

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayashev:*** **Genesis 40:1-23**
 Haftarah: **Amos 3:1-8**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 7:9-16**

Do not interpretations belong to God?

[Genesis 40:8]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 35:17-25;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #6, *Beracha* [Blessing]

Vayehi achar ha-devarim ha-eleh – And it came to pass after these things ... *chatei'u mash'keh melech-Mitzrayim v'ha-ofeh* – that the cupbearer and the baker transgressed against the king of Egypt. **Genesis 40:1.**

The strategy rooms in Heaven are always buzzing. Two questions are the lips of every elder, creature, and angel: *the first question is: “ET-MI ESHLACH?”* [Whom can we send?]. *The second question is “UMI YELECHLANU”?* [And who will go for us]. Not to worry. In Yosef's generation the answer to both questions will be the same: *We will send Yosef* – and Yosef will go! From before the foundation of the world, you see, Yosef had been selected to be the 'wild card' player in the next phase of the Holy One's grand plan - a plan is about ready to make an indelible mark on the world.

Yosef is the prototypical 'secret agent'. His mission is so secret that even he could not know what it was. The Holy One's 'point-man-of-redemption' had to be dragged to Egypt in chains – because he had to be 'on call' at a moment's notice to interpret a peculiar dream that the Holy One intends for Pharaoh to have. Once in Egypt, Yosef could not be allowed to leave. He had to be a slave to a man in Pharaoh's employ. Then, he had to be falsely accused and thrown into prison – because that is where he was destined to meet Pharaoh's cupbearer – the man the Holy One brought to that position so he would, one day, introduce Yosef in Pharaoh's court.

Speaking of Pharaoh's court, as today's aliyah opens there is a boatload of drama going on in those hallowed halls. The details are unclear – but the result is as obvious as it is predictable: Pharaoh is *not happy*. And, of course, when a powerful man like Pharaoh is not happy ... well, let's just say that no one in his realm can rest in *shalom*. The fallout from a Pharaoh's wrath always starts with

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the people closest to him – in this case, the one who *fills his cup*, and the one who *cooks and serves his meals*. Welcome to the trials – and ultimately the dreams - of Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker. We will get to the details of their stories in a moment. Just keep in mind that the reason they are being introduced into the narrative at this juncture is because their season of disfavor will lead them straightway into a Divinely choreographed interaction with the *shining-star-of-the-Covenant-Household-turned-Hebrew-slave* that Potifar’s wife recently had .thrown into prison!

Well Here’s to You, Mrs. Potifar

As deceivers go, Mrs. Potifar proved to be like *Laban on steroids!* A woman of *virtue* she most definitely wasn’t. Dressed to kill in her stylish linen *kalasiris*², she spun – and sold - a web of whoppers about Yosef that would make the Serpent blush. But you had to give her credit - she was good at certain things. For instance, she was really good at faking moral outrage. She was really good at projecting her sensuality and depravity onto others. She was really good at turning a situation she herself created into a ‘*Me, too!*’ spectacle of phony victimization. She was really good at manufacturing a believable narrative out of whatever she was given to work with. She was really good at manipulating people’s paranoias, empathies, emotions, and pseudo-intellecets. She really knew how to play all the age-old culture-conflict, gender-jealousy, and social justice cards of her culture at just the right time, in front of just the right audience, in the most effective and convincing way.

When it came time to turn her wrath on Yosef, Mrs. P. outdid herself. She cunningly played both the *race card* and the *class warfare card* on the same turn – referring to Yosef not by his name - which would suggest he was actually a real person - but simply as ‘*that ... HEBREW ... SLAVE!*’ The word ‘*Hebrew*’ must have slithered off of Mrs. P’s tongue like a swamp rat crawling out of a latrine. The word ‘*slave*’ must have followed it at a strategic interval as if it were a poisonous serpent coiled up, hissing, and ready to strike. Oh, but Mrs. P. wasn’t through yet. She topped it all off by playing her ‘*ace in the hole*’ – *i.e.* her ‘*abused gender*’ card – to perfection. In just the right helpless victim tone of voice, with a quivering lip, she publicly accused Yosef of not just committing a humiliating sexual assault on her, but of cruelly *mocking her* as he did so. Bravo, Mrs. P. Well played! *Woe, woe, woe; woo, woo, woo; hey, hey, hey, and kuku kachoo*³.

² The traditional dress of ancient Egyptian women, a *kalasiris* was a tube-shaped, tight fitting, sheer white linen tube dress. The richer the owner, the higher quality (and thus the more sheer), the linen, and the more tight-fitting and revealing the tube.

³ These references are separate lines from the theme song Paul Simon wrote for the 1967 American motion picture ‘*The Graduate*’. The song was about the main female character in the movie, named

Every word you uttered was a bald-faced lie, of course; but it made for great theater nonetheless. The fact that Yosef might have been innocent of the charge – and that he might actually have been the victim in the situation – was never considered. Truth has nothing on an effectively race baited, class-hatred baited, and gender-baited populace. ‘*Why on earth would she lie about such a thing?*’ people actually pretended to ask themselves. There was no presumption of innocence. There was zero due process. Not even a single eyewitness – much less ‘two or more’ – was required. Mrs. P. didn’t need anything but a few crocodile tears, a trembling lip, a hint of moral outrage, and a hastily contrived web of vicious lies. Everyone just took what she said at face value, and rushed to judgment. To prison – with both a disgraced name and a big target on his back – went Yosef.

