

*Half of the Torah is a Chiasm: The Creation of the Chosen Nation**

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The entire first two books of the Torah comprise one extensive and quite incredible chiasmus. This chiastic structure has, *inter alia*, two important effects: it reveals and emphasizes the thematic underpinnings to the narrative as a whole, and it serves as a tool in the interpretation of discrete episodes and their significance as parts of that whole. While the accompanying color chart (also at www.Hakirah.org/vol29SchwartzChart.pdf) displaying the entire chiasmus should largely speak for itself, this article is intended, as a companion to the chart, to highlight those effects.

Many parts of Tanakh contain “local,” or intra-sectional chiasms.¹ The chiasmus identified here differs from classic or more typical chiasms in two key respects. First, it is one long, elaborate chiasmus that extends throughout the entirety of the narratives of the first two books of the Torah. Second, whereas chiasms are often marked by language, choice of words, and textual patterns, this chiasmus, while at times bolstered with linguistic parallels, is mostly structured with narrative concepts and themes rather than language.²

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¹ For an extensive bibliography of chiastic patterns in the Old Testament, see John M. Murphy, Register to the John W. Welch Chiasmus Collection, 1818-2004, Provo: UT (2007), pp. 36-63.

² For other somewhat extended chiasms of a similar ilk, see Anchor Bible Dictionary, David Noel Freedman, ed., Doubleday, s.v. *Jacob Narrative* (analyzing the Yaakov narrative); Clark, David J., “Patterns of Inverted Parallelism in Genesis,” *Understanding and Translating the Bible*, 44-59 (an elaborate and intricate analysis of much of the patriarchal narrative in *Bereshit*). David A. Dorsey manages to identify a “local” chiasm in every section of *Bereshit* and *Shemot*. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999, 47-71. After completing the chiasmus featured in this article, I saw that he also identified some of the pairings featured here.

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The focus and theme of the narrative structure as a whole, as highlighted by the chiasmus, is the formation and subsequent teleology of the Jewish nation, chosen by God to receive and observe the Torah and worship Him in His Sanctuary. The chiasmic structure emphasizes the thematic build-up and focal points of this narrative in three ways. First, as is self-evident from the chiasmus itself and discussed further below, many of the mirrored pairings throughout it substantively highlight this theme. Second, by definition it structurally highlights a center—and thus central—section of the story.³ Third, this chiasmus appears to “stretch” or “zoom in” as it approaches the center: the more one moves from the edge of the chiasmus toward the middle, the more granularly the associated narrative and its details are represented therein.

The first two books of the Torah, *Bereshit* and *Shemot*, may be described as a discrete narrative unit. *Va-yikra*, being, like much of the rest of the Torah, more of a legal treatise than a chronological story, separates this unit from the rest of the Torah.⁴ Put simply, the story of *Bereshit* and *Shemot* is the story of the creation of the Jewish people. Taken to one more level of granularity, the book of *Bereshit* is the story of God’s iterative process of choosing a particular family, the progenitors of His people. *Shemot*, in turn, is the story of that family becoming a nation and being endowed with its *raison d’être*: the Torah and the bringing of God into this world.⁵

As identified and developed by others,⁶ the recurring theme of *Bereshit* is one of choosing. God creates humanity, and distinguishes—the first

³ See Elie Assis, “Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization,” *Prooftexts* 22:3 (Fall 2002), 273, citing those who suggest that the entire purpose of chiasmus is to focus the reader’s attention to the unit’s center. Other purposes advanced for chiasmus include: serving as a mnemonic device; an artistic and aesthetic form; and to cohere, unify, and confine the boundaries of a literary unit. *Ibid.*

⁴ Relatedly, the chiasmus discussed herein is focused exclusively on the narrative components of *Bereshit* and *Shemot*. Thus, the substantial portions of *Shemot* that are legal, rather than narrative, in nature, do not play a role in the chiasmus, other than to the extent that they play a role in the narrative itself.

⁵ See also Netziv, *Ha’amek Davar*, Introduction to *Shemot* (explaining that the book of *Shemot* is the natural sequel and complement to *Bereshit*, insofar as the receiving of the Torah by the chosen nation represents the telos and hence completion of the creation process); Ramban, Introduction to Commentary on *Shemot* (emphasizing the role of the Mishkan at the end, and climax, of *Shemot* as the completion of the redemption from the exile begun at the end of *Bereshit* and the restoration of the glory of the beginning of *Bereshit*).

