

*Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi*¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayashev:*** **Genesis 37:12-36**
 Haftarah: **Amos 2:9-10**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 6:7-10**

Here comes that dreamer!

[Genesis 37:19]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 35:4-8;

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

Vayelchu echav lir'ot et-tzon avihem biSh'chem – Then his [i.e. Yosef's] brothers left to tend their father's sheep around *Sh'chem*. **Genesis 37:12.**

When bad things happen, geographical locations carry trauma the same way people do. Innocent blood cries out. Trees bear scars. Forests weep. Rocks testify. Deserts whisper offense, outrage and accusation. Case in point: the troubled city of *Shechem*. Have you noticed that there is something about that area that seems to breed recurring incidents of uncontrolled perversion and unmitigated violence? Every time sons or daughters of the Covenant get close to *Shechem*², it seems, the result is another dark episode of trafficking in human misery. Well, here the covenant family comes again - so gird up your loins! The dark energy of Irrational Outrage, Self-Righteousness Indignation, and Cruel Mockery permeates the air. Vain imaginations, inflated egos, arrogant moods, bad attitudes, and negative emotions are running amuck. The love of the many has grown cold; its calm, soft voice being completely drowned out by the seductive rhetoric of hate. Alas, it seems that the ten oldest sons of Ya'akov have caught another *Sh'chem* state of mind! Take a deep breath – and let's try to navigate through the narrative without catching their vile disease.

When Sons of the Covenant Get Caught in a Sh'chem State of Mind

Warning: the aliyah we study today will contain graphic acts of violence. There will be screaming. There will be waves of intense pain. There will even be a brief episode of nudity. But what did you expect - this is, after all, the week of *Transactions in the Marketplace of Human Misery*. Just keep in mind that, whatever it may look or feel like at a given moment, the wheels of redemption are always in motion. Redemption, however, is a process, not an event – and its process is anything but neat, tidy, peaceful, painless, or bloodless.

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² See Genesis 34; see also Judges 9 and Hosea 6:9; compare Isaiah 9:6, where it is said prophetically about Messiah that the government will be *al-shichmu* – i.e. on his *sh'chem* (shoulder[s]).

If you let either your flesh or your easily offended pseudo-intellect control your thoughts, therefore, the events of today's aliyah are likely to trigger quite a 'judgment response'. You may feel deeply moved by *sympathy for poor young Yosef*. You may feel *outrage toward his brothers*. You may feel despair for *Ya'akov*. You may wish you were there to stop it. Ah, but be careful now – this, like every episode of interpersonal or interfamily drama, is *a test*. The question to be decided is: which do you trust more - *the Holy One's redemptive plan*, or *your own sense of morality*? The inspired narrative of what is happened between Yosef and his brothers - not to mention some entrepreneurial Midyanim and Yish'maelim - near *Sh'chem* is programmed to trigger whatever is left of our fleshly, destructive *Tree-of-the-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil* based concepts of 'right' and 'wrong', 'justice' and 'injustice', 'fairness' and 'unfairness', and 'decency' and 'outrage'. After all, right before our eyes - in *broad daylight* no less - we are going to see a deadly trap laid for a bright, handsome, and unsuspecting 17-year-old by ten older, stronger, angry men who clearly have both mayhem on their minds and malice in their hearts. We will overhear the *crude whispers of violent men* as they activate a conspiracy to commit murder. We will witness a *violent ten-against-one assault*, a *vicious battery*, a *public disrobing and robbery*, a *kidnapping*, and a series of blatant *human trafficking* transactions. What is worse, most of the people who will perpetrate these crimes, as well as the victim thereof, will be kinsmen – brothers, no less.

So ... what do you think should happen to the perpetrators of this horrendous crime? Should they receive *judgment* – or *mercy*? Moreover, who should make the decision? Should it be men like us who hear about these events with the hearing of their ears or read about them with the sight of their eyes? Or should judgment be the Holy One, who sees the end from the beginning, the *tav* from the *alef*, and the great redemption scene of Genesis 45 that will, ultimately, make everyone forget the pain of the human misery scene of Genesis 37?

***There Is A Divine Plan – Active On Two Levels;
And the Yosef Narrative Is An Integral Part of the Plan***

Before we dive in too deeply to this narrative there are some things we need to keep in mind. First of all we need to remember that this is the parsha of *the Emerging Shadow of Messiah*. Yosef is not just the son of Ya'akov/Yisrael – he is a prophetic prototype of the Promised Messiah. As we learn Yosef's story, we will be learning Mashiach's story as well. So, understand that *it is an integral part of the Master Plan of the Holy One that the gifted young man we met in yesterday's aliyah – and the Messiah - make a dramatic appearance in the mysterious land of Egypt*. Divine redemptive strategy requires it. It simply must happen. The question

to be addressed in the narrative of *Vayashev* is not *whether Yosef will go to Egypt* – that has been decided since the foundation of the world³. The question that text is designed to answer is *HOW* and under what unpleasant circumstances Yosef's pre-ordained pilgrimage to Egypt – the historical one and the one of which the historical one is prototypical - will come to pass.

Keep in mind that because Yosef's Divine Appointment with the land of the pyramids and sphinxes is rapidly approaching on the Holy One's prophetic calendar, his idyllic season of dressing up in fancy coats and having beautiful dreams in the land of his fathers is running out like the last few grains of sand in an hourglass. Keep in mind as well that because Yosef's grief-stricken father Ya'akov dotes and depends upon him so much, he will never in a million years voluntarily let Yosef go where the Holy One intends to send him. And keep in mind that even if Yosef's father could somehow against all odds be convinced to let Yosef go off to Egypt Yosef has it so good where he is that he will probably never leave the comfort of home of his own free will⁴.

