

# Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



VAYIGASH

## WAGONS HO!

This week's Torah reading is an emotional thrill ride. We feel the pull on our heart strings right from the beginning when Yosef reveals himself to the brothers. The verse declares: His (Yosef's) sobs were so loud that all Egypt could hear (B'reishit 45:2). Then the sentimental power just increases as we read: With that he collapsed upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept (verse 14). If you thought the pathos couldn't get any greater, you'd be wrong because finally, we read:

They told him (Ya'akov Avinu): Yosef still lives! ... And his heart stopped! ... And then he saw the wagons ... And the spirit of Ya'akov their father came back to life! (verses 26 & 27)

Stones could cry over scenes like this!

There is no character in literature who can compete with the trials of Ya'akov (Back off, Hercules and Odysseus!) And, here, finally, he finds some comfort!

But what about those wagons? What is the role of those wagons? Initially, Ya'akov can't believe his ears. Is my dear Yosef, son of my beloved Rachel,

still alive? Then he sees the wagons and he's converted.

The most famous answer to this question is, of course, brought by Rashi: As evidence that it was Yosef who was sending this message he had informed them of the religious subject he had been studying with his father at the time when he left him, the section of the calf that had its neck broken (EGLA ARUFA, D'varim 21:6). It is to this that Scripture refers in the words: And he saw the AGALOT (play on words on calf) which Yosef had sent.

Okay, so it's sort of a covert code between them, and the Midrash lets us in on the secret. Other commentaries see a more pragmatic side to the wagons' importance. Only a powerful and caring person could send wagons in those days. The Netziv adds that no one would expend that kind of expense and effort if the whole scenario wasn't true!

The Radak touchingly explains, 'Ya'akov's spirit which had been as dead from the shock of losing Yosef, now revived. Our sages have said that the "spirit" mentioned in our verse which was revived in Yaakov was the spirit of prophecy which had departed from him 22 years ago (same amount of time Ya'akov had spent with Lavan) when Yosef had been sold. We have an ancient

tradition that in the absence of joy in one's life a person cannot have such a spirit of prophecy. On the way to Egypt, at Beer Sheva, the prophetic spirit of Yaakov (Yisrael) did indeed become manifest again (46:2).

However, other commentaries see deeper secrets in those wagons. Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev uses this incident as an opportunity to explain the significance of IGULIM, 'circles', in Jewish thought. Yosef is visually explaining that this descent to Egypt is part of a Divine Plan (the meaning of the Brit Bein HaBetarim, the Covenant betw the Parts). The exile is a prelude to the great redemption.

The wheels of the wagons represent the wheel of historical causality. Temporary hardship, such as their having to leave the Holy Land now, would result in a much greater good in the end. Yosef wished to indicate to his father that temporary residence of his family in Egypt would result subsequently in his descendants inheriting the whole land of Israel. It was all part of the Divine Plan.

The Chidushei HaRim adds that the IGUL or 'circle of fate' means not only does the history of our people tend to follow repetitive patterns (the entire book of Shoftim follows this recurring pattern), but that the root word IGUL means circle, indicating that everything returns to its spiritual, Divine

source and all of Jewish history is a unity. This is what we say in Kaddish: B'AGALA UVIZMAN KARIV, 'in the circle of fate and in a nearby time-frame'.

Rav Itamar Eldar, in one of his wonderful essays on the Har Etziyon website, explains: It may be suggested that a straight line symbolizes continuous progress and advancement. Walking in a straight line indicates clear direction and a clear destination. Each point along that line brings a person closer and closer to that destination. When walking along a straight line, there is no retreat and no return. A circle, in contrast, symbolizes finiteness and periodicity. Over and over again, we return to our starting point, and every step forward is also a step backward... The circle causes total confusion... Are we going forward or backward? Have we already journeyed far or only a short distance? The answers to these questions are very simple when one is walking along a straight line. On a circle, with each passing moment, one loses more and more of one's sense of direction. Where are we? Have we already arrived? Are we going forward or backward? Are we getting closer or further away? The ability to judge reality gradually disappears.

So, Yosef is informing his beloved father that, indeed, bad times are coming, but they are an indispensable

prelude to the great Redemption at its end. His oblique message is crystal clear to our venerable Patriarch: Yes, your progeny will suffer as 'strangers in a strange land', but this sojourn is a necessary stop along the predicted road to the GEULA!

We must read this episode with the same faith and confidence. Yes, we are right now going through difficult times. The pain, the suffering are real and excruciating. But we must believe that all the missiles, all the casualties, all the tribulations are each another way station on the inevitable path to GEULA!

We have to see the pattern; we have to see the IGUL. We must beg God to make this the last turn of the Wheel of History. Yosef saw the pattern first, the first stop on the circular route. We pray to see the Destination! May it come soon! And then, on to a better world in Yemot HaMashiach. 🙏