

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayashev:*** **Genesis 38:1-30**
 Haftarah: **Amos 2:11-12**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 6:11 - 7:1**

She has been more righteous and just than I.

[Genesis 38:26]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 35:9-10;

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

Vayehi ba'et hahi vayered Yehudah me'et echav – And in came to pass at that time that Yehudah descended from his brothers ... *vayet ad-ish Adulami ush'mo Chirah* – and reached out to/attached himself to a man of Adullam known as Chirah. **Genesis 38:1.**

The covenant affords us many privileges. We have open access to the Creator of the Universe, His Holy Courts and Chambers, His Counsel, His Wisdom, and His Playbook. We have His *lashon kodesh* - the Heavenly kedusha-infused language He employs to converse with angels and men, to create and sustain realms, dimensions, and species, and to manage the cosmos. We have the outline of His Grand Plan for both humanity as a species and Creation as an ecosystem. Instruction Manual for life and positive societal impact – i.e. the Torah. We have His favor. We have His blessing. We have His promises (subject to His conditions). But though it offers all these fantastic benefits, in no way does the covenant insulate us from to tragedy and pain. Sons and daughters of the covenant must experience trauma personally, at dark and dangerous levels, if we are to develop a credible testimony of how to overcome and transcend. So it has been with Ya'akov/Yisrael – and so it will be with us, and all is progeny, in every generation. Trials, tribulation, and trauma are all part of who we are. Overcoming all these things – while the people of the raging nations are cowering in fear and post-traumatic stress syndrome sweats and tremors – is an essential part of what we are called to do. This is all part of our mission. It is a critical element of our calling. So, while others stand with a fist, glaring toward Heaven, we say “*Not our will, but yours be done*”, “*Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do*”, and “*Your Grace is sufficient for me!*”

The Aftermath

News of Yosef's disappearance absolutely devastated Ya'akov Avinu. Upon seeing Yosef's torn and blood-stained coat and imagining the worst he could not

¹ All rights with respect to this publication are reserved to the author, William G. Bullock, Sr., also known as ‘*the Rabbi's son*’. Reproduction of material from any *Rabbi's son* lesson without written permission from the author is prohibited. Copyright © 2024, William G. Bullock, Sr.

contain his grief. He rent his tunic. He put on sackcloth. He sat *sheva*. The traditional seven days passed, and still he sat; still he wept; still he refused to be consoled. All he would say was: ***Ki-ered el-beni avel sheolah vayeveich*** – *in grief will I descend into Sheol because of/unto my son*. See **Genesis 37:34-35**. Oh how our heart goes out to you, dear ancestor! Oh, what losses you have endured! But life goes on, whether you are ready to meet its challenges or not. If you cannot lead the family through this crisis - who will step up to do so in your stead? Who will shepherd the covenant family into – and through - the next phase of the prophetic season of *Ya'akov's Trouble*?

The Curtain Opens

As the curtain rises on today's aliyah the covenant household is absolutely reeling. Our forefathers' *bayit shalom* has been shaky for some time – indeed, ever since Rikvah brought forth two warring nations from her womb. Now a combination of advancing age, grief, and bitter disappointment in his rebellious and hyper-judgmental sons has rendered Ya'akov inert. So ... will any of the boys step up and show leadership capabilities? If so, it will not be lusty Reuven, who shamed himself and his father at Migdal-Eder. See **Genesis 35:21-22**; see also **Genesis 49:3-4**. Nor will it be either of the angry, bloodthirsty conspirators Sh'mon or Levi. See **Genesis 34:25-26**; see also **Genesis 49:5-7**. What about Yehudah – he is a fine specimen! He has the *chutzpah*, the *charisma*, and the *business acumen*. Will he step into the breach? Will he rise to the occasion? Is he the one – or should we look for another?

It Ain't Me – It Ain't Me – I Ain't No Fortunate Son!

No, it will not be Yehudah. His head and heart are somewhere else. Some say ha-Satan has possessed him. Others say he has just fallen under the spell of wanderlust. Still others suspect that he wanders because of bloodguilt, like Kayin. Whatever is going on with Yehudah, however, this is sure: he wants nothing to do with the calling of the Holy One on either his own life or his bloodline. He wants nothing to do with the Avrahamic call. He wants nothing to do with any covenantal responsibility with regard to the Land. He wants nothing to do with the mysterious *HaKodesh Barechu /Elohim* of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, or with any GRAND PLAN for the redemption of mankind as a species and for the restoration of Creation to intended Edenic state of beauty, v fruitfulness, and shalom. He wants no part of any responsibility of any kind – be it spiritual, familial, social, or cultural in nature. He wants no part of accountability. The heart wants what it wants – and his wants 'NO STRINGS'. He has places to go, wild oats to sow, and issues to sort through – so color him OUT OF HERE! It's the lusty, bloody, hedonistic, idol-honoring, party-going, *do-whatever-you-want-to-do-and/or-feel-like-doing* Kena'ani life for him!

Whose bonds – Yosef’s or Yehudah’s - do you think wound up being worse?

Prodigal Son Story – Chapter 2!

When the days Ya’akov’s Trouble came, Yehudah’s response was to buck and run. Like a rat abandoning a sinking ship, he left home, father, mother, brothers, flocks, and herds in the field. He went off to who knows where in search of who knows what. Mostly he probably just wanted to run away from the sound of Yosef’s screams – and the sound of his own voice saying ‘*Mah betza?*’ – what’s in it for me?

Yehudah was not ready for prime time. He bolted. Rather than take the world by storm, he hid himself away in a nondescript little village on in the foothills of central Kena’an. The name of the place was *Adullam*. One day a lineal descendant of his named David will choose that as a hiding place as well. When Yehudah arrived at Adullam he caught the eye of the local Kena’ani warlord – a man named Chirah. Darkness and light, oil and water, fire and straw – that is what these two were; and yet, for a season they put aside their vastly different worldviews and approaches to life and became as thick as thieves.

Chirah’s idol-infested camp in the hills would not be Yehudah’s final destination, of course; it was just his equivalent of Yonah’s ship-bound-for-Tarsus. It met his only real criteria for a place to hang out – it was NOT HOME!

On a Dark Desert Highway ... Cool Wind in My Hair!