What the brothers are about to do is reprehensible, of course - and the law of sowing and reaping will assure that they will pay an appropriately steep price for their actions in time. But have you ever considered that if these brothers had not done what they are about to do ... well **JUST HOW WOULD YOSEF HAVE EVER GOTTEN TO EGYPT TO MAKE HIS DIVINE APPOINTMENT WITH DESTINY?**

Have you ever considered what the Exodus story would have looked like if Yosef's brothers had not hated him bad enough to sell him into slavery? Have you ever considered that things had to happen pretty much the exact way they happened for the greatest deliverance the world has ever seen to play out the way it did? Have you ever considered that the despicable actions of these brothers had to happen just the way they did because they provide an easily recognizable prophetic picture of events which will recur in the end of days and lead to an even greater deliverance of the Holy One's people than the Exodus from Egypt?

³ Hence long before Yosef was born the Holy One told Avram that his descendants would be enslaved for generations, but would be delivered with a great deliverance. See **Genesis 15:13-15**.

⁴ There are Divine purposes that must be fulfilled by Yosef, and in particular by Yosef's separation from his family. Thus the whole story of Yosef and his brothers is to some degree being manipulated by the Holy One. While he does not place the animosity or the murderous plans toward Yosef in their minds He allows them to develop such things in response to their own fleshly passions. He just places limits on them that they cannot see or understand in order that even their worst sins can be used to further a Divine plan in which they would never voluntarily participate. And yet each person involved in the story acts of his own free will – subject to the limits placed upon the exercise of that will by the Holy One and the angelic forces acting under His direction.

I suppose it is possible, of course, that had Yosef's ten elder brothers not presumed to take Yosef's future into their own hands on the fateful day about which we will read in today's aliyah of Torah the Holy One would have shortly arranged a dramatic God-encounter for Ya'akov and for Yosef in connection with which He would have personally instructed them on the details of His Divine Plan. That would have been ideal, wouldn't it? Just as Avram heard the Holy One's *Lech lecha* call while he was still living in Charan in his father's house, perhaps Yosef would have heard and responded to the call the Holy One was making upon him to go to Egypt, trust the Holy One to miraculously pave his way into Pharaoh's good graces and be elevated without pain or heartache to the position of power which he will, due to the imminent world-wide famine, need to occupy in just a few years.

Perhaps Ya'akov would have let Yosef go under such circumstances. Perhaps Yosef could have then gone to Egypt voluntarily and avoided all the trials and tribulations that are going to make up the next 30 years or so of his life. But as much as we might wish it had happened that way, it did not. There was no such God-encounter. Yosef, it appears, is going to have to get to his appointment with destiny - and indeed become everything He was created to become - *the hard way*.

Getting Yosef to Egypt ... the Hard Way

And so as Sh'mon and Levi had a few years previously dealt presumptuously with and executed vigilante vengeance on Sh'chem and his people, so did the brothers deal presumptuously against and execute vigilante vengeance upon their most hated rival, the young dreamer Yosef. *Family violence* is about to break forth.

Yosef's brothers will first make their father's young protégé the object of a conspiracy to commit murder. But the Holy One will not allow Yosef to be murdered. Instead Yosef will be assaulted, stripped, and thrown in a dry cistern – but amazingly his handsome physical body will suffer not the slightest injury as a result. And after listening gleefully while Yosef screamed in fear and in agony from the bottom of the pit his brothers will actually pull him bodily from the pit, sell him to descendants of Yish'mael for a few pieces of silver, and send him off to serve uncircumcised heathens in *Mitzrayim* [Egypt].

Family violence is not, it seems, a new phenomenon, unique to our day. Remember Kayin and Hevel? Kayin slew Hevel out of jealousy. Remember Yish'mael and Yitzchak? Yish'mael bullied Yitzchak so brutally he had to be cut off from the family. Remember Ya'akov and Esav? Ya'akov outwitted and stole from Esav, who in turn plotted his murder. And the problem will not stop with Yosef and his brothers. *Aharon* [Aaron], even while adorned with the robe and ephod of the lofty position of *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest], and Miryam, even while

basking in the mantle of ‘prophetic worshipper’ she donned at the Sea of Reeds, will maliciously slander Moshe in the wilderness. *Yochanan* [John] and *Ya’akov* [James], *Kefa* [Peter] and Andrew - the two sets of brothers who made up Yeshua’s inner circle – will bicker over which of them is the greatest in the Messiah’s kingdom and which is the least. And so it goes - even unto today.

But Am I Really My Brother’s Keeper?

Our aliyah starts innocently enough. Ya’akov, now living on the patriarchal estate at Hebron, is so stricken with grief over the loss of his beloved Rachel that he decides to entrust his flocks into the care of his eldest sons. He sends those sons off to find pasture back in the area of *Shechem* – approximately 50 miles to the North. Ya’akov, of course, knows the pasture in that area very well, and therefore knows how exactly how well – and for how long – the available pastureland there can sustain the flock.

After the ten eldest brothers and the flock have been gone longer than Ya’akov feels the pasture at *Sh’chem* can nurture them he sends Yosef out to check on them. He apparently trusts Yosef completely with this mission. Ya’akov stays at home. Someone has to mind the store, protect Leah and the servants – and of course keep watch over young Benjamin. Ya’akov called for Yosef, and said to him:

Halo acheicha ro'im b'Sh'chem

'I believe your brothers are keeping the sheep in Sh'chem.

lechah v'eshlachacha aleihem

'I would like you to go to them.'

V'yomer lo lech-na re'eh et-sh'lom acheicha v'et-sh'lom ha-tzon

'and he said: go and see how your brothers and the sheep are doing',

v'hashiveyni davar

'and bring me a report.'

[Genesis 37:12-13]

Ever submissive to his father’s will, Yosef left the Hebron Valley and headed off toward *Sh’chem*. When Yosef got to *Shechem*, however, he found neither his brothers nor his father’s flocks. They had *been there* it seems, but they were *now gone*. What was about to happen could not, for spiritual reasons, happen at *Sh’chem*. It had to happen in *another place* a few meters down the road. We will see why in a few moments.

