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# The Wagons – On a Unified Path

In *Parashat Vayigash*, the Torah describes the moment when Yaakov Avinu learns that Yosef is still alive. The brothers return from Egypt and deliver the astonishing news:

וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם... וַיֵּרָא  
אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אוֹתוֹ – וַתְּחִי רוּחַ  
יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם

“They told him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them... and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him, and the spirit of Yaakov their father was revived.”<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, the verse seems straightforward. Yosef sent wagons to transport his father to Egypt and seeing them convinced Yaakov that the message was genuine. Yet Rashi famously cites a Midrash that reads the verse more deeply. The word *Agalot* (wagons) alludes to *eglah arufah* - the last topic of Torah that Yosef and Yaakov had studied together before Yosef was sold. Through this subtle hint, Yosef demonstrated that he remained spiritually connected to his father, and Yaakov recognized the message.

However, the Da’at Zekenim MiBa’alei HaTosafot offer a different interpretation. The *agalot* that revived Yaakov’s spirit were not symbolic references to *eglah arufah*. Rather,

they referred to the actual wagons described later in the Torah, in *Parashat Naso*.

In *Parashat Naso*, the leaders of the twelve tribes- the *nesi'im* - bring offerings for the dedication of the Mishkan. Each *nasi* brings his own korban, and the Torah describes their gifts in painstaking detail. Indeed, the repetition of these offerings is what makes Parashat Naso the longest parasha in the Torah.

When the Torah summarizes the offerings, we find a striking pattern: *Twelve silver bowls, twelve basins, twelve golden ladles - everything appears in groups of twelve, corresponding to the twelve tribes*. Yet at the beginning of the section we encounter something unexpected: “וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת קִרְבָּנָם לִפְנֵי ה' שֵׁשׁ עֲגָלוֹת צֶבַע וּשְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרִי בָקָר – עֲגָלָה עַל שְׁנֵי הַנְּשָׂאִים.”

“They brought their offering before Hashem: six covered wagons and twelve oxen— one wagon for every two princes.”<sup>2</sup>

Here the pattern changes. Instead of twelve wagons, one for each prince, there are only **six**. Why is that?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand<sup>3</sup> suggests a profound explanation. The *nesi'im* were clearly not trying to economize. These were leaders who spared no expense in honoring the Mishkan. If they wished to reduce costs, they could have done so in many other aspects of the offerings. Rather, their decision was deliberate and symbolic. Each prince brought his own individual korban, representing the unique identity of his *shevet*. Yet such individuality carried a potential danger. If every tribe acted entirely

2. Bamidbar 7:3

3. Rabbi Yissachar Frand; *On the Parasha Vol II*

1. Bereishit 45:27

on its own, differences could easily evolve into competition, rivalry, and division. The princes therefore made a conscious statement. While their offerings would be distinct, their wagons would be shared. Two princes per wagon.

By sharing the vehicles that transported the sacred materials, they demonstrated that even while maintaining their individual identities, the tribes remained interconnected parts of a single nation. Difference did not mean separation.

This insight allows us to understand the comment of the Da'at Zekenim. When the Torah says that Yaakov saw the *agalot* and his spirit was revived, it alludes to the future wagons of *Parashat Naso*. It was the wagons that symbolized the unity of the tribes.

Yaakov Avinu's life had been shadowed by a troubling historical pattern. Avraham had two sons, yet Yishmael was excluded. Yitzhak had two sons, yet Esav was rejected. Would the same tragedy repeat itself?

For years Yaakov believed that Yosef had been lost. Perhaps, he feared, the covenant would again continue through only some of his children. Perhaps one tribe, or one brother, would ultimately be cast aside.

Even now, upon hearing that Yosef lived, another concern remained: What about the relationship between Yosef and the brothers? Would old jealousy resurface? Would resentment linger? Then Yaakov saw the *agalot*. Not merely wagons, but a vision of the future, a glimpse of a time when the descendants of his sons would remain distinct tribes yet united as one people. He realized that the family would not fracture. The tribes might differ in character, mission, and blessing, but they would still move forward together.

At that moment, "וַיִּתְחַי רִיחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם" - Yaakov's spirit was revived.

## THE DEEPER MESSAGE

The symbolism of the wagons carries a timeless message. Judaism never demanded uniformity. The twelve tribes were never meant to be identical. Each *shevet* possessed its own personality, strengths, and spiritual path. Yehudah embodied leadership, Yis-sachar scholarship, Zevulun commerce, and so forth. However, diversity was never meant to lead to fragmentation.

The wagons teach that distinct roles can still share the same vehicle. One may travel a different path yet still journey toward the same destination. This idea lies at the heart of the Jewish people's enduring strength. Our unity does not emerge from sameness. Rather, it emerges from the recognition that beneath our differences lies a shared covenant and shared destiny.

Yaakov Avinu understood that if his descendants could preserve the balance of individual identity alongside collective responsibility, then the future of Israel was secure. Perhaps this is why the Torah records that the sight of those wagons revived him. For in them he saw more than transportation. He saw the blueprint of Jewish survival: many tribes, one nation; many voices, one covenant; many journeys, one destiny.

When we remember that lesson and we learn to carry the Mishkan together, even while standing as individuals, we too fulfill the vision that gave Yaakov renewed life. For the true strength of Am Yisrael has always been the ability to travel forward, side by side in the same wagon, as a unified people. ■

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