

December 22, 2012 – Vayigash (Genesis 44:18 – 47:27)

The sidrah this week begins with the longest single speech by a character in the book of Genesis, and perhaps in the Torah. It's called "Judah's speech," and it is directed at Joseph, who sits so close to the throne of Egypt that Judah compares him to Pharaoh himself. We spent much of the study today looking at not just the speech, but at the possible motivations Judah has for giving it, and Joseph has in hearing it. We looked at commentary attributing Judah's reasons to fear, to a calculated appeal for justice, to flattery, to an accusation that Joseph has been breaking the laws of Egypt, to anger at Joseph for picking on them, or to the self-sacrifice of honest compassion. We can find support in the text for each of these interpretations. (There is also an interpretation that there is no support for in the text, having to do with scaring Joseph by attributing to Jacob the ability to curse, but we did not spend much time on that.)

We then studied the emotionalism of Joseph's reunion with his brothers, and the subsequent reunion with his father. As a high point of human emotion in the Torah, these scenes are very moving. Finally, we looked at the settling of Jacob and all his family in Goshen, which places the Israelites into Mitzrayim, the narrow place, and sets them (and us) up for the seminal experience of our people.