an act of charity when G’d dispersed Israel among the nations” (Pessachim 87 b), making it impossible for Esau’s sword to harm our people in its entirety. Thus here also: Yaakov divides his camp; and even if the one “poor” camp (מחנה הנשאר, feminine) should fall *victim* to Esau’s sword, there remains the hope that the other camp (מחנה הנשאר, masculine) may be saved (9).

After these preparations he seeks strength in prayer. His cry of anxiety reaches G’d. He is conscious of his own smallness and unimportance as the recipient of many Divine favors. Divine attention and favors must be deserved through good deeds which are the measure of a man’s greatness. The more we *have*, the less important we may *be* — that is the real danger. “Rescue me from my brother” whose hate may be justified — “rescue me from Esau” whose revenge may be undeserved — save me for the sake of my children upon whom rests the security and lasting peace of my future house (10-12).

There is no direct reply to these cries of anxiety. The answer is implied in the incident that is to occur shortly. As our Galuth-nation in later centuries sought salvation in prayer and attempted to pacify Esau with its material wealth, so Yaakov in this desperate situation turns to the same means. He divided the gifts which he has selected for Esau in separate herds (each some distance away from the other) among his chief shepherds (17). Arriving in succession, each shepherd with his flock was to create the expectation in Esau that he would now meet Yaakov (19); instead, further gifts were to arrive making it impossible



for Esau to let his brother feel the full fury of his wrath. In this way Yaakov hoped to appease Esau gradually. "Perhaps", he reasons, "he will lift up my face which I hardly dare to raise to him", i.e. perhaps he will forgive me so that I can again look up at him (21).

At first he intends to remain on this side of the Yabboq. His uneasiness, however, does not let him rest and he takes his family and all that was his across the river (23-24). The Torah adds (25) that he alone remained behind. The motive (according to the Sages, Chulin 91 a): he wants to go back to make sure that nothing had been forgotten. "The righteous ones cherish their material possession more than they love themselves, for they have acquired them through righteousness". Divine blessing is responsible for even the smallest of their possessions which they treasure as a sacred bond that may not be allowed to be spoiled or go to waste and whose every use they have to account for. A huge sum is worth no more than a pin if it is to be spent for charitable purposes — a pin is worth more than a millicent if it is to go to waste.

## THE NOCTURNAL STRUGGLE — ITS

### WORLD-HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

At a time when Yaakov was completely alone (25) someone attacked him, fought with him determinedly to gain the upper hand. It was this nocturnal experience that constituted Gd's answer to his anxious prayers. Here was מלאך (31), a Divinely designated force embodied in Esau. For even Esau's physical and material strength is created by G'd who directs it to subordinate itself to Yaakov's lofty ideals and spiritual supremacy. (see 25, 23). Yet as long as the night rules the earth, Esau aims at making Yaakov's position untenable on earth as he attempts to lift him up in struggle in order to crush him forever. In this he is unsuccessful. He seizes Yaakov's hip, i.e. the muscle which controls the thigh-bone and thereby man's firm step. Yaakov's stubborn resistance causes the muscle with it

sinews to jerk loose and Yaakov to be afflicted with a permanent limp: Esau can never crush Yaakov; but he is able to impair his firm step on earth. According to the Sages (Chulin, see above), the dust whirling up from this struggle rose unto the world-throne of G'd, for it is a world-historic struggle that flares up throughout the history of mankind. It lasts as long as there is night on earth (25-26).

With dawn approaching, the adversary proposes to retire, but now Yaakov demands a blessing: it is the purpose of this struggle to make the enemy realize Yaakov's right to the blessing and that Esau's material aims must be subordinated to the goals for which Yaakov strives (27).

The adversary (Esau's potent force) recognizes this fact: If Yaakov, who "grasped the heel", could not be conquered by sheer physical power, if he proved to be the "superior one" (שרה) "with G'd and with men" (29), then it is G'd, Divine Omnipotence alone which grants Yaakov this superior power: whoever speaks of יעקב may know: ישראל (שרה אל), it is G'd who is the Superior One! — Only later (35, 10) G'd names Yaakov, Yisroel. (Here it is יאמר, there יקרא).

30. For the duration of the nocturnal struggle the enemies of Israel have but one purpose: "Let us make a name for ourselves" (11, 4). Yet when morning dawns and Yaakov demands to know the name of his adversaries, they must remain silent, for then every name pales before G'd "whose name is "the Only One". Then will be great the name of those who, with Abraham, know but one goal: to call upon men in the name of G'd"; — it is they to whom G'd has promised: "I will make your name great" (12, 2).

32. Twenty years before, comment the Sages, when Yaakov left his home, he walked into the setting sun, and ever since his life was a succession of nocturnal happenings. Now, as he returns, the sun in his life is rising: he was neither beaten nor crushed — but he limped.

## GID HANOSHE

33. The Divine Law has preserved for all time the memory of this incident by the prohibition of the Gid Hanoshe. This could certainly not serve the purpose of informing Yaakov's descendants of the fact that their forefather limped as a result of a "wrestling match". This prohibition rather serves to immortalize and revive ever anew eternal truths which are of basic importance for the proud destiny of our people.

גיד הנשה, "the vein of weakness" (related to נשה, the creditor on whom the debtor depends; also נשים, women). By tearing it loose the enemy broke Yaakov's strength to plant his feet firmly on the ground. Thus the expression "vein of weakness" is not so much an anatomical term as it is an historical reference. This vein must not be eaten by Yaakov's sons. Whenever they sit down to eat, the Book of Life is to confront them with this great admonition: During the nocturnal struggle Esau can neither conquer nor crush Yaakov, but he is able to tear the vein from its socket and impair his firm step on earth. Yaakov goes through history, limping. Yet this physical weakness is needed to open Esau's eyes to perceive the real forces that alone are responsible for Yaakov's invincibility. In joyful devotion Yaakov's nation is to renounce its claim to this vein, realizing that its continued existence through the course of history depends neither on this vein nor on its loss. If Yaakov falls, it is not because his material potency does not measure up to Esau's; if he falls, it will be because he failed to cultivate the Divine protection. When Israel stands firm it is not because of its physical and material strength — it stands, because G'd carries it on the eagle's wings of His Omnipotence.

## THE MEETING WITH ESAU. SEPARATION.

Ch. 33 describes the meeting between the two brothers. Yaakov watches Esau approach at the head of his soldiers. He knew well in advance the character the meeting would assume and once again he takes the necessary precautions (1-2).

4.) Esau's kiss may be feigned but the tears streaming down from his eyes are genuine. Esau was human, after all. It is this evidence of "humaneness" which makes this "family" meeting a world-historic event: the future belongs not to the sword and brute force, but to the humanity which creates the bond of equality between the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong.

5.) Esau notices the wives and the children. His question "what are they to you?" evokes from Yaakov merely a reference to his children with whom G'd has blessed him. Thus, with great delicacy of feeling, he characterizes the roles his wives play in his life: to him they are the mothers of his children.

6-7.) The order (see V. 2) in which the wives and children approach Esau and their attitude at meeting the dreaded adversary are exceedingly significant. Yaakov probably instructed them to approach Esau with humble respectfulness. Thus, the maid-servants and their children advanced first, as their past record of servitude led Yaakov to expect that they would bow to his wishes. He was right. They advanced, *הֵנָּה* *they* (with special emphasis) together with their children, bow down (therefore *וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּיֵן*, feminine, referring to the maids). Then Leah approaches, the proud and noble woman and main pillar of the Yaakov-house — a Leah does not bow before Esau — her children do it for her (therefore *וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּוּ*, masculine, referring to the children). Now it was Rachel's turn to come up — there Joseph steps protectively in front of his mother. Rachel, anxious not to draw Esau's anger, bows quickly, completely disarming

Esau, so that Joseph also bows, וישתחוו, and thus they both bow down.

Esau has conquered his evil nature temporarily. At this moment Yaakov looks up to him as his "Judge" (10) who has forgiven all that has happened. He prays that he may accept his presents as מנחה, as homage and also as a sign that he refuses to derive material advantages from the ברכה he received from his father. Yaakov is eager to demonstrate that he is content with all that G'd has given him and that he desires nothing further. —

On this note the brothers separate. It is still a dream of the future that Esau and Yaakov will walk together in unity (12). For the time being Esau "goes his own way" (16). Yaakov prepares to build his first real house, still outside the borders of Canaan (17).

#### HOME. — מוֹזֶבֶה AND מַצֵּבָה.

Yaakov returns home שלם: during the long years, while acquiring his material wealth, he succeeded in preserving his moral "integrity" (18). Here, on the land promised by G'd to his descendants, ויצב שם מוֹזֶבֶה, "he built an altar as a monument" (20). This combination of מַצֵּבָה and מוֹזֶבֶה is found only here. To describe the building of an altar the Torah commonly uses the term עשה or בנה. In the lives of our forefathers we meet מַצֵּבָה as well as מוֹזֶבֶה. מַצֵּבָה, the single stone, produced by nature, served them as a monument for all that G'd, Master of nature and of human life, has done for them; upon it, with נסכים, they paid homage to G'd for his blessed gifts. Upon the מוֹזֶבֶה, joined together by individual stones, and thereby product of their human action, they vowed with קרבנות the devotion of their lives to the Divine Will. After מתן תורה מוֹזֶבֶה replaced the מַצֵּבָה as the sole center of Divine worship which, performed through the מַצֵּבָה, and isolated from the

מזבה, becomes flagrant sin. The faithful fulfillment of the Divine demands through the תר"ג מצות means to transform our entire life into a living revelation of G'd — for G'd wants to be perceived and revealed not in our fate but in our deed, and He shapes our fate in accordance with our deeds: The נסכים-offerings are also to be brought on the מזבה, and on the מזבה alone, representing the earth elevated to G'd, upon which Gd's nation vows in קרבנות to transform the earth, with their deeds, into a הר אל, a mountain of G'd. The מצבה, divorced from the מזבה, disappears completely. Upon entering the land which was to be the home of the Divine Law, Yaakov expresses in the שם מזבה ויצב what he feels this place will in the future expect from his descendants: their מזבה, upon which they vow to shape their entire earthly lives in accordance with the Divine demands, shall become the lone monument of their worship of G'd.

