AND WHEN HE SAW THE 'AGALOT JOSEPH HAD SENT TO CARRY HIM BACK, THE SPIRIT OF THEIR FATHER JACOB REVIVED (GEN. 45:27) - WHY?

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After decades of separation, and a lengthy process of trials and tribulations, Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers. When they brought their father the report that Joseph lives, he initially did not believe them (Gen. 45:26). It is only after he saw *the wagons* [*'agalot*] *that Joseph had sent* that *his spirit revived*, and he declared his beloved son still alive (45:27-28). Rashi famously brings the *midrash*: "He gave them a sign regarding what he was dealing with then he left them, the *'eglah 'arufah*." This refers to the laws pertaining to a ceremony in which a heifer's neck was to be broken following an unsolved murder, laws which Jacob and Joseph had ostensibly discussed the last time they were together. Why would this 'sign' explain Jacob's acceptance of the happy news, where his sons' report did not suffice? Traditional commentaries attend to the symbolic connection between the wagons which Jacob saw and the *'eglah 'arufah*. In this paper, I wish to explore the deeper meaning of this midrash and note how the underlying components of the *'eglah 'arufah* issue are intricately connected with elements in the Joseph story.[1]

At the most basic level, commentators view this 'sign' as an identity marker. It is as if Joseph had sent his father a secret signal known only to the two of them; if the signal was sent, then Joseph must be alive, for only he could have sent it. However, there are several difficulties with this explanation.

The first is linguistic. In biblical Hebrew, the word for 'wagon' and the word for 'heifer' are the same, *'agalah/'eglah*, enabling the midrash to connect the two. However, Joseph did not send a written or verbal message; he sent actual wagons. Can we assume that when Jacob saw Egyptian wagons, the *'agalot*, he associated them with the biblical pericope of the *'eglah 'arufah* based on their being homonyms?

The *Minhat Yehuda*, R. Yehuda b. Elazar (13th-14th c., France) addresses this difficulty. He concludes that since wagons were then pulled by calves, or heifers, the verse must imply that what Jacob perceived were the animals who pulled the wagons, and not the wagons themselves. These heifers, who pulled the wagons, reminded Jacob of the *'eglah arufah* that he had discussed with Joseph, and concluded that Joseph had sent them as an indication that he was alive.

The second difficulty is contextual, where the text seems to shift the responsibility of sending the wagons from Pharaoh to Joseph. At first, it explicitly notes that sending the

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wagons was Pharaoh's idea (Gen. 45:19). Then we are told that Joseph gave them the wagons *as Pharaoh had commanded* (45:21). If so, it is odd that Jacob would view them as a sign from Joseph. Rashi points out this difficulty, perhaps hinting that the text was written from Jacob's perspective: Even though it was Pharaoh who sent the wagons, Jacob perceived them as a message from Joseph. Rashbam uses this second verse to help solve this issue, noting that Jacob saw the wagons *that Joseph had sent* (45:27) – as *according to Pharaoh's command*. In any case, it is difficult to view these *'agalot* as a sign from Joseph if it was Pharaoh who initiated their dispatch.

Other commentators explain why Jacob's misattributing the source of the wagons helped convince him that Joseph lives. *Midrash Lekah Tov* realizes that official Egyptian wagons could only be used with the king's permission. Therefore, Jacob realized that the sons' report – "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt" – must be true, as only a ruler would have the authority to send the wagons. Rashbam projects the matter back to the earlier account of Joseph's dreams. While the brothers were at first angry, and then jealous, of Joseph, Jacob "kept the matter in mind" (Gen. 37:11). Rashbam views this as the backdrop for the report of Jacob's initial disbelief, and subsequent belief. After hearing the dream that portended Joseph's eventual rise to power, Jacob waited to see whether it would come true; and now, seeing wagons that only one in power could authorize sending, he realized that it had.

