

Introduction to Parsha #9: Vayashev¹

READINGS: ***Torah Vayashev:*** **Genesis 37:1 – 40:23**
 Haftarah: **Amos 2:6 – 3:8**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 6:1 – 7:16**



Your sheaves ... bowed down ...
[Genesis 37:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 35:1-3;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *Petition # 6, B'racha* [Blessing]

Vayeshev Ya'akov be'erezt megurei aviv be'erezt Kena'an - *And Ya'akov settled/sat/sprawled in the land where his fathers had sojourned, the land of Kena'an ...* ***Eleh toldot Ya'akov*** – *These are the prophetic narratives of Ya'akov* **Genesis 37:1-2a.**

The patriarchal era – the epoch of covenantal pioneering - is drawing to a close. This is the part of the story where the spotlight begins to shift off of Ya'akov and onto Yosef. Ya'akov will 'settle'; Yosef will arise.

Od Avinu Chai? [Does our Patriarch Still Live?]

Yes, Ya'akov is still alive – biologically at least. As our *parsha ha-shavua* begins he is in his 108th year - and reeling from a daunting series of personal tragedies. He will live another thirty-nine years, but will spend the last 17 of those years in Egypt. He is not yet the *Person/Pioneer/Patriarch of Divine Light* the Holy One designed him to be. He is nowhere close to walking in his 'higher-self' 'Yisrael' identity. He will have to grow into that role over decades – and the growth process will be extremely painful. (More on that this week!)

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And what of the Covenant household? As the week begins, that household is in turmoil. Shechem has happened. Dinah is lost. Sh'mon and Levi have gone rogue. Rachel is dead. Reuven has rebelled. The reunion with Yitzchak turned bittersweet, and his life ended shortly after Ya'akov's return to the homestead. As a result of all the above, and a brewing storm of interfamily jealousy, envy, and offense, the atmosphere in the covenant household is anything but *bayit shalom*. There is a growing spirit of lawlessness in his camp. Hearts are hard. Love has grown cold. It is only a matter of time until violence erupts and poisons the atmosphere of the land of Promise so thoroughly that the skies over Israel turn to brass, causing the most fertile land on the planet to fail to produce. If that happens, it might just result in a famine of Biblical proportions – and the mass migration of starving souls. Don't change that dial, Beloved – things are about to get really, really interesting for Ya'akov, for his family, and for the world!

***A Covenant Family that is Divided Against Itself ... Is a
Worldwide Famine and a Long, Hard Season
of Collective Captivity Waiting to Happen***

After Ya'akov returned to and resettled in the land, the Holy One saw to it that no outside force could cause the family harm. But what the nations could not do, the family did to itself. Negative emotions like envy, jealousy, anger, and offense were running rampant. There was an explosion of hard feelings, hard stares, hard words – all of which resulted in hard lines of division. The *sons of the concubines* [*i.e.* Dan, Naftali, Asher, and Gad] allied together in one camp. The *sons of Leah* [*i.e.* Reuven, Sh'mon, Levi, Yehudah, Yissakhar, and Zevulun] aligned themselves in another. Both of these resented the third camp - the camp of special privilege' – which was made up of the sons of Rachel [*i.e.* Yosef and Binyamin]. Only in the latter camp was the head of the entire covenant household, Ya'akov-destined-to-be-Yisrael, still respected. In both of the other camps his authority was resented - and resisted - more and more each day.

How did things get so far off the 'blessedness' track? Perhaps the seeds for this shocking disintegration of family unity can be traced back to Penuel. There, in a desperate but ultimately ill-advised attempt to save at least some of the people he loved from the anticipated attack of Esav, Ya'akov had done the unthinkable: he had divided his family into 'camps'. He did not cast lots to see who he would assign to which camp. He did not ask for volunteers. He prioritized Rachel and Yosef highest, Leah and her brood next, and Bilhah and Zilpah and their children least. As Torah describes it: “*He put the maidservants and their children in front [i.e. in Esav's direct line of attack], Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Yosef last.*” **Genesis 33:2**. What a message that sent to Dan and Naftali, Asher and Gad – and for that matter to Reuven, Sh'mon, Levi, Yehudah, Yissakhar and

Zevulun, about who ‘ranked’ where in their father’s affection and evaluation of worth. When the family was threatened, Ya’akov had chosen division and stratification over unity. The older boys took notice how much lower in esteem Ya’akov held all of them compared to Rachel and to Yosef. Respect is not something to which a person – even a parent – is entitled automatically based on his position. Respect is learned behavior. It must be caught – and learned - from one who shows respect to you. Alas, disrespect tends to follow the same pattern.

In the short run, the collapse of respect for Ya’akov’s patriarchal authority will result in a bloody rift in the covenant family. This will start with snarky attitudes and snide remarks; it will, however, soon progress to inciteful rhetoric, episodes of lawlessness, escalating violence, economic crisis, mass migration, and persecution. But do not fret; the Holy One has a plan to turn even this into good. He knows something that fallen man doesn’t – that ultimately, in times of severe crisis such as are about to come upon the earth, men’s hearts tire of the violence and depravity of their fellow man, and begin to cry out for Messianic redemption. That is when He moves – because that is when men are ready for Him to move. So cue the chaos. Let the nations rage. Let the unoffended rant and rave. Let jealousy have its day. Let hate speech pour forth like sewage from a broken pipe. Let men’s arrogance and self-righteous indignation drive to indulge in disgusting, repulsive acts of depravity ... as men’s arrogance and self-righteous indignation always do. Let the *love of the brethren grow cold*. Let the bitter tongues of the self-entitled virtue-signalers wag. Let people degenerate into obsessive-compulsive lovers of themselves ... and lovers of money ... rather than lovers of God. Let vain imaginations, vile passions, and reprobate mind run wild. Cue the explosion of personal, racial, ethnic, gender-centric, class-based, academic, institutional, and religious pride. Cue appetites, urges, attitudes, opinions, and offenses raging out of control. Cue disobedience to parents. Cue ingratitude. Cue family violence. Cue profane thought, speech, and behavior. Cue attitudes of self-righteous irreverence. Cue arrogant boasting, and casting off all restraint. Cue unclean passions and vile practices. Cue false narratives. Cue vain imaginations. Cue baseless hatred. Cue persecutions - and even talk of genocide. Cue false accusation. Cue contagious outrage. Cue intrigue. Cue trauma. Cue tribulation. Cue bondage. Cue reaping exactly what we have sown. Cue the outbreak of whatever forms and levels of sickness and suffering it takes to make men wake up and cry out loud for the cure. Know this – ultimately men will have had enough – and will cry out for Divine Redemption. And when that happens, He will come – and set things right.