Will young Yehudah, the Covenant-Partner-in-Training of the generation, introduce *shalom*, *simchah*, *tikvah*, *emunah*, and *chen* to these hills, valleys, and fields? Hardly. Will he model for the people who dwell there how to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Creator of the Universe? Not a chance. Will he, while in this area, meditate on the Torah, day and night – speaking of it when he sits in his home and as he walks by the way, when he lies down and when he rises up? In a pig’s eye! Will he, while in self-imposed exile in Adullam, represent the Kingdom of Heaven with calm confidence, dignity, honor, and selflessness? Sadly, no! Will he model *teshuvah* [the protocols of constantly turning to the Holy One and His Torah Ways for direction, discipline, and wisdom], *tefillah* [ongoing psalmistry to and conversation with the Holy One regarding every situation of life he faces], *tzedekah* [the kind of behavior that advances the long-term priorities of the Kingdom, especially redemption and restoration], and *mishpat* [the wise decrees of the Holy One in relation to all situations he faces] to the people in his new sphere of influence? Not even close! Will Yehudah usher in a sweet, refreshing Sabbath for the land there, its orchards, vineyards, and fields, and all the living creatures of the local ecosystem? He will not! Will the people, the families, and the bloodlines of humankind and the species of Created beings and things that he encounters in the region of Adullam be better for his presence in

their midst – or will they be worse for it? You know the answer to that question, right? Will Yehudah find a way to bring out the best in them – or will the dark energy that controls them find a dozen ways to bring out the worst in him? Is young Yehudah ready for ‘Kingdom Prime Time’ – or is he about to embarrass himself and bring dishonor to his family name? Sigh – the proof will be in the pudding.

Hold on to your hats, Beloved – *Yehudah’s inglorious odyssey of descent* is underway – and it promises to be a very bumpy – not to mention *X-rated* - ride! More on that in a few moments. First, however, has anyone seen YOSEF?

The Thing About New Spheres of Influence

Do you remember when the Holy One told Avram about a great captivity that his seed was destined to endure, saying: ***Your seed will be strangers in a land not their own, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years***²? Well, it has begun. It started with Yosef being marched off to Mitzrayim in chains – all for a few pieces of silver. And now, Yehudah is experiencing a different kind of captivity - one of his own choosing. Yosef is in Potifar’s house, living among Egyptians; Yehudah is in the house of *Chirah the Adullamite*, living among and behaving like the Kena’ani. Ya’akov misses them both; their brothers – or the ten of them oldest of them at least – do not miss either. Unbeknownst to any of them, however, the Holy One is *very close to, diligently watching over, and skillfully training* both Yosef and Yehudah – right where they are. He has plans for these young men, you see. He has plans for *their seed*. They are going to play important roles in His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and harmony. No matter what messes these two young men get into, therefore – of someone else’s making or their own - He is working all things together for good – for them, for their progeny, and for the world.

Torah is now active on three sets – one set is the camp of Ya’akov; another is the camp of Chirah the warlord of Adullam; and the third is the house of Potifar, the captain of Pharaoh’s royal guard. Let’s zoom in, and see what is happening on all three of these sets.

Set #1 – Potifar’s House:* *Yosef’s New Mitzrayimian Reality Show

Yosef’s whole world has been turned upside down. He is no longer a shepherd – he is now a *piece of meat*. He is no longer a favored son on a fast track to Melchizedekian priesthood – he is now just another lab rat on a treadmill. He is no

² Genesis 15:13.

longer a protégé – he is now just another beast of burden. No matter where he is, or what he is doing, he is now always *for sale* - at the right price, of course. It is just a matter of how many pieces of silver the next human trafficker happens to have in his sack.

Yosef's life is now governed by a new reality – the reality of a captive. Go where you are led. Keep your head down. Look no man in the eye. Do not ever speak unless you are spoken to. When you do speak, you must say only what those in power want to hear. You are subject to *our laws* – indeed, our *whims* – now; so there must never again be any mention of, much less attempts to practice, Torah. No speaking about – or even meditating on - the Ways of your father's God will be allowed at any time. Forget about maintaining any distinction between things your father would say were 'clean' vs. those he would say are 'unclean', or between that which he would describe as 'holy' and those he would label 'profane'. Those distinctions are not recognized here. We will keep you far too busy to concern yourself with them. You will reckon your days by our calendar, not yours. You will have no Sabbath. Since we venerate the sun here, you will neither hear nor blow a shofar at the changing of the moon. There can be no speaking or singing in Hebrew – EVER! Calling on the name of the Hebrew God will not be permitted under any circumstances – on penalty of death. No declaration of *modeh ani, kriyat sh'ma, kiddush, ha-motzee, or haskiveinu* will be tolerated ... *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*³. Do what you are told. We will decide if, when, where, and for how long you can rest; when and what and how much you must eat; if, when, and what you can drink; where, and how fast, you must move, and of what your service must consist of. Obey all our commands as if your life depended upon it – because it does. Resistance will be met with the back of the hand. Insolence will be met with the sting of the whip. Any attempt to run away will be met with a form of public execution so painful that every other slave who hears about it will be deterred from even thinking about it. And get this through your thick skull right up front: there is absolutely nothing you can do about any of this.

Set #2 – the Ancestral Camp:
Welcome to 'Heartbreak Hotel'

Meanwhile, back at Hebron, a broken-hearted father grieves bitterly for his son. Ya'akov's most beloved son Yosef is missing and presumed dead. There is no search party combing the hillsides. There will be neither rescue nor funeral. There is going to be pain – but no closure. All that Ya'akov has left of the best and brightest star of his household is the remains of the 'coat of many colors' that once

³ The quote is from the 1956 American movie *'The King and I'*, in which Yul Brynner, playing the arrogant King of Siam, instructed his new English governess, Anna, on the protocol she must follow in his company, saying: "*When I sit, you sit. When I kneel, you kneel. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*"

adorned Yosef's powerful shoulders. And now the very sight of *that coat* - ripped asunder by hatred and stained with innocent blood - torments Ya'akov's soul day and night.