⁶ See, e.g., Menachem Leibtag, at <https://tanach.org/breishit/lech.txt>; <https://tanach.org/breishit/toldot/toldots1.htm>; <https://tanach.org/breishit/vaychi/vaychis1.htm>.

choosing—humanity from the rest of creation, for better and for worse, in its ability to make moral choices: to be good or bad. Man’s capacity for evil (sin) is manifested on an individual scale in the story of Adam and Eve, and on a global scale in that of the Flood. After the episode of the Tower of Babel demonstrates that an utterly homogeneous, universalist humanity is not the ideal approach for the redemption of man, the initial seeds of chosenness are sown in the foundation of heterogeneous nations. The inevitable next step is the choosing of Avraham as a chosen individual and in turn the father of a chosen family, with the identified ultimate objective, from the outset, of developing into a chosen nation. We are then met with two generational iterations of merit-based intrafamily culling and perfecting, of choosing and rejection, culminating with the life of the father of the Sons of Israel: Israel himself (Yaakov). Hence the story of Yaakov’s life and family form the broader center of the chiasmus.

The crystallization of a chosen family into a nation inevitably requires an end to the pattern of intrafamily winnowing and choosing. Once identified and crystallized, the chosen nation remains chosen in its entirety, including all of its variegated parts. And like humanity as a whole, a nation itself cannot be internally homogeneous—not only in kind but even in relation to moral worth and stature—and it does require leaders and leadership. Yet at a certain point that does not have to mean the selection of some at the expense of others, but rather a recognition of individual differences as part of a whole. This difficult adjustment is at the core of the story of Yosef and his brothers, the next level of centrality and magnification of the chiasmus.

Taken in the context of the family’s history until their time rather than with the benefit of hindsight, the brothers’ otherwise disturbing treatment of Yosef becomes more understandable. Whether because of their perception of him as an ignoble, rejected brother of the Yishmael/Esau mold, or conversely as a rival, presumptuous or otherwise, to the exclusive Yitzhak/Yaakov “chosen” berth, the brothers are playing with the deck they believe they have been handed, in which their internecine rivalry is a zero-sum game. Yosef, for his part, perhaps does not even know that his exile is something other than a rejection in the tradition of Yishmael’s and Esau’s,⁷ and possibly does not learn otherwise at least until his spectacular recovery and elevation from the depths of the dungeon to the power office in Pharaoh’s palace. Regardless of which of the many explanations one accepts for Yosef’s extended harassment of his brothers when they

⁷ See, e.g. Yoel Bin Nun, “Why Didn’t Yosef Send (a Messenger) to His Father?”, *Megadim* 1:20-31 (1986).

are first reunited in Egypt,⁸ their resulting acknowledgment of prior wrongs, peacemaking, and unification constitutes the transformation of a set of individual rivals into a cohesive family, one that is fit to become a nation. Thus, in contrast to R1⁹, where, in a final wave of choosing and rejection, only one brother is blessed by the patriarch, at the expense of the other, its parallel in R2 sees all the brothers blessed together, as prototypes of a future nation.¹⁰ As is the case throughout, their placement as pairs within the chiasmus serves to highlight this important contrast.

But while they are blessed together, they do not, of course, all receive the same blessing. Like any nation, albeit a fledgling one, the Jewish people is multifarious. And like any nation, they are in need of some form of leadership. The ultimate destiny of the Jewish people is to live as a sovereign pious nation in its land, worshipping in its Sanctuary (per A1/A2)—and ruled by a king¹¹ from its divinely designated royal line, the line of Yehuda. Thus, the final stage of the initial formation of the Jewish people necessarily comprises the identification and inception of the royal line. As has been developed by many others,¹² the story of Yosef and his brothers contains within it the identification of Yehuda as the leader of the family, and, in turn, the future nation. From this standpoint, the hub of this storyline is the episode of Yehuda and Tamar, comprising as it does not only the turning point in the development of Yehuda's character and his suitability for the leadership role¹³ but also the literal initial seeds of his royal line.

⁸ See, e.g., Ramban, *Beresbit* 42:9; Abarbanel, *Beresbit* 41.