One Accusation Always Leads to Another

What did the cupbearer and the baker do to warrant being thrown in prison? The text does not tell us. An ancient legend says that the cupbearer offended Pharaoh by serving him a cup of wine into which a fly had flown – and that the baker lost favor when he served Pharaoh a piece of bread into which a tiny pebble had fallen. The specific allegation against neither is actually stated in the text, however. The purpose of Torah is not to spread slander; it is to tell us what role each played in the Holy One’s Grand Redemptive Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and harmony. But let’s admit it – both mankind and the world have a long way to go! Sometimes during the year – like right now - the Darkness seems to be growing – not shrinking! A thick veil of darkness seems to have settled over the *kosmos*. A black hole of *dark energy* seems to have squelched every last semblance of light. Every year at this season, about the time of the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, a veritable *blitzkrieg* of encroaching darkness assails the world, its cities, and its population. On one flank of darkness’ advance always comes an explosion in narcissism, materialism, sensuality, sentimentality, and lust; on the other flank is always a rising epidemic of bad attitudes that manifest in destructive forms of self-expression. Conversations among humans start to reek with cynicism, sarcasm, breast-beating, insinuation, accusation, shame-labeling, blame-casting, mudslinging, incivility, profanity, self-righteous claims of ideological, racial, social, sexual, and moral superiority, blatant use of double-standards, contempt, and hate. Driving it all is a deep, ugly, serpentine river of arrogance, pride, egotism, and conceit. Planet Earth suddenly seems overcome by human self-obsession. Young men embrace outrage as a ‘natural’ and ‘right’ response to what they do not like. They therefore walk around ready to explode at the least

‘Mrs. Robinson’, played by Anne Bancroft, who, like Potifar’s wife, tried to seduce a much younger male character, played in the movie by Dustin Hoffman.

provocation – or at nothing at all. For their part, young women seethe with bitterness and offense, play the game of promiscuous progressivism, then spew the self-righteous venom of victimization. Parents are paralyzed by fear of what could happen to their children; children catch their parents' anxiety, and become afflicted by hypersensitivity and overtaxed by stress. Whew. *Tis the season*, indeed! Peace on earth, goodwill toward men? Well ... not so much!

***Tis the Season ... of Hypersensitivity, Hyper Sentimentality,
Hyper Sensuality, Hyper Sexuality, and Just Plain HYPE***

Demagogues everywhere are having a heyday. They keep shouting that *the sky is falling*, the *icebergs are melting*, the *aliens are coming*, the *bankers and corporations are all evil*, etc. etc. They keep insisting that *any politician they don't like is either Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, or Jack the Ripper reincarnate*. They offer loud opinions with mock outrage about who and what is to blame for everything they see as a problem – but whisper not a word about any solution to either the problem itself or the darkness that underlies that problem. Agitators have everyone obsessed with pointing fingers. “*If the stone fits, wear it!*” is the prevailing mantra. Where is mercy? Where is kindness? Where is forgiveness? Alas, these are not things in which demagogues have ever dared to traffic.

This is the time of year when those who choose to consider themselves victims of life embrace anger, discontent, depression, and despair. This is the therefore the season when suicides, murders, assaults, and thefts, as well as incidents of school and workplace violence, road rage, parking lot rage, shopping center rage, political rage, ideological rage, and sexual rage spiral out of control.

What of *shalom*? *Shalom* is being sacrificed on the altar of emotionally charged political and ideological oratory. What of joy? *Simchah* is being washed away in a deluge of racial, cultural, and ideological hatred. What of faith? *Emunah* is forgotten in the flood of rantings, fear mongering, and hate mongering. What of hope for redemption? *Tikvah* is being traded in like a used car for cynicism, sarcasm, and intellectual snobbery. What of wisdom? Treasure chests of *chokmah* are being sold a penny's worth of folly. What of Truth? *Emet* is being exchanged for politically motivated disinformation. What of understanding? *Binah* is being bartered for inflammatory opinions of blame. What of humility? *It cannot co-exist with* self-righteousness. What of courage? *Courage* is being displaced by machismo. *Kindness* and compassion? They are being swallowed up by narcissism. *Patience*? It is being sold for unfounded accusation. *Gentleness*? It is being upstaged by outrage. *Confidence in the goodness of the Holy One*? Sold for paranoid delusion. *Self-control*? Crucified on an unholy trinity of crosses – the cross of base materialism, the cross of extremist ideology, and the cross of

unbridled lust. *Love*? It is being redefined daily, and is therefore mutating from the deep, life-changing covenant commitment to another's welfare that reflects the Creator's approach to a self-absorbed experience involving the deification of romantic notions, of feelings of sentimentality, and of sexual expression in whatever form happens to strike one's fancy.

As a result, suddenly it seems like everyone is hyper-tense. Consumption of unhealthy 'comfort' foods, of alcohol, of tobacco, of illegal drugs, of opioids and other pain and mood-altering medications, and pornography is skyrocketing. Wasteful spending on material things, luxuries, alcohol, entertainment, leisure, and drugs is the order of the day. Everyone on the street is stressed, oppressed, depressed, self-obsessed, and irritable. Everything that happens – and seemingly everything anyone says about anything - seems to make somebody upset. Many people are merely one unpleasant incident away from a virulent rant, if not a violent assault. Fury is rampant. Drama is epidemic.

There seems to be no fear of God, no reverence for the holy things, no dedication to the Covenant, and no real appetite for seeking the Will of the Holy One. No one seems to want to *sh'ma* the Voice that declared '**Let there be Light!**', or walk in His Wisdom and ways, or humbly model His Divine attributes to real people, in real ways, in real time –as sons and daughters of the Covenant are called to do.

Ah, but it is always darkest just before the dawn. Darkness will not prevail. ***The earth is the Holy One's, and all its fullness; the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters***⁴. The Holy One has a plan – involving a people that He intends to raise up, to call forth, and to send out into the darkness to redeem, to restore, to refresh, and renew the species – and the world – that He Created. Welcome to the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Creator of the Universe – and to the part He has designed for you to play in it. As the prophet has declared:

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, and increased its joy;
They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest,
as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.
For You have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder.*

[Isaiah 9:2-4(a)]

This is not the time to be discouraged. This is not the time to be frightened. This is not the time to give in to doubt, fear, offense, greed, sentimentality, lust or despair. This is the season of *Chanukah* – i.e. dedication. This is the appointed

⁴ Psalm 24:1-2.

time for the sons and the daughters of the Creator of the Universe to arise and shine. This is the time to reclaim the *shalom of our Bridegroom-King*, to walk in the *simchah [joy]* of His Kingdom, and to declare the *tikvah [hope]* of His restoration. Now is the time for those who in Covenant with the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov to wake up, to come alive, to quit destroying their own influence in the world by complaining, accusing, blaming, over-reacting, and pontificating, and to raise high the lamp of the wisdom and the glory of the Holy One. So where, in this season, are *the 'torch-bearers' of the Creator and Most High God*? Where, when the world needs us most, are *the Holy One's designated and empowered 'witnesses'*? What has happened to *the covenant the Holy One is said to have made with Avraham and with his descendants forever*? What has become of *the redemptive plan of the Holy One for mankind and Creation*? If we who know the Holy One of Israel do not arise and begin to function as candles burning in the dark, pushing back the night, holding forth the word of life⁵ ... well, if we do not do it, *who will*? If we are not willing to resist the temptation to join the rising tide of negativity, from whence will the foundation for redemption and restoration come?