Once it was much different. Once Ya'akov's heart leapt at the sight of that coat. The scent of *a field the Holy One has blessed* was on it. The *hope of a new and better day* – for the Covenant family and for the world - was wrapped up in it. But now the garment emits only the stench of death, and its tatters conjure up only sad images of *glorious dreams dashed* and *world-changing potential unfulfilled*. Meanwhile, unheard by human ears, the blood that was spilled upon that garment by Yehudah and his co-conspirators could be expected to cry out to the Holy One with sounds that cannot be uttered: *How long O Lord, Holy and True, until you avenge ... ?*⁴ For those that have ears to *sh'ma*, however, the actual cry going forth from the blood on the garment of many colors is something different altogether. Those with ears to *sh'ma* can faintly hear the blood crying out: *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they have done!*

Set #3: The House of Chirah ***Yehudah's Equivalent of a Ship Bound for Tarshish***

Who Yehudah has run away from is none other than the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient God. That means that no matter *how hard Yehudah runs*, no matter *how cleverly he disguises himself* in pagan clothing, no matter *what amount of slime he chooses to wallow in* to try to cover up the scent of his calling, Yehudah *will never be able to escape*. The hounds of Heaven will follow Yehudah wherever he goes and will sniff him out. And - when the time is right – angels will bring him home. The Holy One *will not relent ...* until he has Yehudah's all. And that, Dear Reader, much more than the promises of possession of the land, of offspring, of material blessing and of a richly positive impact upon all nations of the world is the most wonderful part of the covenant we have with the most-High God.

There is a song written by modern psalmist Jason Upton that expresses the concept I am talking about very well. The words of Jason's song, which draws off the model of the story of Jonah and is called '*Run Baby Run*'⁵ are as follows:

*I've been calling you to go to the city.
I've been watching you every day.
Now I'm paying for a one-way ticket on a ship that sails the opposite way
And you laugh and you cry ... and you live and you die
but you don't really know who you are*

⁴ The cry of innocent blood is a substantive and substantial spiritual force in creation. See Genesis 4:10, Genesis 18:20, and Revelation 6:10 for examples.

⁵ Copyright c. 2002 Key of David Ministries. For more information, see JasonUpton.com.

*All alone in this world ... orphan boy /orphan girl ...
'cause you don't really know who you are*

*Hear me laughing as you run from your calling
See me crying in the storms that rage
One way or another you will be going - to obey is such an easier way*

***But run baby run ... my hands release you, baby
run baby run ... just as fast as you can
Run till your legs lead your heart to the real truth
You're my daughter my son;
so run baby ... run baby ... run!***

Yes, Yehudah. Yes, all you other *beloved prodigals* out there. *Run baby run!*

Ah, But There is Always Something Going On In The Unseen Realm!

Meanwhile, in the realm of the unseen, where the stage is being set for the next few scenes of the Holy One's Grand Redemptive Plan for the redemption of mankind, the Avrahamic Covenant is still alive and well. A shadowy messianic prototype is even now being trained up through a series of tests, temptations, and crucibles. Unbeknownst to anyone except his brothers and the hosts of Heaven, the blood crying out to the Holy One is *not* the blood of Yosef; it is instead the blood of a young goat that just happened to have found himself in very much the wrong place at very much the wrong time. And, unbeknownst to anyone in Kena'an, the young man who once wore that mangled coat is *not dead*. He is just biding his time, sharpening his administrative talents and people skills, and having his faith in the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov tested daily - far away in some lowly slave quarters in Africa.

The true story of what really happened at Dotan has not yet been told – and indeed will not be told for quite some time. But those who have sown sorrow are about to begin a long season of reaping what they have sown. Yehudah – the man whose '*Mah-betza?*' sent a stunned young Yosef off to a life of slavery in Egypt – is first in line. As you read today's aliyah of Torah of Yehudah's darkest season of life keep in mind the testimony of three witnesses that Yehudah and his brothers used to deal deceitfully with Ya'akov. They used the testimony of a *garment*, a *goat*, and the *outcry of innocent blood*. At the end of the story I think you will understand exactly why I told you to keep these things in mind.

Of Heroes and Halos

The story of Yehudah's horrible experiences in the house of Chirah is one of those that my flesh really used to wish the Holy One had just "left out" of the Torah. It is a story about how a son of the Covenant, destined for great things, walked away from his calling, assumed the role of a prodigal, and descended into the world's darkest and most disgusting cesspools of filth and perversion.

I used to reason that it was bad enough for us to have had to see our ‘spiritual hero’ Yehudah, whose name means ‘*He will praise the Holy One*’, participate in rape and pillage at Shechem. I used to cringe when Torah showed him conspiring against and then viciously attacking his younger brother Yosef. I used to want to scream out ‘NO HOLY ONE - IT CANNOT BE SO!’ when I saw Torah attribute to Yehudah the heartless inquiry ‘*Mah-betza?*’ [What’s in it *for me?*] in the moment of Yosef’s most intense suffering. **Genesis 37:26-27**. I used to consider it gut-wrenching to have Torah show Yehudah participating in the infliction of needless suffering upon his father Ya’akov by showing him Yosef’s ‘coat of many colors’ after deceptively soaking it in innocent blood. **Genesis 37:31-32**. I used to reason “haven’t we seen enough to get the point?” I used to wonder “*Must Torah proceed to show us even more disgusting aspects of the darkness that resides in my forefather’s soul?*” Must we really have a front row seat to witness first-hand all Yehudah’s prophetic transactions in the marketplace of human misery? There were some things, you see, which this inquiring mind really did NOT want to know. It used to make me uncomfortable to see a ‘hero’ of my ancestry – a prominent member of the household of faith - exposed for all to see as he wallowed in the miry clay of blatant rebellion and throes of disgusting sin. My flesh used to prefer that I be allowed to labor under the pleasant delusion that members of the household of faith – particularly leaders among them like Yehudah – would always be *holy*, and *righteous*, and well ... *above such things*.

That was of course before I had much life experience under my belt. Now I realize that it is the wisdom of the Holy One to make known plainly to us that even ‘*spiritual heroes*’ are *far from perfect* and are in fact perfectly *capable of engaging in the most disgusting behavior* known to man. Now I realize that the Holy One never wants us to judge sons of the covenant – or anyone for that matter – by *the sight of our eyes or the hearing of our ears*. Now I understand that *a season of rebellion does not separate us from the love of the Father*, nor does the stain of sin disqualify anyone from participation in the covenant. Now I realize that the gifts and callings of the Holy One *really are* completely, absolutely, 100% *irrevocable*.