Whew! Perhaps we need to back up, Beloved - and take this one step at a time.

One Step at a Time

*Vayashev*² is a transition parsha. Its function is to prepare us for a great cataclysm – which will be followed by a great – indeed epic - redemption. Gird up your loins - this parsha introduces the prophetic time of *tzarah hi l'Ya'akov* – i.e. *Jacob's Trouble*. It is *the parsha of Prophetic Transactions in the Marketplace of Human Misery*. There will be a lot of buying and selling; and there will be layers of human misery unleashed that will adversely affect every family and bloodline on the planet. The sledding will be rough for everyone, beginning with the Covenant household. The tare seed sown by Ya'akov's oldest sons at Shechem have pretty much insured that. But *on the other hand*

On the other hand, we should never look at *Vayashev* as only - or even primarily – being about misery. The Creative Genius Who is secretly applying the Master's stylus to the scroll is not writing a Dostoyevskian dirge about the injustice of human suffering – but an inspiring prophetic parable unveiling the beautiful pathways and protocols that He follows to bring about epic episodes of deliverance, healing, redemption, and restoration. *Vayashev's* subject matter is not wrath – nor guilt, nor shame, nor condemnation; it is mercy. *Vayashev* is not about despair, or futility, or judgment; it is about hope, about light shining in the darkness, and about the sweet, healing fragrance of forgiveness. *Vayashev* is about learning to face, take and shake off the blows of, and navigate through the worst situations and circumstances that life, family, or one-world order disinformation and oppression can throw at you, by digging deep into the Covenant and Its Author, and letting Him empower you to hang on, stay faithful, *overcome*, and *transcend*. *Vayashev* is about dealing with the dark side of living in a fallen world – and learning how to do it gracefully, without becoming jaded and judgmental. *Vayashev* is about the untidy process of learning to really trust our All-Wise Creator to fulfill His Promises and execute His decrees – when it looks to any sane mind like there is simply no way on earth the things the Creator has spoken can possibly come to pass. *Vayashev* is about what it looks like for a son of the Covenant to persevere in the Holy One's Words and Ways – and hold onto His dream of a grand redemption - when everyone around you has ceased to do so. *Vayashev* is about fighting the Good Fight of Faith – and coming face to face with, but refusing to give in to, bitterness, offense, rage, unforgiveness, judgmentalism, and hate. *Vayashev* is about learning how to stand up to and resist things like sensuality, lust, sentimentality, fear of man, and despair. *Vayashev* is about learning hard lessons about destiny-destroying temptations like self-righteousness,

² *Vayashev* is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase spelled *vav, yod, shin, veit*. It is pronounced *vah-yawsh-shev'*.

pride, victimization-complex, entitlement-mentality, greed, and fixation on what one's fallen human mind wants to opine, based on the prevailing cultural milieu, is 'good vs. evil', 'right' vs. 'wrong', 'fair' vs. 'unfair', 'moral vs. immoral', and 'just vs. unjust'. *Vayashev* is about what it looks like, in real time, for a man to walk humbly with the Author of the Covenant, begin to love mercy the way He does, and instead of loudly *ranting about* 'justice', to actually begin to quietly 'do'³ it – i.e. *make it a visible, functional reality; to lay it as a foundation and build upon it, layer upon layer, so as to cause it to take shape and bear fruit.*

In the Days of Deepest Darkness Is When Dreams of Deliverance Are Birthed and Visions of Mashiach Begin to Unfold

With *Vayashev* a new door of Divine Revelation and inspiration will begin to open for us. With the commencement of Torah's fascinating narratives of the epic struggles endured by *Yosef*, the Holy One's promise of a glorious Messiah – hidden between the lines of the Scroll since Genesis 3:15 – will begin to re-emerge. In fact, the shadowy image of Mashiach – Messiah *ben Yosef* - will actually begin to take center stage. For this reason I also sometimes also call the unit of Torah that introduces '*the Chronicles of Messiah's Shadow*'.

Why does the Holy present in one narrative – and in the life of one son of the Covenant - the seemingly polar opposite themes of *human suffering and misery* on the one hand and *Glorious Messianic Hope on the other*? Through the medium of Torah the Holy One is about to teach all His Covenant Children, in all generations, a valuable lesson. He is about to teach us that *every trauma or wound ever inflicted on any human being is important only as forming the necessary historical foundation for an epic moment of forgiveness, healing, and redemption.* Mashiach will be like *Yosef*, you see. But it will not by any means end with Mashiach. Instead, Mashiach will just be the beginning. As and to the extent we, the sons and daughters of the Covenant, unite with, walk in submission to, and come into harmony with Mashiach, *we* will become more and more like *Yosef* as well. There will be a series of grand visions – and those very visions will become fiery flashpoints for conflict and persecution. There will be false accusations, derogatory labels, and painful betrayals – and those very accusations, labels, and betrayals will become the portals through which our spheres of influence and zones of impact get exponentially expanded. There will be temptations and lies, followed by arrests, trials, and confinements. But those very things will be used by the Holy One to open the doors to our destiny. That is the Covenant. That is the Grand Redemptive

³ *The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as 'do' is asah – ayin, sin, hey.* The first usage is Genesis 1:7, where the Author of Torah tells us that on the second day of Creation, ***Elohim made [asah-ed] the firmament, and divided the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament; and caused it to remain so.*** See also Genesis 1:16: ***Elohim God made [asah-ed] two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars also.***

Plan of our God and King. That is why we have been redeemed. As the sons and daughters of the Covenant, our message to the world is supposed to be *Ani Yosef!* - *i.e.* I am Yosef! ... *You meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Genesis 50:20.*

In the realm of the Kingdom of Heaven, you see, insult, offense, and trauma are not wounds to be nursed, to get outraged about, or to be avenged - they are just challenges to be faced, overcome and transcended. In the realm of Covenant Life, parties to disputes and controversies are constantly being led by the Divine Hand of the Unseen Shepherd of our souls toward a glorious and joyful reconciliation. Those humble ones who respond to the Unseen Shepherd's leading ultimately find *shalom* and deep layers of purpose and positive influence in life; those who refuse the leading toward reconciliation, preferring to nurse the wound and embrace the outrage, just find – and dispense to those around them – more and more drama and misery.

The message of the life of Yosef, whose chronicles we will begin to study this week, is that *life is just too short; and the world is simply too dark, for sons and daughters of the Covenant to keep the light of the Majesty of the Holy One in hiding under a bushel of human outrage, offense, woundedness, and self-righteousness.* We are not here to place blame or pronounce curses; we are here to announce – and demonstrate the reality of – *good, good news.*

Lights! Camera! Action!