The third difficulty with accepting the wagons as proof that Joseph lives is textual. Let us assume that Jacob realized the connection between the Egyptian wagons and the topic of *'eglah 'arufah*, and that, assuming the wagons were sent by Joseph, he perceived it as a sign that Joseph was alive. All this is not written in the text; it is midrash. So, whoever put together this midrash chose to single out the issue of *'eglah 'arufah* as the topic that would be most likely to convince Jacob that Joseph still lives. Why this issue, and not another? For example, why not assume that Jacob saw all the new clothes that Joseph had given the brothers, and connect that to the clothes – the *ketonet passim* - that Jacob had given Joseph? While the small inconsistencies can be solved, it is still unclear why the Sages would pin Jacob's revived spirit on the memory of sharing a discussion with Joseph on the topic of *'eglah 'arufah*. Perhaps Jacob was relieved to discover that Joseph still remembered their shared learning, viewing it as evidence that even after years in exile, Joseph has remained a 'good Jew' who remembers his cultural background. However, this still does not explain why the Sages chose to single out the issue of *'eglah 'arufah* for this purpose.

R. Isaiah MiTrani addresses this question, attending to the particular content of the *'eglah 'arufah* pericope. He quotes the Yerushalmi, which envisions an interaction between Jacob and Joseph that took place before the separation: "When Jacob had sent Joseph to his brothers, Jacob escorted him. Joseph said, Father, go back, so I will not be punished for having caused you the trouble. Jacob responded, My sons will stumble on

this in the future, when they will not escort a stranger, and he will be killed, and they will then bring an *'eglah 'arufah*… and therefore it says that "he saw the wagons [*'agalot*]."

According to this explanation, Jacob and Joseph did not 'happen' to be learning about *'eglah 'arufah* before Joseph departed. Rather, Jacob taught him this law in the context of their final conversation, which took place before Joseph set out to search for his brothers. Joseph feared that he would be punished for having his father go to the trouble of escorting him, and Jacob explained the importance of the escort: one who leaves without an escort is in danger of being killed, a scenario which would then require the *'eglah 'arufah* ceremony. The Maharal also mentions this midrash, adding that since a lack of escort may lead to danger, then, by extension, the potential danger is averted by an escort. This homiletic reading removes the wagons from their literal context, attending to a different sense of the word *'agalot*, meaning 'heifers.' The midrash then explores an alternative reading wherein Jacob perceived Joseph as sending him a sign by reminding him of the heifer issue, the *'eglah 'arufah*, they had previously discussed. According to this reading, Jacob connected the sight of the *'agalot* to their earlier discussion about escort, which then led him to realize that since he had escorted Joseph, therefore Joseph must be safe.

The Maharal continues this line of thought, and takes it one step further, offering a close reading of Rashi's commentary – *siman massar lahem*, Joseph gave them a 'sign.' First, he asks, why would he give a 'sign,' and not explicitly state, as proof that he is alive, that he last spoke to Jacob about the *'eglah 'arufah*? Furthermore, why did Joseph give the sign *lahem*, to his brothers, and not to Jacob? With great sensitivity, Maharal suggests that Joseph had indeed been protected by Jacob's escort; however, that implies that without the escort, he would have been in danger. The immediate danger, as borne out by the continuation of the story, was posed by the brothers. Ohr HaChaim fills in an extra line of dialogue: Within the discussion of Jacob escorting Joseph, he has Jacob reassuring Joseph that if you, Joseph, fear your brothers' hatred "I will escort you and send you off as my agent for carrying out a *mitzvah* on my behalf, as emissaries of a *mitzvah* will not be harmed."

The assumption behind this addition is that Joseph was protected not only by Jacob's escort, but by the very fact that he was doing Jacob's will; by serving as a *shaliah mitzvah*, he would be safe from harm (BT *Pesahim* 8b). Maharal says that this is the reason why the message had to be sent by delicate insinuation only; had the brothers realized the implication of Joseph's message, they would have thought that Joseph views them as potential murderers. Therefore, he sent the message, through them, in the form of a 'sign.'

This scenario helps explain the centrality of *'agalot* to Jacob's memory of Joseph. If the last moment they shared was colored by the implications of Jacob's escort, then it is not

difficult to understand why *'agalot* would constitute a powerful indication that Joseph was still alive. However, it also introduces a narratological element not present in the text – Jacob having, in fact, escorted Joseph. If we look back at that decisive moment, we read that: *Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready." And he said to him, "Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron* (Gen/ 37:13-14).

There is no mention here of any escort, only that Jacob had 'sent him' off to find his brothers.