When I think about it, you see, I realize that it isn’t just Yehudah who had sin problems like this. *Avraham* had major issues with truthfulness – especially about his relationship with his wife. *Sarah* had serious anger management problems – and an unusual sense of humor to boot. *Yitzhak* was so spiritually blind he couldn’t see either Esav or Ya’akov through the Holy One’s eyes. And what of *Rivkah*? That was some wild plan she cooked up for Ya’akov to carry out, was it not? *Ya’akov*? Well, where do want me to start? *Rachel*? What is that she’s hiding under that saddle? *Sh’mon and Levi*? *Bloody swords* say all that needs to be said

about them. *Moshe?* A little problem with rage and murder as I recall. *David?* Oh yeah, there was that Bat-Sheva thing. And let's not even talk about Uriah.

Okay – point made? The Holy One does not seem to want us to put ‘spiritual heroes’ on a pedestal or to imagine them wearing some kind of halo. He wants us to know that ‘spiritual heroes’ are just *ordinary people* like us – people who *make stupid mistakes*, who *commit disgusting sins*, and who yet, despite it all, *get redeemed by a great and loving God – a God Who then Divinely commissions, empowers and uses them to do great deeds ... despite themselves.*

Hmmmmn. How about *you, Dear Reader?* Are *you* imperfect? If so, *congratulations* - it is precisely for that reason that *you* qualify in the Holy One's eyes to be a ‘*spiritual hero*’.

Keeping It All In Perspective

Before we delve into the disgusting aspects of today's aliyah, it may give you some perspective to read Matthew 1:3. It is a simple line from a genealogy. It reads: ***Yehudah begat Peretz and Zerah by Tamar. Peretz begat Hezron. Hezron begat Ram.*** Whose genealogy is this, you ask? It is the genealogy of Messiah. Yehudah is there. And so is a woman named Tamar, who we haven't met yet. In case you are wondering, Tamar is a Kena'ani – and a whole LOT younger than Ya'akov. And when she gets pregnant with Peretz and Zerah, well ... for now, let's just say the circumstances – and the motives – of all involved were less than ideal! For this union to turn into the seedbed from which Messiah will come is going to require some SERIOUS REDEMPTION-INTERVENTION FROM ON HIGH!

As you find yourself getting disgusted by today's sordid tale, therefore, try to keep in mind this end result. The Holy One is able to bring forth good from *absolutely anything*. This does not, of course, in any way *excuse* our breaches of covenant or our excursions into the realm of human folly. Nor does it *relieve us personally* of the consequences of those missteps in this life. It does however hopefully help us to *see other people's sins against us in perspective.*

In other words, every time you see someone else really mess up or do something clearly violative of Torah - or unspiritual, or even immoral - *please pause before you judge that person.* In the Holy One's eyes you see the person you are about to judge as unfit for your companionship might just be a ‘*spiritual hero*’ in the *making.*

Yehudah's 'Rite of Passage'

The picture Torah paints for us of Yehudah in the years of Yosef's servitude and

imprisonment is that of a man so far removed from the ways of the Holy One that he is *absolutely indistinguishable from his gaggle of Kena'anite friends*. He is, at this point in his life, *an embarrassment* to his grandfather, to his father, and most of all *to himself*. This future patriarch - whose name means "*He will praise the Holy One*" and through whom the Holy One has chosen to bring forth the Messiah - is demonstrated in today's aliyah to be *totally enamored by and engulfed in the secular society of Kena'an*. His soul is about to become enslaved by the sensuality and depravity of that culture.

Beloved, if Yehudah's story does not cause you to be amazed at the grace and covenant faithfulness of the Holy One - despite the sin of His people - nothing will. And in addition Yehudah's story should cause us all to stop and take another look at, and hold off on final judgment regarding, those sons and daughters of the covenant we know who right now at least are behaving every bit as bad as the pagans in the world.

Maybe in light of what happened with Yehudah in the end we should not be too quick to give up on these prodigals just yet.

The Holy One Is Still Very Much In Control

Though the Holy One may be – indeed had to be – less than thrilled by both Yehudah's attitude and conduct, at no point does the Holy One even think of abandoning or giving up on the young prodigal. Redemption can be found right between "creation" and "signs and wonders" on the Holy One's resume. As you read this aliyah therefore remember that the Holy One is always *moving furniture around behind the scenes* of Yehudah's odyssey. Angels have been given charge over Yehudah.

Please note therefore that *the Holy One does not let Yehudah get away with anything*. The poor fellow just *keeps getting caught*. Yehudah's destiny is far too important for the Holy One to allow him to squander it on the sensual pleasures of the Kena'anite lifestyle. The same holds true for YOUR DESTINY. You were born for *better things than this*.

Seeing the Bigger Picture

Even more importantly in the long run, keep in mind as you read of Yehudah's experiences today that while the precipitating physical cause of Yosef's being sold into slavery in Mitzrayim was his brothers' hatred of and sins against him, the *real spiritual reason* Yosef is suffering in Egypt as the events of today's aliyah unfold was because unknown to anyone on Planet Earth the Holy One was using his suffering to rearrange the 'big picture' of the world and introduce the next phase of His redemptive plan.

The land and the lifestyle of Kana'an were both about to change dramatically - because the Holy One was about to bring about *a famine* that would *destroy the economy of that land* and turn the focus of the people away from *perverse pursuits of pleasure* to *sheer survival*. Granted, it is going to seem like “business as usual” and *laissez les bon temps rouler* for Yehudah and his Kana'ani friends for a little while as they engage in their youthful follies. But in just a few days, even as they anesthetize themselves with sensual pleasures and material things the world as they know it is going to *totally change*. Their land, their lifestyles, and their lives would never be the same.

The Holy One's redemptive plan for mankind, you see, involved having Yosef serve as the Covenant family's 'advance man' in Egypt. Before the famine that was about to shake Kana'an ever began, the Holy One wanted Yosef to be firmly established in the land in which Ya'akov and his family would find refuge from the famine. But because of Ya'akov's special relationship with Yosef and Binyamin, the sons of Rachel, Ya'akov was not about to send Yosef off to Egypt voluntarily. Torah does not even indicate the Holy One *asked* Ya'akov to send him – probably because He knew in advance what Ya'akov's answer would be.