While the story of the forefathers usually contains the expression ויקרא בשם ה' meaning that they called upon men to learn to accept G'd as the Master over heaven and earth, it says here significantly ויקרא לו: for what he wanted to proclaim through this מזבה, erected as מצבה, he actually proclaimed to himself and to his family. This was the real purpose: to make himself and his family conscious of the great Jewish truth that אל, the Divine Omnipotence which is responsible for all that moves heaven and earth, aims to become אלקי ישראל, Israel's Law-Giver and Judge, evident not only in Israel's destiny, but, above all, visible in Israel's deed.

### SHECHEM

Ch. 34. The event described in this chapter, not unlike subsequent events in the history of this first Yaakov-family, is designed to clarify the necessity of purification in the "iron smelting pot" of suffering (in preparation of

transforming these people into a Nation of G'd, destined to become heralds of the Divine Will) despite the good and noble traits already evident in this family: according to the Sages, G'd has selected us as His tools not because we were the most willing, but because we were the most stubborn, the most stiff-necked nation, so that the wonderful power of Gd's Omnipotence, the wonderful force of His Law may find through us its most convincing demonstration.

Dinah, Leah's daughter, ventured forth to look around among the daughters of the land in order to get acquainted with the strange girls. While this "exodus" from the family circle into the midst of foreigners became the direct cause of her mistreatment, she was nevertheless "born to Yaakov", a worthy daughter of Yaakov. But she was young and curious (1). Shechem, the "prince of the land", meets her and violates her (2). Her moral purity and natural charm turned his sensual lust into a real desire for a normal and permanent relationship (3). He approaches his father: "take this girl for me as a wife"; proud words of a man who is used to command. He takes it for granted that a move of his hand would bring the desired result — a strange "Jew-girl" (4). Yaakov, informed of the crime, maintains silence until his sons return home (5). His lack of action reveals the peculiar aspects of the affair. If it had been possible to stop Shechem by legal means, it would surely have been more impressive if the aging father himself had gone to the prince to reclaim his dishonored daughter.

*As soon as they heard of the incident, the sons returned home (?): it pained them to know that their sister was no longer pure and innocent. The crime that had been committed made "their anger burn" as they voice their indignation over "the infamy done to Israel" which וכן לא יעשה could never have happened if one had respected the "victorious Godlines" in "Yaakov's daughter", the daughter of the defenseless and weak.*

While they had been taught (Gid Hanoshe) to leave

the "vein of the firm step" to the other nations, this incident which jeopardized purity and morality made them painfully aware of the occasional need for taking the sword of Esau into their own hands! — The respective fathers assume peculiar positions in this affair. Yaakov's silence results from the assumption that he, the "old one", would only be laughed at. Shechem's father, on the other side, feels that any attempt to approach Yaakov would be a hopeless undertaking. The brothers, he expects, will lend him and his son a willing ear. Of course, neither he nor his son even think of returning Dinah to her family and then perhaps ask her in marriage! — The brothers have but one desire: to free their sister from the strangers. They know that the action which they are determined to take might not find Yaakov's approval, and they, therefore, speak before of their father וידברו (13). Ordinarily it would be inconceivable that the whole populace should submit to circumcision so that Shechem might keep Dinah. But the words ויצאי שער העיר indicate that they were poor peasants, completely dependent on their feudal lord, who daily went out (ויצאי) to work on the fields. (In connection with Abraham the term באי שער העיר is used, referring to a people's assembly which had the decisive vote).

25 ff.) Little could be said against the brother's killing of Shechem and Chamor. Yet they also killed the other defenseless inhabitants and even plundered the city. Yaakov severely reproaches them: You have spoiled my good name (30), you have brought me a bad reputation — you have acted neither justly nor wise. They reply curtly: "Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?" (31). This fellow would not have dared to do what he did had he not dealt with a strange, forlorn Jewish girl. This knowledge drove them to their act of vengeance. They wanted to be feared from now on so that no one would ever dare to repeat the crime.

It was a noble, holy spirit which inspired Shimon and



Levi even though the means to which they resorted were to be condemned. Yet on his deathbed father Yaakov cursed their action, but their spirit he praised with blessing recognition; their spirit has given glory to the history of our people.

### BETH-EL

Ch. 35. The preceding events showed clearly how living with the Canaanite population endangered the family of Yaakov. Instead of lingering here, he should have proceeded directly to the place where, during the flight from his father's house, he had solemnly proclaimed the vow of his life and laid the cornerstone of his future. Then he should have returned to the land where his parents and grandparents lived and gained the respect and thereby the protective friendship of the population.

The Divine word now reminds him of his duties. He is to return to "Beth-El" and stay there with his family (ושב שם) to be inculcated with the spirit represented by this place: for here he had promised to build the monument (מצבה) which he established as a "house of G'd" that will prove worthy of the presence of G'd. The fulfillment of this vow means: to erect a מצבה where until now there stood a מצבה; to give his house the character of a house of G'd through the מצבה of his active life in the service of G'd (1). Yaakov prepares his family for this "ascent to Beth-El" as his people will once prepare for the day of the Sinai: he demands the removal of all "strange gods" (2), of all objects, used in Shechem, that served the perpetuation of idolatry. He further demands: "cleanse yourselves and wash your clothes" as the Jewish people did when it received the Torah at the Sinai (2 B. M., 19, 14). The place, once called Beth-El, (28, 19) he now names "El Beth-El" (7): here G'd has assured him of His assistance; He fulfilled His promise: that it was given to Yaakov to

build "Beth-El", he owes exclusively to the omnipresent help of G'd; what a pagan world hopes to obtain from its supposed and varied idols (אלהי נכר) — Yaakov receives from G'd, the Only One: אלקימ to him is אל (see also 1, 1).

8.) Here in Beth-El Deborah, the nurse of Rivkah, died. The Torah does not elaborate on the reasons for her presence in Yaakov's camp. Either Rivkah sent her to him with a message, or she had followed him from Laban's house in order to see Rivkah once more whom she had nursed as a child. Appropriately Yaakov names the tree growing over her grave "the oak of weeping": in mourning the passing of the aged nurse, he actually honors the memory of his mother.

#### "ISRAEL"

9.) Once more on his return G'd appears to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to "Israel" (10): towards the outside the nation which he is to found shall be a unified whole (גוי), and a "multitude of peoples" in its inner structure (11): it is to become a "model-nation" which, in a small and yet exact pattern, is to show all the peculiar qualities of the various national groups on earth. In its tribes, vastly differing in profession and character, all faculties will be represented: it will be a nation of war and of trade, of agriculture and of science; yet all united by the great convocation of life: "Israel" — to help the Divine rule to its glorious recognition on earth. The Kingdom of G'd on earth is to find its first realization in Gd's nation, an example to all mankind. For that purpose G'd assures him of the certain possession of the Promised Land. His descendants, however, if they remain faithful to this idea, will once receive the whole earth as a spiritual heritage (12), ולזרעך אהרניך אתן את הארץ, (Siporno). —

The place where he received this revelation is also called Beth-El (15) — for Beth-El rises wherever men

are willing to pave the way for Gd's presence. His presence is not bound to a certain locality but depends on the men who devote their lives to the perpetuation of His Will. Thus, it says here significantly: "G'd went up from *him* — in the place where He spoke with him" (13).

### RACHEL'S DEATH. REUBEN.

16.) On the way, only a "piece of land" (כַּבְרַת אֲרֵץ), i.e. a short distance away from Efrath, Rachel gives birth to a son. She dies immediately thereafter. She calls her child בֶּן אֲוֵנִי, son of my sorrow (אֲוֵן refers to the painful loss of a "possession" אֲוֵן). The father gives him the name בֶּן יְמִיִן, "son of the right hand", son of the strength inspired by his beloved wife with the birth of this child. "Yaakov" (20), in his sorrow, takes courage as "Yisroel" (4). He continues the journey but pitches his tent, which he used to share with Rachel, (therefore אֶהְלֵה, feminine) some distance away from the tower of the flocks around which the family camped. As long as Rachel was alive, Yaakov also lived with Leah and the other wives. After her death he separated from them. This may possibly have been the motive which caused Reuben to remind his father of his duty to reestablish his relationship with Leah. The Torah criticizes his action as an encroachment upon his father's marriage rights. The attempt was unsuccessful. Yaakov's isolation continues — and thus there remain "the sons of Yaakov — twelve" (22).

### YIZCHAK'S DEATH

Yaakov returned to his father (27). While at Abraham's death it says "Yizchak and Yishmael" buried him, mentioning Yizchak, the younger brother, before Yishmael, it says

here at Yizchak's death: "his sons Esau and Yaakov buried him". This may be a further proof that Yaakov never attempted to take advantage of either the בכורה or the בריכה. Unhesitatingly, he let the older brother have precedence in all matters.