The *Keli Yakar* (Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, 17th c. Prague) offers a fantastic perspective on the connection between Jacob seeing the *'agalot* and believing that Joseph still lives. He notes that the laws of *'eglah 'arufah* include physically measuring the distance between the murder victim and the nearest city. Similarly, he writes, one needs to also 'measure' it rationally, by figuring out what sin led to the victim's death – his own, that of his family, or of his city; where the closest city is the one that requires atonement. Seeing the *'agalot* reminded Jacob of the need to 'measure,' or figure out, what sin he had committed that warranted the punishment of so many years of separation from his beloved son. He would realize that his sin must have been all the time – 22 years – he spent in Laban's house, during which he was not able to properly honor his father and mother. Now, after 22 years of not having his beloved son properly honor him, he would understand that Joseph must still be alive; for if not, then his suffering would have lasted longer than his sin warranted. Therefore, when he saw the *'agalot*, he believed that Joseph still lived and his spirit revived.

The *Keli Yakar* suggested that Jacob, wondering what offense he had committed to warrant his extended separation from Joseph, 'measured' the number of years that he himself had not attended his elders and thus reached the conclusion that, having suffered for a comparable extent of time, Joseph must be alive. Ibn Ezra, too, speaks of this connection between sin and punishment. Commenting on the command to measure the distance between the victim and the surrounding cities, he writes that the closest city must be guilty, for had they not committed some similar offense, one close to them (for the victim had recently departed their city) would not have been killed.

To sum up thus far, we have seen that some measure of guilt is attributed to Jacob for having sent Joseph on a dangerous mission. According to the conventional reading of the *midrash*, this guilt was alleviated by Jacob having done all in his power to prevent any harm befalling Joseph – by escorting him. This, in turn, is derived from the sin attributed to the elders of the city nearest an unidentified murder victim: had they only escorted him, he would not have been harmed. As part of the ceremony of atonement, the elders were to declare: *Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done* (Deut. 21:7). Rashi, like many others, immediately asks, "Could we have possibly considered

that the elders are murderers? Rather, we did not take notice of him and let him leave without food and escort." As atonement for this oversight, they were required to perform the ceremony of the *'eglah 'arufah*. We also noted that while this reading fits the general gist of the narrative, there is no indication within the text itself that Jacob had, in fact, escorted Joseph on that fatal day.

I would like to digress for a moment and look at the laws in Numbers concerning a murderer. After listing the laws relating to the cities of sanctuary and the blood avenger, the verses warn: *So you shall not pollute the land in which you are: for blood, it pollutes the land; and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him who shed it* (Num. 35:33).

The connection between these verses and the unidentified murder victim in Deuteronomy 21 is fairly straightforward. Both pericopes deal with murder. Both emphasize blood: In Numbers 35 the blood is ostensibly that of the murder victim, which is said to "pollute the land," while in Deuteronomy 21 the blood is that of the heifer, which either symbolically re-enacts the murder (see BT *Sotah* 66b) or perhaps represents the execution of the perpetrator, the most one can do until the guilty party is found. The Deuteronomy case specifies that the heifer should be killed over a river with a strong current, "which is not tilled or sown" (21:4), once again connecting the blood with a curse of the land, first mentioned in Genesis 4:11, when the ground is cursed for having accepted the blood of the murdered Abel.

As part of the confessional speech in the *'eglah 'arufah* ceremony, the elders declare: *Absolve, Lord, Your people Israel whom You redeemed, and do not let guilt for the blood of the innocent remain among Your people Israel* (Deut. 21:8). Based on the above similarities to the laws pertaining to the murderer, some exegetes connect this "guilt for the blood of the innocent," *dam naki*, to a curse placed upon the land. For example, the Netziv writes that 'polluting the land' leads to punishment and a lack of grain ("*hoser tevuah*"). Shmuel David Luzzato (Shadal, commenting on Num, 35:33) posits that the 'great sins' cause the land to be cursed, leading to national disasters, "especially famine." Similarly, the *Torah Temimah* quotes the Yerushalmi (*Kiddushin* 4:1): "David said, for four sins the rains are locked away. For the sins of foreign worship, incest and adultery, murder, and the sins of those who publicly promise money for welfare but do not pay . . . From where because of the murderers? *Because blood will distort the Land* (Num 35:33)."

According to the above sources, God will punish the 'great sin' of murder by cursing the land; this is effected by withholding rain, thus causing a famine.