⁹ All references are to labeled lines in the chiasmus, as indicated in the attached chart.

¹⁰ Similarly, Yosef's rejection of his brothers' offer in P2 provides a contrast with the fateful and far-reaching pact sealed in P1.

¹¹ I take no position on the long-debated question of whether monarchy is presented in Tanakh as the a priori ideal form of government for the Jewish people. See *Sanbedrin* 20b, *Sifrei* 156, and nearly all commentators on the tension between *Devarim* 17 and *I Shmuel* 8. Ideal or not, a Jewish monarchy is certainly not only the destined government of the Jewish people in Tanakh but is also a dominant theme throughout Tanakh. That said, and regardless of the chiasmus identified in this essay, the strong thematic foreshadowing, as early as *Beresbit*, of the selection of Yehuda as the royal tribe does seem to emphasize the fundamental—if not ideal—role that monarchy plays in the Jewish people's destiny.

¹² See, e.g., Zvi Shimon, *Hanbagat Yehuda Le-Umat Hanbagat Reuven*, at <https://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/miketz/shi.html>; Yonatan Grossman, "The Story of Yehuda and Tamar—The Contribution to the Narrative Cycle of Yosef and His Brothers," at https://www.etzion.org.il/en/story-yehuda-and-tamar-contribution-narrative-cycle-yosef-and-his-brothers#_ftnref10.

¹³ See *Shemot Rabbah*, 30:16,19; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta Va-yehi Be-shalakh* 5; Grossman, *ibid*.

Hence, not only is the central story of the chiasmus this turning point in his character, but the very center of this center (at line AM) is the conception of this royal line. Thus, while not usually thought of as a particularly foundational story, the chiasmus is telling us “loud and clear” that the Yehuda-Tamar story is indeed the focal point in the narrative of the formation of the Jewish people: the turning point or climax in the transition from chosen family to chosen nation is the conception of the royal line, of the leadership of that nation. While at first blush the centrality of leadership in general and kingship in particular is not an obvious thematic cornerstone of the Torah, taken in the broader context of Tanakh—which is clearly focused on the kingdom of Israel and its leaders, not to mention the ultimate advent of the messianic progeny of this royal line—this becomes much more understandable. Indeed, why shouldn’t the Torah properly highlight and introduce the dominant theme of the broader Bible of which it is a part?

Because of the difficulty of keeping track of such a large chiasmus (consisting of 77 “line items,” or 38 mirrored pairs and a central axis), the accompanying chart is colored and shaded in order to facilitate identifying the counterpart of each narrative element. Rather than structuring the chart as one uninterrupted shape of increasingly indented rows, I have chosen to present it in eight sections—two sections of four “chapters” each—for two reasons. The first is quite pragmatic: it is simply a more practical method of capturing the entire thing on one piece of paper. Second and more importantly, as mentioned above, it appears that the degree of granularity to which the chiasmus is embedded in the narrative takes a step up as we move among its four “chapters”: from creation until the story of Yaakov’s life; that story itself, namely the story of Israel, the father of the nation of Israel; the story of the *shevatim*, or Yosef and his brothers; and the story of Yehuda and Tamar culminating in the creation of the initial seeds of the royal line of Yehuda. In other words, as we move from one chapter to the next, the chiasmus is more comprehensively embedded in not just the broad strokes of the narrative but in the finer details therein.¹⁴

¹⁴ In a similar vein, some of the parallels or pairs in the outer edges of the chiasmus are what I would call “secondary” rather than “primary” parallels. By this I mean that their existence would not necessarily, in my view, be obvious or compelling enough on their own to justify the claim that this chiasmus is indeed embedded in the narrative. Perhaps B1-B2 is such an example. Rather, once the chiasmus with its “primary” parallels (which are primarily though not only concentrated

Relatedly, I will share that the aforementioned phenomenon is directly connected to my discovery of the chiasmus itself. I began by noticing the much more prominent—precisely because it is much more granular—chiasmus embedded in *parshat Va-yeshev*. Given its strong, almost undeniable salience, it then served as an anchor as I searched for its continuation beyond—i.e., both before and after—*Va-yeshev* and to include all of Yaakov's life story. Reassured by what this uncovered, I then proceeded to explore just how far this pattern really extends and where were its outer boundaries. This in turn is what led me to the discovery of the full extent of the chiasmus—reinforced from a Bayesian perspective not only by the continued waves of parallel mirrored pairs but also by their consistency with the core thematic idea described herein—as encompassing the entire books of *Beresbit* and *Shemot*, which is to say, the entire creation/foundation story of the Chosen Nation of Israel.