## ESAU'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Ch. 36 contains Esau's genealogical record. While he lived in Seir heretofore (32, 4), he does not seem to have lived there permanently. His family and his possessions (1-5) were still in Canaan. Only after Yaakov's return did he move his entire household to Seir (8). The reason: Canaan, where they were tolerated as strangers, failed to offer sufficient space for both (7); to this was added Esau's uncomfortable feeling whenever he was together with Yaakov; true, the past was forgotten, but the spiritual and moral contrast between the two brothers was too great to be bridged. So he journeyed "before his brother Yaakov" אל ארץ, to another land (6). Significantly the Torah neglects to mention here the name of the new land: all Esau desired was to get away from Yaakov — any other country would do.

Thus, the further development of Esau's house was entirely different from the path of suffering that comprises the history of Yaakov's house: while Yaakov's descendants languished under the slavery of Mizraim and did not yet enjoy the guidance of their first leader, Moshe (31), Esau established his state with his sword, complete with princes and kings.

YAAKOV'S FAMILY HISTORY.  
JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Ch. 37. After his many sojournings, Yaakov at last hopes to settle quietly (וישב) in the land where his father had stayed but fleetingly (גור). Still, in accordance with the Divine plan, the time for a permanent settlement had not yet come. We stand at the beginning of תלדות יעקב, the family history of Yaakov in the land of Canaan. What we shall bear in the further course of this narrative does not at all conform with the ideals of a Jewish house: The ensuing chapters tell of jealousy and hate which do not even halt at outright crime. We are made to realize that Yaakov's descendants, despite several sordid aspects of their history, have become the most humane nation on earth whose family life, with its love for parents and for children and its ability to preserve its character under the most adverse conditions, became a shining example for the peoples of the world. We realize that the Jewish nation owes this position to the triumph of education through the Divine Law.

"Joseph, being seventeen years old, was a shepherd of the flocks with his brothers" (2). Only the daily work brought him together with the brothers, the sons of Leah. "As a lad he was together with the sons of Bilah and the sons of Zilpah, the wives of his father". His mother died when he was very young. Benjamin was too young to be a companion for the lad. As a "lad" he did not feel at home with his step-brothers. He is attracted by the sons of the handmaids, "the wives of his father", who do not receive him as a brother but are willing to subordinate themselves to Joseph, who thus betrays early talents of a future ruler. Perhaps as a lad he had a tendency towards vanity and was rather susceptible to flattery. What the sons of the handmaids told him about the other brothers (דבבתם), he

promptly forwarded to his father רעה, with evil intentions. Yet, despite these faults, he was outstanding in many ways. Not Yaakov, but "Israel" saw in him the most distinguished of his sons, his בן זקונים (see 21, 7). The fact that Yaakov loved Joseph more than all his other sons and set him apart by giving him a special garment, indicates weaknesses that were to have serious repercussions. The brothers hated Joseph "and could not speak peaceably with him" (4), i.e. in a manner which could have preserved the peace.

### JOSEPH'S DREAMS

He has a dream and tells his brothers about it. As he begins his story, they turn away from him (5). He implores them: you must hear this dream! (6). The thrice repeated והנה emphasizes three motives for the dream. In his dream Joseph sees himself at peace with his brothers and not at all separated: together we wanted to gather the small sheaves (אלומה) which each of us had bound, and make them, in the midst of the field, into a large heap of sheaves (אלומיט); but my sheaf refused, arose and stood upright — and now the other sheaves gathered around mine and bowed to it! —

Of course, they were but shepherds now, and only much later their descendants were to become a people, devoted to agriculture. Was Joseph thinking of the future? Do you plan to become our king, or perhaps you would like to rule already now! They hated him all the more because of the contents of the dream as well as his impudence (this is what they took it to be) in telling them such stories (8). — As to the other dream, the brothers at first did not fully grasp its significance in relation to their own future. Only after they heard their father comment on the dream, they began to take it seriously and became jealous of the place the future held for Joseph (9-11).

THE CRIME AND ITS MOTIVES

While the incident that follows has no real justification, it is important to clarify its motives. We are not dealing with a gang of hoodlums who do not think anything of committing a murder for the sake of a laced coat and hurt feelings. Rightly Siporno comments that the brothers, when their conscience began to bother them (42, 21), did not seem to regret their actual crime as much as the cruelty that was employed, indicating that they did not consider their action to be a real crime. Their peculiar attitude may perhaps be explained by the following consideration: after they saw that their father also saw in the second dream more than just a dream — and even gave it a chance of actual realization (V. 11 “the father kept the matter in mind”), they were convinced that Joseph was a threat to their independence and liberty. “They left” (12, a sentence by itself), went far away to Shechem where once before they had formed a united front to revenge the violated honor of their sister. Now they saw — or believed — their rights and independence threatened by Joseph’s burning ambition. Was not their brother’s lust for power in striking contrast with the Abrahamic convocation of life which called for the unity of all men in love and justice under the rulership of G’d? Had not Nimrod’s kingdom become a curse to humanity and was the same not true of the royal might that Esau established with his sword? Was now the house of Yaakov also to be enslaved by the chains of such ambition? —

Yaakov senses the cleavage between Joseph and the brothers and at once determines to stop it from widening. Joseph must go to his brothers. He is ready. His conscience is clear. His heart knows no desire for royal power.

18.) When the brothers see him approach from afar ויתנכלו אותם, like ונתנחלתם אתם “you should acquire them for yourselves” (dative). נכל (נוכל is the deceitful

one, the swindler) means "to look upon someone as a deceiver". Here (hithpael): in their minds (dative) he presented himself as a deceiver, they saw in him a dangerous rival, להטיירו, guilty enough to deserve death.

## REUBEN

21-25.) Reuben's attitude is puzzling. His presence appears to be accidental, or he may not have approved of their intentions that led them to Shechem. Now he resolutely opposes their plan to kill Joseph: "We will not slay him" — I, the eldest brother, will not tolerate it! The repeatedly emphasized ויאמר hints at a lengthy discussion that must have taken place. He proposes a new plan which he hopes would save the brother. It appears that he left temporarily as witness his desperation when he finds the pit empty upon his return. "I, whither shall I go" (30), i.e. where will I henceforth be able to find peace of mind. Was the reason for his desperation that he did not act with sufficient energy to prevent the crime and thus failed to complete the Mizva he had begun? Was he lacking in determination because he himself felt guilty (see 35, 22), and the knowledge of his own weakness robbed him of the strength for a more resolute action? Furthermore: the fear created by Joseph's "threat" to their independence had driven the brothers to their crime. Reuben was the first-born son. He may have felt that responsibility for the crime rested primarily upon him.

## THE SALE OF JOSEPH

The brothers wanted to sell Joseph to a passing caravan of Ishmaelites (27) who would probably take him to their native land after disposing of their merchandise in Egypt (25). This explains why they never thought Joseph to be



in Egypt. However Midianite “merchants” (actually slave dealers) stole a march upon them (28), drew Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites merchants who brought him to Egypt. Thus it says Ch. 38, 1: Potiphar “bought him from the hands of the Ishmaelites”. The remark at the end of this chapter, “the Medanites (probably identical with Midianites) sold him into Egypt”, may be understood as an indirect reference: by selling him to the Ishmaelites, they had actually sold him **לְמִצְרַיִם**, “into Mizraim”. — While the brothers thus did not actually sell Joseph, they did nothing to prevent the sale, and the entire responsibility rested upon them.

#### THE FATHER'S GRIEF AND SORROW

The father's shock is profound: “a wild animal has devoured him” — thus he pictures the loss of his beloved child; “torn, torn to pieces is Joseph” — bringing home the awful happening with all its implications (33). He rends his clothes. (**בָּגְדוֹ**, clothing show man in his outward appearance — with this loss Yaakov's life has been dealt a cruel blow.) **שָׂמְלָה** is the garment which covers the bare body; Yaakov rends his clothes down to the body. Instead of a soft garment he puts on a coarse dress uncomfortably reminding him at every moment and at every move that he has no right to be happy and gay. His sons and daughters-in-law “arose” (35) to comfort him: They themselves were overcome with grief and had to summon courage to comfort the father. But how to comfort him when, at the sight of the inconsolable, old father, they are tortured by bitter remorse! Why did none of them make an attempt to heal the wound by announcing: he is alive! Yet this would have been the greatest cruelty: in the minds of parents a dead child is not lost; a spoiled, undutiful child — more than lost! They had to remain silent if they did

not want to increase their father's grief a thousand times.

Yaakov refuses to accept comfort. He will mourn his child until the end of his days. "Thus his father mourned for him". This is the final remark and refers to the future: whenever his family was gay, the father's eyes filled with hidden tears.

### JOSEPH IN MIZRAIM

36.) Joseph was sold to Potiphar who was a טריים, an officer in Pharaoh's household, the "prince of the cooks". In Pharaoh's state, the most important state of ancient times, we meet "princes" of the cooks, bakers etc., a significant fact. In an ancient state of Egyptian dimensions where the kings assumed Divine status, a ray of reflected splendor also shone upon those who were allowed to serve the exalted ruler. — However, the office of the "prince of cooks" involved another terrible assignment: the slaughterer of animals was at the same time slaughterer שר הטבחים of human beings: Nebuzaradan (Kings 11 25, 9), as שר הטבחים, was also the royal court's chief executioner!

### IN THE HOUSE OF YAAKOV. YEHUDA.

Ch. 38. The crime committed against Joseph had bitter repercussions on the family life of Yaakov's house. Yehuda leaves his brothers (1). Their relations appear to have become rather strained, especially in their contact with Yehuda who gave the idea and supplied the leadership for the sad deed (37, 26-27). Yehuda receives a severe punishment: his wife and sons die and, to make things worse, the sons died because they were "wicked in the sight of G'd" (v. 7, 10). The offenses described in this chapter also show the extent to which the future Divine Law had to go to perform its intensive work of moral education on the

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descendants of Yaakov. On the other hand we find that at this early stage the spirit of the law of "Yibbum" was already alive in Yaakov's house. This law demands that, in the case when one of several brothers dies without leaving children, a surviving brother must continue the marriage with the brother's widow as a final duty of love for his deceased brother. This thought motivated Tamar's action. Yehuda, too, saw in her a widow who was still obligated to her brother-in-law, so much so that he branded her action as an attempt to commit outright adultery.

#### JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF POTIPHAR

Ch. 39. Joseph had been brought to Egypt. The "prince of the cooks", "an Egyptian", bought him (1). He was only a Hebrew, nomadic slave-boy. How the rich Egyptian household must have looked down on him with disgust! What intelligence and ability Joseph must have exhibited if he managed to gain the favor of the royal official who was an Egyptian. This was made possible only through Gd's special assistance which Joseph proved worthy of receiving. This thought is emphasized in V. 2 by the thrice repeated ויִהְיֶה: because G'd was with him and he was successful in everything that he undertook, the Egyptian swallowed the disgust which Egyptians normally felt for "Hebrews", and took him into his house. There he continued to be so exceptionally successful that the Egyptian came to the reluctant conclusion that "G'd" and His blessing stood at the side of this lad (3). Joseph found such favor in the eyes of his master that he, at first, elevated him to the rank of personal valet ("he appointed him over his house") and subsequently made him administrator of his entire estate (4-5), giving him unlimited authority — "and with all this, Joseph was of beautiful form and fair to look upon" (6) —

## TEMPTATION

Then came for him the decisive hour of temptation in the person of the mistress of the house. "Day after day" (10) she perfected on Joseph the art of seduction. He refuses her: it would be a betrayal of her husband (8), a crime against *G'd* (9)! "On such a day" when she renewed her attempt, Joseph made the fatal mistake of remaining in the house although no one else was there (11). The Torah rebukes Joseph for his oversight which had serious consequences for him.

## IN THE PRISON

20.) Potiphar has him imprisoned. He does not put him in the general state penitentiary, but in a "selected" prison reserved for special "prisoners of the king"; — "there he was in the prison", the verse adds pensively: if Potiphar ordered him removed to this particular prison, it was probably because deep in his heart he was convinced of Joseph's innocence, but was forced to punish him to keep up the pretense of protecting his honor. The prison witnesses a repetition of Joseph's previous success in dealing with the Egyptians (21-23). As *G'd* has been with him in the house of Potiphar, so "*G'd* showed him here His kindness" (21).

Ch. 40, 1-2.) The first verse calls the officials simply "butler and baker", while the second verse restores their rank: "prince" of the butlers, "prince" of the bakers. This characterizes the wretchedness of their positions: towards the people they were "princes" whom the king honored with his favor; to the king they were nothing but slaves whose lives and freedom were in his hands. And when His Majesty got angry, they received a hard kick, and off they went to prison!

INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM

5.) Both officials had a dream in the same night, but each dreamed his own dream. Both, prisoners now (as emphasized in this verse), saw themselves restored to their posts, one as the chief butler, the other as chief baker. The dreams were so vivid that they almost resembled the "interpretations of the dream", i.e. they hardly needed the services of an interpreter. They felt that these dream-visions had some connection with their fate, and they brooded and were uneasy (6). — Joseph let them tell their dreams. In his wisdom he still looks upon them as court dignitaries (an apparently superfluous remark in V. 7) whom Pharaoh has taken into temporary "custody" (חֲבֻשָׁה), and who had a very good chance to be released the very next morning — and they were "with him" (אִתּוֹ), prisoners! He is seized by a strange feeling that this odd gathering (himself and the two officials) may be part of a Divine plan and that these officials may play a decisive (and favorable) role in his future life. As to the dreams, he informs them that "the interpretations belong to G'd" (8), i.e. if the dreams are worthy of interpretation, they are bound to be inspired by G'd who is certain to supply the correct interpretation. He then interprets the dream of the chief of the butlers, adding the request (14) that, when he would regain the favor of the king, he may remember Joseph and work for his release. — The "prince of the bakers" saw that Joseph's "interpretation was good" (16), i.e. it was obvious that no other solution was possible. He also tells his dream. He saw three baskets (סִבִּיבִים) are free, noble men; thus סִבִּיבִים: distinguished) of fine design on his head and filled with food worthy of a Pharaoh — it is not the king but a bird that ate the food out of the basket upon his head (17). No normal bird would do this to man whom it fears. Here, too, the meaning is self-explanatory (19). — And all came true, exactly as Joseph had predicted. But the chief of the butlers failed to remember Joseph. Re-instated in his office, he forgot him completely.

## PHARAO'S DREAM

Ch. 41. "Pharao" is not the name of a person or a family but depicts royal power and dignity: "Pharao dreams", it is a dream of royal caliber. He finds himself musing by the river, the latter being the object of his meditation. The fruitfulness of the country, whose wealth was centered in its cattle and corn, depended largely on the regular inundations caused by the river. Thus, cows and ears of corn symbolize gifts of the river. Seven times the river produces fat cows, seven times lean ones. Since the river "acted" but once a year, it becomes clear that the seven cows signify seven years, the same holding true of the ears of corn. Furthermore: after emerging from the river, the fat cows come upon a pasture (2) where they graze leisurely. Yet when the lean cows come up from the river, we find that the fat cows have already returned from the pasture where they fed on all the available grass. There would have been no need for the lean cows to devour the fat ones had the latter left some food on the pasture. Thereby symbolic warning is served not to consume the entire stock during the seven good years: the whole interpretation is given in the dream itself.

The appearance of the lean cows frightens Pharao so that he is stirred, but not sufficiently so to be fully awakened. Again he falls asleep and again he dreams (4-5). In the morning his mind is troubled and he calls in all the wise men of Egypt, especially the experts on pictorial script (חֲרִטְוֹמִים), trained in the interpretation of Hieroglyphics, who could be expected to be able to interpret also dreams. "None could interpret *them* for Pharao" (8). Their inability to perceive the connection between the two dreams caused their interpretation to be so erratic and unfounded that they failed to satisfy Pharao. — It was at this moment that the chief of the butlers remembered Joseph. He was able to interpret their dreams "to each man according to

his dream (כהלומו) he did interpret" (12): Because his interpretation followed closely the outline of the dream, it appeared to us at once to be the correct one.

## JOSEPH BEFORE PHARAO.

### INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM.

14.) What is said here of Joseph again proves his profound wisdom. The court officials want to get him *quickly* to the king who must be calmed at all costs — and Joseph is only a poor, imprisoned slave! (12). The latter, however, is in no hurry; he shaves himself, changes his clothes, all in his own good time; he "comes" to Pharaoh, fully aware of the weight of his personality and the importance of his mission.

15 ff.) "I have heard say of you: you so *hear* a dream that you are able to interpret it", all depends on the right kind of listening. Joseph replies modestly: "It is not in me. G'd will answer Pharaoh what may serve his peace". Then he interprets the dream. Seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine which may crush the country's economy unless appropriate measures are taken in time. For this purpose a high official must be appointed to administer the country (33). Pharaoh himself is to tax the country with one fifth (המש), i.e. during the seven years of plenty tax officials are to raise one fifth of the total national income, resp. harvest (34) which would provide a minimum supply for the years of famine. Furthermore: "All the foodstuffs (אויכל) shall be kept together during the seven good years" (קביץ), i.e. nothing is to be sold to other countries; whoever wants to sell wheat, should sell it to Pharaoh to be registered and safeguarded in the nearest city (35).

## JOSEPH, RULER IN MIZRAIM.

Pharao appoints Joseph "over his house", charged with the administration of the suggested measures: "according to your word (עַל פִּיךָ) shall all my people ready themselves (נִשְׁקוּ)". After Pharao he is to be the highest official of the country: "only in the throne will I be greater than you" (40). By placing his royal signet ring on Joseph's finger, Pharao formally installs him as his chief deputy — his hand is now Pharao's hand; the King arrayed him in royal clothes, put "the gold chain" around his neck (evidently the highest distinction), and let him ride in the "chariot of the second" (the King's deputy), and then exclaimed before him: "I command to kneel" (44): in the Egyptian state homage was never obtained voluntarily but ordered by His Majesty — Joseph is the second Pharao!

47.) During the seven years of plenty "the land produced handful" (קַמִּיץ) — where one fruit grew before, there were now a handful of fruit.

## JOSEPH'S CHILDREN

50.) Pharao gave to Joseph the daughter of a distinguished Egyptian priest for a wife (45). She bore him two sons. Significantly it says here: "unto Joseph were born" (וַיֵּלֶד, singular!) — "the mother bore them for *him*": what is usually a matter of course, must be strongly emphasized in this case; for without Gd's blessing and assistance these children would have never become his children — he, the only Jew in Mizraim — she, the daughter of an Egyptian priest — ; yet these became men whose names parents of all generations throughout Jewish history used to bless their children, knowing no sweeter desire than to be blessed with children as these!

51.) If כִּי נִשְׁכַּח (נִשְׁכַּח) were to be translated as "forget",



it would mean: he calls his first-born son Menashe "for G'd has made me forget all my misfortune and all my father's house" — that would have been an act of utter heartlessness. Yet נִשָּׂה also means "the creditor". Thus here: G'd has made "creditors" of my misfortune and my father's house, i.e. what heretofore appeared to me to be the worst misfortune, has now, through Divine guidance, found a happy solution. In other words: he feels deeply indebted to his previous sad experience and the injustice inflicted upon him in his father's house.