Vayashev contains all the elements of a blockbuster movie. From its *Cinderella-like theme, to dreams of grandeur, to jealous rage spiraling out of control, to conspiracy to commit murder, to human trafficking, to exotic journeys, to seduction, and then to the political intrigues of the most powerful nation on earth,* this is a parsha of *soaring drama.* If one can see beyond the fast-paced action and raw emotion however there is *much, much more* than just fantastic literature involved. Just beneath the surface of the parsha, but still in plain view for all with ears to hear and eyes to see, lie amazing secrets of covenant life - secrets that the Holy One desires for every son and daughter of the covenant to learn, internalize, and incorporate into their faith-walk.

This is the parsha of both the *God-inspired dream* and the *God-inspired dreamer.* May all our eyes be open in wonder this week as we explore the treasures the Holy One has hidden in plain view for those who will dare to *dream His dream.* May our hearts be encouraged within us - and may our passion for the Will and ways of the Holy One fanned into flame - as He whispers words of guidance, direction and destiny into our ears this week.

Whispered on the winds all week long will be the following Divine interrogatory:

Oh, Son or daughter of the Covenant – Dearly Beloved one, wherever you are - will you be the one in your generation who dares to dream the Holy One's dream, and endure – then forgive, bless, and serve – the very people who mocked and persecuted you for daring to have that dream in the first place?

The Season of the Silent Heaven ... and the Hidden Face of God

And now, Dear Reader, it is my unpleasant task to present you with *a prophetic warning*. We are approaching a time of famine on earth – a famine for both physical *bread* and for *the life-giving power of the Manifest Presence, the Voice, and the Empowering Words* of the Creator. We are, you see, about to enter a very *dark era* in our patriarchal and prophetic history – an *era of the Silent Heaven and the 'Hidden Face' of God*. For the first time in a long, long time there will not be a single '*God-encounter*' anywhere to be found in this week's parsha. Neither Ya'akov nor any other person alive on planet earth will either hear the Voice of the Creator *or* see any recognizable manifestation of the presence of the Holy One.

Our Covenant Partner in Heaven is about to become strangely – and *uncharacteristically* – *silent*. In fact, not only this week [parsha *Vayashev*] but also next week [parsha *Miketz*] as well there will be *no direct communication from the Holy One whatsoever*. From time to time, you see, the Holy One in His great wisdom chooses to *hide from our view, secret Himself from our senses* – and seemingly disappear from our lives. Please note that I said *seemingly*. The Holy One does not ever *actually* leave us to our own devices or forsake us – in times of the Silent Heaven and the Hidden Face it just *seems* to us that He has done so. In truth, even in times like the present the Holy One is here all the while – just *hiding, waiting, and watching* to see when we will *miss Him*, when we will *realize our desperate need of Him*, and cry out to Him, and when *our souls will thirst for Him* as a deer pants for the water, driving us to *seek Him with all our heart and with all our soul*.

Alas that process usually *takes awhile*. The human condition tends to be *stubborn and independent, and prideful - and resistant toward surrender*. So, in the interim, even as humans who once knew intimacy with the Holy One embarrass themselves by living as they please, spouting religious nonsense, waxing philosophical, and feeling more and more proud of themselves as they take up self-righteous offenses, the Words which the Holy One spoke over us just keep doing what they were intended by the Holy One to do. You see, Dear Reader, the Words that He has previously spoken over our lives in the course of the encounters we have experienced are '*seed*'. They have been *planted in good soil* and are being *protected* by the Holy One until it is the appointed time for them to *germinate*.

For every season of planting seed there must follow a season of letting that seed *sprout*, and *grow*, and *flourish*, and *mature*, and eventually *reproduce after its own kind*.

Can I Get a 'With-ness'?

Times of the Hidden Face present a great challenge to those of us who desire to live the *sh'ma* lifestyle. We tend to thrive on 'fresh' 'new' words from the Holy One to *sh'ma*. In a time of the Hidden Face however, all there is to *sh'ma* are *words received in the past*. This is a time we must exercise our *memory skills* – *i.e. how well we can recall the Words the Holy One has spoken over us in the former days*. This is a time we must hone our *concentration skills* – *i.e. how well we can keep the purpose and destiny and promises the Holy One has spoken concerning us in the forefront of our mind despite distractions, naysayers, competing voices and messages from the world around us, not to mention creeping doubt from within us*. And this is a time we must develop a spiritual 'sixth sense' – the ability to 'see in the dark' so to speak. This is the enablement that is imparted by Words of the Holy One to *look beyond the realm of natural vision* and to actually see – albeit through a glass darkly - into the realm of spirit where the Holy One is always operating.

Times of regular God-encounters such as we have experienced up to this week are designed by the Holy One to develop in us '*ears to hear*' and '*eyes to see*'. Times of Silent Heaven and the Hidden Face on the other hand are designed by our Covenant Partner in Heaven *to test us regarding how well we can 'see what the Father is doing'*.

In times of the Silent Heaven and the Hidden Face we must trust what I call the 'with-ness' of the Holy One. We must trust that even when we cannot see Him or hear Him or sense Him physically, He is still very much '*with*' us. It is the Holy One's plan that Yosef teach us this skill. For Torah tells us that even when he was sold into slavery:

The Holy One was with Yosef, and He became a successful man And the Holy One was with him⁴; and in all his work, the Holy One caused it to prosper in his hand.

[Genesis 39:2-3]

A little later, when Yosef was condemned to an Egyptian prison, we are told:

***The Holy One was with Yosef,
and He showed him kindness,
making him find favor with the warden of the dungeon.***

⁴The Hebrew word translated here as 'successful man' is *matzliach*, *mem*, *tzade*, *lamed*, *yod*, *chet*. This is a noun derivative of the verb root *tzalach*, *tzade*, *lamed*, *chet*, meaning 'he prospers', or 'he advances/progresses [in position]'.

*The Holy One was with [Yosef],
and the Holy One granted him success in everything he did.
[Genesis 39:21, 23]*

I call this the ‘with-ness’ principle of Torah. The ‘with-ness’ principle started with – of all people - *Yish’mael*. This young man is the first-person Torah tells us the Holy One was ‘with’. Genesis 21:20 says specifically: *And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.*

Of course, the Holy One also promised to be ‘with’ Yitzchak. In Genesis 26:3 the Holy One told Yitzchak:” *Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will you thee; for unto you, and unto your seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Avraham your father*; In Genesis 26:24 the Holy One repeated the promise, saying: *I am the God of Avraham your father: fear not, for I am with you, and will bless you and multiply your seed for my servant Avraham's sake.*

Despite far less than perfect behavior by Yitzchak, the *with-ness* of the Holy One he experienced was noticed by others. When the Ph’lishtim king Avimelech along with his advisor and the chief captain of his army approached Yitzchak, for instance, they said, *We have certainly seen that the Holy One was with you: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, [even] betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with you.* Genesis 26:26,28.