The verse continues: *No expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him who shed it*. Connecting the case in Numbers once again to the *'eglah 'arufah* in Deuteronomy, the *Sifri* notes that despite the ceremonial killing of the heifer, no atonement can be found for the land until the murderer himself pays the

price. The Malbim explains that while the *'eglah 'arufah* ceremony does indeed expiate the people, so long as the murderer has not been found, the land itself remains cursed until the murderer's blood has been shed (see BT *Ketubot* 37 and *Sotah* 42). This means that in the case of a murder, where the murderer has not yet been punished, the land – in the form of famine – will suffer.

All this is fascinating in the context of the Joseph story. The story opens with Jacob favoring his son, leading to jealousy and strife among the brothers. While the brothers are out grazing the sheep, Joseph remains at home with his father, who eventually sends him off to find his brothers. At this point, Jacob remains at home and does not know what transpires between his sons. The brothers attack Joseph and throw him into a pit which is to be his grave (Gen. 37:22-24). Then they change their plan and Joseph is sold as a slave; Joseph's coat, dipped in a goat's blood, is used as proof of his demise. Twenty-two years later, a famine compels Jacob to send his sons to Egypt in search of food.

At several points throughout the story, the narrator offers the reader an insight into the brothers' feelings of guilt. The first such mention occurs during the first time they go to Egypt, when Joseph tells them they must bring Benjamin as proof of their innocent intentions. In a reaction that seems totally out of context, they say to one another: *Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us* (Gen. 42:21) Decades after they mistreated Joseph, they still view their misfortunes as punishment. Reuben, too, connects their current situation with that earlier deed: *Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood* (42:22). After their second visit to Egypt Joseph has his silver goblet planted in Benjamin's sack, framing him for the theft. Joseph knows he is not guilty; the brothers, who found their money returned in each of their own sacks (Gen. 44:1, 11-12), also knew that Benjamin was innocent. When Joseph accused Benjamin, Judah stepped forward and spoke on behalf of all the brothers. However, he did not deny their guilt, but rather accepted it: *What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants* (44:16). He is clearly not referring to the crime they have not [just recently] committed, but, rather, he views their current calamity as God's hour of reckoning for that earlier crime of abusing Joseph.

The narrator also demonstrates Joseph's interpretation of his own history. He credits God with his success in interpreting dreams (Gen. 40:8, 41:16), and declares that God directs history (41:25, 32). His actions are directed by a fear of God (Gen. 39:9, 42:18). While his brothers are fearful of the money they found returned in their sacks, Joseph's servant, speaking on behalf of Joseph, attributes their good fortune to God (43:23). Finally, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he explicitly asserts that it is God, not the brothers, who had sent him to Egypt: *Now, do not be distressed or reproach*

yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you (45:5); *So, it was not you who sent me here, but God* (45:8).

We see, therefore, that Joseph and the brothers interpreted their family history in different ways. While the brothers continued to experience guilt, and attributed every misfortune to their earlier crime, Joseph viewed the entire process as an unfolding of God's plan.[2] This does not, of course, absolve the brothers of their wrongdoing; but it poses both Joseph and the brothers as mere pawns who act to fulfill God's plan.

But what about Jacob? The text does not indicate whether he suspected his sons of foul play. Let us now look at a simplified version of the story from Jacob's point of view. He sent his favored son on a dangerous mission and was later shown a bloody garment as evidence of his death. He does not know who killed Joseph, but blood is soaking the ground. Years later there is a famine, and he was compelled to send Benjamin down to Egypt in search of food. How does Jacob interpret the events that befell his family?

I think it is not farfetched to assume that he may have felt some measure of guilt. He knew that his older sons harbored a fair measure of animosity toward Joseph, yet he sent Joseph, unarmed and alone, to face the ten older men. Joseph disappears, leaving behind only a bloodied coat. Years later Jacob is forced to entrust his beloved Rachel's lone surviving son, Benjamin, to those same men, in the wake of a famine. What caused the famine? Earlier we saw that *Hazal* connected murder to God withholding rain and cursing the land. Was Jacob responsible for this? Did he cause Joseph's death? Did he indirectly contribute to the famine?

Although the text does not tell us whom Jacob blamed for Joseph's demise, himself or his older sons, I believe that we are given a glimpse of Jacob's mental turmoil in his initial refusal to send Benjamin with them: *Their father Jacob said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin – 'alai hayu khulanah* (Gen. 42:36).

This last part, *'alai hayu khulanah*, is difficult to translate. The English translations all offer some form of 'All these things have happened to me,' meaning, Jacob is listing his woes, bemoaning the sons that were taken from him. This type of translation understands the word "*'alai*" literally – all these things were *upon* me.