### YEARS OF FAMINE

Then came the years of severe famine; there was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread (54). Pharaoh simply directed the hungry population to Joseph. "He opened כָּל אֵת כָּל (rooms) אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם which contained (food)", but sold it only in small amounts (שֶׁבֶר, to break, retail trade) and only to the head of the family, appearing in person — designed to prevent hoarding (56). Joseph himself supervised the sale (57), unwilling to rely on his subordinates and eager to maintain the immediate contact with the buying public. All these measures lead to the subsequent events: Yaakov could dispatch neither a messenger nor one of his sons, and so it happened that Joseph soon met his brothers face to face. Thus it says in the following chapter, V. 6: "Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who took care of the individual sale to the whole population".

### THE BROTHERS COME TO MIZRAIM.

#### JOSEPH'S ATTITUDE.

Ch. 42. Yaakov heard the news that one had to appear in person in Mizraim to obtain food. The sons doubt this

rule; they look at each other in the hope that one of them might volunteer. Whereupon Yaakov: "Why do you look at each other?" You must all go down in person (1-2). So "the brothers of Joseph" (3) went down, ten of them, for Benjamin remained behind; — as "sons of Israel" they came to Mizraim "among the others that came" (5). Little did they suspect that this "routine" journey was destined to have far-reaching consequences for the whole future of "Israel's sons" (for the first time the Torah uses here this term in reference to the brothers).

Joseph immediately recognized his brothers but "made himself strange unto them" (נכר), showed himself in a different light by addressing them harshly. Moreover he negotiated with them through an interpreter (23), speaking in a foreign tongue. It was only natural that they failed to recognize their once so gentle brother (7-8).

How can Joseph's attitude be explained? Why the delay in revealing his identity, if only for the sake of his father? Certainly his behavior was more than mere chicanery. If we try to put ourselves in his place, the following consideration may result: Joseph longs to re-enter the circle of his family as brother and son. To restore the intimacy of old times, the memory of past incidents must be completely wiped out. This, he reasoned, would be possible only if he could change his opinion of his brothers and vice versa. He would never forget what they did to him unless he would be convinced that his brothers had undergone a complete change of mind. He had to put them to the test. Fear of his would-be rulership had once driven them to their crime which robbed a father of his son. Would they be capable of repeating the crime now? — He also wanted them to think differently of him, Joseph, and his character. Once they feared him because of his dreams (9); now they shall meet him in the role of a ruler (שליט) who could do with them as he pleased. If, despite very good reasons to act otherwise, he would prove to be their greatest

benefactor, there was real hope that they might be cured of their erroneous ideas, once and for all.

Thus, we also understand why Joseph failed to contact his father during the years of prosperity. True, Yaakov would have found the beloved son he had given up as lost long ago; but once he learnt the true story — and there was no doubt that he would — would he not “lose” his other children? Before the approaching re-union with his father he wanted to make certain that the past happenings were “dead”, buried, a thing of the past in the mind of the father.

Joseph accuses them of being spies (9); if it is true that they came just to buy food, why did all of them come, ten altogether? Food is distributed individually. They reply that they are all brothers, sons of one father (11), and they supply detailed information to assist a possible investigation (13). Joseph concentrates on the fact that the youngest brother remained home: *הוּא אִשֶּׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי*, because your father knows only too well the danger of your undertaking, he let the youngest son stay home (14). They are to be imprisoned until their information can be verified and their youngest brother be brought to Egypt. — Joseph lets three days go by, giving them plenty of time to think this matter over: — perhaps one or the other will decide, in view of their precarious situation, to take the youngest child away from the father, either by cunning or by force! (15-17).

The three days having passed, Joseph changes the order. One of the brothers is to stay behind as hostage, while the others may return home with their purchases and then come back with the youngest brother. At this point the brothers begin to realize that the misfortune which has befallen them is a punishment of G'd. Until now they thought that their treatment of Joseph could be justified; now the knowledge of their guilt begins to dawn upon them: *Yet* (*אבל*) we *are* guilty. They accuse each other of having

been hard and cruel when they refused to heed the plea of the brother (21). Reuben tells them that the whole deed was a vicious crime as they have sinned against the "child" (77); it was only childish talk (22) that frightened you. As Joseph listens to their self-accusations, he turns aside and weeps (24). — Shimon stays behind. The others return home. Joseph had issued orders to put their money ("bundle of money", see V. 35) and added provisions in their sacks, besides the foodstuff that they bought. On the way, one of them opens his sack to feed the donkey; he finds his money "on top of his baggage sack" (אמתהרת is probably a large receptacle, containing several sacks). Terror-stricken, the brothers witness the incident — was a new danger threatening them? (28).

They come home to their father, report all that happened and, as they do so, find their money in each sack which only increases their apprehension. They implore their father to let Benjamin go back with them. Yaakov refuses. He cannot and must not permit it; he does not grasp the implications of the affair — all he knows is that Joseph is lost (through their fault?); and now Shimon, too, is not here — how can he trust them with Benjamin? It must not happen again! (36).

## BENJAMIN

Ch. 43. The famine weighed heavily on the land. The foodstuffs imported from Mizraim were all but gone. Without Benjamin they could not think of returning to Egypt. Yaakov, who believed that he had no right to let Benjamin go, now is forced to give his consent. He is somewhat comforted by the thought that Benjamin's life would have been in danger had he kept him at home. While heretofore, in his depressed state of mind, he appears as "Yaakov", he now acts as "Yisroel" (6): he has done his duty but he is at the end of his strength; he relies entirely on the

assistance of G'd whose Will governs his life **ישראל**. — Yehuda declares his willingness to assume full responsibility for the welfare of Benjamin (8). The father gives his consent **אם כן איפוא**, “if it be so” — what else can he do! (11). The sons are to take along tokens of respect for the man “products for which the land is celebrated” (**זמרת הארץ**): a little balm, a little honey etc., a little of everything, not too much, that it should not appear as a gift — as though one could donate something to the great man. He did not let them take from the “seven fruits” for the simple reason that nothing had grown for a long time. The products he sent were well preserved from former years. Besides the money that they found in their sacks, they are to take “double money” (12) for purchases, for all eventualities. G'd **שדי** (see 17, 1), the “All-Sufficing One”, who sets the goals for all beings in His world and who is certain to make an end to Yaakov's sufferings — may He grant them mercy before the “man”. Should the worst happen to him to lose all his children — he is even prepared for this blow if it should fall: “I am bereaved of my children” (14).

The sons return to Egypt, and once again they stand before Joseph (15). He sees Benjamin — but still fails to reveal his identity, for it is important to establish that they did not take Benjamin forcibly away from the father. He proceeds to obtain the proof by the following course of action.

He gives orders to invite the brothers to dine with him. At home he inquires about the father and his welfare. Barely finished with the question he is seized by sudden fear: is he still alive? (27). — At the sight of Benjamin, “the son of his mother” (29), he is overwhelmed by memories. Quickly he retires to his room to hide his tears and emotions. Returning to the brothers, he manages to control his feelings — it is hard for him, but it must be seen through until the end.

32.) Joseph made it a custom never to dine with

Egyptians. Thus even as a ruler, he neither denied nor forgot his Hebrew origin. By their different way of life Abraham's descendants were already known in Mizraim as "Ivrim". Thus Joseph was able to state in the prison that he was stolen from the "land of the Ivrim" (40, 15) — this despite the fact that Abraham's descendants, at this time, numbered less than seventy souls!

Joseph placed the brothers around the table in the order of their age. They look at each other in surprise (33); "portions were taken to them from before him", and Benjamin's portion was five times as much as theirs; "they drank and were intoxicated with him" (34): Were they not used to wine anymore? Did they not drink wine since misfortune had struck their father's house? Or was it a carefully prepared plan on the part of Joseph to get them drunk, not too much, of course, — how else could they have overlooked that their money was replaced in their sacks a second time.

## THE LAST TRIAL

Ch. 44. Joseph's steward must have been a righteous man. Earlier, asked to show kindness to these people, he is immediately ready, and thus it says there: "the man did as Joseph had said" (43, 17). Here, ordered to create a good deal of trouble for an innocent person (namely, to smuggle his master's goblet into Benjamin's sack), the steward hesitates to carry out the order; it required Joseph's full authority to make the servant do as told. Thus, it says here: "he did according to the order of Joseph that he had expressly given" (2).

The order was to pursue the men who had set out early in the morning on their journey back to Canaan. The steward receives detailed instructions how to accuse the men of thievery: you need not even name the stolen object (5); once you confront them, they will know quite

well what you are after. Their "crime" is especially wicked in view of the fact that the "stolen" goblet is irreplaceable, as it represents an object the master treasures with superstitious love. —

Thieves? Indignantly, the brothers deny the accusation. It is quite impossible that they should commit such a stupid deed (8): the person in whose possession the goblet is found should die, and they, the brothers, be sold as slaves. The man replies (10): you are right, it seems incredible that men, who returned the money voluntarily, should suddenly become thieves. However, there is one among you who does not belong in this category (knowing only too well that the goblet was in Benjamin's sack).

14.) Brought back before Joseph, Yehuda steps in front of the brothers, for now it was his duty, in accordance with his promise to Yaakov, to stand up for Benjamin. He deems it unwise to appeal to the mercy of the master. Was it not Benjamin's "task" to clear the others of all suspicion? Now he is himself revealed a "thief"! Was not the old suspicion stronger than ever? — Now they all face slavery. They know that they are innocent, but "G'd has found out the iniquity of your servants" (16) — Now they must take the punishment for other sins. — Only Joseph reacts differently than expected and decrees the punishment of Benjamin, while the others are free to return home (17). Yehuda resorts to an urgent appeal to the mercy of the master.

Before elaborating on his request, Yehuda asks the "master" not to take amiss what he will say to him; for "behold, you are like Pharaoh and Pharaoh is like you" (18), i.e. I honor you like Pharaoh, and if I shall say something that may offend you, please do not take it as an expression of disrespect; what I will tell you, I would also say to Pharaoh.