towards its center) is already validated as clearly salient, the secondary parallels sort of fall into place; one would not necessarily have established a chiasmus on their basis to begin with, but once they are there, they appear to be teaching us something in their own right, as well as solidifying and emphasizing the center that they frame. See also note 3.

Importantly, however, generally all of the parallels, in one way or another, substantively relate to the broader chiastic theme: the creation of a nation.

APPENDIX

The essence of this essay is the chiasmus itself rather than my commentary on it, and most of the mirrored pairs are self-explanatory. To digest and fully appreciate the chiasmus, the reader is encouraged to review and compare each chiastic pair chronologically, until they converge at the center. Below I provide some purely supplemental observations and annotations on individual line items and mirrored pairs, taking for granted the self-explanatory parallels between the pairs but either adding additional elaboration on the extent to which they further the broader theme described above, or making secondary or derivative points about their parallelisms.

- A1-A2: By mirroring the creation of the world in the creation of the Mishkan, the text conveys the message of nothing less than the purpose of creation: for man¹⁵ to bring God into this world, specifically by way of worship embodied in the Mishkan (and its successor, the Mikdash). This parallel, highlighted via chiasmus, of the creations of the world and the Mishkan, is emphasized by several midrashim,¹⁶ and, as noted by others,¹⁷ contains textual parallels as well.

The chiastic pairing of the creations of the world and the Mishkan also provides a stark textual basis for and coherence to the prima facie peculiar rabbinic interpretation that the definition of *melakha*, forbidden on Shabbat to commemorate the creation of the world,¹⁸ derives from, of all things, the activities involved in the creation of the Mishkan.

- B1-B2 represent the only two times in history that God directly bestows on man a priceless spiritual gift: his divine soul, and the divine Torah. This underscores the well-established idea that the

¹⁵ Insofar as the essence of the chiasmus is the story of the creation of the Jewish nation, it conveys that the execution of this mission is charged in particular to that nation.

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Midrash ha-Gadol, Shemot* 25:3-7; *Tanḥuma, Shemot Pekudei*, 2; *Pesikta Rab-bati, parasha* 6; *Midrash Mishlei*, 30:4; *Tanḥuma, Naso*, 19; *Be-midbar Rabbah*, 12:13. See also *Megillah* 10b.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 213; Menachem Leibtag at <https://tanach.org/shmot/vayak/vayaks1.htm>; Yitzchak Levy at <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-10-history-resting-shekhinapart-i-creation-world-and-mikdash>, in each case based upon *Shemot Rabbah* and other midrashim.

¹⁸ *Shemot* 19:11. As well as to commemorate the Exodus (*Devarim* 5:15).

Torah is, and should be, the most fundamental element and purpose of the chosen people's existence.¹⁹

While in one sense this parallel is not obvious—i.e. the conceptual similarity of B1 and B2 is not necessarily something that would have formed a primary basis for the existence of this chiasmus—nevertheless, once the chiasmus has in any event been identified, it both fits structurally and, more importantly, plays the critical role of highlighting the purpose of the creation of the individual units of the chosen nation.²⁰

The parallel of *matan Torah* with God's creation of the first male-female couple also provides textual basis for the widely discussed mystical idea of the Sinaitic covenant representing a coupling, or marriage, of God and the Jewish people.

Note an additional parallel within the B1-B2 narratives: In B1, this initial creation story (Chapter 1) is paired with a secondary, simultaneous narrative (Chapter 2), using—for the first time in the Torah—the verb ויצר, which emphasizes (unlike in Chapter 1,) God's infusion of spiritual life into the mundane physical, to form man. Conversely, in B2, the story of *matan Torah* is paired with a secondary, simultaneous narrative (that of the golden calf), using—for the last time in the Torah—the verb ויצר (32:4), which emphasizes man's attribution of spiritual life to the mundane physical, to form a god.