Classical commentators look at the statement within context. The first time the brothers came back from Egypt, Simeon did not return with them; now, when they wish to take Benjamin with them, Jacob connects between his long-missing son (Joseph), his recently-missing son (Simeon), and his youngest for whom he fears (Benjamin). In his anger, Jacob blames his sons for causing all these misfortunes, positing that they all occurred as a result of the brothers' strife (Seforno). Rashi, and others following him, take the accusation a step further: "This teaches that he suspected that they had killed or sold Simeon [who remained hostage in Egypt] as they had Joseph." These exegetes view Jacob's statement as proof that he suspected his sons of foul play in the Joseph affair.

This is certainly reasonable; however, it does not fit into the words "*'alai hayu khulanah*."

I would like to propose an alternative interpretation of the word *'alai*. The simple meaning of *'al* is, as noted, 'upon' – this is common in phrases such as *'al ha-aretz* (upon the earth), or *'al shikhmo* (upon his shoulder). However, the word *'al* at times presents in the sense of 'because of,' 'on account of.'[3] For example, when God appears to Abimelech in a dream and chastises him for taking Sarah, He says *You are to die because of* (al) *the woman that you have taken* (Gen. 20:3).[4] If we adopt this reading of the word *'al* within our context, then when Jacob says "Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin – *'alai hayu khulanah*," perhaps he is expressing, through the use of the polysemic "*'alai*," a fear (or realization? Confession?) that he, Jacob, was the cause of the above misfortunes. It is *because of me*, *on my account*, that all these misfortunes have occurred. I, Jacob, am to blame for the absence of both Joseph and Simeon, and if they take away Benjamin, then that would be on my account as well.

Why would Jacob consider himself to blame for the loss of Joseph and Simeon? If we return to the Sages' interpretation of the elders' role in the *'eglah 'arufah* issue, it is clear that when someone leaves the safety of a city, it is the elders' responsibility to ensure he has food and escort. If they do not, and the traveler is subsequently attacked, it is the elders who are to take responsibility for his murder. Jacob had sent Joseph out on a dangerous mission. R. Kimchi explains the weighty use of Joseph's response, *hineni*, to mean that he was not afraid of his brothers because he believed that they would not harm him for fear of their father, and that Jacob believed that as well; otherwise, he would not have sent him. However, the brothers did cause Joseph harm, and Jacob was responsible for sending him.

As far as Jacob knew, Joseph was killed. As we saw above, until the perpetrator is found, God's punishment for manslaughter is to curse the land, resulting in famine. Indeed, there was a famine; it was the famine that obliged Jacob to send his sons to Egypt in search of food, a decision that culminated in Simeon's incarceration. This, too, was now on Jacob's conscience.

We could perhaps turn to the Sages for yet another ambiguous 'confession' on Jacob's behalf. Decades earlier, when fleeing from Laban's house, Laban caught up with Jacob's family and accused them of stealing his gods. Not knowing that Rachel had indeed taken them, Jacob protested innocence, adding that *Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive* (Gen. 31:32). The *teraphim* were not discovered at that point; however, Rachel died in childbirth not long after (35:19). Rashi, and many others (commenting on Gen. 31:32) attribute her death to Jacob's earlier curse: Jacob did not mean to curse her, he believed his whole household innocent, but "God upholds the decree of a righteous man" (BT *Taanit* 23a, and others). According to this reading, Jacob was (inadvertently!) responsible for Rachel's death.

The text does not record Jacob's emotional response to the death of his beloved wife. However, decades later, when he reunites with Joseph in Egypt, he recounts that tragic event: *When I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died 'alai while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, now Bethlehem* (Gen. 48:7).

Many commentators focus on the importance of this report, within context, and view it as Jacob's apology to Joseph for having buried Rachel by the side of the road. I wish, however, to focus on the singular expression *meitah 'alai Rachel*, often translated as 'to my sorrow.' BT *Sanhedrin* 22b states that when a woman dies, it is her husband who suffers most. This is the reading that all the translations seem to adopt.

While this may be true, we could also look at the use of *'alai* in the sense previously discussed, 'because of,' 'on account of.' Used this way, when Jacob says *meitah 'alai Rachel* he is actually confessing: Rachel died on my account. My fault. Perhaps Jacob, as the Sages after him, perceived Rachel's death to be the result of his words to Laban.