The with-ness of the Holy One was promised to Ya’akov in Genesis 28:15:

“And behold, I [am] with you, and will keep watch over and protect you in all wherever you go, and will bring you back again into this land; for I will not leave you until I have fulfilled that which I have spoken to you.”

In times of a Silent Heaven and of a Hidden Face it is very, very important for us all to *understand*, to *appreciate*, and to *appropriate* this *with-ness* principle. Whatever *seems* to be happening in the world – however much the geo-political, economic, religious, and physical forces in the world seem to be taking us to Hell in a hand basket – it is just a mirage. The Holy One is WITH us, and is working in every circumstance to bring about His plan of redemption – for us as well as all of mankind who will respond. So when disturbances and disorder and discouragement and disillusionment and distress and disease swirl around you, and Heaven is silent, and His Face is nowhere to be seen, and you can’t seem to get a ‘now’ Word or a ‘fresh touch’ for the life of you, just cry out to the Holy One, along with me, Beloved: Well, Holy One ... at the very least ... *can I get a with-ness?*

Hearing From the Creator – Another Way

Meanwhile, there might be more messages headed our way from the Throne of

Heaven than we realize. Let me explain what I mean. Heretofore in Torah we have focused upon two means of the Holy One's revelation of Himself and His Will to mankind - the *God-encounter* and the *Divinely ordained life experience*. Through the God-encounters and Divinely ordained life-experiences of Avram/Avraham and Sarai/Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and more recently of Ya'akov/Yisrael we have learned much about the principles of interacting with the Holy One and His Creation as a '*friend of God*'. But while these two means of Divine Revelation will continue to be present in Torah from time-to-time, this week's parsha will introduce us to a third very important way in which the Holy One sometimes chooses to communicate His Words, His Will, and His instructions for living to us – *the message of the prophet*. We will read of certain seemingly ordinary men having dreams and visions – dreams and visions that foresee little tidbits of what the Holy One is going to do in what we mortals think of as *the future*. We will then see that after these seemingly ordinary men experience such dreams/visions their lives suddenly seem to be characterized by amazing levels of wisdom and discernment and knowledge.

Wow! What a *tremendous honor!* What an *awesome destiny!* But alas we will see that such revelation from the Holy One *does not come without cost*. We will see that the gift of 'prophecy' as we will come to call it is a gift that *stirs up very negative human responses* – responses ranging from *ridicule* to *resentment*, from *jealousy* to *judgmentalism*, and from *hatred* to *homicide*.

The faint-hearted and super-sensitive need not apply. For we will discover that to be called as a prophet of the Holy One entitles one to free admittance into such places as *pits of vipers*, *slave markets*, and *prisons*, not to mention *fiery furnaces* and *lion's dens*, *dark, dreary caves*, and *cliff-bottoms* [seen from the unique perspective of *being thrown down*]. To receive and communicate prophetic messages from the Holy One, it seems, earns one the privilege of beratings and beatings – if not beheading - at the hands of the people to whom the blessing of a Word from the Holy One is given. And as we will learn in this week's readings from the *B'rit Chadasha* the gift of speaking prophetic messages on behalf of the Holy One sometimes entitles one to all the stones one could ever desire for one's landscaping needs – being hurled at you fast and furious, that is, by angry countrymen who would rather kill the messenger than heed the message.

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as *prophet* is *navi*, *nun*, *veit*, *yod*, literally meaning "one who is inspired by God". The primary callings of a prophet are to draw men *to* – or *back to* - the covenant the Holy One cut with Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. The function of a *navi* is to reveal what the Holy One discloses to him or is His will in a specific situation for an individual, a people

group, or a nation. This requires a *navi* from time to time to boldly expose for what it is not only *blatant evil* but also *pious hypocrisy*, and to cause people to hunger for a nobler, simpler way of relating to and interacting with the Holy One, with the times in which he or she lives, with his or her own destiny and purpose in life, with Creation, and his fellow human beings. This requires more than stern, caustic speech; it requires a heart ablaze with both passion for the Holy One and compassion for man.

Our test for the week will be *how we deal with the prophets the Holy One sends us*. We will examine the *sh'ma*-responsiveness of the Holy One's people to forms of Divine revelation that He sends through men. Torah teaches us what not to do in response to a prophetic message spoken through a human voice before it teaches us what to do. What we are definitely not to do in response to a prophetic message spoken through a human being is what Yosef's brothers did to him.

A Vayashev Travelogue

This will be the week in which the spotlight of Torah begins to shine on a new 'hero' – Rachel's firstborn son *Yosef* [Joseph]. We will see Yosef's relations with his half-brothers enter a vortex of jealousy and misunderstanding that spirals out of control and lands Rachel's firstborn son in Egyptian captivity. Let's take a quick look ahead to the various scenarios that parsha Vayashev will lead us through this week, shall we?

1. Introduction to Yosef, the 'Dreamer of Dreams'

With the opening lines of this parsha we will begin to understand that the future of the patriarch Ya'akov is going to be inextricably tied not to his eldest, Rueven, to the feisty warriors Sh'mon and Levi, or even to the charismatic *Y'hudah* [Judah]. Ya'akov's destiny is instead bound up in soul with *Rachel's firstborn son, Yosef*.

As the parsha begins Yosef is a 17-year-old shepherd-in-training - *the favorite son of his father*. That makes him *public enemy #1* in the eyes of all of his older half-brothers.

It behooves us to understand that in this world there is always someone that people are going to just *love to hate*. For Yosef's half-brothers, Yosef was *that guy*. Yosef was 'different' from them. His mother was not their mother, of course, that was obvious. But it was much more than that. His *worldview* was not their worldview. His *work ethic* was not their work ethic. *His commitments* were not their commitments. And *his loyalties* were most definitely not their loyalties.

Yosef had very different standards, priorities, and values than his brothers. He excelled in everything he did. He thought of himself as a prince and lived by the

principle of *noblesse oblige*⁵. In giving the report his father asked for about the work his half-brothers were doing he very likely just *told it like he saw it*. But he saw it through *the eyes of a dreamer*, not the eyes of a brother. He reported as *a servant of his father* – not as an advocate of his brethren.