- C1-C2: This parallel adds force to—and is in turn, perhaps, strengthened by—the famous passage in *Hullin* 139b: “From where in the Torah [is there an allusion to] Haman? [It is from] ‘Did you eat from (המֵן) this tree...?’” (Genesis 3:11). Haman the Aggagite is, of course, widely understood to be a descendant, and prime representative of, Amalek, and as such he is alluded to in the verse describing man's first sin, instigated via the evil inclination personified in the form of the serpent.
- E1-E2: It is further noteworthy that in both cases the Midrash asserts that immediately upon embarking on this exile/journey from/to said land, man/B'nai Yisrael for the very first time receive and observe Shabbat.²¹

¹⁹ See, in this vein, the sources cited in note 5.

²⁰ See note 14.

²¹ Regarding Adam and Eve, see *Sanhedrin* 38b; regarding B'nai Yisrael at Marah, see *Sanhedrin* 56b.

In addition, note a further parallel between these two wanderings: Kayin, like B'nai Yisrael, complains to God that it will lead to his death. (*Beresbit* 4:14; *Shemot* 16:3).

- F1-F2: Besides the obvious parallel here, note as well that in both cases, the righteous were saved from the waters via a Divine wind sent to unveil the dry land (*Beresbit* 8:1, *Shemot* 14:21). In addition, in both cases the extended salvation is described as beginning "בעצם היום הזה" (*Beresbit* 7:13, *Shemot* 12:41).²²
- H1-H2: This parallel, obviously on a conceptual rather than chiasmic basis, is obliquely highlighted by the Midrash: "‘And they said to one another’ (11:3): Who said to whom? Said R. Berakhiah, Mitzrayim said to Cush." (*Beresbit Rabbah* 38:8). As Eitz Yosef notes, R. Berakhiah’s identification of Mitzrayim as the speaker is presumably rooted in the fact that the plot of Mitzrayim’s progeny similarly revolved around *המר ולבנים*. What’s more, in both instances Mitzrayim’s insidious plot is hatched with the introductory word "הבה" (*Beresbit* 11:3, *Shemot* 1:10).

Besides what is cited in the chart, there appears to be an additional linguistic parallelism here. The objective of the people’s wrongful plan in H1 is described as a defensive one: "פן נפוץ על" "פני כל הארץ". Note the similarity to the formulation of the objective of the wrongful national plan in H2: "פן ירבה... ועלה מן הארץ".

- J1-J2: Note as well that in both cases, the emigrant is subsequently paid a visit by God regarding the requirement of circumcision, particularly in the context of the (imminent/ recent) birth of his second son (*Beresbit* ch. 17; *Shemot* 4:24-26).
- L1-L2: Ba'al Ha-Turim picks up on the parallels between Hagar and the Jewish people in Egypt, and even suggests that the centuries of slavery in Egypt were a punishment for Sarah’s treatment of Hagar. Interestingly, he makes this observation on *Beresbit* 21:10, in which Sarah demands that Hagar and Yishmael be cast out from their household, notwithstanding the fact that no less than God appears to endorse this decision (21:12). Ba'al Ha-Turim is motivated by the language in 21:10, as Sarah’s command

²² Note as well the placement of the first *shirah* in the Torah—Lamech’s brief poem for his wives, an otherwise cryptic passage whose purpose is quite opaque—as the very last narrative passage before that of the *Mabul*, precisely mirroring the *Shirat Ha-Yam* which immediately follows *kriat Yam Suf*.

of גרש האמה results in the enslavement of her progeny in Egypt and their subsequent need to be chased out (להתגרש) therefrom. He might instead have made a similar comment on 16:6, which similarly has language (ותענה) reminiscent of the same enslavement but is not accompanied by a divine imprimatur.²³