Because the Holy One was moving behind the scenes, ever faithful to His covenant, when disaster and devastation finally struck Yosef the 'advance man' would be in place. The Holy One would use him to deliver His people. The stage would be set for *the birth of a holy nation* which would be visibly different from the Kana'ani – a nation who would live by the Holy One's Torah and who would fulfill the Avrahamic calling to:

*‘... teach his children and his household after him,
that they may keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice;
to the end that the Holy One may bring on Avraham
that which he has spoken of him.*

[Genesis 18:19-20]

Being part of the Covenant family means that our smaller stories of *personal grief and familial shame* – however petty or epic they may appear to us - always merely pave the way for the manifestation of the grandeur and majesty of *the greater story* of the Divine Romance between the Holy One and fallen man.

A Look at Kana'an's Marketplace of Human Misery – Up Close and Personal

Before we get to the birth of a holy nation part however Torah sees to it that we first get a close-up and personal look at the depravity of the Kana'ani society and culture that the Holy One was about to destroy. The Holy One chooses to do this

through including in the Torah at this juncture a very dark chapter in the life of our ancestor Yehudah. He left his father and his brothers to deal with the fallout of the great *Yosef Deception* without him. He decided to drown out the voice of his conscience – and the ‘*Come to your Destiny!*’ whispers of his father’s God - in the perverse and irresponsible pleasures of a Kena’anite lifestyle. He wanted to forget *who he was* and become *what he saw other people doing*. He saw a beautiful woman. He did not restrain his lust. He took her, moved her in the tent with him, and proceeded to make babies with her. As Torah describes it:

Vayar-sham Yehudah bat-ish Kna'ani ush'mo Shu'a

Yehudah saw there a daughter of a certain Kana`ani named Shua

V'yikacheiha v'yavo eleiha

And he took her, and went in to her.

V'tahar v'teled ben vayikra et-sh'mo Er

She conceived, and bore a son; and he named him `Er.

V'tahar od v'teled ben vatikra et-sh'mo Onan

She conceived again, and bore a son; and she named him Onan.

V'tosef od v'teled ben v'tikra et-shmo Shelah

She gave birth once again to a son, and she named him Shelah.

[Genesis 38:2-5(a)]

Like Adam, like Noach, Yehudah now has three sons. And that brings us to the really mysterious part of the story – the part where Yehudah begins to reap a series of harvest of exactly what he has sown. Yehudah’s oldest son, Er⁶, turns out to be *ra b'eynei Adonai* ‘KJV ‘wicked’ in the eyes of the Holy One] that the Holy One unalived him. **Genesis 38:7**. Hmmmmn. Let’s see now ... in Yehudah’s sight his little brother Yosef had been wicked, so he did away with him. Seed sown. Harvest reaped. *Measure for measure* Yehudah. But Yehudah failed to recognize – or at least acknowledge - the connection. He did not make tefillah [KJV prayer]. He did not make *teshuvah* [KJV repentance; literally, return to the Holy One and His ways]. That meant another season of reaping what he sowed is on its way.

Introducing Tamar – the Gentile Progenitor of Mashiach

Complicating the situation for Yehudah is the fact that before Er met the strange fate Torah describes Yehudah had actually chosen as a wife for him a feisty Kena’anite girl named *Tamar*. Yehudah apparently used the same criteria in choosing a wife for Er as he had used in choosing a wife for himself – *i.e.* she was *attractive, available, and willing*. Since Yehudah was at the time fully immersed in a Kena’anite lifestyle, it made sense that would make his choice of a bride for his son using Kena’anite criteria. This is perhaps a good point in the course of these lessons to point out that for those in covenant with the Holy One, *choosing a wife* –

⁶ In Hebrew the name *Er* [*ayin, resh*] means *aroused, awakened, incited, and/or stirred up*.

whether for ones' self or for one's son - *is an act of great consequence*, requiring interaction with, and heeding the instructions, of God. Think of Avraham's care in seeking out a wife for Yitzchak from his home country. Similarly, think of Yitzchak and Rivkah, and how adamant they were that Ya'akov not take a bride from among the Kena'ani.

For sons of the covenant you see, the Kana'ani method of finding a wife – *i.e.* latching onto the first person to which one is physically attracted - is almost always a *miserable failure*. Intense physical attraction does not exactly have a good track record as a successful foundation on which to build a long-standing marriage relationship. Things like *an understanding and appreciation of a calling to fulfill a great destiny, dedication to the God of the Torah, faithfulness in prayer, willingness to serve others, loyalty to the family unit, and ability to hear from and listen to the Creator, and willingness to adapt as necessary to overcome life's challenges*, tend to mean a whole lot more in the long run.

But back to our story. After Er mysteriously falls dead, Yehudah tries to marry Er's Kena'ani wife Tamar off to his second-born son Onan⁷ – in order that, under ancient custom at least, the family line of Er would continue. Onan however did not want any part of the 'continue the family line' concept. He was not any more dedicated to family than his father Yehudah. I would go so far as to expect that when Yehudah told Onan what he wanted him to do Onan's response was the equivalent in the Kena'ani language of '*Mah-betza?*' I think I see Yehudah's field of shame germinating for a second time. Onan was willing to take Tamar *as a sex object* to use for his own pleasure – but he absolutely refused to allow her to receive his 'seed' and thereby become pregnant with a child that could be attributed to Er. He apparently hated his brother. He certainly disrespected him. A seed sown by Yehudah in his relations with Yosef has turned into a harvest reaped by him through his children.

Torah tells us that what Onan did in this regard, namely spilling his 'seed' on the ground so that Tamar could not have a child to carry forth Er's lineage, was 'wicked' in the Holy One's sight, and that for that reason the Holy One '*put him to death also*'. As Yehudah had sought to cut off his despised brother Yosef's lineage, so his son Onan did to his despised brother Er.