3. Yosef Has Dreams of Grandeur Corresponding to His Sense of Nobility

Yosef is next recorded as having two separate dreams the essence of which was interpreted by his family to be that he was destined to eventually rule over not only his brothers but his father as well.

In light of the bad feelings that had already been generated by the ‘bad report’ Yosef had given to his father against his half-brothers and by Ya’akov’s gift to Yosef of an elaborate chieftain’s cloak, all this wild-eyed dreamer-talk just threw fuel on the mounting bonfire of jealousy that was burning in the hearts of his elder brothers.

4. Yosef’s Prophetic Odyssey Begins

So when Ya’akov decided once again to send Yosef to ‘spy’ on his elder brothers as they were tending their father's flock near what used to be the city of Shechem, the elder brothers sensed the time to put Yosef in his place had come.

5. Yosef is Assaulted by His Brothers

The minute his brothers saw Yosef approaching they hatched a plot *to kill him*. As he made his way into their camp they *bushwhacked him* with murder in their minds. They violently stripped from his back the special coat he had received from Ya’akov. Just before a fatal blow could be struck however the eldest of his half-brothers, Reuven, intervened.

Reuven suggested that instead of shedding Yosef’s blood themselves they could accomplish the same objective by throwing him into a nearby pit where wild animals would probably do the job for them. Torah tells us that Reuven secretly planned to go back later and help Yosef escape from the pit. But it was not to be.

6. Yosef is Sold Into Slavery In Egypt

With Yosef in the pit crying out for his life Torah tells us that the brothers sat down to enjoy a meal. Vengeance was sweet – just like at Shechem. But just like at Shechem the sweet taste of vengeance would wind up turning very bitter in their

⁵ ‘*Noblesse oblige*’ is a French phrase literally meaning “*nobility obligates*”. Figuratively it means that one born into a noble class or placed in a position of honor has corresponding responsibilities to pursue excellence, to exercise wisdom and discretion, to lead by example as well as rule by power, and to manage with a best-interest-of-the-kingdom mentality, rather than wasting time or substance on idle, selfish, or frivolous pursuits.

mouths.

It all started when a caravan of Yish'maeli merchants just happened to pass by as the brothers were trying to figure out how the episode should end. At Y'hudah's suggestion the ten elder half-brothers decided to rid themselves of Yosef forever – and make a little money in the process - by selling him as a slave to the Yish'maeli merchants. Through a mysterious 3-way transaction involving the ten brothers, a band of Midyanim who suddenly show up out of nowhere and the Yishma'eli merchants mentioned above Yosef found himself out of the frying pan into the fire – out of the pit, but in chains, being led against his will to a new life in Egypt.

7. The Great Conspiracy

The brothers decided to cover their tracks by making Ya'akov think Yosef was dead, torn apart by wild animals. The plan involved slaughtering a goat, smearing its blood all over Yosef's special coat, sending the coat to Ya'akov, and letting Ya'akov draw the logical conclusion.

Note the irony here - just as Ya'akov had deceived his father Yitzchak years previously with a goat and a garment in order to appropriate to himself the blessing Yitzchak seemed intent on giving to Esav so too was Ya'akov deceived by his 10 eldest sons using the very same implements. As the sages say: *mida k'neged mida* - measure for measure⁶.

8. Into Captivity Yosef Is Led!

Members of a Yish'maeli human-trafficking cartel were happy to make a denarii or two off the covenant family's strife. They bound the young Hebrew Yosef with chains and marched him to the slave market in Egypt. There he caught the eye of a nobleman named Potifar, who just so happened to be the captain of Pharaoh's palace guard. Whatever Potifar expected from this acquisition, he got tons more! Since the blessing of the Holy One was on Yosef, everything he touched was blessed. Suddenly Potifar's house was *the place to be*. As Lavan's house prospered because of Ya'akov's presence, so Potifar's house prospered by reason of Yosef's. His new master took notice – and put Yosef over his entire household. Let the good times roll – well, at least until the 'other shoe' part of the covenant plan drops, that is. He who blesses the seed of Avraham gets blessed; but, as we will

⁶ Rashi introduces another aspect of "measure for Measure" punishment in regard to Ya'akov. Torah says that Ya'akov "*mourned for his son many days*." Rashi calculates the time of mourning as 22 years, reasoning that Yosef was 17 when he was sold, 30 when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and was elevated to second in command in Egypt, and 39 when he was reunited with Ya'akov after seven years of plenty and two years of famine. That makes 22 years that Ya'akov was without Yosef. Rashi says, exactly equals the length of time that Ya'akov was away from Yitzchak - the 20 years Ya'akov spent with Laban, plus a year and a half in Sukkot, plus six months in Sh'chem and Beit El.

soon be reminded, there is another side to that story.

9. Y'hudah Plays Prodigal

Meanwhile, back in the land of Kena'an, Y'hudah is having a bit of a mid-life crisis. Is it guilt? Is it shame? Is it wanderlust? Or is he just restless? Whatever it was, he took off for greener pastures. Abandoning his father's household, he started hanging out with the Kena'ani. He took a Kena'ani to bed, and had a series of children under less-than-ideal circumstances. He became the prototype for the prodigal son character of the Master's most famous parable. Fortunately, a few decades into the after many years he came to his senses, and made teshuvah.

10. Beware the Wrath of Potifar's Wife

Yosef, meanwhile, was garnering way too much attention from an unexpected source - Potifar's wife. She looked at him a lot – and she liked what she saw. She wanted him – and she was used to getting what she wanted. He resisted – and that just seemed to make her want him more. She set an elaborate trap to get him alone and seduce him – but he was having none of it. Unwilling to be told 'no', she grabbed his garment to pull him into her arms. Yosef pulled away, leaving his garment in her hands. He then ran from the house.

Angry at Yosef for spurning her advances, Mrs. P. opted for retribution. She made up a story that was sure to stir up racial offense. She deflected/projected her lust and perverse ways onto him. She knew an accusation by her of sexual assault of an Egyptian woman by a Hebrew slave would create societal outrage – if not get Yosef killed.

In an interesting twist, Potifar's wife decided to use the garment that Yosef had left in her hands in order to escape her advances as evidence against him. She just had to lie a little bit about how she came into possession of the cloth. In the Holy One's eyes *garments* are evidence of many things, it appears. Be sure to keep your garments spotless - and on your back *where they belong*.

11. Yosef Is Condemned to Prison

In light of the scandalous accusations his wife made against Yosef, Potifar had no choice but to have Yosef either killed or imprisoned. Strangely enough he opted for the latter. So off to prison Yosef went. Even in a dark, damp Egyptian prison, however, the Holy One smiled upon Yosef. He quickly found favor in the eyes of the jailers, and the warden of the prison eventually wound up placing him in charge of other prisoners.