- N1-N2: Here begins, and ends, the story of Yaakov's life and the transition from families of individuals—in which some are chosen and others rejected—to a nation, in which all are chosen.
- O1: While the predominant interpretation of יושב אהלים—a studious “*shteiiger*” in the *beit midrash*—is midrashic and clearly not *psbat*-based, Ibn Ezra points out the precedent for the simple *psbat* definition of “shepherd”: ותלד עדה את יבל הוא היה אבי ישב אהל ומקנה (*Beresbit* 4:20).
- W1,X1-W2,X2: In addition to the like-sounding and mirroring descriptions highlighted in the chart (יפת תואר, רכות/רקות) and (יפ(ו)ת מראה), note that just as in W1-X1 the wrong wife is dressed up as the favored wife—the one described as "רכות" hidden imperceptibly inside the clothing of the one described as יפת תואר and יפ(ו)ת מראה—in W2-X2 we find, in an abstract sense, the mirror image of the same: “The [ones described as יפת תואר and יפ(ו)ת מראה] came inside [the ones described as רכות], but it was imperceptible that they had come inside them, for their appearance remained inferior as at first” (*Beresbit* 41:21).
- There is an additional striking parallel that is omitted from the chart, because its chronology just misses fitting into the broader structure of the rest of the chiasm. Given that it does not fit, it clearly does not belong in the chiasm as presented. Nevertheless, I mention it here simply as a subject for further analysis; perhaps a reader might improve upon the structure in a way that incorporates this item. Specifically:

Following X1, as described in *Beresbit* 31:19-32, Yaakov and the *shvatim* are on their way back to Canaan, having left a place where they were treated abusively, and are chased after, accosted and accused of stealing

²³ For further discussion of the parallels between the Hagar story and that of the enslavement in Egypt, see Yonatan Grossman, “The Suffering of Hagar and the Enslavement in Egypt,” at <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/suffering-hagar-and-enslavement-egypt>; and Elchanan Samet, “Sarah Treated Her Harshly,” at <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/sarah-treated-her-harshly>.

a divining object, to which they respond that whoever has it should die. It turns out that the most beloved person and the last person checked, Rachel (who happens to be a youngest sibling) has it.

The almost exact mirror image of this event takes place in *Beresbit* 44:1-12. The *shvatim* are on their way back to Canaan, having left a place where they were treated abusively, and are chased after, accosted and accused of stealing a divining object, to which they respond that whoever has it should die. It turns out that the most beloved person and the last person checked, Binyamin (who happens to be a youngest sibling), has it.

Unfortunately, this parallel comes close but not close enough to fitting within the confines of the broader chiasm: whereas the structure would dictate that it be located just before X2, we know that chronologically and textually, it takes place following V2.

- Besides its narrative parallelism, AB1-AB2 includes a subtle linguistic parallelism as well. Ibn Ezra notes the apparent redundancy within AB2, or *Beresbit* 40:23: ולא זכר שר המשקים את יוסף וישכחהו. He solves this problem by explaining that the proper translation of “זָכַר” here is not “remembered” but “mentioned”—as in וּמִשָּׂא ד' לֹא תִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד (Jeremiah 23:36).²⁴ The wine steward not only failed to mention Yosef outwardly to Pharaoh but also completely forgot about him internally. This appears to be the plain meaning of the text, and as such it more directly mirrors AB1 (37:4): וישנאו אותו ולא יכלו דברו לשלום. The brothers not only hated him internally but also could not outwardly speak with him peaceably.
- AG1-AG2: Interestingly, both of these passages contain the word וּמִאֵן. These are the first two instances of that word in the Torah, and they further mirror each other with the first appearing at the end of the first story (in AG1) and second at the beginning of the second story (in AG2).

This parallel takes on further significance still, in light of the Midrash²⁵ that as Yosef was tempted by Potiphar's wife, an image of his father appeared to him which induced him to reject her

²⁴ A more directly relevant, and supportive, example is Yosef's request itself: “make mention of me (וְהִזְכַּרְתִּינִי) unto Pharaoh” (*Beresbit* 40:14), as noted in H. Norman Strickman & Arthur M. Silver, eds., *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch* (New York: Menorah, 1988), 370 n. 34.

²⁵ *Sotah* 36b. See also *Midrash Aggada, Beresbit* 39:8:2.

overtures. We thus have parallel instances of **יָאָבֵד**, further highlighted by their placement within the chiasmus: Yaakov refuses to give up on Yosef, subsequently mirrored by Yosef refusing to betray or give up on Yaakov.²⁶ ❧

²⁶ A similar point is made in Midrash *Sefer Ha-yashar, Va-yeshiv* 20.