Entertaining Angels Unawares

Instead of finding Rueven, Sh’mon, Levi, Y’hudah, and the other sons of Yisrael/Ya’akov at *Sh’chem*, Yosef encountered someone else – someone Torah

merely refers to as simply as an *ish*⁵. Ya'akov had seen melachim – angels. Yosef was not ready for that yet. Besides, this is the season of the 'hidden face', when even men of the Covenant tend to be blind to the spiritual realities going on around us. Torah tells us, therefore:

Vayimtza'eihu ish v'hineh to'eh b'sadei

*And he [Yosef] was found by an **ish** blundering about in the fields.*

V'yish'aleihu ha-ish l'emor mah-tevakesh

*'What are you looking for?' asked the **ish**.*

[Genesis 37:15]

The one who found Yosef wandering lost in the fields of *Sh'chem* was not just a 'certain man', as the KJV calls him – nor was he merely a 'stranger', as some other translations tell us. So who – or *what* - was he? This was no ordinary man. This was an *ish*. The last time we met someone referred to simply as *ish* Ya'akov wrestled with him all night. Unlike his father, young Yosef will neither recognize the spiritual essence of this stranger nor grab hold of him and start wrestling. All Torah tells us Yosef did was pose an inquiry to him:

Et-achai anochi mevakeish

'I'm looking for my brothers.'

hagidah-na li eyfoh hem ro'im

'Perhaps you can tell me where they are tending the sheep.'

The *ish* replied that he had overheard the brothers talking about going to a place not yet mentioned in Torah – a place called '*Dotan*' [Dothan]. Yosef seemed to be suffering from an amazing lack of curiosity about the *ish* or how he knew his brothers. Yosef just headed off toward *Dotan* – without the slightest inkling of what was going to befall him there, much less how this dramatic action sequence would change the life of everyone he knows – and, for that matter, the history of the world – forever.

Welcome to "Dotan"

The place our English Bibles call *Dothan* is located approximately 20 miles to the north of the city of *Sh'chem*. It is in later days destined to be the home of *ha-navi Elishahu* [the prophet Elisha]. It is going to be at this place where, in response to Elishahu's request, the Holy One is going to open his servant's eyes so that ... *he saw: and behold, the mountain [was] full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. II Kings 6:17.*

⁵ *Ish* is *alef, yod, shin*, Strong's Hebrew word #376, pronounced *eesh*. This word is usually translated 'man'. In this chapter, some translate it *a stranger*, others [such as the KJV] translate it as *a certain man*. As pointed out in connection with the Rabbi's son's *Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi* [Tuesday's Study] of parsha *V'yishlach*, the Hebrew word *ish* presents a Hebraic hieroglyphic of a *physical manifestation of the Divine Presence*. Some Hebrew commentators have speculated that this *ish* was Gabriel. See *Targum Yonatan* and the Commentary of Rashi.

This place called Dotan is a *very special place*. It is the kind of place where *an army of angels in chariots of fire* might just disguise themselves as a caravan of Yish'maeli merchantmen.

Oh, it certainly appears to our human perspective that Dotan is about to be extremely unkind to Yosef. At Dotan Yosef is unquestionably going to meet hatred and violence in one of its ugliest manifestations. But do not think for a moment that Yosef is going to go into that city alone. The *Divine Plan of the Holy One* is at stake. The Holy One knows full well what is about to happen to Yosef. And He who watches over Yisrael *neither slumbers nor sleeps*. Hence understand that Divine Watchmen with supernatural horses such as Messiah will ride and chariots of fire at their command are *observing Yosef's every move ... and are ordering his every step*. Where pray tell did you think the *ish* Yosef encountered at Sh'chem as he was blundering around looking for his brothers came from? No, Dear Reader, Yosef *does not enter Dotan alone*. Vast armies of angels stand ready to intervene – and protect Yosef - if the Holy One but whispers the word. But angels do not act of their own accord. Absent a word from the Holy One they simply – even if reluctantly - let events take their natural course. And on this day the Holy One has chosen *not* to have His angels intervene. Not *yet* at least. What is happening according to the natural course of events is after all an essential part of His eternal plan for the redemption of Israel and all mankind.

You see, Dear Reader, pain – even torture and death – is sometimes allowed by the Holy One *when it serves His eternal purposes of redemption for mankind*. In the eyes of the Holy One the redemption of mankind is worth even the ultimate cost.

The Hebrew Word Picture of Dotan

In Hebrew *Dotan*⁶ is spelled *dalet, tav, nun sofit*. The first consonant is *dalet*, which makes what English speakers think of as the 'd' sound. This Hebrew letter is a pictograph of a *doorway, passageway, or portal*. The second consonant in the word *Dotan* is *tav*, one of two Hebrew letters that makes what English speakers think of as the 't' sound. The letter *tav* — the final letter of the Hebrew *alef beit* - is a Hebraic symbol for covenant. It represents the sign, or token of a covenant, given as a down payment, or earnest, assuring that future performance will be forthcoming. The third and final consonant of the word *Dotan* is *nun sofit*, which is the consonant written when a Hebrew word ends with an 'n' sound. The *nun* is a Hebraic symbol for a son or heir. The *nun sofit* [ultimate nun] is the Hebraic symbol for the Messiah – the ultimate Son and Heir of all things.

⁶ Dotan is pronounced *doe'-tawn*.

Putting the three Hebraic symbols/pictures that make up the word *Dotan* together causes us to see a mural – a *doorway/passageway/portal* [*dalet*] leading to the *covenant sign* [*tav*] of the *Messiah* [*nun sofit*]. That sounds really good – but what does it mean? To me it means that the place Yosef is about to enter is going to be like a supernatural ‘*time warp*’ of sorts. To me it means that what is about to happen to Yosef at Dotan is merely a prefiguring of what the Holy One has ordained from the foundation of the world is going to happen to Messiah. For you see I believe that in the course of the events Yosef is about to experience at the hands of his brothers the Holy One has pictured for us the arrest, stripping, flogging, trial, conviction, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection *and ascension* of the Messiah.