Living in the Times: Rising and Falling With the Patriarchal Narratives of Torah

As it is in the Torah portion of the week, so it is in our world and in our lives. As darkness encroaches, *what has become of Ya'akov Avinu* [i.e. Jacob our father/ancestor]? Alas, there's the rub. Our patriarch continues as he has now for years to sit *sheva*, mourning disconsolately not only for his beloved Rachel who *'died on'* him on the road near Beit-Lechem but also now for Rachel's firstborn, Yosef. Ya'akov's grief has reduced him to *a shadow of his former self*. Depression has virtually *disabled* him. His Covenant Torch of Divine Light is, if not 'out', *burning so dimly that only the Holy One can see it*.

Okay – so *what has become of the brilliant and charismatic young dreamer Yosef* – the family's *best and brightest hope for the future of the Covenant clan and the world*? Alas Yosef has disappeared. Unbeknownst to any in his family he now wastes away in an Egyptian prison, bearing the punishment of a crime he did not – *would* not by any means, under any circumstances - commit.

A third question we might ask is *what has become of the promising young pragmatist Y'hudah*, the 4th son of Ya'akov's union with Leah? Y'hudah appears to have abandoned the God-centered lifestyle of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov

⁵ Shaul enjoined us: *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life ...”* Philippians 2:14-16.

- as well as the *b'rit* and the calling of Avraham's descendants - altogether. At last sight he was dwelling among the *Kena'anim* [Canaanites] immersing his soul in the materialism and sensuality of pagan culture – all the way up to dallying with prostitutes who sit by the side of the road.

Let's not give up yet. *What, we might ask, has become of Ya'akov/Yisrael's 10 other sons?* And that is the problem. That is the reason dark energy is consuming the world. Not one of those 10 sons, nor Ya'akov, nor Yosef, nor Y'hudah, has stepped forward to fill what I call the '*Light Brigade leadership void*'. All the heirs to the promises of the Holy One seem, at present, in this dark season, to be *struggling mightily just to keep their families together and alive*, to keep their own sanity and household intact, and to not be completely overwhelmed by life.

Alas, this time of the year *the darkness starts closing in* and settling upon the earth. Like a thick blanket of wet winter snow it falls. As it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual. During this period of time Torah's pages are completely void of 'God-encounters'. This time of year is a time of *hester panim* – the *hidden Face*. And sometimes the separation – and the heaviness of the darkness that asserts itself in the absence of the Light of our Bridegroom-King's Countenance - seems unbearable.

Where Are You, Master of the World?

Where, the question must have been asked, *in this very dark hour on planet earth, was the Holy One? Why*, those involved must have wondered, *was the Holy One allowing His chosen vessels of redemption and blessing to go through such trauma and such pain?* If, as we have been taught, the Holy One is indeed a *loving God*, faithful to His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov, and concerned with all Creation, why does He allow His people to suffer so? Ah but let's *look closer*, Dear Reader. Let us open our spiritual eyes and look beyond the *tachat ha-shemesh* [under the sun] realm⁶ of ordinary human vision. Let us look *beyond the veil*. Let us look *into the realm of tachat ha-ohr* - the *unseen realm* where the light source comes from Genesis 1:3 [*Let there be Light ...*] instead of from Genesis 1:14 [*Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years ...*]. Let us dare to look beyond the realm of '*through a glass darkly*', and into the realm of '*p'nei'im al p'nei'im* [face-to-Face]⁷.

⁶ The reference comes from *Kohelet* [Ecclesiastes], where we are told all about the futility and emptiness of life lived exclusively in the realm of *tachat ha-shemesh* (under the sun). *Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, 5-9, 14; 2:11-22; 3:16; 4:1-3, 7, 15; 5:13, 6:1-2, 12; 8:9, 15-17; 9:3-6; 11-13.*

⁷ The reference of course comes from Genesis 32:20, referring to Ya'akov's description of how he saw the Holy One in a manifest form at the place by the River Yabbok which he named Peni'el – the Face of God. The same phrase is used in Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10, to describe how Moshe saw

Look Again!

When we look a little closer we see that, contrary to the way it seemed, the Holy One has not been, and is not now, sitting idly by. He has not been – and will never be - oblivious to His people’s plight. Throughout this time of darkness He has been - and at this moment is - very, very busy about the task of bringing to pass His prophecy to Avraham that his descendants would be strangers and slaves in a country not their own for four hundred years. Not many years hence, you see, the Holy One knows that a famine is coming. And what He is doing is getting ready to provide the provision in advance of the people’s need. The Holy One has a plan to preserve His People from annihilation by starvation and malnutrition and, in the process, to build *character* in them, and to *restore both Y’hudah and Yosef to their assigned places of leadership in the Covenant family*.

Of course, the human beings alive at the time of the events recorded in today’s aliyah could not see the Unseen Hand at work in the very real events and circumstances they had to face in real time. If they had known or understood what the Holy One was doing they probably would have either *tried to make it happen themselves*. Even worse, they might have considered the Holy One’s plan to be ‘too severe’, and *tried to prevent the Holy One’s Will from being done*.