Wow. Things really aren't going too well for Yehudah in his new Kena'ani lifestyle are they? The destructive things he did in the house of his father are being done in his own household now, measure for measure. Who does Yehudah blame

⁷ In Hebrew the name *Onan* [alef, cholem vav, nun, nun sofit] means vigorous, potent one – *i.e.* a man empowered to sire offspring.

for this? Not himself, of course. Not his unconfessed sin against Yosef. Not his wholesale abandonment of his destiny. Not Er – or the Yehudah seed in Er. Not Onan or the Yehudah seed in Onan. Of all people he could have chosen, Yehudah decided to place the blame on the only truly innocent person in the picture - *Tamar*. So if you think things are not going well for Yehudah ... well, just think what emotional trauma poor Tamar must be going through.

Yehudah now has only one son left and this one is too young for Tamar to marry. Yehudah therefore sends Tamar away, telling her to '*live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up.*' Yehudah just keeps repeating the same old sin patterns that got him in this mess. First Yehudah was responsible for sending *Yosef* away to languish and suffer as a slave; now he is responsible for sending Tamar away to languish and suffer as a '*black widow*'. He makes sure she cannot, since she is waiting on Shelah, marry anyone else. He sentences her to grieve and mourn perpetually the loss of her first love – just like Ya'akov, who would not be consoled or comforted regarding the loss of Yosef.

Of course, Torah makes it clear that though Yehudah told Tamar he would marry her to Shelah⁸ when Shelah was old enough, he never had any intention whatever of doing so. All Yehudah really wanted was to *be rid of Tamar*. He told her what he figured she wanted to hear so that she would – at least for the foreseeable future - leave him and his favored son Shelah alone.

Yehudah Hits 'Rock Bottom'

But *Tamar* was not the root of Yehudah's problem. Getting rid of Tamar therefore did not make Yehudah's situation improve one whit. Oh, Shelah apparently survived and grew up just fine⁹ – but Yehudah's Kena'ani concubine *bat-Shua* died on him.

Alas, the loss of his Kena'ani concubine still did not get Yehudah's attention. It would take a blow even more crushing for the Holy One to bring him to his senses. Yehudah would, it appears, have to reach '*rock bottom*'. And so we reach the narrative of the lowest point in Yehudah's life – the most thoroughly disgusting part of his plunge into the sensual Kena'anite world in which he chose to live in the years following his sale of Yosef into slavery. This 'rock bottom' point in Yehudah's life is vividly portrayed in verses 12-18 of the 38th chapter of Genesis. In those verses Torah tells us:

⁸ In Hebrew the name *Shelah* [shin, alef, lamed, hey] means *requested, prayed for*.

⁹ In Genesis 46:12 the sons of Yehudah will be listed and it will be stated that Er and Onan died, but no reference will be made to the death of Shelah, and it will appear that he goes to Egypt with Yehudah, Tamar, and the twin sons Tamar bore to Yehudah, namely Perez and Zerah.

V'yinachem Yehudah vaya'al al-gozezei tzono
Yehudah was comforted, and went up to shear his sheep

hu v'Chirah re'eihu ha-Adulami Timnatah
he and his friend Chirah, the `Adullami. to Timnah,

v'yugad l'Tamar l'emor
It was told Tamar, saying,

hineh chamich oleh Timnatah lagoz tzono
"Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

V'tasar bigdei almeinutah me'aleiha
She took off of her the garments of her widowhood,

vateichas batza'if vatit'alaf
and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself,

vateshev b'fetach Eynayim asher al-derech Timnatah
and sat in the gate of `Enayim, which is by the way to Timnah;

ki ra'atah ki-gadal Shelah
for she saw that Shelach was grown up,

v'hi lo-nitnah lo l'ishah
and she wasn't given to him as a wife.

Please note if you will the *poetic irony* found in the Hebrew text above. Pay close attention to what Torah tells us Tamar did in the gate as the episode of Yehudah's shame begins. Torah tells us she is [a] *seeking to deceive by dressing up in deceptive garments* [as had Ya'akov, when he wore Esav's clothes, and as had Leah, when she dressed herself in Rachel's wedding dress]; and she is [b] *vateshev* – i.e. *sitting* – a derivative form of the word *vayashev*, the name of our parsha, which describes the kind of existence to which Ya'akov has been reduced by the loss of Yosef and to which Tamar has been reduced by Yehudah's sending her into exile under false pretenses. The text is therefore drawing a clear parallel between Tamar and her defrauded situation and Ya'akov and his defrauded situation – and is pointing out to those with ears to hear that, in large measure, Yehudah is being held responsible by the Holy One *for both*.

The point is well taken of course that Yehudah has indeed defrauded them both. Torah goes on however to explain *prophetically* how Yehudah is going to suffer serious consequences as a result of both types of fraud he has practiced. Watch carefully how Torah develops Yehudah's prophetic 'judgment day' scenario:

Vayir'eiha Yehudah v'yachsiveha l'zonah
When Yehudah saw her he thought that she was a prostitute,

ki chistah paneiha
for she had covered her face.

Remember how in the Book of Revelation ‘Mystery Babylon the Great’ is pictured as the ‘*great prostitute*’ and the ‘*mother of all prostitutes*’ and is said to *sit* [i.e. *vateshev*] on many waters. **Revelation 17:1-6**. Do you think there might just be a parallel here? But let’s continue with the narrative. Yehudah is about to make another prophetic transaction in the marketplace of human misery. Torah tells us:

V’yet eleiha el ha-derech vayomer

He [Yehudah] turned to her [Tamar] by the way, and said,

havah-na avo elayich

Please come, let me come in to you:"

ki lo yada ki chalato hi vatomer mah-titen-li ki tavo elay

for he didn't know that she was his daughter-in-law.

Why was a son of the Covenant *soliciting favors* from a woman he believed to be a prostitute? That is no way for a son of the covenant to act, is it? Methinks Yehudah has been *living like a Kena’ani for way too long*.

What on earth could Yehudah have been *thinking*? What could he have thought he was *doing*? Alas, how far has the prince among Ya’akov’s sons fallen. All Yehudah saw in the young woman sitting by the road wrapped in veils apparently was *an object through which to satisfy his lust*. At that moment, Yehudah’s verbal commitment to Tamar, the beautiful young Kena’ani woman to whom he had promised to give Shelah as a husband, was the furthest thing from his mind. The ways of the Holy One, as taught to him by his father, were also obviously nothing but a remote memory. But all of that is about to change. The *Ruach* is going to expose Yehudah’s guilt publicly, right in the pages of Torah. Everyone, in every generation, will be made to see Yehudah ben Ya’akov for the totally self-centered deceiver that he allowed himself to become.