For whom did Yosef suffer and – to all appearances, at least - die? For the very brothers who conspired to kill him, who beat him, and stripped him, and threw him in an earthen grave. For whom did the Holy One raise him up and establish him as Lord of a Future Harvest? For the very brothers who conspired to kill him, who beat him, and stripped him, and threw him in an earthen grave – and for all others who hungered, and came to him for bread.

Conspiracy to Commit ... An Epic Deliverance?

The narrative of our aliyah permits us to eavesdrop on the conversations of Yosef's brothers as they camped at Dotan. Here is what we are told:

V'yir'u oto merachok uv'terem yikrav aleihem

They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them,

V'yitnaklu oto l'hamito

they conspired against him to kill him.

Vayo m'ru ish el-achiv

They said one to another,

hineh ba'al ha-chalomot ha-lazeh ba

"Behold, this dreamer comes.

V'atah lechu v'nahargeihu

Come now therefore, and let's kill him,

v'nashlicheihu b'achad ha-borot

and cast him into one of the pits,

v'amarnu chayah ra'ah achalat'hu

and we will say, 'An evil animal has devoured him.'

V'nir'eh mah-yihyu chalomotav

We will see what will become of his dreams."

[Genesis 37:18-20]

Ten jealous brothers. Years of resentment culminating in intense hatred. A Common scheme. A Clearly stated criminal conspiracy. Malice aforethought. Opportunity. All the elements are present for a conviction of intended murder times ten. Even Reuven, who would later have a change of heart⁷, and Y'hudah, who would later come up with a plan to turn a profit on Yosef's demise by selling him to the Yish'maelim as a slave rather than killing him, would be found guilty in virtually any criminal court in the world. But for such as these the Holy One wrought an epic deliverance – and He did it *through the very evil they perpetrated*. As Yosef himself would later acknowledge to his brothers:

*You intended it to harm me, but the Holy One intended it for good,
To accomplish what is now being done – the saving of many lives.*
[Genesis 50:20]

The Holy One was faithful to *raise Yosef up*. He was even faithful, after Yosef rose to prominence among the gentiles of Egypt to *reconcile Yosef and his brothers* and to *redeem 'all Israel'*. The Holy One likewise was faithful to raise up Messiah – *and He will be faithful to reconcile Him with the brothers who turned on Him* – His own brethren after the flesh – *in the proper time*. And again, *all Israel will be saved*. It is an essential part of the Holy One's Divine Plan for mankind. As the Holy One says in Zechariah 12:

*... they will look upon He whom they have pierced;
and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son,
and will grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for his firstborn.*
[Zechariah 12:10]

May it happen speedily, and in our day. Meanwhile, however, *a father weeps - and refuses to be comforted*.

Brotherly Love?

For us as well as for Yosef the Holy One determines into what family situations and relationships each of us will be born. It is always the Holy One's intention for *good* to come from our relationships. From the beginning however Kayin and Hevel - and their progeny - have often *competed* rather than *cooperated*. Ah, and lest you ladies start to develop an inappropriate gender pride complex it must be pointed out that *sisters* are in no wise exempt. Consider first of all the bitter struggle between Rachel and Leah. Note also that it was Miryam [Miriam] the great prophetess of Israel who was the chief offender regarding the slander of her brother Moshe - a slander in which Aharon ultimately joined.

⁷ Rashi says that while Reuven truly intended to come back and save Yosef, his reason was selfish – he realized that he, as oldest, would take the bulk of the blame for Yosef's death. Under his plan he could not only avoid taking the blame, but could even come across as a hero in his father's eyes, by saving Yosef. This would enhance his status in the family, while it would decrease the status of the other 9 elder brothers, whose evil plot would be revealed to Ya'akov when Rueven and Yosef got home. Rueven therefore appeared to want to do the 'right thing for the wrong reason'.

Sibling rivalry is real. It is *a shroud of darkness*. Human beings of all nationalities and all genders are subject to its evil effects. One of the toughest challenges of youth is to learn to resist its downward pull - and to let one's feelings and attitudes, as well as one's words and actions, towards and concerning one's brother be dictated by *the Holy One, not by the Serpent*. And for those who do not deal with the challenge effectively during youth, the problem re-surfaces *every holiday season, and at every family gathering, for the rest of their lives*.

So what is the answer? Is it chalk lines in the middle of shared bedrooms? Is psychological counseling? Is it spankings or "time-out"? Is it prisons? Is it funerals? No - none of these will solve the problem. The rivalry is a shroud of darkness. The only cure is *Light*. Well then ... Let there be *Light!* What does Torah say? First of all, the Holy One indicated from the very beginning that He will inquire of each of us concerning both our attitude toward and our treatment of our brother. The Holy One came to Kayin, the first man who had a brother, and asked specifically: "*Where is your brother?*" Kayin responded in horror: *I did not know I was to sh'mar [i.e. treasure, cherish, guard, and watch over as a precious gift] my brother!*" Genesis 4:9.

The Holy One responded to Kayin's slaying of Hevel by revealing an insight into how precious a brother is to Him: *Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!* Genesis 4:10. And in the Torah revealed at Mt. Sinai the Holy One spoke these words of loving instruction - and of caution - for all generations of His people: *Do not hate your brother in your heart. Set yourself in front of your neighbor [i.e. model righteous behavior and humility before him], and do not bear sin because of him.* Leviticus 19:17.