So it is with us. We do not know when famine will come. We do not know either the *timing* or the *details* of God’s plan to awaken and deliver His Remnant. We do not know the end result nor the place in the Divine Plan for our lives of the struggles we – and others around us - are undergoing. In times of deep darkness who can be expected to interpret these things? But let us not despair. Somewhere, perhaps hidden under a bushel, there is still at least *one candle burning*.

The Shamash Candle – One Candle Burning!

Consider now the life of Yosef up to this point in the narrative. He has been *the apple of his father’s eye ... and he has been the victim of his brothers’ rage*. He has been *the recipient of his master’s favor ... and the source of his master’s blessing*. He has been both *the object of a woman’s lustful imaginations ... and the target of her baseless accusations*. He has been *stripped of his garments and robbed of his dignity*. He has been *thrown in a pit*. He has been *sold to Ishmaelite traders*. He has been *auctioned publicly to the highest bidder*. He has been *wrongly accused of attempted rape*. And he has been *cast into a prison* for

and interacted with the Holy One - *face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*. The phrase *p’nei’im al-p’nei’im* is also used to describe the level of revelation which was given at Sinai. See Deuteronomy 5:4, where Moshe tells the redeemed community, *The Holy One talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire*. This level of revelation is what Shaul of Tarsus was referring to in I Corinthians 13:12, when he said that now we see *through a glass darkly*, but then ‘*face-to-Face*’.

enemies of the State. He has been forced to watch helplessly while the Holy One richly blessed the lives of men who worshipped idols and committed abominations for the sole reason that he, a chosen son of a chosen people, was in their households serving as their slave.

"*What is wrong with this picture?*" Yosef could well have asked. He could have focused on how unjust and unfair it all was. He could have focused on who was to blame for him being in this mess. But he chose to focus on something else instead. He chose to focus on the fact that he was still alive. He chose to focus on the fact that others around him were confused and hurting. He chose to focus on the fact that the gifts, callings, and promises of the Holy One are irrevocable – and not dependent upon our prosperity. He therefore kept turning his attention to the next task to which he was assigned in the prison, to the next person he was given the opportunity – or the command - to serve, and to the next opportunity he had to be a blessing to every family and nation on the face of the earth as the Covenant the Holy One made with his forefathers provided. *Selah!*

The People Who Walk in Darkness Have Seen A Great Light!

As we walk through this season of *Chanukah*; as we meditate on the evil decree of Antiochus; as we relive the struggles faced by the Maccabees; as we try to understand, and pray for, the Hellenists; as we draw strong lines in the sand once again between our lives and Greco-Roman worldview, values, and culture; as we get down to the details of cleansing our Temple of all pagan influence and rededicating the altar to intimate communion with our King; and as we teach our children the flashpoints and protocols they need to know; the most important thing we can do - the most critical challenge for our lives - is not to *save the world*, or even to *wage war upon those who threaten to destroy it* - but is to keep the light of God burning in our hearts and in our homes.

We do not have to *illumine the entire world*, you see; we just have to keep our *one candle burning*. If we will simply do that, then when the time is right the Holy One will send a mighty, rushing wind ... and a *shamash candle somewhere* – like unto Yosef – in which an ember of Divine Light still burns, will combust into a spectacular super-nova of light and energy - and the darkness which grips the world will flee before it.

May we all *catch His fire* this Chanukah season. May the fire that burns in our hearts this season *never be extinguished* - whatever circumstances we may endure. May the Holy One keep in you, as He did in Yosef, a *pure vessel of oil* with which to start a fire that will light the world. *Happy Chanukah*, Beloved Children of the Holy One!

Ha-Mash'kim v Ha-Ofim [The Cupbearer and the Baker]

What does one need to make *Kiddush* and *Ha-Motzee* on a *yom tov*? Why, one needs *wine* and *bread*, of course. And who better in the land of Egypt to provide Yosef with the elements necessary for sanctifying the day there in the dungeon but Pharaoh's own *cupbearer* [i.e. wine steward] and Pharaoh's own *royal baker*? In today's aliyah therefore we will see Yosef joined in Pharaoh's private prison by those men. It seems that both have suddenly fallen from favor with Pharaoh and now find themselves in desperate situations. Here is how Torah introduces us to these men:

V'yehi achar ha-d'varim ha-eleh

It happened after these things,

chate'u mashkeh melech-Mitzrayim

that the wine steward of the Egyptian king

V'ha-ofeh l'adoneihem l'melech Mitzrayim

and his [royal] baker offended their master the king of Egypt.

V'yiktzof Par'oh al sh'nei sarisav

Pharaoh was angry with these two officers,

al sar ha-mashkim v'al sar ha-ofim

with the chief cupbearer and with the chief baker,

V'yiten otam b'mishmar beit sar ha-tabachim

So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard⁸,

el-beit ha-sohar mekom asher Yosef asur sham

into the dungeon, the place where Yosef was bound.

Vayifkod sar ha-tabachim et-Yosef itam v'yesharet otam

The captain of the guard then assigned them to Yosef, and he took care of them.

vayihyu yamim b'mish'mar

And they stayed many days in custody/detention.

[Genesis 40:1-4]

In the midst of the worst of conditions the Holy One works behind the scenes. First he re-establishes the trust between Yosef and Potifar. Torah has already told us that Potifar was the '*captain of the guard*'. Please note that the cupbearer and the baker were turned over by Pharaoh to none other than the '*captain of the guard*'. Into whose custody does this '*captain of the guard*' entrust them? Into the custody of *his former personal assistant* – the man accused of attempting to rape his wife – the young Hebrew slave Yosef. This reconciliation and re-establishment of trust is just the first fruits of a greater reconciliation and re-establishment of trust to come – that involving Yosef and his brothers. With this accomplished the

⁸ Keep in mind that this appears to have been Potifar. See Genesis 37:36.

Holy One stirs up in Yosef the mature form of the gift deposited in him when he was a child – the gift of prophetic dreams. When he was a child Yosef was *the dreamer* – he will now graduate from dreamer to *interpreter of dreams*⁹. One who has never dreamed himself can scarcely be trusted to interpret the dreams of others. And one who has never had his dreams misinterpreted, scoffed at, and ridiculed by others cannot understand the level of kindness that listening to, refusing to judge, and being willing to wait patiently on the Holy One for an interpretation of, another person’s dreams truly is.