Talk about *accountability*! Of whomever much is given, much is required.

A Goat and a Garment: It’s All Part of the Deception

As you read the narrative of Yehudah’s descent keep in mind the centrality of *garments as evidence* in this week’s parsha. When the kidnappers of Yosef wanted to convince their father that Yosef had been killed by wild animals, for instance, what evidence did they offer? They showed their father *Yosef’s garment* [the coat of many colors], which they had smeared with the blood of a young goat. Ten eyewitnesses stood silent while a bloody goatskin veritably screamed out a testimony that human eyes only thought they could decipher and that human ears only thought they could interpret.

Later in the parsha when Potifar’s wife wants to convince her husband that Yosef

has attempted to rape her, what evidence does she offer? She will show Potifar *Yosef's garment* that she had ripped from his body, which will also testify in a deceptive, incomplete way what happened.

We are about to discover that Tamar is going to employ a *garment* as evidence as well. This time the garment will be that of Yehudah. Tamar asked Yehudah: "*What will you give me, that you may come in to me?*" And he replied:

Anochi ashalach gdi-izim min-ha-tzon
"I will send you a kid of the goats from the flock."

vatomer im-titen eravon ad sholcheicha
She said, "Will you give me a pledge, until you send it?"

V'yomer mah ha-eravon asher eten-lach
He said, "What pledge will I give you?"

V'tomer chotamcha uf'tileicha
She said, "Your signet and your outer garment,

umatcha asher b'yadeicha
and your staff that is in your hand."

V'yiten-lah vayavo eleiha v'tahar-lo
He gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Vayehi kemish'losh chodashim v'yugad li-Yehudah l'emor
Some three months passed, and Yehudah was told,

zantah Tamar kalateicha v'gam hineh ha-rah l'z'nunim
'Your daughter-in-law has behaved badly, and is pregnant from bad behavior.

V'yomer Yehudah hotzi'uha v'tisarech
And Yehudah said: 'Take her out and have her burned.'

Hi mutzet v'hi shalchah el-chamiha l'emor
When she was being taken out, she sent [the security] to her father-in-law, saying

l'ish asher-eleh lo anochi harah
'By the man who is the owner of these articles am I pregnant.'

V'tomer haker-na
[When Yehudah came to her,] she said, 'If you would, identify [these objects].

L'mi ha-chotemet v'ha-p'tilim v'ha-mateh ha-eleh
Who is the owner of this seal, this outer garment, and this staff?'

Haker-Na!

Torah tells us that when Tamar presented to Yehudah the seal, the garment and the staff of the man responsible for her condition, she accompanied the presentation of these evidentiary items with the phrase '*Haker-Na*'. That phrase will drive the nail

through Yehudah's heart. You see, Beloved, the Hebrew phrase *haker-na* which Tamar spoke as she presented to Yehudah the evidence she possessed of the identity of the man who engaged in adultery with her, means, roughly, 'Pray, can you identify!'

If you do not read Hebrew you unfortunately miss a very important point – the words Tamar speaks are *the exact same words* which Torah records as having been spoken by one of the brothers – perhaps Yehudah himself – to Ya'akov at the agonizing moment he was shown the blood stained 'coat of many colors' that had belonged to Yosef. See **Genesis 37:32**. '*Haker-na!*' he said to Ya'akov when he showed him the bloodstained coat of many colors. '*Haker-na!*' Tamar says to him as she holds forth the seal, the garment, and the staff.

The words cut like a knife. Yehudah's soul is laid bare. *Haker-na!* indeed. With those simple words Yehudah came undone. The cold, hard reality of the depth of his sin – of what he has done – have finally been brought home to his heart. For Torah says:

V'yaker Yehudah
And then Yehudah understood,
v'yomer tzadkah mimeni
and he said: 'She is more righteous than I!'

Yes Yehudah, you are exactly right. Tamar the Kena'ani, the one who played the prostitute to entrap you, is indeed more righteous than you. A hundred times more righteous. You are not even in her league. But do not despair. This is *not the end* for you Yehudah. It is indeed only the beginning. So please do not look at this snapshot of Yehudah, get disgusted, and give up on him – *or on any other son or daughter of the covenant*. Whatever bad things they have done, however hypocritical they have acted, or whatever perverse depths of sinful lifestyle into which they have fallen, do not 'write them off', judge them, or allow either revulsion or outrage to steal your love for them. Over the next few chapters of Torah we are going to see that the sheer *magnificence of the Holy One's tireless love* and the *immense power of His prophetic voice* can transform even a scoundrel like *Yehudah* into a force for good through whom all nations will be blessed – and, even more importantly, into a *tzaddik* through whom the Holy One's name will be glorified.

Never give up on prodigal sons and daughters. And prodigals – never, ever give up on yourselves or your God! *Haker-na*, Dear Reader – *Pray, Can you identify?*

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's begin our study with some basic questions:

[A] Where does Yehudah go as we begin today's aliyah?

[B] What does the name of this place mean?

[C] Locate this place on your Bible Atlas. What direction and how many miles is it from Hebron, where a grieving Ya'akov, and the rest of the covenant family, was living?

[D] In whose dwelling does Yehudah abide? What is the meaning of that person's name?

2. Regarding the children born to Yehudah in the course of his 'sowing his wild oats':

[A] What was the name of Kena'ani woman Yehudah moved in with him?

[B] What does this woman's name mean?

[C] What were the names of the three sons born to Yehudah and this woman, and what does each name mean?

[D] Where were Yehudah and his Kena'ani woman when their third son was born? What is the meaning of the name of this place?

[E] What happened to the first two sons born to Yehudah by this woman? Why?

[F] Imagine you were an angel assigned to Yehudah (after all, from him will eventually come not only King David but also the Messiah!). When you report daily to the Holy One during the period Yehudah is living with this woman, what do you think is the Holy One's attitude toward Yehudah? [Be careful - you are about to explore your concept of who God is and what He is like!].

3. Regarding the bride Yehudah chose for his son *Er*:

[A] What was the name of the wife Yehudah chose for Er?

[B] What does this name mean?