12. The Prophetic Dreams of the Cupbearer and Baker

At this point the narrative turns back to the subject of prophetic dreams with which it began. Two members of Pharaoh's staff - his personal cupbearer and baker - fall from royal favor and are put in prison. Yosef was then assigned to serve as their liaison and steward.

One night both of these former servants to Pharaoh had very troubling dreams. In the cupbearer's dream he saw grape clusters from which he squeezed wine out into Pharaoh's special cup. The baker on the other hand dreamed about baking baskets of baked goods for Pharaoh that got eaten by a bird of prey before he could deliver them to Pharaoh's table. The two disgraced dignitaries told their respective dreams to Yosef, and Yosef interpreted them both. Yosef prophesied, based upon these dreams, that the cupbearer would be restored to his former position in Pharaoh's service, while the baker would die by hanging. And of course the prophetic declarations made by Yosef came to pass exactly as he said they would.

After the prophecies made by Yosef come true Yosef called the cupbearer aside and implored him to mention Yosef's plight to Pharaoh. By the time the cupbearer got back to the palace however Yosef's request was the last thing on the cupbearer's mind.

The parsha thus ends with Yosef still languishing in prison with no obvious change of circumstances in sight. More on that *next week*. Before we get to that however we have *a matter of no small importance to consider*.

Who Will Carry the Torch of Covenant Forward?

One will note that with the death of Yitzchak the question became who would take up the torch Yitzchak had borne – the torch of *yada* [intimate relationship] with and *sh'ma* response to the Holy One. Who among Yitzchak's descendants will step forward as Avraham's successor as the weaker partner in the Avrahamic covenant? We know it will not be Esav who carries the torch forward. But will it be *Yisrael/Ya'akov*? Or will it be one of his children?⁷

We will see through the course of our studies this week that *Yisrael/Ya'akov* is not going to be the one who picks up the torch and runs with it in any meaningful way. *Yisrael/Ya'akov* is, we will find, basically going to *grieve the rest of his life away*. Indeed when *Ya'akov/Yisrael* sits down at the beginning of parsha *Vayashev* to mourn the loss of both his beloved Rachel and the father who always loved Esav best everything seemed to hit him at once. His misspent youth, the long, arduous

⁷ It will not be Reuven, firstborn of *Ya'akov* and Leah – as the events described in Genesis 35:22 demonstrated that his head and heart were in another direction altogether. That squarely raises the issue of whether it will be *Ya'akov*'s 'other' firstborn – his firstborn by Rachel – namely, Yosef.

years of exile, of backbreaking servitude and of cruel deception in Laban's house, the fact that he never saw his mother again, the shock and outrage of Dinah's lost innocence, the savage treachery of Sh'mon and Levi against the Shechemi, the shocking act of rebellion committed against him by his oldest son Reuven and the residue of his own personal failures along the way all seem to *overwhelm him*. Though Yisrael/Ya'akov will live many more years he is not recorded as doing much of anything after he returned to *Beit-El* and built a *mizbe'ach*. That was his shining moment on Torah' stage. From then on he simply absorbs the punches life throws him. He *sits down to mourn ...* and he *never really seems to get up*.

No, Yisrael/Ya'akov does not pick up the torch. Grief [both past and future, in the form of what is about to happen to Yosef] *consumed* and *disabled* him. The torch is going to be picked up, however. When it is not picked up in any meaningful way by Yisrael/Ya'akov, another steps forward. It is this one about whom we will read throughout the remainder of *Sefer B'reshit* [the book of Genesis].

It all starts in today's aliyah. For it is in Genesis 37 that the torch of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov is embraced by a 17-year-old dreamer of dreams. The name of this new torchbearer is *Yosef*. He will carry the torch forward to the next generation. It was *why he was born*. It is *his reason to be alive*. It is *the air that he breathes*. It is *his destiny*. So ... is it your destiny as well? Is it your destiny to carry the torch of *yada* relationship and *sh'ma* response to the world – a world that does not particularly want to hear the message? Have you been put on this planet at such a time as this to be unto the Holy One a successor to Avraham in the covenant by which the Holy One proposes to bring light and blessing to all nations of the earth?

Is this the reason you were born? Is it your purpose in life as it was Yosef's? If so ... well if that is so you *need to understand* something up front – something Yosef is about to learn very well. Here it is: *people who carry torches MAKE EASY TARGETS!* As we prepare to observe the anniversary of the abominations committed against our forefathers by Antiochus Epiphanes approximately 165 BCE, take a few moments with your family to discuss the cost that sometimes comes because of our calling to shine Divine Light from on high into the darkness of this world. The Torah lifestyle is not for those with low pain thresholds or who thrive on popularity and social position – because the strategic counterculture/light-casting role we have been assigned is not a game.

Behold – the Dreamer!

One of the supernatural enablings with which the Holy One endows Yosef is the gift of *receiving and prophetically interpreting spiritual dreams*.

Yosef is not the first person in history to receive revelation from the Holy One in the form of ‘God-inspired’ dreams. The first such recorded revelatory dream belonged to Avimelech, the king/ruler of the Ph’lishtim in the time of Avraham. See **Genesis 20:3, 6**. Ya’akov as well experienced God-inspired dreams. See **Genesis 28:12 and 31:10-11**. Even the salty, godless character Laban received revelation from the Holy One in a dream. See **Genesis 31:24**. So it was not necessarily a mark of either spiritual maturity or the Holy One’s favor that led to Yosef at age 17 receiving the revelatory dreams recorded in Genesis 37. Dream revelation is generally regarded as *the lowest level of man/God interaction* – a form of interaction usually reserved for those who are NOT spiritually attuned. By breaking into a person’s subconscious while he/she sleeps, the Holy One bypasses the will, mind, and emotions, and speaks directly to the spirit of a man or woman.

The peculiar thing about Yosef’s dreams therefore lies not in the fact that he had them but in their *substance* and *subject matter*. The Holy One was not warning him about something, as He had done with Avimelech and Laban; nor was he appearing to or covenanting with him, as he had done with Ya’akov. The Holy One was *showing him the future* in symbolic form. That, Dear Reader, is something ‘new’ in Torah. No one prior to Yosef had experienced that kind of prophetic revelation. So let us look for a moment at Yosef’s dreams and see what the future holds.

Dream #1:

The Great End-Time Harvest

Yosef Becomes the Master/Lord of the Ultimate Ingathering

Here is how Torah records the first of Yosef’s dreams:

Yosef dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they hated him all the more.