The Prophetic Dreams of the Cupbearer and the Baker

Once the cupbearer¹⁰ and baker arrived in Yosef’s custody, Yosef’s ability to receive prophetic dreams – dormant since his adolescence – appears to have awakened – but not in Yosef. It awakened *in the two Egyptian officials that had been placed in his charge*. Here is how Torah records this strange turn of events:

*Yosef came to them **b'boker** [in the morning], and saw them,
and saw that they were **zo'afim** [upset, sad].
He asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying,
Madua p'neichem ra'im ha-yom ["Why do you look so sad today?"]
They said to him, "We have dreamed a dream"¹¹,
ufoter eyn oto [and there is no one who can interpret it]."
Yosef said to them, **Halo l'Elohim pitronim** ["Don't interpretations belong to Elohim?"]
Sapru-na li. [Why not tell them to me.]"*

The first thing we should note is that these 2 prophetic dreams that Yosef was given to *interpret* provide a perfect ‘bookend’ for the parsha – which as you will recall started with 2 prophetic dreams which Yosef had talked about. Perhaps there is actually a connection between the two sets of dreams. Hmmmmn. I will leave that idea out there for your prayerful consideration. I will focus instead on the specifics of the dreams of the cupbearer and baker and how those specifics aid the interpretation.

Keep in mind that the first rule of dream interpretation is that they must not be

⁹ Two years later [in our next parsha, *Miketz*] this very gift will be the vehicle the Holy One uses to promote Yosef to a place where he can feed his people in the midst of worldwide famine.

¹⁰ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘cupbearer’ or, in some versions, ‘butler’, is a form of the verb root *shaqah*, *shin*, *quf*, *hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #8248, meaning to *give drink*, or *cause to drink*. The servant in question was *sar ha-mashqim* – the chief of those who give drink [to Pharaoh]. The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 2:6, where Torah tells us that in the early days of Creation, before any rain fell, ‘*a mist went up from the earth, and watered [shaqah] the face of the ground.*’ See also Genesis 2:10, where we are told that ‘*a river went out of Eden to water [shaqah] the garden.*’ A later Scriptural figure known as a *mashqah* [cupbearer] to the king was Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes [see **Nehemiah 1:11**].

¹¹ In the Hebrew, the word our English Bibles translate as ‘dream’ is *khalom*, *chet*, *lamed*, *vav*, *mem sofit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #2472, pronounced *khawl-ome*’. It generally refers to a *Divinely initiated dream*. E.g. **Genesis 20:3 and 31:10-11, 31:24, 37:5, 9**.

viewed through the lenses of self-interest, prejudice, ideology, offense, or preconceived notions. If the Holy Spirit is to interpret, the human vessel's mind, will, and emotions must butt out and let Him speak. Yosef's brothers never got this. Neither did Ya'akov. But Yosef has been *learning to sh'ma*. He is like Yeshua, who we are told 'learned obedience' [in Hebrew, by *lamad*-ing learned to more accurately and precisely *sh'ma* the *Voice* and effectuate the intent of the Holy One in the most productive and least destructive/offensive way possible] through suffering. **Hebrews 5:8.**

The Seven Prophetic Elements of the Cupbearer's Dream

Amazed that anyone cared about his dream, the royal cupbearer's excitedly spilled the details of his dream first.

'I dreamed,' he said,

v'hineh-gefen l'fanai – and behold, there was a grape vine right there in front of me.

*The vine had **sh'loshah sarigim** – i.e. three branches.*

As soon as its buds formed, its blossoms bloomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes.

V'chos Par'oh – i.e. Pharaoh's cup - was in my hand.

v'ekach et ha-anavim – i.e. I took the grapes

va'eschat otam el-kos Par'oh – i.e. and I squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup.

Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.'

There are seven separate elements of the royal cupbearer's dream. First, there is a *vine*. Second, there are *three branches*. Thirdly, there are an unspecified number of *buds*, which, in the course of the dream, become *blossoms*, then *clusters of grapes*. Fourthly, there is *the cup of the king*. Fifthly, there is a *partial harvesting of the grapes* by the cupbearer. Sixthly, there is *the squeezing of the harvested portion of grapes* by the cupbearer such that their juice flows into the cup of the king. And finally, there is *the placing of the cup in the hand of the king* – and the king receiving that cup from him.

Yosef listened – and somehow he immediately understood. So he gave the cupbearer the following interpretation:

Zeh pitrono

'This is the interpretation:

Sh'loshet ha-sarigim sh'loshet yamim hem

The three branches are three days.

B'od sh'loshet yamim yisa Far'oh et-rosheicha

In three days, Pharaoh will lift your head

V'hashivcha al-kaneicha

and give you back your position.

V'natata kos-Par'oh b'yado kamish'pat ha-rishon

You will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you did before,

asher hayita mashkeihu

when you were his steward.

[Genesis 40:9-13]

The interpretation Yosef offered was definitely *good news* to the cupbearer. He has descended - but he will *ascend!* He has suffered disgrace - but he will *receive vindication!* That is all the cupbearer really needs to know.

But, between you and me - did Yosef *hold something back?* Notice that Yosef only mentioned two of the seven elements of the dream in the interpretation he gave the royal cupbearer. Yosef gave interpretive commentary to the cupbearer only on the *three branches* and on *the placement of the cup in the hand of the king*. Yosef did not identify *the vine*. He did not discuss the buds/blossoms/clusters of grapes. He did not render any interpretation of either the *partial harvesting* or the *squeezing of the grapes*. And while he mentioned the placement of the cup in the hand of the king, Yosef also did not discuss anything about *the nature or essence of the vessel* itself.

Keep those uninterrupted elements of the dream in mind. We will revisit them later. For now however we need to turn our attention to the other dream dreamed that night – the dream of the royal *ofim*, or baker.

