

# Jacob Worries About the Future

## Parashat Vayechi 5783 1/7/23

Source Sheet by Rabbi Ari Sunshine

1) Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, The Beginning of Desire, p.355

The problem is one of survival. A deathly darkness falls over Jacob as he confronts his family and their future. Egypt is quintessential exile: the first exile, the paradigm exile. The whole family, in search of bread, has 'gone down' into Egypt – an idiom not merely geographical, indicating a movement southward, but existential in resonance. Downward is deathward. If, to Hamlet, Denmark is a prison, then to Jacob, Egypt is a grave that threatens to swallow his family's aspiration for a distinct destiny.

### 2) Bereishit Rabbah 98:3

..."And hearken unto Israel your father" (Genesis 49:2).... Eleazar ben Achui said: From here Israel received the privilege of reciting the Shema. When the patriarch Jacob was departing from the world, he called his twelve sons and said to them: 'Is the God of Israel in heaven your father? Maybe in your hearts you wish to break away from the Holy One, Blessed be God?' 'Hear, O Israel (Deuteronomy 6:4), our father', they replied; as there is no internal debate in your heart to break away from God, so there is no debate in our hearts; rather, 'The Lord is our God, the Lord is One' (Deuteronomy 6:4). Thereupon Jacob also uttered with his lips, saying, 'Blessed be the name of God's glorious kingdom for ever and ever'. Rabbi Berekiah and Rabbi Helbo said in Rabbi Shmuel's name: On account of that, Israel declares every day, morning and evening, 'Hear, O Israel' our ancestor from the cave of Machpelah where you lie buried, and know that what you commanded us to do we still practice, for 'The Lord is our God, the Lord is one'.

### בראשית רבה צ"ח:ג'

(בראשית מט, ב): וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם.... אֶלְעֶזֶר בֶּן אַחֲוֵי אֲמַר מִכָּאן זָכוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְקִרְיָאֵת שְׁמַע, בְּשָׁעָה שְׁהֵיָה יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ נִפְטָר מִן הָעוֹלָם קָרָא לְשָׁנִים עֶשֶׂר בְּנָיו אֲמַר לָהֶם שְׁמַעוּ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁבַשְׁמִים אֲבִיכֶם, שְׁמָא יֵשׁ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם מַחְלָקֵת עַל הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֲמַרוּ לוֹ (דְּבָרִים ו, ד): שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִינוּ, כְּשֵׁם שְׁאִין בְּלִבְךָ מַחְלָקֵת עַל הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, כִּי אֵין בְּלִבְנוּ מַחְלָקֵת, אֶלָּא (דְּבָרִים ו, ד): ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד, אִף הוּא פְּרַשׁ בְּשִׁפְתָיו וְאָמַר: בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. רַבִּי בְּרַכְיָה וְרַבִּי חֵלְבוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל הַדָּא הוּא שִׁישְׂרָאֵל מְשַׁכְּיָמִים וּמַעְרִיבִים בְּכָל יוֹם וְאוֹמְרִים שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִינוּ מִמַּעַרְתַּת הַמִּכְפֵּלָה, אוֹתוֹ דְּבַר שְׁצוּיָתְנוּ עֲדִין הוּא נוֹהֵג בְּנוֹ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד.



Congregation  
Shearith Israel

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### 3) Talmud Pesachim 56a

**What is the reason that we recite that passage: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever, even though it does not appear in the Torah? The Gemara answers: We recite it in accordance with that which Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish interpreted homiletically. As Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said that it is written: "And Jacob called his sons and said, Gather around and I will tell you what will occur to you at the end of days" (Genesis 49:1). Jacob wanted to reveal to his sons when the complete redemption would arrive at the end of days (see Daniel 12:13), but the Divine Presence abandoned him, rendering him unable to prophesy. He said: Perhaps the Divine Presence has abandoned me because, God forbid, one of my descendants is unfit, as was the case with my grandfather Abraham, from whom Ishmael emerged, and like my father Isaac, from whom Esau emerged. His sons said to him: Hear Israel, our father, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. They said: Just as there is only one God in your heart, so too, there is only one in our hearts. At that moment Jacob our father said in praise: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever, as all his children were righteous. The Rabbis said: What should we do? Shall we recite this verse? But Moses, our teacher, did not say it in the Torah as part of *Shema*. Shall we not recite it? But Jacob said it. In order to resolve this dilemma they established that this passage should be recited quietly....**

### 4) Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:36

When Moses went up to the heavens, he heard the angels praise God by saying, "Blessed [is His] Name, etc." When he returned to earth, he taught it to the Jewish People. We say it in an undertone so as not to offend the angels. On Yom Kippur however, when we are considered like angels, we are permitted to say שמ ברוך aloud.

### 5) Rabbi Lawrence Kushner in *My People's Prayerbook*, v. 1. P.94.

"...the *Barukh Shem* which is not in the biblical text itself, but was added by the Rabbis as a congregational response. The *Barukh Shem*, [Ba'al Hatanya] says, is our attempt to bring back into this world the supernal unity spoken of in the first line. We have a vision of ultimate unity when we utter [the *Shema*]. And when we recite *Barukh shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed*, we try to bring that unity into everyday reality."