Then he describes in a deeply moving speech the consequences if they were to return without the lad: "when the father realizes that the boy is not with us, he will die" (31) before we are even able to explain the matter, to make it easier for him to stand the shock. He offers himself as a slave in place of the lad.

## JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF.

### RECONCILIATION.

Ch. 45. The presence of his subordinates (1) enabled Joseph to control himself; — he can do so no longer — he orders all strangers to leave and "gave forth his voice in weeping". What respect Joseph must have commanded if "Egypt heard it, and the house of Pharaoh heard it"; the court, the whole country, feels with Joseph, without knowing more than the spectacle of Joseph's sudden outburst.

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. His first question: "is my father *really* alive?" Then he talks gently and soothingly to his brothers whose consternation and confusion is complete (3). Whatever injustice occurred in the past, do not let it sadden you now and lessen the joy of this hour. Again and again (V. 5, 7, 8) he points out the role of G'd in this chain of events. "G'd has sent me before you to prepare a hold (שארית) for you in the land", (בארץ) (probably referring to ארץ), "to preserve the land for you for a great deliverance" (7), as you face a future shaped by the Will of G'd. — Indeed, no other story or episode demonstrates so vividly the manner and method of Divine leadership, eloquently described in Mishlei (26, 10): "G'd, exalted master of the world, He causes all to develop from smallest beginnings, in His service are fools, in His service also criminals" — unknowingly, unwillingly, they, too, serve Him. This episode is a classic example of G'd's ways; and so comment the Sages: through the "two



ounces of silk" with which Yaakov embellished Joseph's coat, the Divine promises (based on the treaty) and the revelation as to how Abraham's descendants were to mature as the nation of G'd *ברית בין הבתרים* (Ch. 15) were fully realized.

16.) The news of the arrival in Egypt of Joseph's brothers soon reached the royal court. Pharaoh liked it. He wants Joseph's family to settle permanently in Mizraim, in order to insure Joseph's continued services. Even the servants of the King liked it, as none of them was actually jealous of Joseph. Pharaoh issues an invitation to Yaakov and his family, at the same time "ordering" Joseph (19) to take all necessary measures to prepare their arrival: Pharaoh knows that Joseph's modesty and honesty might prevent him from making arrangements that would easily be interpreted as an abuse of his high office for personal advantages!

The brothers return home after Joseph bade them good-bye with the admonition: "be without anxiety on the way" (24), i. e. complete your journey in good spirits and do not worry over the future.

They arrive at home and bring the great news to their father — "his heart fainted, for he did not believe them" (26); only when they report all that happened and he saw Pharaoh's wagons, the spirit of their father *Yaakov* revived (27) and he arose from a twenty-year period of mourning as *Yisroel* (28; see 35, 20, 21) — One great thought dominates him: he is to see his son again!

### YAAKOV'S HOUSE ENTERS THE "GALUTH" OF MIZRAIM.

Ch. 46. *Yisroel* departs in a joyful mood, travelling southward and stopping only in B'er Sheva, the place made memorable by his father's history. Here he sacrifices

זבחים. Heretofore, in the life-stories of our forefathers, we always find that they sacrifice עולות. עולות vows the complete devotion to G'd. זבחה really is the meal that is eaten in the circle of the family. As sacrifice it reaches the family table dedicating it to become an altar of G'd, worthy of the Divine presence. Significantly, Yaakov-Yisroel offers זבחים at this time, because for the first time he is happy and gay in the circle of his family. He offers his sacrifices of joy to the G'd "of his father Yizchak" — he owes his happiness not to his own merits but to the זכות אבות, "the merits of his forefathers"; perhaps also because his whole previous life was one great "Akeda", a continuous trial, the happy ending of which he believes to have reached. There, G'd speaks, to *Yisroel* — in visions during the night: *Yaakov, Yaakov!* (2). This call alone should have served to tear him from his happy mood and prepare him for hard, sorrowful times: — yet Yaakov responds quickly: *הנהני*, "Here I am", I am ready to accept whatever G'd has in store for me. G'd replies: *You* need not fear, *I* am G'd whom you worshipped at the gay family meal. Sufferings may await you and your descendants in Mizraim — I will bring your exile to a happy conclusion. There you will become the promised, great nation. I myself will accompany you, and lead you back, after you have become a nation. As to yourself, never again will you lose Joseph (3-4). — "Yaakov rose", i. e. he took courage, for his soul was filled with the revelation of this night. His sons were in a gay mood, they knew nothing of their father's experience. Thus: "the sons of *Israel* guided their father *Yaakov*" (5).

"They came to Mizraim, Yaakov and *all* his descendants *with him*" (6); they were *all his* children! He did not have to share his forefather's grief by losing one of his children, estranged. They were all *his* sons, *his* daughters, *his* grandchildren, who, while already beginning to branch out in the various families, gathered around their father Yaakov: *He* took them all with *him* to Egypt (7). Therein lies the

significance of the ensuing story of the individual members of the Yaakov-house, according to their descent.

10.) If **בנענית** refers to Dinah who (after the tradition) married Shimon, it may be assumed that Saul was the son of Dinah's enforced union with Shechem. Dinah is referred to as **בנענית** in the sense that her son was **בן בנעני**. But he, too, could be counted as a member of the Yaakov family in whose spirit he was brought up.

20.) see 41, 50.

26.) **כל נפש**, Esau's house, comment the Sages, numbered only six souls and of them it is said (36, 6) **כל נפשות ביתו** (plural). Yaakov's house totals seventy souls, yet together they are but *one נפש*; for *one* spirit lived in them, *one* mind; they were so much a unity that, after the reference in V. 9 "these are the names of the sons of Israel", the count begins with the words "Yaakov and his sons": it is as though Yaakov is counted among the "sons of Yaakov"!

28.) In Mizraim Yaakov plans to settle in Goshen, a remote province. Although "father of the ruler", he prefers not to proceed on his own. Therefore, "he sent Yehuda before him unto Joseph" that he (Joseph) "show him the way to Goshen before his arrival" (**לפניו**).

## REUNION

29.) As they meet again, Joseph embraces his father, weeping. Yaakov does not cry, but Joseph continues to sob **עוד** even while his father is talking to him (30). — Yaakov had spent long years mourning for his son, there were no tears left in him. Joseph, on the other hand, never had the time to nurse his grief over the separation — now emotion overwhelms him as he recalls the sufferings during the long separation. And Yaakov: "Now I will die!" He feels that he has arrived at the climax of human happiness, he cannot possibly be more happy — now he will gladly die!

## IN GOSHEN

31-34.) It was Yaakov's desire that his family should settle in Goshen, as far removed as possible from Egyptian influence. By a happy coincidence the professions of shepherd and herdsman were thoroughly despised in Egypt (34) which helped to guarantee the desired isolation. Joseph, the ruler, decided to inform Pharaoh at once; his brothers are to be introduced to Pharaoh as shepherds.

### YAAKOV BEFORE PHARAO

Ch. 47. The presentation of Joseph's brothers before Pharaoh precedes that of Yaakov. He selects those of his brothers (2) of whom he could expect sufficient humility and servilence required before the King, (an attitude he could hardly expect of his father). When finally Yaakov is presented to the King, he does not wait to be addressed, but bestows a blessing upon Pharaoh: a sovereign is standing before the throne. Pharaoh's question "how many are the days of the years of your life" (8) reflects the deep impression he received from Yaakov. If one counts the years, one does not number the days. Only in the lives of a select few each day counts, as there is not a single day without special significance. — In his reply Yaakov draws a line between the years of his *life* (*lived* are only those years that are spent meeting the demands of life!) and the years of his sojournings, i.e. of his existence on earth. He says modestly: You ask about the days of the years of my life: "I have sojourned on earth for 130 years; but the days of my *life* were but a few (לפני), and they were the most bitter and unhappy days of my life". You cannot compare my life to that of my fathers in richness and importance: "they do not attain the days of the years of the *lives* of my forefathers in the days of their *sojournings*" (9).

11.) The family came to Egypt with the intention to stay in the land temporarily (לגור, V. 4.). Pharaoh's order induced them to settle down (וישב, Joseph assigns living quarters to them), and they receive landed property (אחזה).

### JOSEPH TAKES MEASURES IN MIZRAIM

13 ff.) The famine, weighing heavily on the country, threatened to ruin its entire economy and, thereby, its very existence (ותלה derived from להיה). The population had delivered all its money (14) and cattle (17) to Pharaoh, in return for bread distributed among them by Joseph from the stock. The people were finally forced to offer Pharaoh their land and their persons in return for food. Joseph refused the last-mentioned offer. But the entire area of Egypt gradually became state property (20). In order to demonstrate to the Egyptian people Pharaoh's newly acquired ownership of the soil, Joseph moved whole cities (21), i.e. the entire populace of a city was re-settled in another town. A complete change in the form of a mass-emigration took place. No Egyptian lived on soil he could call his own (thus no one could look down on the Hebrew newcomers as foreign intruders). Only the priests were spared from these measures as theirs was a "fixed portion" (חוק) in accordance with Egyptian law. They were entitled to as much land as they needed to live on and Pharaoh was responsible for their maintenance (22).

Meanwhile the people were given seeds by Joseph with the proviso to relinquish one fifth from the harvest to the treasury of Pharaoh (24). Thus, they were reduced to tenant-farmers and the King became the actual proprietor. This ruling became permanent law in Mizraim: "it is the property of Pharaoh (לפרעה) in regards to the fifth" (להמש); whoever failed to pay the fifth, lost his land (26).