Ha-Chalom L'ha-Olim - The Baker's Dream

The dream of the baker¹² is a different story altogether. The baker's dream constituted a very solemn warning to the baker – a warning that in a very short period of time a *horrible judgment would come upon him*. Here is how the baker described his dream:

*"I also dreamed, **v'hineh** – and behold,
sh'loshah salei chori al-roshi – three baskets of fine white bread were on my head.*

In the uppermost basket there was all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh,

***v'ha-of ochel otam** – and the birds ate them*

***min-hasal me'al roshi** – out of the basket on my head."*

[Genesis 40:16-18]

There are 5 elements of this dream. First, there are *three baskets of fine white bread*. Second, there is *placing of these baskets on someone's head*, a head that the baker identifies as his own. [Note that the baker does not indicate how or by whom the baskets were prepared, nor by whose hands they were placed upon his head]. Third, there is a *qualitative difference between the bread in the first two baskets and the variety of*

¹² The Hebrew word that English Bibles translate as 'baker' is *afah*, *alef, feh, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #644, pronounced *aw-faw*, and meaning 'he bakes'. Its first usage in Torah is in reference to Lot, when he baked [*afah*] unleavened bread to feed the angels sent by the Holy One to S'dom to investigate the outcry which had come before The Holy One concerning the evil of that city. **Genesis 19:3.**

baked foods prepared for the king that are placed in the uppermost basket. Fourth, there are *the birds*. And fifth, there is *the eating, out of the basket, by the birds*, of the variety of baked foods prepared for the king.

In the dream, the baker never entered the king's presence, and never presented him with the bread he had baked. So ... what is the interpretation, Yosef?

Yosef's Interpretation of the Baker's Dream

Yosef saw that the dream of the baker was similar to the cupbearer's dream in one particular - that the first thing mentioned in both dreams was the number 3 [in Hebrew, *sh'losh*]. At that point, however, Yosef noticed that the paths of the two dreams diverged significantly. In the cupbearer's dream, he had been *active* – he had taken up the cup, he had plucked a handful of grapes, he had squeezed the grapes until their juice flowed into Pharaoh's cup, and he had placed Pharaoh's cup in his hand. He *saw himself* in favor with Pharaoh. Indeed he saw himself in his old position.

In the royal baker's dream in contrast the baker did nothing active at all. Unlike the cupbearer the baker was *totally passive*. He did not see himself in favor with Pharaoh – in fact, he did not even see Pharaoh receiving, much less eating, what he had baked for him. He saw himself as *a victim*.

Moreover, in the cupbearer's dream there had been a *living vine*, and it was *full of life*. In a baker's dream one would not expect a vine, of course, but you would expect to see a flourishing field of grain from which his baking flour would come. There was, however, no such sign of life and promise in the baker's dream. In fact what happens in the baker's dream is that birds [which would be expected to eat grain in a field] attack 'fine white bread' in a basket on the man's head. This indicates that there was a shortage of living grain – which birds greatly prefer - available. These aspects of the baker's vision of his own future communicated themselves clearly to Yosef.

Here is the way Torah records Yosef's interpretation of the baker's dream:

Zeh pitrono

This is the interpretation.

Sh'loshet ha-salim sh'loshet yamim hem

The three baskets are three days.

B'od sh'loshet yamim yisa Far'oh et-roshcha me'aleicha

Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you,

V'talah otcha al-etz

and will hang you on a tree;

v'achal ha-of et-besarcha me'aleycha
and the *birds* will eat your flesh from off you.

On a direct, personal level the obvious *p'shat* or literal meaning is that *the Holy One wanted this baker to know what would happen to him – even though it was something bad*. The haftarah reading for today picks up on this theme¹³.

The basic truth is this: *the Holy One's way is always to announce to someone (He chooses to whom, and it is not usually the one men think it should be or would like it to be) any kind of judgment He intends to inflict*. This is an indispensable bit of knowledge to the people of the Holy One. The Holy One *wants you to know, before judgments are unleashed, that they are coming. And He wants you to know not only THAT judgment is coming, but what kind of judgment is coming, and why it is coming*. The Holy One actually wants you and me, like Yosef, to know what He is going to do *before He does it*. It is all part of being a descendant of Avraham, to whom the Holy One revealed what He was about to do in S'dom and G'morrah before He did it. As the Holy One said then: ***Shall I hide from Avraham what I am about to do?*** Genesis 18:17.

If you are a party to the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham, then re-read that Divine declaration substituting your name for that of our beloved forefather. As the world changes before your eyes, *do not ever forget this truth*. Do not therefore look to established spiritual “moguls” or “authorities” – *i.e.* religious leaders - to announce the judgments of the Holy One, or the plans He has for you or for the world or the people around you. They cannot. They *should not be expected to*. The “leaders” of religious organizations and movements are, you see, simply too dependent – financially and emotionally - upon the religious system presently in place to even contemplate any major change. Be assured of this: *the judgments of the Holy One always involve a major change*. So *sh'ma lecha - listen for yourself*. Listen *carefully* for the Divine Voice. *Sh'ma, sh'ma, and sh'ma* some more. And if even yet, despite straining to hear with all your power, you find you still cannot hear the Holy One directly, *listen for a passionate voice of one of your fellows crying in the wilderness* – like a Noach, or an Avraham, or a Yosef, or a Yonah, or an Amos, or a Stephen. Such are the true friends and most trusted servants of the Holy One – *i.e.* those He knows have ears to *sh'ma*, to whom He loves to announce not only His *instructions* but His *reasons*.

The Rapid Approach of Judgment Day

Yosef's prophetic interpretations were quickly fulfilled. This is one of many instances in the Holy One's timetable when a significant event or series of events

¹³ The assigned readings from the haftarah – *i.e.* Amos 3:1-8 - and the B'rit Chadasha – *i.e.* Acts 7:9-16 - follow this theme as well.

took place ‘*b’yom ha-sh’lishi*’ – on the ‘third day’. This ‘third day’ happened to be Pharaoh’s birthday. That day became a prophetic precursor of the Great Day of Judgment – when the Holy One judges between the peoples of the earth.