The Holy One is not particularly impressed with a man's (or woman's) outward deeds of piety. Many *prayers and gifts to the poor and teachings of Bible truth and acts of evangelism* - even demonstration of *healing* - are done by those who hate their brother or sister in their hearts. Those deeds are chaff that the wind drives away - wood, hay, and stubble. The test of a true walk with the Holy One is not how pious one acts in public, or how spiritual one appears when engaging in ministry. The true test is *how one deals with his mother, his father, his brother, his sister, his spouse - the inhabitants of one's own home*. What occurs *inside the walls of one's home* provides the litmus test of true intimacy with the Holy One. It is where the "rubber meets the road." It is the only place a relationship with the Holy One cannot be faked. *If therefore our spirituality does not "work" in our homes - in the context and crucible of our most intimate relationships - the truth is it is simply not real* - or at least not *mature*. And that is true however "pious" we may think ourselves to be or try to look on the outside and however "gifted" or

“anointed” we may appear to others. To *sing*, to *dance*, to participate in public *prayer events*, to *teach*, to *preach*, to *make music* unto the Holy One, to *study Torah*, to *minister* - it is all meaningless, a *chasing after the wind*, if we do not learn that our brother/sister (our literal, physical brother/sister first of all, and all mankind secondly) is not our enemy but *a precious gift from the Holy One, given to us to treasure, to cherish, to watch over with care and responsibility, fear and trembling*. When we learn this - and act upon it - *a light shines in the darkness*.

The Holy One’s Divine Plan for Family Life

The elements of a real Torah-based relationship with a brother/sister - or a neighbor - involves several aspects. Here are a couple of the most important ones.

1. Do not hate your brother in your heart

What does it mean to “hate” your brother? The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “hate” is *sane*⁸. It means to think of your brother as your *adversary* – as an *enemy*—an *object* or *obstacle* in your way. It means *someone we consider a threat* to some aspect of our lives, *someone we feel a need to get the best of*, and *rule over* if not *destroy*.

Each of us should stop and ask ourselves as we read this – is *that* how I think of my brother or sister? Do I think of my brother or sister as a *gift of God* to me and to my family – a potential teacher, Torah study-partner, co-laborer, rescuer, playmate, and friend, dearly beloved by the Holy One, with a wonderful *Divine Destiny, Plan and Purpose* for his life, unique in all creation, yet given to me and my family? Or do I resent him or her - thinking of him/her merely as ‘in my way’ – someone standing between me and the attention or recognition or achievement (or *sense* of achievement) I want?

Note that Torah instructs us not to harbor the latter attitude toward our brother in our *heart*. This is particularly significant because *we are told specifically how we are to keep our heart fully occupied* – we are to *love the Holy One our God* with all our heart, as well as all our mind and all our strength. If we spend our mental or emotional energy thinking bad thoughts (which leads to saying bad things, and of course worse) about our brother we have *displaced our energy* and cannot fulfill our Torah purpose of loving the Holy One. For this reason, for us to harbor resentment and ill feelings toward a brother or sister - however unlovably he or she has acted - is to *miss the mark of loving the Holy One*. For *one simply cannot love the Holy One with His heart while he is thinking evil of or resentment toward his brother or sister*. Everyone who holds ill-will or contempt toward a fellow human being is a hypocrite – pretending to love the Holy One when he is really hating the Holy

⁸ Strong’s Hebrew word #8130, pronounced *saw-nay*’.

One's creation and rejecting and resenting the Holy One's gift to him.

2. Surely *yakach* [i.e. stand in the light before/and cast the light of your purity upon] your neighbor, so that you do not bear sin because of him.

Heeding the admonition not to hate your brother in his heart does not in any way mean that you have to *agree with* or *condone* everything your brother [or sister] does. It certainly does not mean you *participate with, enable, or facilitate* him [or her] in their sin. The Holy One knew when He told you not to hate your brother in your heart that your brother or sister was *not perfect*. He knew your brother and sister would *make mistakes*. He knew they would sometimes get swept away in folly. He knew they would *get on your nerves*. He knew they would at times *sin against you* - and *vice versa*, of course. The Holy One therefore instructed us *how* to not hate our brother. He instructed us to do something our English Bibles translate as “rebuke” him [or her] – and to do so in a way our English Bibles describe as “surely”.

The word our English Bibles translate as “rebuke” is the Hebrew verb *yakach*⁹. This Hebrew verb root draws a picture of someone *becoming a bright light* and source of *illumination*, and of being very close in front of or facing someone or something. It primarily involves not over-reacting in the flesh to one's brother's sin with anger, disgust, despair, or self-righteous sermonizing, but instead providing him a consistent role model of perfect love, joy, shalom; *i.e.* being slow to anger, being kind, being meek, being a fountain of *tov* [goodness], staying faithful to Covenant, and demonstrating self-control.

When our brother [or sister] is – at least to our perspective - walking in darkness we are called to *confront him/her quickly about his or her error*. We are to address our brother/sister not with any kind of physical challenge or moral approbation but with words of redemption from the heart of the Holy One – *i.e.* words of Divine Counsel, spoken in love from the heart of our King. We must be gentle at all times. We must be uncompromisingly kind. We must come from a place of humility, not offense, revulsion, or outrage. Every word we speak is to clearly evidence *selfless concern* - not judgmental haughtiness. Every message we communicate is to be forward-looking, not past- or even present-focused. Before we open our mouths, make sure there is no beam in our own eye. Our life – including our thoughts,

⁹ *Yakach* is Strong's Hebrew word #3198, pronounced *yaw-kakh*'. The first Biblical usage of *yakach* illustrates its 'role-model' essence. In Genesis 20:16, after discovering that Avraham and Sarah had deceived him into believing that Sarah was Avraham's sister instead of his wife, Avimelech of Gerar 'rebuked' Avraham and Sarah for their deception. How did he do so? He *yakach*-ed them - by setting Sarah free from his harem, and giving Avraham 1000 pieces of silver. This was not a sermon or an admonition – this was proof positive, by unmistakable action, that Avimelech was the righteous one in this particular instance.

motivations, prayers, reactions, and behaviors – must be checked and double-checked for purity. Once we have surrendered our flesh reactions, our selfish motivations, and any self-righteousness, to the Holy One, after, of course, we pray for him, get the burden of the Holy One for him and his destiny and purpose on earth, and start to feel his pain, if the Holy One opens a door for us to do we are to, in humility so tell the brother [or sister] *five things*:

First, we are to go to our brother personally and privately and inform him clearly, in honest, frank, yet non-condemning language, exactly what we believe his destiny requires and exactly how what we have seen him doing is leading him astray from that destiny.