The Chiasmic Narrative Structure of the Creation of the Chosen Nation

A1	God creates the world, for man. By way of “ <i>melakha</i> ” (and stopping on Shabbat) (2:2-4). It is created over seven days.
B1	God endows newly created man with a Divine soul.
C1	Man encounters and struggles with evil personified (the <i>nafesh</i>), resulting in an eternal war between their progenies (3:15).
D1	Man, having been told of “divine” food and a strict rule thereof—it must not be consumed at all—promptly violates that rule.
E1	Man (Adam) begins long exile from his idyllic, divine land. He (Kayin) soon receives mankind’s first generalized instruction about sin, virtue, and their consequences (4:7).
F1	Evil oppressive society is drowned, with the chosen good miraculously saved.
G1	The saved party brings—as he has been instructed to prepare for before his salvation—a special <i>korban</i> (8:20).
H1	God disrupts a nation to foil its evil plan (which includes mass building of a city [11:4] with <i>לְבָנִים</i> [11:3]).
I1	Avraham is chosen by God and charged with a mission: to go to Israel and become a nation.
J1	Avraham leaves his homeland and journeys to a foreign land.
K1	Avraham is told about the future slavery in Egypt (15:13-14).
L1	Sarah oppresses (רָמְסָה) her Egyptian slave (16:6). She subsequently drives the slave out of her home and into the desert.
M1	Avraham has a son, Yitzchak, and he is promised to become a nation of multitudes (17:2-6). This is soon followed by a decree to kill his son.
N1	Yaakov and his brother—and rival-to-be—are born. The story of Yaakov’s family begins.
O1	Yaakov begins his life peacefully as a shepherd (Ibn Ezra’s <i>psihat</i> definition of <i>אֵלֶּיךָ</i>) (25:27).
P1	After the family head dies (Avraham, midtash), Yaakov’s brother agrees to be subordinate to him (25:31-34).
Q1	Yitzhak makes a deathbed request (27:2).
R1	Yaakov receives the prophetic <i>berakhah</i> from his father, as the chosen son (27:27-29).
S1	Yaakov, as a result of brotherly strife, leaves his family and begins a very difficult phase of his life (28:10).
T1	Yaakov, on his journey from Beer-Sheba to <i>hutz la-aretz</i> , is reassured by God that He will be with him in <i>hutz la-aretz</i> , will make him into a great nation, and will return him to Israel (28:13-15).
U1	Yaakov asks that God provide for him and give him bread (28:20).
V	Yaakov sees Rachel, who will become his favored wife, and breaks out crying (29:11).
W1	Seven Inauspicious Years (working in vain for the wrong wife—whose features are described as <i>רַחֵמָה</i> [29:17]).
X1	Seven Auspicious Years (working for favored wife, whose features are described as <i>יִפְתָּהּ בְּרָאָה</i> [יִפְתָּהּ בְּרָאָה]). During these years, Yaakov has his children. In the following years, Yaakov will arrange a clever transaction whereby he manages to collect a huge portion of his host’s flock.
Y1	End of story of confrontation between former enemy siblings, which results in Yaakov bowing before his sibling (33:3).

Va-yeshev

- Z1 Yosef's age is specified (one of only two times) (37:2).
- AA1 Yosef is chosen as the favorite of his father and given a fancy garment (37:3).
- AB1 The brothers, the subject of the immediately upcoming dream, hate Yosef (37:4).
- AC1 Two prophetic and parallel dreams (37:5-9).
- AD1 Yosef is sent to the people who are the subjects of the immediately preceding dreams (37:13-14).
- AE1 Yosef is thrown into a בור (37:24).
- AF1 Yosef is victimized unfairly (37:28).
- AG1 Yosef's forcibly removed garment is used to trick his master into thinking something horrible about him, causing his master intense aggravation (37:31-35).
- AH1 Yosef is brought down to Egypt and sold to Potiphar (37:36).
- AI1 Yehuda has two sons (via a Canaanite) who die (38:3-10).
- AJ1 Yehuda promises Shelah to Tamar (38:11).
- AK1 Tamar presents as a *zonah* (by putting on a garment) (38:14-15).
- AL1 Yehuda gives a pledge to Tamar (38:17-18).
- AM ENCOUNTER OF YEHUDA AND TAMAR:
TAMAR CONCEIVES THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP (38:18).
- AL2 Yehuda leaves pledge with Tamar (38:22-23).
- AK2 Tamar is found pregnant via *zenut* (38:24) (having removed her garment).
- AJ2 Yehuda acknowledges that he broke his promise to Tamar to wed her to Shelah (38:26).
- AL2 Yehuda has two sons (via a Canaanite) who not only live but begin his dynasty (38:27-30).
- AH2 Yosef is brought down to Egypt and sold to Potiphar (39:1).
- AG2 Yosef's garment is forcibly removed (to trick his master into thinking something horrible about him, causing his master intense aggravation) (39:7-12).
- AF2 Yosef is victimized unfairly (39:14-18).
- AE2 Yosef is thrown into a בור (39:20), described as such in 40:15.
- AD2 The people who are the subjects of the immediately forthcoming dreams are sent to Yosef (40:3).
- AC2 Two prophetic and parallel dreams (40:5).
- AB2 The butler, the subject of the immediately prior dream, forgets Yosef (40:23).
- AA2 Yosef is chosen as the favorite of the king and given a fancy garment (41:41-42).
- Z2 Yosef's age is specified (one of only two times) (41:46).