Vayehi b’yom ha-sh’lishi yom huledet et-Par’oh

It happened that the third day was Par’oh’s birthday,

vaya’as mishteh l’chol-avadai

And he made a feast for all his servants,

Vayisa et-rosh sar ha-mash’kim

and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer

v’et-rosh sar ha-ofim b’toch avaday

and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

Vayashev et-sar ha-mash’kim al-mashkehu

He restored the chief cupbearer to his position again,

V’yiten ha-kos al-kaf Par’oh

and he gave the cup into Par’oh’s hand;

V’et sar ha-ofim talah ka-asher patar lahem Yosef

but he hanged the chief baker, as Yosef had interpreted to them.

[Genesis 40:20-21]

Yosef’s interpretations were very important to the cupbearer and the baker, of course. But why are we given all these details about dreams dreamed *over 3,000 years ago by people we do not even know*, who were absolute *strangers to the covenant*? Why were we not just told by Torah that the Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker each had a dream, that Yosef interpreted their dreams for them, and that Yosef’s interpretation turned out to be prophetic of what happened? Why did the Writer of Torah insist that we be given *all the details*? And why are there aspects of the dreams that Yosef does not touch upon in his explanations/interpretations to the men who actually did the dreaming? Is there something more going on here than meets the eye? Is it possible these two specific dreams are recited in detail by Torah because they have *prophetic importance for far more people than the cupbearer and the baker who dreamed them*?

Think about the cupbearer’s dream. The central symbol is *the vine*. The vine is often used in Hebrew writing and thought as a symbol for Israel. See, for instance Hosea 10:1, where we are told that "*Yisrael was a spreading vine*." See also Psalm 80:8, where the psalmist recites to the Holy One, concerning Israel: "*You brought a vine out of Egypt ...*".

What might the *3 branches of that vine* which the cupbearer saw in his dream be? Might they possibly be the tribes of the children of Leah [under Y’hudah], the tribes of the children of Yosef [Under Efrayim], and the tribes of the children of the slave

girls [under Dan]? Or might they be the three branches of the prophet, the priest, and the king, given to Israel as the Divine forms of government that will be joined together in Messiah? Or might they be the three *Shekinah*-radiance periods that Israel would experience – the era of the *Mish'kan*, the era of Sh'lomo's Temple, and the era of the Temple that the remnant who returned from Babylonian captivity built under Zerubbabel (to which Herod made gaudy, Romanesque modifications)?

What might *the juice-laden grapes* of which the cupbearer dreamed be? Could they be the leaders – physical and spiritual – of Israel that come forth from the aforesaid 'branches' of the vine? Might it be the priests and judges and kings and prophets and sages? Or might the grapes be the *talmidim* of the Messiah? Or perhaps do speak prophetically of 'all Israel', as referenced by Shaul of Tarsus in Romans 11?

What might *the cup of the king* represent prophetically? Jeremiah 51:7 calls Babylon a 'golden cup in the hand of the Holy One'. Zechariah 12:2 calls Jerusalem a 'cup of trembling' to all nations. Or is the *cup of the king* in the cupbearer's dream representative of the cup of the Holy One's judgment and/or wrath, as described in Isaiah 51 and in Jeremiah 25?

What might *the squeezing of the grapes* visualized by the cupbearer portend? Might it prophesy of the captivities, the persecutions, the destruction of the Temples, the exiles, the pogroms, and the holocausts experienced by Israel over the centuries? Might it refer to the '*time of Ya'akov's trouble*' that must occur before the Messiah's glorious appearance? Might it - since Yeshua was the representative of all Israel chosen to act as its surrogate to receive the Holy One's judgment on its behalf - reference the night of the passion, trial, and torture, and execution of the Master – first in the Garden of Gethsemane, then in the house of Caiaphas?

And what does *the juice of the grapes* that the cupbearer saw himself squeeze into the king's cup portend? Might it speak to us of the blood of the Passover lamb, collected in a vessel, and used to daub the doorposts of the houses of our people in Egypt? Might it prophesy of *the blood of the martyrs*, the innocents slain over the millennia? Or might it reference *the streams of blood that flowed from Yeshua's head, and back, and hands, and feet, and side*?

Could *the restoring the cupbearer to his original status after three days* be seen as symbolic of Israel being returned to the land and to her Divine calling as a light to the world after 3 periods of captivity/exile? Might it prophesy of 'all Israel being saved' as spoken of by Shaul in Romans 11? Might it reference Yeshua – as the first fruits of the greater resurrection - being restored to life after three days in the

grave?

And what about the baker's dream? The baker's dream did not turn out so well. While the cupbearer received *atonement* and *restoration*, the baker received *judgment* and *punishment*. What do the three baskets of bread seen by the baker symbolize? Note, there is nothing wrong with either the bread or the baskets. The problem comes from the baker's pride-fully exposing the baskets of bread improperly, i.e. leaving them *uncovered* and *unguarded* such that the fowl of the air can get to and consume them. Does not this symbolize those who do not receive, cherish, and carefully *sh'mar* [guard, keep watch over] the bread of life?

Whose were the hands that put the improperly covered baskets of bread on the baker's head? Does the baker's *state of unpreparedness* – his lack of a covering – bring to mind the man who did not wear wedding clothes to the wedding banquet thrown by the King for his son [Matthew 22:11-13] and/or the 5 foolish virgins who took with them no oil [Matthew 25:3]?

And of what do *the birds that ate of the food of the king prophesy*? Do they not symbolize the same 'fowls of the air' described by Yeshua in his parable of the sower and the seed? Luke 8:5 says: "**A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.**" Luke 8:11-12 explains: "**Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are they that hear; then comes the devil, and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.**"

Hmmmmn. Learn to distinguish between the King's cupbearers, bearers of new wine of the kingdom, and those who deliver nothing but stale bread, picked apart and polluted by the fowl of the air, and which brings death. It just may be that, in due time, one of those cupbearers will remember you to the King.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah Yosef is joined in Pharaoh's private prison by two men in desperate situations. In the midst of the worst of conditions the Holy One arranges a divine encounter and stirs in Yosef the gift of interpreting prophetic dreams.