Secondly, we are to tell him what the Holy One has revealed to us in prayer that *the consequences of such a straying from destiny* will be if not corrected.

Thirdly, we are to tell him *what the Holy One has revealed to us in prayer that He wants our brother to do to correct the situation*, make *t'shuvah*, and be reconciled with the Holy One, with his destiny, and with his fellow man.

Fourthly, we are to *promise our brother and ourselves not to uncover him publicly* – *i.e.* by speaking evil of him, or discussing his faults or mistakes, to or with others.

Fifthly, we are then to *offer our assistance in the process*, our prayer, and our forgiveness, and follow up diligently, continuing to bring light into his situation, not claiming superior spirituality in any way.

After all, it is the Holy One's plan that this same brother [or sister] will eventually, God willing, do the same for us when we ourselves err. This means that our lives and relationships are intended to consist of *meaningful interactions*. We are not to *fear* men – even those closest to us, whose affections and friendships we most treasure. We are Divinely instructed - and empowered - to *care enough to have real conversations about real issues* – *without judging, condemning, or adopting a condescending, self-righteous attitude*. This kind of approach is not “tidy”. It is not what our flesh wants. Our flesh, you see, wants one of two things. It wants either to *judge and feel superior, to look down on our brother, categorize him as not worthy of us, and to discuss his faults with our mutual friends*, all the time pretending we are doing so out of “love” (so the hearer of our gossip will think we are spiritual) – or it wants to *ignore our brother's wrongdoing and bad attitude, sweep it all under the rug* ‘in the name of love’ and *pretend everything is ‘just fine’* – while we *adopt a ‘martyr’ attitude*.

If we cave into our flesh in either of these ways however we *participate in our brother's sin, make it our own* - and *bear it* before man and before the Holy One. This is why Yeshua taught us in Matthew 18: ***If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother.*** Matthew 18:15. See also Galatians 6:1, where Shaul teaches: ***If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.***

What Yeshua describes in Matthew 18:15 and what Shaul describes Galatians 6:1 is what it means to *yakach* and to 'not hate' your brother. This has been God's plan all along, and was part of Torah. Yeshua was not announcing a new teaching. Real love, you see, absolutely requires carefully measured, loving, compassionate, selfless, and gentle intervention. Shaul's oft-quoted teaching in I Corinthians 13 that *love is patient, love is kind ... keeps no record of wrongs* should be read and understood against this backdrop. Love keeps no record of wrongs because love sees the end from the beginning, the tav from the alef, and chooses to focus on the joy of the great redemption scene that the Holy One desires and is paving the way for instead of the horror of the sin scenario that is presently unfolding.

What is love – Hebrew *ahavah* - after all? *Ahavah* is not what the world in which we live makes 'love' out to be. *Ahavah* is not ooey, gooey, honey-dripping hugs and kisses and smiles to someone's face, pretending there is nothing wrong. *Ahavah* is being very, very *real*. *Ahavah* is not surrendering to the flesh urge toward offense, woundedness, and/or outrage, but instead seeking and aggressively pursuing the Holy One's pathway to redemption in relation to every sin scenario. *Ahavah* is being willing to resist the urge to pontificate, or spread *lashon hara*, but instead to stay humble, respectful, and compassionate even toward the most egregious wrongdoer[s]. *Ahavah* is to both *speak* redemptive, restorative wisdom to, and *model* redemptive, restorative behaviors for, real people in the throes of human drama – and to do so one on one, not hiding behind a wall of feigned spirituality that really masks cruel judgmentalism. If we cannot - or will not – seek redemption and restoration for a fellow human being who sins, you see, we do not truly love him – or his Maker - however eloquently we may be able to spout politically correct generalities about *unconditional love* and flowery *clichés* about forgiveness. If we do not love our brother, the truth of the matter is that we do not love the Holy One. And when we neither love our brother nor the Holy One we will always sell our relationships with both out to any Ishmaelite caravan that passes our way and offers us a few shiny pieces of silver.

The Verdict

Toward the end of today's aliyah Y'hudah –whose descendants are destined to become the true leaders of the covenant nation – step up for his first leadership

role. Y'hudah says to the others:

Mah-beitza ki naharog et-achinu v'chisinu et-damo

'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood?

Lechu v'nimkereinu l'Yishme'elim v'yadeinu al-tehi-vo

Let's sell him to the Yishmaelites and not harm him with our own hands.

ki-achinu vesareinu hu

After all, he's our brother, our own flesh and blood.'

vayishmei'u echav

And his brothers agreed.

[Genesis 37:26-27]

Because Yosef is hated by his brethren he has been assaulted, stripped naked, and placed under a sentence of death. At Rueven's suggestion he has been thrown into a pit while the brothers sit down to porridge. The young dreamer's fate hangs in the balance. He has, at it were, been *found guilty* by a jury of his peers - and now helplessly *awaits his sentence*.

Yosef's accusers and adversaries press for the death penalty. Their message is loud and clear: *Now we have the chance! Let's kill him* **Genesis 37:20**. At this point in the narrative however, both Rueven and Y'hudah - for totally different reasons - decide it is time to intervene and mediate on Yosef's behalf a lesser punishment.

Rueven's Proposal – Lo Nakeinu Nafesh

Rueven the firstborn begins the process by protesting with the words: ***Lo nakeinu nafesh – Let's not take his life!***" **Genesis 37:21**. Under this proposal instead of being violently murdered [as had the Sh'chemites, at the hands of Sh'mon and Levi] Yosef would merely be *thrown into the pit* for a kind of 'trial by ordeal'. Once in the pit Yosef's ultimate punishment would be decided not by the brothers but by the Holy One. Most likely, of course, the brothers expected that the young dreamer would die of starvation, or by venomous serpent bite, or perhaps by being torn apart by wild beasts. But of course that would be left up to the Holy One.