Y2	Beginning of story of confrontation between former enemy siblings, which will ultimately result in Yosef's siblings bowing before him.
X2	Seven Auspicious Years (whose symbols are described [41:2,18] as <i>יָפוּת הָרָחֵק</i> & <i>יָפוּת הַבָּיִת</i>). During these years, Yosef has his children (41:50). In the following years, Yosef will arrange a clever transaction whereby he manages to collect a huge portion of his host's flock.
W2	Seven Inauspicious Years (whose symbols are described as <i>רָקִיעַ</i> [41:19]).
V2	Yosef sees Binyamin, his favored brother (and only brother from Rachel, as noted by the verse), and breaks out crying (43:29-30).
U2	Yaakov is sent a message (from Yosef) that God has provided for him and is sent bread (45:9,23).
T2	Yaakov, on his journey from Beer-Sheba to <i>hutz la-aretz</i> , is reassured by God that He will be with him in <i>hutz la-aretz</i> , will make him into a great nation, and will return him to Israel (46:1-4).
S2	Yaakov, after the resolution of brotherly strife, is reunited with his family, ending the difficult phase of his life. (47:27).
R2	Yaakov gives the prophetic <i>berakhot</i> to his children (49:1-27). All are chosen.
Q2	Yaakov makes a deathbed request (49:29).
P2	After Yaakov, the family head, dies, Yosef's brothers offer to be subordinate to him. They are refused (50:18-21).
O2	Yaakov's sons live out their lives peacefully as shepherds (50:22-23).
N2	Yaakov's sons—the former brotherly rivals—die, and the story of his family ends (50:26; <i>Shemot</i> 1:6).
M2	The brothers become a nation of multitudes (<i>Shemot</i> 1:7). This is soon followed by a decree to kill all the sons.
L2	Egypt oppresses (עַבְדָּה) their Jewish slaves (1:11-12). They subsequently drive the slaves out of the country and into the desert.
K2	Slavery in Egypt (1:13-14).
J2	Moshe leaves his homeland and journeys to a foreign land (2:15).
I2	Moshe is chosen by God and charged with a mission: to take the nation to Israel.
H2	God disrupts a nation to foil its evil plan (which includes mass building of cities [1:11], with [1:14] <i>תִּזְכֹּר וְלִבְנֵיהֶם</i>).
G2	The saved nation brings—as they had been instructed to prepare for before their salvation—a special <i>korban</i> (ch. 12).
F2	Evil oppressive society is drowned, with the chosen good miraculously saved (14:21-29).
E2	B'nai Yisrael begin long journey to their idyllic, divine land. They soon receive their first generalized instruction about sin, virtue, and their consequences (5:26).
D2	B'nai Yisrael, having been told of "divine" food and a strict rule thereof—it must be fully consumed—promptly violates that rule (16:19-20).
C2	B'nai Yisrael encounter and struggle with evil personified (Amalek), resulting in an eternal war between their progenies (17:16).
B2	God endows the new nation of Israel with the Divine Torah.
A2	Man creates the mishkan, for God. By way of "melekhah" (36:3-7) (and stopping on Shabbat) (35:2). It is inaugurated over seven days.