[A] What were the occupations of the two men who joined Yosef in prison in today's aliyah?

[B] Who do these men represent prophetically? [Hint: Consider the thing each man dealt with daily in the court of the king. What are these things used for in the spiritual realm? Who uses them - on earth, and in Heaven?]

[C] Into whose care did the captain of the guard place these men? Why do you think he did this?

[D] Why do you think both of these men dreamed a dream on the same

night?

[E] Why did the dreams cause both men to be depressed?

[F] What was the first man's dream?

[G] What was the second man's dream?

[H] How was Yosef able to interpret the dream?

[I] Do you think people can be trained to interpret dreams? Explain your answer, first from a "Greek" viewpoint, and then from a Hebraic one.

[J] After revealing the interpretation of the first man's dream, Yosef asked that the man remember him to Pharaoh. How does Yosef describe to this man the way in which he came to be in the prison in Egypt? According to Yosef, at this stage in his life, who was responsible for his being imprisoned in Egypt?

[K] On what day did the interpretations given by Yosef come to pass?

2. In today's concluding aliyah from haftarah *Vayashev* the Holy One through His messenger Amos reveals His plan to bring judgment upon the "children of Israel" - "the whole family [He] brought up from the land of Egypt".

*'You only have I chosen of all the families of the eretz.'
Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins.'*

Do two walk together unless they have agreed?

Will a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out of his den if he has caught nothing?

Can a bird fall in a trap on the eretz where no snare is set for him?

Does a snare spring up from the ground when there is nothing to catch?

Does the shofar alarm sound in a city without the people being afraid?

Does evil happen to a city and the Holy One hasn't done it?

*Surely the Holy One GOD will do nothing,
unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets.*

The lion has roared. Who will not fear?

The Holy One GOD has spoken. Who can but prophesy?

[A] By way of review, for what sins was the Holy One going to bring judgment upon *B'nei Yisrael* [the children of Israel]?

[B] The Holy One asks in verse 3 "*Do two walk together except they be agreed*" [Amplified, "*Do two walk together except they make an agreement and have agreed?*"] What do you think the Holy One is talking about?

[C] There have been many great judgments spoken about in Scripture. See, for instance, Genesis 6:1 and following [the great flood], Genesis 18:17 and following [S'dom and G'morrah], Genesis 41:30 [the 7-year famine of Yosef's time], Exodus 7:1 and following [the ten plagues on Egypt in the time of Moshe], Jonah 1:2, and 3:4 [the destruction of Nineveh], etc. In each case, the Holy One announced to someone what He was intending to do, and why. Why do you think the Holy One always tells someone when judgment is coming? What does that tell you about the Holy One's nature?

3. In this week's reading from the B'rit Chadasha, *Stefanos* - a Hebrew follower of Yeshua with a Greek name - is making his final speech to the Sanhedrin - the speech for which he would very shortly be stoned to death. In today's verses, Stefanos discusses the events of this week's parsha (and more).

The patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Yosef, sold him into Mitzrayim.

*The Holy One was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions,
and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Mitzrayim.*

He made him governor over Mitzrayim and all his house.

*Now a famine came over all the land of Mitzrayim and Kana'an, and great affliction.
Our fathers found no food. But when Ya'akov heard that there was grain in Mitzrayim,
he sent out our fathers the first time.*

*On the second time Yosef was made known to his brothers, and Yosef's race
was revealed to Pharaoh. Yosef sent, and summoned Ya'akov, his father, and all his relatives,
seventy-five souls. Ya'akov went down into Mitzrayim, and he died,
himself and our fathers, and they were brought back to Shechem, and laid in the tomb
that Avraham bought for a price in silver from the sons of Hamor of Shechem.*

[A] What does Stefanos say led Yosef's brothers to sell Yosef into slavery?

[B] In Strong's, look up the Greek word translated as "envy" in verse 9.

Write the Greek word and its meaning.

[C] In verse 10 what two things does Stefanos say the Holy One gave to Yosef?

[D] In verse 11 Stefanos calls the judgment the Holy One imposed upon Egypt and Kena'an a "dearth" and an "affliction". Look up these two words in Strong's, and write the Greek words used and their definitions.

[E] Based upon what you found in response to the previous question, write a description of the conditions that existed in Kena'an during the time of the judgment that led to Ya'akov's move to Egypt.

[F] Is the information Stefanos gives in verses 12-16 a completely accurate account of what is described in the Torah concerning those subjects? What discrepancies if any do you find between Stefanos' account and what Torah describes? [Hint: See Genesis 23:1-19 and compare to Acts 7:16; see also Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:1-5; compare Acts 7:14]

[i] Why do you think Stefanos got these details 'wrong'?

[ii] Do you think the glaring mistakes Stefanos made in his discourse played any part in getting him stoned for blasphemy? Explain.

*May you hear the voice of the Holy One,
daily in the words of Torah and nightly by means of your dreams.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 35:17-28

*Lord, how long will you look on?
Rescue my soul from their destruction, my precious life from the lions.
I will give you thanks in the great assembly.
I will praise you among many people.
Don't let those who are my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me;
Neither let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause.
For they don't speak shalom, But they devise deceitful words
against those who are quiet in the land. Yes, they opened their mouth wide against me.
They said, "**Aha! Aha! Our eye has seen it!**"*

*You have seen it, O Holy One. Don't keep silent. Lord, don't be far from me.
Wake up! Rise up to defend me, my God! My Lord, contend for me!
Vindicate me, Holy One my God, according to your righteousness;
Don't let them gloat over me.*

*Don't let them say in their heart, "**Aha! That's the way we want it!**"
Don't let them say, "**We have swallowed him up!**"*

*Let them be disappointed and confounded together who rejoice at my calamity.
Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves against me.
Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause.
Yes, let them say continually, "**May the Holy One be magnified,
Who has pleasure in the prosperity of his servant!**"*

My tongue will talk about your righteousness and about your praise all day long.