Yosef's chances improved greatly with Rueven's suggestion – not necessarily because Rueven himself planned to rescue Yosef, although he did, but because the Holy One had plans for Yosef with which no serpent or beast of Creation would be allowed to interfere.

Y'hudah's Counter-Proposal – Mah-beitza?

Just as things are beginning to look a little bit better for Yosef however up stands Y'hudah. Y'hudah questions the wisdom of Rueven's plan, asking concerning it: ***Mah-beitza?*** This Hebrew phrase is usually translated into English as "*What is*

gained?” or “*What does it profit?*” Believe it or not these are the first words we have ever heard from the mouth of Y’hudah. Let’s consider them closely, shall we?

The Hebrew word ***mah*** means *what*. The Hebrew word ***beitza***¹⁰, used by Y’hudah in this interrogative, literally means *to cut off or break off* and thus means gain only in the *agricultural sense* of gain through *scything* and *threshing*. The phrase perhaps should thus more properly be rendered ‘***What is the cut?***’

What was Y’hudah really asking his brothers? Was he really appealing to their sense of *greed*? Was he really wanting to know how much each person’s ‘cut’ would be? It is possible of course. But it is also possible that Y’hudah was merely attempting to introduce *human logic* – instead of *raw emotion* – into the situation. He was asking a question that required a *cost-benefit analysis* and thereby transferred the thought processes concerning the circumstances from ‘*feeling*’ *driven intuitive* and *subjective decision-making* to the making of decisions based upon a *rational assessment of probable consequences and perceived benefits*.

That is going to prove to be Y’hudah’s leadership style throughout the generations to come. Y’hudah’s leadership will always seem to revolve around the same question - ***mah-betza?*** - *What is the cut/profit?* With Y’hudah, it is always all about *the bottom line*.

But back to our story. Y’hudah proposed that pragmatism – whether you define that as common sense or as greed - dictated that young Yosef not neither be killed nor left to die in the pit. Neither of those courses of action would yield a net profit to anyone. But there was another way ... what if young Yosef could be *sold into slavery*?

Y’hudah’s counterproposal was a classic compromise proposal, falling approximately midway between the extreme options of *returning Yosef safely home* [Rueven’s ultimate plan] and *murdering him* [the plan of the others]. Which idea do you like better, Dear Reader? If you has been there which would you have chosen? Rashi asserts that Y’hudah was actually worthy of great praise for working out this compromise. Rashi says that Ya’akov himself acknowledged this when he said, in connection with his deathbed blessing: ***Y’hudah ... from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself***. Genesis 49:8-9. To Rashi Ya’akov was referring to Yosef as the ‘prey’ and was referring to Y’hudah’s proposal to sell Yosef as a slave rather than kill him as the way Y’hudah ‘elevated’ himself. I confess that I have a hard time getting my mind around what Rashi is suggesting. But one thing is for sure - we will be hearing a whole lot more from this fellow Y’hudah in days to come than we have heard from him in days past.

¹⁰ *Betza* is *beit, tzade, ayin*. It is pronounced ***bait’-zah***.

Who Really Sold Yosef Into Slavery?

At this point in the narrative a strange thing happens - a group of Yish'maeli traders with a caravan of camels loaded with *spices* [Hebrew, *nechot*], *balm* [from *tzori* (*balsam*)] and *ingredients for incense and perfume* [Hebrew, *lot*], just happens to come by at exactly the right moment. Similarly, also seemingly out of nowhere just happen to come a group of Midyanites. Torah tells us plainly that it was the Midyanim - not the brothers - who physically pulled Yosef from the pit and sold him as a slave to the Yish'maeli traders for 20 pieces of silver. So the question arises – *who made the actual sale?* Did *the brothers* make the sale and get the silver - or did *the Midyanites*? Is it possible the Midyanites stole Yosef away and sold him while the brothers were still debating the Y'hudah's *mah betza* question? Or were the Midyanim simply 'middlemen' in the transaction? Torah does not say - at this point at least. All it says here is:

When Rueven returned to the well, Yosef was no longer there. [Reuven] tore his clothes in grief.

He returned to his brothers. 'The boy is gone!' he exclaimed. And I - where can I go?'

Rueven, what on earth do you mean “*Where can you go?*” Our flesh wants to scream across the centuries: “Rueven, *get real!*” Go home!!!! Someone has to break the news to Ya'akov ... don't they?

Meanwhile, if you want to know who really sold Yosef into slavery I have a suggestion for you – *Pssst ... FOLLOW THE MONEY!!!!* Watch and see, Dear Reader, who spends money like a drunken sailor over the next few *aliyot* of Torah.

The Cover-Up of Many Colors

Okay. It is time for another Rabbi's son 'keep in mind moment'. Are you ready? Keep in mind as you read the story of how the brothers deceive Ya'akov regarding what happened to his favorite son that many, many years previously Ya'akov himself had once slaughtered a goat surreptitiously, put on a garment of goat hair, took some of the meat of that goat which his mother had prepared to taste like wild game, lied to his father Yitzchak, and deceived him into bestowing upon him the blessing he had planned to give to Esav. A generation later Ya'akov is about to *reap what he sowed* so long ago.

As you read the Torah record, look for the three signs of the deception that tie in to the prior account – a *goat*, a *garment*, and *lies*. Here is how Torah describes the deception of Ya'akov by 10 of his sons:

[The brothers] took Yosef's garment.

They slaughtered a goat and dipped the garment in the blood.

They sent the long colorful garment, and it was brought to their father.

'We found this,' explained [the brothers when they returned].

Haker-na [Can you identify it?]
ha-ktonet bincha hi im-lo [Is it your son's garment or not?]
[Ya'akov immediately] *recognized it. 'It is my son's coat!' he cried.*
'A wild beast must have eaten him! My Yosef has been torn to pieces!'