He said to them, Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:

for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field,

and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright;

and behold, your sheaves came around, and bowed down to my sheaf.

This particular dream may not have been the kind of dream a wise person would have shared – at least with people who are already jealous of him. It foretold in symbolic language that Yosef would become ‘lord of the harvest’ that his family would reap. This dream has *end-time significance*. But his brothers did not see that. They just saw their little half-blood brother exalted over them. And they did not look further or consider the Divine implications.

Predictably their response to Yosef’s telling of this dream was fleshly and shortsighted:

*His brothers said to him, "Will you indeed reign over us?
Or will you indeed have dominion over us?"
They hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words.*

And that brings us to Yosef's second dream.

Dream #2:

The Ultimate Reunification of the Ha-Shamayim and Ha-Aretz Realms The Sun, Moon and Stars Bow to Yosef

Torah records Yosef's second prophetic dream as follows:

*He dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brothers,
and said, **Behold, I have dreamed yet another dream:
and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me.***

*He told it to his father and to his brothers.
His father rebuked him, and said to him, **What is this dream that you have dreamed?
Will I and your mother⁸ and your brothers
indeed come to bow ourselves down to you to the eretz?**
His brothers envied him; but his father kept this saying in mind.*

Now Yosef has *really done it*. Some revelations are better kept in the mind than spoken aloud. Before the week is over we will see how the seeds of hatred and envy so planted grow and bear a harvest of pain.

A Brief Look At Haftarah Vayashev

Amos 2:6 – 3:8

This week's haftarah is taken from the writings of the prophet Amos⁹. Amos came from a small village between *Beit-Lechem* (i.e. Bethlehem) and *Y'rushalayim* (i.e. Jerusalem). A contemporary of Hoshea, Amos began to prophesy somewhere around 785 BCE at a time when King Uzziah was ruling in the Southern Kingdom and the wicked king Jereboam II, son of Yoash, was on the throne in the Northern Kingdom.

Amos was not a trained clergyman; much less was he professional public speaker. He was just a simple God-fearing shepherd. As Amos himself put it: ***I am not a prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees*** Amos 7:14. Amos and Hoshea were the Holy One's primary messengers to

⁸ Yosef's mother Rachel was already dead at the time of this dream – having died giving birth to Binyamin – and thus would never bow to Yosef. Rashi explains this problem with the dream in two ways: (1) The 'moon' figure in the dream must have been Bilhah - who raised Yosef in Rachel's absence, and (2) even "true" dreams frequently have an element of nonsense about them.

⁹ The name *Amos* is Strong's Hebrew word #5986, spelled *ayin, mem, vav, samech*, and pronounced *aw-moce*'. The word is often translated into English as 'burden', because it is a noun form of the Hebrew verb root *amas, ayin mem, samech*, Strong's Hebrew word #6006, meaning to lay a burden or yoke on someone or something [often an animal such as a camel, ox, pack horse, or donkey].

their generation. Their styles and personalities were vastly different. But they both spoke the truth of the Holy One boldly at a time when it was not popular to do so. In a passage of Amos that we will not read this week Amaziah, the reigning high priest of the calf altar at Beit-El, confronted Amos one day and ordered him out of Israel.

*Don't tell us these things, for the land cannot bear them.
You have become a nuisance to us; we don't want you here in Israel.
Go back to Y'hudah [the Southern Kingdom] where you came from.*
[Amos 7:10-13]

The part of Amos' message that got him in trouble with Amaziah and others of his day, of course, was the part addressed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel – *i.e.* the confederation of tribes under the leadership of Yosef's descendants. In the course of that message Amos discussed the central theme of parsha *Vayashev* - how men are to (and not to) relate to the Holy One's messengers and witnesses, saying, on behalf of the Holy One:

***Va'akim mib'neichem l'nevi'im**
I chose some of your sons to be prophets,
umibachureichem l'nezirim
and some of your men for Nazirites.
ha'af eyn-zot b'nei Yisra'el ne'um-Adonai
Is it not indeed so, O children of Israel? says the Holy One.*

***Vatashku et-ha-nezirim yayin**
But you made the Nazirites drink wine;
v'al-ha-nevi'im tzivitem l'emor lo tinave'u
and commanded the prophets, saying, 'Do not prophesy.'*
[Amos 2:11-12]

For these very wrong interactions with the prophets and *netzrim* He sent among them - and for other sins - Amos was sent to declare in the Holy One's Name that judgment had been decreed upon the Northern Kingdom. For as Amos further declares on the Holy One' behalf:

***Hayelchu shenayim yach'dav bilti im-noa'du**
Can two walk together without having agreed?
Ha-yish'ag aryeh b'ya'ar v'teref eyn
Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?
lo ha-yiten k'fir kolo mimei'onato bilti im-lachad
Will a young lion growl from his den, if he has taken nothing?
Ha-tipol tzipor al-pach ha-aretz umokesh eyn
Will a bird fall in a snare on the earth where there is no bait for it?*

lah ha-ya'aleh-pach min-ha-adamah v'lachod lo yilkod

Will a snare spring up from the ground, if it has taken nothing?

Im-yitaka shofar b'ir v'am lo yecheradu

If a shofar is sounded in the city, shall the people not tremble?

im-tihyeh rah b'ir v'Adonai lo asah

Will evil befall a city, unless the Holy One has done it?

Ki lo ya'aseh Adonai Elohim davar

Surely the Holy One your God will do nothing

ki im-galah sodo el-avadav ha-nevi'im

without revealing His counsel to His servants the prophets.

Aryeh sha'ag mi lo yira

The lion has roared; who will not fear?

Adonai Elohim diber mi lo yinave

The Holy One your God has spoken; who can but prophesy?

[Amos 3:3-8]

For these transgressions Amos declares in the Holy One's Name *judgment was coming* upon the Northern Kingdom. And come it did just a few decades later in 722 BCE. The Assyrians attacked with great violence, wrought havoc and destruction, and carried those who survived the onslaught away into captivity.