27.) "Israel" settled in the land of Egypt and they

were "seized" by the soil (ויאחזו, Nif'al of אָחַז, to take possession); they let the land "capture" them. Here the Torah hints at the danger for the house of Yaakov and its G'd-willed destiny, a danger that lies in the possession of one's own land.

#### YAAKOV REFUSES TO BE BURIED IN MIZRAIM

ויחי (28) does not represent a new chapter (therefore no new פרשה), for the seventeen remaining years of Yaakov's life formed but the peaceful climax of a fighting career which saw the crowning achievement in the naming of "Yisroel". In striking contrast to Yaakov's humble remark before Pharaoh, it says here: "the days of Yaakov, the years of his life" — they were all years of a life that met the Divine demands in all its phases. When he felt his end drawing near, he asked for Joseph. It appears that he always refused any special treatment — now, if there is *one* favor Joseph may grant him (אם נא), it is that he may use his influence to prevent Yaakov from being buried in Mizraim. One should suppose that it might not be too difficult to fulfil this last wish. Yet we recall that Pharaoh desired the permanent "naturalization" of Joseph's family, mainly because he did not want to lose his foremost citizen. The removal of Yaakov's body to another land would create bad feelings by demonstrating that Yaakov's children still considered themselves strangers who owe their allegiance to their old country. Yaakov on the other hand, had made the observation that his children felt more and more at home in Mizraim (see V. 27): "Yisroel" (29), as the father of the future of his people as a nation, expresses the earnest desire to be buried in the land that was slated to become the real homeland of the Jewish nation. Joseph "swore it unto his father" who can now rest quietly; by bowing down "upon the bed's head" (31), he proclaims, at the same time, his grateful devotion (וישתחו) to G'd.

## EPHRAIM AND MENASHE

Ch. 48. Earlier Yaakov has called Joseph in to assure himself that his wish would be fulfilled. Now he only sends a message to Joseph, "your father is ill", knowing that his son would rush at once to his bedside. As "Yisroel" he gathered all his strength (2) when he is told that Joseph is on the way; as the father of his people's future he is resolved to bestow the בְּרָכָה upon Joseph, and as "Yisroel" he also blesses the latter's sons (8 ff.). V. 3-7 tell us Yaakov's motives, as he speaks to Joseph as father: the land, promised to him by G'd, is to be distributed among a "gathering of peoples", i. e. the individual tribes of the Jewish people (see 17, 6; 35, 11). There Joseph is to form a "double-tribe" represented by his sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Sentimental reasons may have guided father Yaakov's decision. In the last days of his life the memory of his wife whom he loved most returns vividly to his mind. She who was the real wife of his choice, of whom he had hoped that she might become the real mother of his people — she had left him so early. He feared that in the memory of his nation she might be relegated to the background — as he had not even been able to bury her in the place where the nation's great men and women rested! It is in this light that we must evaluate Yaakov's desire to elevate also Rachel's first-born son to the position of a real first-born, in the midst of the tribes of his people. All this finds delicate expression in the words וְאָנֹכִי מֵתָה עָלַי רָחֵל.

In moving words of gratitude to G'd, Yisroel, founding father of the future nation, gives expression to the overwhelming feeling of elation and happiness at the sight of the children of a son he had believed lost (11). Joseph, too, is swept by emotion (12). And then Yisroel, inspired by the Divine spirit, pronounces words of blessing — he blesses Joseph (15) by blessing his children: there is no

greater blessing for a father than the blessing bestowed on his children. G'd, "before whom my fathers conducted themselves", i.e. before whom they lived in free and noble morality, while of himself he says modestly that to him G'd was "shepherd" throughout his life who guided and preserved him — G'd may also bless his grandsons that they, too, may let themselves be guided by G'd to whom alone, and not to their own strength, they owe their existence. He also owes G'd his salvation from all the evil that threatened his life. In each blow that struck his life he saw an "angel" of G'd, Divine messengers, tools of the Divine Will. G'd has always sent him the angel of salvation, i.e. He has so shaped his fate that his whole life became one great blessing. May such Divine messengers always shape the lives of his grandsons! May they prove to be worthy bearers of their father's name, "may they prosper as the fish (דגה) from דג, fish) in the midst of the earth" (16). As water is the element of the fish, so are they, in the midst of a differently orientated mankind, never to become estranged from their peculiar "element" that to them means the only possible way of life. —

While Yaakov pronounced the blessing, he laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger son, and his left hand on the head of the older brother. He cannot be made to change this procedure; for his clear eyes see the younger son grow more powerful than the older brother: Ephraim's descendants will become מלא גוים, a puzzling expression. גוים may refer to the future tribes (see V. 4); מלא is the plenty, the complement of a lack; this is to be Ephraim's task: to complement what is lacking in the other tribes. — ביום הזה (20), "on this day", the blessing is pronounced for the first time that lives ever since on the lips of every Jewish parent. Jewish parents will know no greater blessing for their children than this: "May G'd make you as Ephraim and Menashe".



JOSEPH BECOMES THE HEAD OF

THE HOUSE OF YAAKOV.

21-22.) Now the father turns to Joseph: as I die, I leave few material gods — we live in a strange land — G'd must bring you back to the promised land. He designates him as his successor in the leadership of the family: he transfers to him "the honor (שכם is the shoulder which carries responsibility) of the אהרד על אחיך, the first among your brothers" (אהרד, not אהרד, means one among others, while על is added, he is placed *above* the others, to be their head). Your brothers "whom I have torn from the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" — his children are his sole conquests — among the Amorites they did not become like them, they remained his children. He owes these victories to his moral and spiritual strength, which unlike Esau, is his only weapon.

YAAKOV'S TESTAMENT

Ch. 49. His first admonition to his sons who are gathered around his death bed: הוֹאֲמֵנו! However different you may be in character and talent — be united (אסף) by the one common task and goal to which your lives must be devoted. In the further course of the blessing in brief, poignant sentences Yaakov sketched the outlines of this goal which is intimately connected with the goal set by G'd for mankind's history (אהרית הימים).

2.) "Stand by each other, and hear, sons of Yaakov": as "sons of Yaakov" you are materially weak, powerless. What makes you strong is the unity, inspired by the spirit that lets you hear and preserve for all time "father Yisroel's" immortal message.

3.) Yaakov's prophetic eye seeks the leader who is able to bring about this unity. It is only natural that he turns at first to Reuben. "You are my first-born, my might" on

whom I have spent my strength; "the first of my possession" (his children are Yaakov's most precious possession, see 49, 22), and as first-born "outstanding (יִתָּר) in honor, outstanding in power". But he is not fit as leader, for the leader must above everything possess inner strength, which is lacking in Reuben. "Your instability, resembling the water" (water always flows downwards), does not permit this prerogative (Hiphil of יִתָּר). At the incident which Yaakov obviously refers to (reported in Ch. 35, 22), Reuben has shown that he does not possess this "stability". Yet this criticism of Reuben cannot be taken literally, or the father would not have called him his most precious possession, and would have condemned his action in harsher words.

5.) Shimon and Levi possess a common trait that makes them appear fit for leadership. They are "brothers" whose genuine brotherly feelings were strongly expressed when the honor of their sister was at stake. Yet the means they employed to attain their goal (כִּרְוָה, to acquire) were "weapons of violence" — under the cloak of peaceful endeavors they committed acts of abominable violence: in their raging anger — certainly justified — they also killed innocent men after paralyzing (through the Milah) their strength (עֹרֵן, the bull; here refers to its strength) with friendliness (רַחֲמֵיךָ, benevolence). "Into their council my will must not come", they shall not decide the will of the Jewish nation — "my honor must not unite with them (יִזְדָּךְ) at their assembly", my honor must not be jeopardized by them. They are unfit for leadership, actually dangerous. While other nations welcome cunning and violence as in the interest of the "welfare of the state", Yaakov's testament curses the use of force — however justified the aims — leaving his people with this immortal message: in the life of the community — as well as in the life of the individual — not only the aims, but also the means to attain them, must be unselfish and pure.

Yet Yaakov puts the curse only on their blind fury, not on their persons and their noble motives. In "Yisroel", i.e. in times of national prosperity they might endanger the future of the Jewish people; then **יפצצו**, they are to be dispersed, weakened, made incapable of exerting political influence. Thus, when the Jewish state was established, the tribe of the Levites was left without possession of land, dispersed throughout the country; while Simon, completely surrounded by the powerful Judah, was entirely dependant on the latter. — But in "Yaakov", i.e. the Jewish people in its Galuth appearance, oppressed and persecuted, "I will divide them" (a division, not to produce weakness, but of a nature that lets others have a part in it **קחלק**); then their strength and their pride shall inspire their suffering and persecuted brothers with unflinching strength and upright Jewish pride. The Torah is the inexhaustible source of this strength and pride for the Galuth-nation. According to the tradition our greatest teachers of the youth and of the science of Torah are descendants of Levi and Simon.

8.) "Yehuda, it is you", you are the appointed leader, "Your hand is at the neck of your enemies", you need not resort to the sword, or commit murder — your natural power (**ג**) is so awe-inspiring that your enemies turn their backs on you, content that you leave them in peace. In internal affairs, too, your brothers will completely subordinate themselves. Yehuda is "a young (**גור**), old lion (**אריה**)" — he combines the courage of youth with the wisdom of old age; "you stand above lowly prey" (9). His awe-inspiring greatness is also demonstrated by his calm — "who will dare to rouse him up to a roaring lion!" (**לביא** may be derived from **לבה**, to burst into roaring flames). "Neither scepter nor the pen of the law (whom the sitting ruler held between his knees) will ever depart from Judah". Yaakov prophetic eye gazes beyond the narrow borders of time: a time will come when Yehuda no longer will be strong as the lion, and it is taken for granted that he is finished

forever. Then his last offspring will appear (שׂוֹל: the outer rim, the extreme end), seemingly weak (שׂוֹלָה, the feminine suffix) — yet it is not he but the nations of the world who are decrepitate, longing for the rejuvenation that only Moshiach can bring them :ל, “unto him (masculine ending), who in reality is the manly, strong one, will be the weakness (קִיָּה) of the nations” i.e. unto him the nations, weak of age, will then pay homage (10).