The word *'al*, or *'alai*, can be read in [at least] two ways, as either 'upon' or 'on account of.' If so, Jacob's pained cry "*'alai hayu khulanah*" could be understood in two ways as well. According to the first meaning, 'upon,' Jacob is bemoaning the loss of his sons; while according to the second meaning, 'on account of,' Jacob is assuming responsibility for the loss of his sons.

We can now go back and look at the *'agalot* that Pharaoh had told Joseph to send to Jacob. Seeing these *'agalot*, Jacob's spirit revived and he declared that his son, Joseph, still lives. The Sages attributed the revived spirit to the cherished memory of their last conversation, their shared learning of the laws of *'eglah 'arufah*. What is the *'eglah 'arufah*? It is a ceremony that takes place after a man is murdered, his slayers unknown. The elders who should have provided an escort perform the ceremony of expiation, but the land remains cursed until the perpetrator is found and punished. Perhaps, from Jacob's point of view, he was that elder. Perhaps he felt responsible for his son's demise, and the land is accursed on account of him until the murderer is found. But what about Joseph's point of view?

We noted earlier that Joseph attributed the entire family history to God's plan. This prism allowed Joseph to not only forgive his brothers, but to completely sidestep their involvement in his sale to slavery: *It was not you who sent me here, but God* (45:8). If Joseph viewed his history, perhaps positively, as a predetermined course culminating in his ability to sustain his family, he would presumably not blame his father for taking any part in the sale either. In fact, Joseph, the victim, would completely absolve his father from any misdeed – for, in his eyes, no crime had been committed. This view leads to a completely different explanation of the family history:[5] there was no crime, no murder, and therefore the famine was not God's punishment. There was no need for perpetrators to be found and punished, or even absolved, for there was no crime.

This may be the message that the Sages had Jacob read in the *'agalot*. When the brothers initially brought the surprising news that Joseph lives and that he rules over all of Egypt (45:26), Jacob's heart "fainted" (JPS translation) and he did not believe them. After seeing the *'agalot* his spirit revived and he did believe them. The sight of the *'agalot* seemed to have changed both his emotion (from 'faint' to 'revived') and his belief in the news (from disbelief to belief). The verses seem to connect the two: So long as he remained anguished, he did not believe; once his anguish was relieved, he allowed himself to believe as well. Jacob saw the *'agalot* as a sign and connected them to the *'eglah 'arufah*. The *'eglah* ceremony was performed to exonerate the elders from their sin. If Joseph, the victim, is alive, yet blames Jacob for all that had transpired, his heart remains faint; but if Joseph sent the *'agalot* as a reminder of the *'eglah 'arufah*, this is a sign that the elder is exonerated. At this, Jacob's spirit revived. Perhaps he never believed his son truly dead, and therefore never ceased mourning for him (37:35). If his son was not dead, he was perhaps alive and blaming Jacob for whatever had transpired. Now Jacob could truly be comforted – his son was not only alive but had forgiven him as well. In the words of *Midrash Lekah Tov*:

This is what the Sages teach us: God's spirit does not come upon one who is lazy, or sad, but only one who experiences joy.

With the realization that Joseph lives, and the understanding that he is absolved of the burden of guilt, Jacob's spirit is revived.

NOTES

1. Ruth Walfish suggested two different readings of this *midrash*. I follow, and expand upon, the first these readings. Walfish, R., "Joseph and the *Eglah Arufa*," *JBQ* 40/1 (2012), pp 25-28.

2. I claim that Joseph viewed his own history of misfortunes as God's plan, with the brothers playing their part. This seems to contradict Joseph's seeming maltreatment of his brothers from the moment they first went down to Egypt. This difficult issue has been discussed by many scholars. It is not my intention, within the scope of this essay, to contribute to the conversation on this topic.

3. See BDB 1f(b).

4. For the use of על in this sense see also Gen. 21:12; 26:7, 9; 27:41; Lev. 4:3, 28; 5:18; 19:17; 26:18, 24, 28; Deut. 9:18; 24:16; Josh. 9:20; Jer. 1:16; 5:9; 15:15; and many, many others.

5. "We cannot change the past, but by changing how we think of the past - we can change the future." Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, as quoted in Jonathan Grossman, *Yosef: Sippuran shel Halomot*, Miskal, 2021.