The House of Yosef had to go into captivity just as its notable ancestor did. In light of Yisrael's rejection of and attempts to still the messages of the Holy One's prophets, by the time Amos prophesied this judgment was already in mind of the Holy One. We must understand therefore that Amos was not sent to save Israel, or even to call it to repentance, but merely to *pronounce the judgment of the Holy One upon it*, and to tell them *why – for what specific sins* - they were about to be punished. Amos described those sins specifically. They included, first and foremost, exploitation and oppression of the poor. **Amos 2:6-7.**

In addition to that was the failure to administrate justice equally and without corruption. **Amos 5:12-13.** They could probably talk a blue streak about *justice as a concept*. Oh, they could *preach* justice. They could *demand* it. They could *march for it, stage protests in its name, and write angry posts about it*. But they just could not – or would not – ditch their attitudes, shut their mouths, and actually *live before men in a way that actually made justice attractive and desirable in real time*. Added to the fact that they were all emotion and rhetoric about justice as a concept, was the fact that the people of the Northern Kingdom in that day, though they claimed to be people of the Covenant, lived and actually celebrated self-obsessed priorities and Covenant-witness destructive lifestyles. **Amos 6:4-7.** Furthermore, the Northern Kingdom people substituted mechanical ritual for a personal relationship

with God and for love of their neighbor. **Amos 4:4, 5, 12.** Above all this, those to whom Amos was sent to prophesy were haughty and arrogant; they refused to turn from their sin or acknowledge their need of the Holy One. That, like the response of Yosef's brethren, constitutes a very wrong response to a prophetic messenger.

A Corresponding Message from the Apostles Of Yeshua of Natzret

Acts 6:1 – 7:16

In the course of this week's reading from the B'rit Chadasha we will see another prophet of the Holy One ill received. In fact before the week is over we will witness this particular *navi* being stoned.

The prophet about whom we will read this week in the apostolic Scriptures is *Stefanos* [Stephen]. He is described as a 'deacon' in our English Bibles. The Hebrew term would be a *shamash*.

Who was Stefanos - and what did he say/do that got him stoned? Stefanos was a Hebrew, though he was called by a Greek name¹⁰. The assumption is that more than likely either his father was a gentile or his parents were at least partially Hellenized. Stefanos was one of the myriads of First Century Jews who recognized Yeshua as the Messiah promised in the Torah. Described in the Book of Acts as a man of "*good reputation*", he is said to have been "*full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*."¹¹ He was said also to be "*full of faith and the Holy Spirit*"¹², and "*full of faith and power*". He was, we are told, used by the Holy One to do "*great wonders and signs among the people*."¹³ We are not, however, informed of what exactly those 'wonders' and/or 'signs' consisted.

In the course of living his life in the footsteps of Messiah, Stefanos aroused the ire of a small fringe group of Greek-speaking Jews – probably a group with which he had been affiliated before accepting Yeshua as Messiah. This small group of adversaries is specifically described by Lukas, the writer of the Book of Acts, as members of "*[a synagogue] of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia*." These Greek-speaking Jews then "suborned men, which said, *We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moshe (Moses), and [against] the Holy One*." **Acts 6:11.** These false charges were presented by the Greek-speaking Jews to the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem. That resulted in

¹⁰ The name *Stefanos* [Strong's Greek word #4736] means 'crowned', referring to the prize given to a Greek Olympian athlete who is victorious in his event. The 'crown' was an interwoven laurel wreath ceremonial placed on the head by an official, much as a gold medal is draped around the neck by an Olympian official today.

¹¹ Acts 6:3.

¹² Acts 6:5.

¹³ Acts 6:8.

Stefanos being brought before the Sanhedrin for trial on charges of heresy. Acts 6:12. At this trial the Greek-speaking Jews who had the quarrel with Stefanos presented more false witnesses, this time testifying “*This man does not stop speaking blasphemous words against **this holy place and against the Torah: For we have heard him say that this Yeshua of Natzret will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moshe delivered us.***”

Before we go on, note that the reason Stefanos was charged with heresy and brought before the Sanhedrin was not by reason of his having accepted Yeshua as the Messiah. Myriads of Jewish people had accepted the Rabbi of Natzret as such, and had become His disciples. While the Sanhedrin and the majority of the leadership strongly disagreed, belief that Yeshua was the Messiah was not in itself – at that time at least – considered heresy in and of itself.

What was argued against Stefanos was not that he was a follower of Yeshua but that his teaching was [1] contrary to the prophetic words delivered to Israel by Moshe (Moses), [2] a *chilul the Holy One* [*i.e.* a profaning of the Divine, covenant name of God]; [3] a disavowal of the *Mik’dash* [Holy Sanctuary – *i.e.* Temple], and [4] calling people to depart from both the ways of the Holy Writ of Torah and the customs and traditions handed down by the sages [often called the “Oral Torah”]. The one sitting in the position of High Priest that day then asked Stefanos the following fatal question: *Are these things so?* [Acts 7:1]. All eyes fell on Stefanos. He was not going to be condemned on the testimony of false witnesses. He was given a chance to deny the charges and explain of what his teaching truly consisted.

Stefanos did not merely answer the question asked of him. In a prophetic discourse sermon 1000-plus words long he spoke eloquently of Sh’lomo’s Temple and quoted Yeshayahu [Isaiah], saying: *Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me, says the Holy One, or what is the place of My rest? Has not My hand made all these things?*

When Stefanos got to the point where he discussed the events of this week’s parsha, there were some discrepancies between what Stefanos said and what Torah says happened¹⁴. Stefanos also got very, very personal with his response. He demanded that those who accused him of blasphemy themselves respond to charges he [Stafanos] felt the Holy One was making against them. Stefanos called his attackers *stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears*, and accused them of always resisting the *Ruach HaQodesh*, of *killing the prophetic messengers sent by the Holy One to foretell the coming of the Just One* [Messiah]. He even

¹⁴ For example, go back and read Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:1-5; then compare those passages with what Stefanos said as recorded in Acts 7:14.

demanded to know *Which of the prophets did you fathers not persecute?* Tough words, no doubt. But *the Holy One's words* nonetheless. What was the response of the people of the day gathered at the Sanhedrin? They were "*cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*" And, of course, they stoned him to death.

This is yet another wrong response to a prophetic message. This was not the way of Avraham, Yitzchak or Ya'akov. This was not the way of Yosef. This was not the way of the Covenant. This was a very, very serious breach of the Covenant, and it would have severe consequences.

*May your heart be purified this week,
that you may see all other human beings through the eyes of the Holy One.*

The Rabbi's son

The 6th Petition: B'racha – Blessing

B'rech oleynu Adonai Eloheinu et-ha-shanah hazot

Bless this year for our us, O Holy One our God

V'et kol mineh t'vuatah l'tovah

that all our plantings may yield a good, fruitful harvest

v'ten b'racha al-p'nei ha-adamah

and give a blessing on the face of the soil

v'sabeinu mituveicha

satisfy us with Your bounty

u'varech shanahteinu ka-shonim ha-tovot

and bless our year, so as to make it a banner year

Baruch Atah Adonai M'varech ha-shonim

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Who Blesses the Years