[C] Why did Yehudah not give his youngest son, Shelah, to Tamar as he had promised?

[D] On what criteria do you think Yehudah selected a wife for himself and for his sons (this can be referred to as the "way of Esav")?

[E] We have read the Holy One's way of selecting a wife for a son - the story of the selection of Rivkah for Yitzchak (**Genesis 24**). What do you think (in light of that story and, by negative implication, the story of today's aliyah) are the most important criteria a man should have in choosing a wife?

4. Regarding the remarkable chain of events which led to the conception and birth of Tamar's twin sons:

[A] Where did these events happen?

[B] What does the name of that place mean?

[C] List the things Yehudah did in those verses that do not fit in with the

lifestyle of Torah.

[D] What was Yehudah's attitude when Tamar was found to be pregnant?

[E] How does this further illustrate Yehudah's depraved condition?

[F] What were the names of Tamar's two children, and what do those names mean?

5. Garments - articles of clothing - play a large role in this week's parsha - starting with the special robe of Yosef. What Yehudah and his accomplices with the robe of Yosef will come back to haunt Yehudah. Just as he sought to use the robe of Yosef as evidence to cover up his guilt in connection with Yosef's disappearance, it was a robe – his own robe - that Tamar used as evidence against him.

[A] List all the garments - articles/types of clothing - mentioned in today's aliyah.

[B] What does this tell you of the way in which persons living a Kena'anite lifestyle utilize clothing [pay special attention to Tamar's use of clothing to entice Yehudah]?

[C] What kind of clothing do you feel honors the Holy One, and is appropriate for you to wear? List the characteristics you feel are important.

[D] What characteristics of clothing would be inappropriate for those who wish to honor the Holy One?

6. In today's Haftarah reading the prophet Amos of Tekoa, a shepherd by trade, serves as God's spokesman concerning the sins of Israel, for which judgment is due. The Holy One's charge is that, in addition to "selling the righteous", Israel has abused the poor, denied justice to the oppressed, and profaned His Name through sexual perversions - all as a result of *imitating the idolatrous ways of the Emori*, whom the Holy One cast out of the land. The problem Amos specifically addresses in today's aliyah is the problem of *ignoring God, and rejecting and abusing His messengers of t'shuvah*.

I raised up some of your sons for prophets and some of your young men for Nazirim.

Isn't this true, You children of Yisra'el?" says the Holy One.

***"But you gave the Nazirim wine to drink,
and you commanded the prophets: 'Do not prophesy!'***

[A] What two groups of people *outside the priesthood* does the Holy One say He has "raised up" - and given to the people in order to guide them back into righteousness?

[B] Which of these was Yosef? Which was Yeshua?

[C] What does the Holy One say the people did with these two groups of people? Why do you think they did this?

7. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha we see the seductive power of the

dibbah ra (evil report). The *Yehudim*¹⁰ from Cilicia, from Asia, from Alexandria, and from the synagogue of the Libertines, [all Diaspora Jews] who could not contend with Stephen's teaching, and got embarrassed and offended when they did not "win" the religious 'debate', decided to maliciously and underhandedly attack his *character* instead. This kind of thing is still going on today.

In this episode we see how even among people who are in the Holy One's covenant community a little jealousy and competition can quickly mushroom into the intent to destroy – all through the seductive power of juicy gossip and half-truths. In yesterday's aliyah we saw that the Yehudim from Cilicia, from Asia, from Alexandria and the synagogue of the Libertines got embarrassed publicly when they tried – and failed – to successfully challenge Stefanos' teaching. In today's aliyah we see their wounded response: they make it their mission in life to go around talking about Stefanos, taking things he has said out of context, and inflaming the passions and wounds of others. They clothe their *dibbah ra* regarding Stefanos in high-sounding religious language to *appeal to the weak points in others*. They know what magic words and subjects will seduce potential allies – even former enemies - into their camp. They will fix that "dreamer", just wait!

Watch the 7-step process these angry men use against Stefanos *very, very carefully*. This same process is going on today, in your community, all around you! The *dibbah ra* that sounds so spiritual and inflames your religious spirit (or reopens old wounds you had forgotten about) is even now being whispered in the shadows. You or someone you know may be its next victim.

If the intended victim is someone you know do not allow yourself to be sucked into the seductive web of the *dibbah ra*. If the intended victim is you ... well at least may the Holy One cause your face, like Stefanos', to *shine like an angel* in the midst of it all.

*Then they secretly induced men to say,
"We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moshe and God."
They stirred up the people, the Zakenim, and the Sofrim, and came against him
and seized him, and brought him in to the council and set up false witnesses who said,
"This man never stops speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the Torah.
For we have heard him say that this Yeshua of Natzeret will destroy this place,
and will change the customs which Moshe delivered to us."
All who sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him,
saw his face like it was the face of an angel.*

¹⁰ It appears from the context that, as had Yochanan [John] in his gospel account, the writer of Acts classified as 'Yehudim' those of Hebrew descent who rejected Yeshua, and who made the choice to adhere to the man-made traditions inherent in the various Judaisms of the day [*i.e.* the school of Hillel vs. school of Shammai, Pharisaism vs. Saduceanism, Essenism, Zealotism, etc.] as opposed to returning to the True Avrahamic Way and Covenant Lifestyle described in Torah.

Don't worry – it is just another prophetic transaction in the marketplace we are getting to know so well.

[A] What group of people was responsible for spreading a *dibbah ra* against Stefanos?

[B] What were the motivations of those spreading the *dibbah ra*?

[C] If these people had a legitimate offense against Stefanos, what were the proper steps, under the Torah, for them to have followed to resolve it?

[D] What three groups did the ones responsible for the *dibbah ra* “stir up” against Stefanos?

[E] List the 7 steps that the Yehudim of Cilicia followed in order to get Stephen condemned to death.

[F] List each of the accusations levied against Stefanos.

[G] To what extent were any of these charges true?

*May the Holy One pursue us as He pursued Yehudah,
and may He bring each of us into our divine destiny, despite our weaknesses and depravity.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 35:9-10

My soul will be joyful in the Holy One.

It will rejoice in His Yeshuah.

All my bones will say, "O Holy One, who is like You,

Who delivers the poor

from him who is too strong for him,

Yes, the poor and the needy from him who robs him?"