Please note that Torah does not at this point record any response whatever being made, or the slightest twinge of guilt being felt, by any of the 10 brothers. They were unified in their conspiracy of stone-faced deception. Not one of them told the heart-broken patriarch the truth. Not a single one of them. All ten were eyewitnesses – *zero were truth-tellers*. They referred to the owner of the cover-up/coat of many colors as ‘your son’ – not as ‘our brother’. And yet another transaction was thus contracted in the marketplace of human misery.

Ya'akov's world collapsed around him. He tore his robes in grief. He put on sackcloth. In agony he mourned ... and mourned ... and mourned. *I will go down to the grave mourning for my son, he said.*

Ya'akov had wept before. He had, indeed, mourned many times. This was different. This was *the grief of a father for his beloved son*. This was *prophetic grief* arising out of a *personal tragedy*. Ya'akov's grief over Rachel had been horrible in its intensity. But at least in connection with Rachel's death Ya'akov had the offsetting joy of Binyamin's birth. For a while he at least had both Yosef and Binyamin by which to remember Rachel. Now, however, all he had left of Yosef was a bloodstained coat.

Ya'akov's grief over the loss of Yosef was so powerful that Ya'akov could simply never be comforted or consoled – not by anyone, and not by anything. There is a reason for that. Ya'akov's grief over Yosef was intended to serve, you see, as a prophetic type of the grief Ya'akov's progeny will experience in the end of days. As the prophet *Zecharyah* [Zechariah] describes it:

*... and they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son,
and will grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for his firstborn.*
[Zechariah 12:10]

The law of sowing and reaping is *still in effect*, Dear Reader. So be very, very careful *what you sow* into the field of life – and in what prophetic transactions you consider participating as you walk along the midway of the marketplace of human misery.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah the animosity between the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah and Yosef erupts, as the brothers lay in wait for and conspire to do away with “that dreamer” forever. As you read, keep in mind that all the brothers intend for evil

the Holy One our King will turn into good! Also, keep in mind that what happened to Yosef foreshadows what happened to our beloved Messiah Yeshua when He “*came to His own, and His own received Him not*”.

[A] Where was Yisrael/Ya’akov living as today’s aliyah begins?

[B] To what location did Yisrael/Ya’akov send Yosef to check on his brothers? What had happened at that location?

[C] What happened this time at the location where Yisrael/Ya’akov sent Yosef?

[D] In Strongs and Gesenius, look up the word translated as “man” in verse 15. Write the Hebrew word and its definition. Is this the same word as was used to describe the being which wrestled with Ya’akov by the River Yabbok back in Genesis 32:24? Who do you think this was?

[E] Where did Yosef find his brothers? Find that place in your Bible Atlas. What kind of terrain is there?

[F] What did the majority of Yosef’s brothers want to do to him, and why?

[G] What did Reuven counsel be done to Yosef instead? What reasoning did he use? Why do you think the others consented?

[H] What three things did the brothers do to Yosef? Can you think of a symbolic significance of each of these three things?

[I] From where had the caravan of Ishmaelites come? Where was its destination? What was it carrying? Does this foreshadow anything that happened to Yeshua?

[J] What was the price the Ishmaelites paid for Yosef? Look at Leviticus 27:1-5. What would this price later be revealed to represent? What was the “price” for which Yeshua was sold [Matthew 26:14-15]? What did that price represent [See Exodus 21:32]?

[K] How did Yosef’s brothers deceive Yisrael/Ya’akov into believing Yosef had been killed by wild animals? In a way, this method of deception was Ya’akov “reaping what he had sown”. Explain.

2. In today’s Haftarah reading the Holy One, speaking through Ha-Navi *Amos* [the prophet Amos], reminds Israel that its possession of the Eretz Yisrael [the land of Israel] was His doing, not theirs.

*I destroyed the Amori before them,
Whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks;*

Yet I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath.

*Also I brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim,
And led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amori.*

[A] By whom does the Holy One say the Amori [Amorite] was destroyed?

[B] What part did the Israelites play in the destruction of the Amori and the taking of the land?

[C] In verse 9 the Holy One says that He destroyed the Amori *fruit above* and the Amori *root below* when He gave Israel the land of promise. What “Amori *fruit*” in your life has the Holy One destroyed (or do you want Him to destroy)? What “Amori *root*” in your life has the Holy One destroyed (or do you want Him to destroy)?

3. In today’s aliyah from the B’rit Chadasha another ‘dreamer’ arouses jealousy among his “brothers”. This dreamer is a man named **Stefanos** [Stephen].

*The word of the Holy One increased
and the number of the talmidim multiplied in Y’rushalayim exceedingly.*

*A great company of the Kohanim were obedient to the faith.
Stefanos, full of faith and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.
But some of those who were of the synagogue called "The Libertines,"
and of the Cyrenians, of the Alexandrians,
and of those of Cilicia and Asia arose, disputing with Stephen.
They weren't able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.*

Hmmmmn. I think I may have met some of those ‘Libertine’ fellows’ descendants!

[A] What does the name Stephen mean?

[B] List the things that verses 7-8 say were happening before [according to verse 9] opposition to Stephen began.

[C] From where did the opposition come?

[D] The Roman province called “Cilicia” was where Tarsus was located - in fact, Tarsus was one of that province’s chief cities. Can you think of an influential Jew who came from Tarsus?

[E] The areas from which the opposition to Stephen arose were all areas that were highly “Hellenized”. Look up Hellenization in the encyclopedia and write a brief description of what that means and the effect you would expect that process to have upon a Jew.

*May your heart be flooded with light in this Chanukah season, Beloved;
and in that light may you treasure and cherish the brothers (and sisters)
the Holy One has given to you.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Aliyah

[Psalm 35:4-8]

*May those who seek my life be put to shame and brought to dishonor.
May those who plot my hurt be turned back and brought to confusion.
May they be like chaff before the wind,
and may the angel of the Holy One put them to flight.
May their way be dark and slippery,
and may the angel of the Holy One chase them down.*

*For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit,
which they have dug without cause for my life.
May calamity come upon him suddenly,
and may he be trapped in the net that he has hidden;
into the very danger he has planned for me may he fall.*