He sees Moshiach, not on a horse, but riding on an ass's colt, the peaceful beast of burden (see Secharyah 9, 9) — for he brings peace to the world. His garment is red, but not of human blood; together with mankind, nature, too, rejuvenates: “he binds his foal unto the vine” (which then becomes strong as a tree) (11); Paradise returns to the earth — man's eyes are more glowing than wine” (demonstrating their joy of life) — “and the white of the teeth is whiter than milk” (a sign of health).

Yaakov now returns his scrutinizing eye on the other sons whom he briefly characterizes in their individuality as members of Gd's nation. — *Zebulun* will dwell at the shore of the sea, will himself become a “harbor of ships”, frequented by merchant ships; he is the trading tribe, but he does not seek world-trade (i.e. he does not live for trading only): his extreme border is the powerful trader Zidon (13).

In *Issachar* he sees the core of his future people: the Jewish farmer, the working-man, full of strength (“a nimble beast of burden”), resting after the labor at the fire-place of his home “between the row of dishes”. He works to obtain the leisure which is the most precious fruit of his labor — “realizing that the leisure is good” — for it gives him time to devote himself to the study of the Torah. He knows that not business and trade but the work on the soil offers such time of leisure — realizing that “the soil fits this aim”; therefore, he gladly takes upon himself the heavy burden of the farmer, “bows his shoulder to bear”,

and performs the "taxing" chore of the peasant. Issachar became the most intellectual tribe of the Jewish nation — and this was the Jewish farmer! (15).

Yaakov now turns to the sons of the former maid-servants. They are no less valuable members of the Jewish nation. "*Dan* will fight for the rights of his people as one of the tribes of Israel" (16). This Verse refers to a time when Israel's power is broken and it must resort to cunning to survive the onslaughts of the enemy; — like a snake "that bites the horse's heels, so that the rider falls backwards". Here it does not say (as in V. 21) דָן נָחָשׁ, "Dan is a snake" but יַחֲיִי: "Dan will *become* a snake" (17), i.e. he will be forced to resort to cunning, the weapon of the weak. G'd forbid that it should ever become a *permanent* trait of any Jewish tribe! This may explain Yaakov's added words (18): "I hope for your salvation, oh G'd!" While in times of suffering your children must resort to cunning and trickery, let it not become a mark of their character, but let them keep alive their sense of justice and righteousness.

*Gad's* attitude will be in marked contrast to the previously developed ideas. Dwelling at the border of the country, "many an enemy troop (גִּדְוֹד) will cut in his territory" (גִּדְדָה, to cut in) — courageously he will beat back the attack and "cut in the heel" of the fleeing foe (19). Dan and Gad prove successful in their attitude towards the outside world, thus supplementing the task of Judah.

*Asher's* territory mainly produces delicacies, as rare fruit etc.; "it yields royal dainties", brings them to market and secures for himself an abundance of food, "fat nourishment". Asher belongs to Zebulun.

*Naphtali* is swift as a deer when he is called upon to execute a task for the benefit of the community. His is the gift of "eloquent speech", the ability to express thoughts in eloquent form. He joins Issachar.

Now Yaakov turns to *Joseph*. בן פורים (the Pual-form of פירם, to separate, isolate; אפירתי, distinguished), a distinguished son is Joseph, ennobled by his character and conviction — not only now, but from his earliest youth, “at the source”, referring to the mother, Rachel, whose memory stirs vividly in his soul during his last days on earth. “Daughters!” Hear it, women: “she, the mother, stepped over the wall” — she was not an ordinary woman although her life was confined to the narrow walls of the house (22). — The brothers committed a flagrant injustice against Joseph when they turned against him in hostility (רבו, pual-form of ריב, to quarrel), and conspired against him in bitter hate. What they did to him were “arrows” which Joseph might well have turned against them in Mizraim; they were the “masters of the arrows”, although Joseph in Mizraim possessed the “bow” and thereby the ability to turn these arrows against them — “but his bow remained calm, even when the arms of his hands were adorned with golden ornament” (24), i.e. even after he attained royal powers. מירי, Joseph owes this miraculous turn of events in his life to the same Divine providence which also guided the life of Yaakov. Yaakov, too, saw in G’d the אביר, the driving force which raised him from the depths of human misery; he experienced G’d, the “shepherd”, in all phases of his life and no less vividly in the life of Joseph. G’d “feeds”, devotes His loving care to the “stone of Israel”, i.e. that primitive stone which he dedicated long ago, in the midst of a desolate countryside, to become Beth-El. — “All this you owe to the G’d of your father — may he continue to provide for you in time to come”; ואת שדי, you remain faithful to your G’d — may He bestow upon you abundant blessing (25); — Yaakov recalls gratefully that he owes these blessings to the blessings which he received from his parents; “upon their blessings his blessings mightily rise” (גברו). These blessings reach until the end of the days (אחרית הימים) until the great goal that will

be attained by the "hills of the world" ("hills" signifies the nations as great powers), i. e. the history of mankind. These blessings "shall be on the head of Joseph" (26) who has proven himself the true נזיר among his brothers (by avoiding all impure and ignoble contact).

Yaakov's prophetic eye again gazes beyond the "hills" of time. Yet he does not overlook the existence of his people, "wolves" that endanger his flock. *Benjamin*, the youngest, — he prophesies — will tear to pieces the wolf (Amalek). "In the morning", at the dawn of the national history, he already "devours a piece" (עָד); "and in the evening", באהרית, he will divide him as his spoils, a complete conquest. "Not Yehuda but the weakened power of Rachel's sons will conquer Amalek —".

28.) All these are "tribes of Israel" who will bear the future of Yisrael. They are "twelve", not more and no less — and there is none who does not deserve to be counted among them. "This is what their father said of them (mainly descriptions of their individual character) as he blessed them". The Torah adds significantly: "he blessed *each one* בברכתו, according to the blessing corresponding with each tribe's peculiar position and character — and thus "he blessed them *all*: the community was to benefit by the blessing of the individual tribe, just as each tribe benefited by the blessing of all Israel.

Once again (29) Yaakov demands the solemn promise of his children to carry his body to the grave where his fathers and mothers were buried. They are to take care of his *body*, when his real *self*, his soul, will long since have returned to the realm of his ancestors (33).

## THE BURIAL

Ch. 50 describes in detail the preparations for Yaakov's funeral. Joseph ordered the embalming of the body. It was

not in accordance with the Jewish view which prescribes that the body be returned to the earth. The soul is immortal and only the body dies. It is probable that Joseph desired to follow the Egyptian custom, knowing that a rejection of this custom would be interpreted as a lack of reverence for the deceased. — Joseph sends a message to Pharaoh informing him of his father's last wish to be buried in Canaan, and of his (Joseph's) promise to fulfill this wish (4). Despite his vast influence in all matters of state, he was not at all certain that the King would give his permission: it might be uncomfortable for His Majesty to have the Egyptian people realize at this occasion that a foreigner was the actual ruler of the land.

"Mizraim", the *people* weep for father Yaakov (3). The body is brought to Canaan with the highest honors (7-8). The Egyptians accompanied the funeral procession to the border of Canaan, beyond the Jordan river (they took this circuitous route probably with the intention to avoid the land of the Philistines). These demonstrations of public mourning must have been so impressive (10) that the local populace, by naming this site "Mizraim in mourning", אבל מצרים, immortalized the love and respect that a Jewish ancestor found in the midst of a foreign nation. Proceeding from there, only the children accompanied the body to the burial-place (12-13). The others waited at the border and returned with Joseph and his brothers to Mizraim (14).

#### AFTER THE DEATH OF THE FATHER

As long as parents are alive, children rally around them in love and mutual friendship. After the death of the parents, the link often loosens and relations become strained. In this case, too, "the brothers saw" (15), they strongly felt the absence of their father. In the name of their *father* they ask Joseph to forgive their crimes (פשע) and their sins (חטא);



they let the father plead for them, alleviating their "crimes" to mere "sins" (perhaps Joseph was not completely innocent). Yet in their own approach they only use the term פשע, they do not even think of an apology. Also, they do not call themselves Joseph's brothers, knowing that they have lost this "title" through their crime, — yet they are still "servants of the G'd of your father", adherents to the same covenant (17). Joseph wept and comforted them: they may rest assured that with the death of their father, his attitude towards them will remain unchanged.

### JOSEPH'S TESTAMENT

Joseph's last words to his brothers: "G'd will again provide for you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He swore to your forefathers". פקד יפקד: this duplication expresses the thought that during long periods of time G'd will *not* provide for Yaakov's children, but leave them to their fate, leading to the Galuth with all its terrible sufferings in the midst of an entirely foreign nation. For Yaakov's children, the Jewish people, are dependant upon Gd's constant care. Yet, at the same time, the certainty of the final redemption is strongly expressed (24). Joseph "takes an oath", not of his brothers (24) but of "Israel's sons" (25) (and thereby the coming generations), to carry his remains up with them when the great hour of redemption arrives. He was entitled to this request since it was the brothers who had brought him to Mizraim, and thus his request amounted to something of an atonement. At the same time Joseph's remains, resting in a coffin, were to provide the foundation for the firm confidence with which they awaited their return to the promised homeland.