

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Miketz:** **Genesis 41:53 - 42:26**
 Haftarah: **II Chronicles 2:4-6**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 2:3**

All countries came to Yosef in Egypt to buy grain

[Genesis 41:57a]

Today's Meditation for today is Psalm 75:6-7;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #7, *Kabatz* [Ingathering]

Vatik'leynah sheva shnei ha-sava asher hayah – *And then the seven years of plenty were completed* Genesis 41:53.

It was quite the phenomenon; seven straight years of record-breaking crop production. That mean seven straight years of full cupboards and overflowing storehouses. This was prosperity at a never-before-seen level, filtering down to and raising the standard of living of all economic classes. Perhaps those seven years Egypt represent a foretaste of what life can be like under Messiah's Millennial Reign. Yosef, the Messiah prototype, showed the world what a 'wise and discerning man' who walks humbly with the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and prioritizes His Will and His Ways, can bring about if given the chance. There had been bountiful harvests here and there before, of course, but not since Eden has there been so much agricultural bounty coming forth every field, orchard, pasture, and garden, all at once. Yosef had tapped into something infinite and eternal - the Genesis 1:11/Third Day of Creation Week blessing over the earth! Each tract of land Pharaoh placed under Yosef's management has become fruitful and multiplied to the fullness of its potential, demonstrating the infinite productive capacity of the Creator's ecosystem when a man who walks in Covenant 'tends and keeps' it according to Divine instruction.

Let the Earth Bring Forth ... And It Was So!

With Yosef now firmly established as the 'Lord of the Harvest', suddenly every farmer and gardener in Egypt seem to have developed a green thumb. For seven straight years the Heavens and the earth aligned in perfect harmony – and everywhere the sole of Yosef's foot trod or the sound of his voice carried the land outdid itself. Deserts came alive, shook off centuries of barrenness, and burst into bloom. Every seed that anyone planted in Egypt germinated. Rain fell in season, awakening the latent productivity of the land. Every stalk of grain, every plant, not

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to mention every branch and twig of every tree, produced bountifully. Every acre produced a record crop. This sudden improvement in productivity had nothing to do with any new technology. It was not the product of the arrogant human mind's pseudo-science. This bounty resulted from one thing alone: the Holy One's release of His *p'ru v'urvuvu* [*i.e.* be fruitful and multiply] blessing upon a faithful son of the Covenant.

What did Yosef's blessing on the land mean for the protectorate Pharaoh has placed under Yosef's management? What does it mean for the world? It is what Proverbs 29:2 is all about. The rule of the righteous means banner years of Heavenly *shalom*; season after season of supreme blessedness; the former and latter rains coming in the proper time and in proper proportion; moderate temperatures; and the greenest pastures and stillest waters anyone has ever seen. It means year after year of record-setting bumper crops, free from locust invasion. It means an epoch free from the devastation of war. It means gardens, vineyards and orchards producing so much fruit, over such a long period, that people start decorating their houses with produce instead of eating it or storing it. It means bustling shuks, soaring profits; chicken in every pot, and silver in every sack. It means of granaries overflowing with grain, vats with oil, and cisterns with new wine. It was thus but a small sample of what we can expect to happen in Greater Israel when Mashiach reigns on earth. All Creation groans in eager expectation. Can you imagine? It was a foretaste of *man's ultimate return to the Garden!*

The Earth Became Edenic Again ... Alas, Mankind Did Not

The Hebrew text calls the seven-year boomtime period we are discussing a time of *sava* – *i.e.* an era of *fullness, satiation, saturation, and satisfaction*. During these seven years the economic center-of-gravity of the entire world shifted Egypt's way. The Holy One was doing His thing – moving the world's wealth around, shifting the balance of power from East to West, birthing a great migration of peoples, and changing the landscape of the earth. These are just the kinds of things He *has always done, is always in the process of doing, and will always do* to preserve the planet's ecosystem for future generations. He designed the earth for man to dwell in, and He knew the fullness of the depth of fallen man's propensity for corrupting the ecosystem around him when He did so. So whenever men do foolish or selfish things that pollute certain areas of it – subjecting those areas to reap-what-you-sow curses related to idolatry, sexual perversion, oppression of the poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the sojourner, the shedding of innocent blood, self-absorption, etc. - He knows exactly what it takes to cleanse and renew the land. Of course, the Holy One's 'cleanse-and-renew' methods are never pleasant for the people who did the polluting; but He never asks either their permission before doing what is necessary nor begs their forgiveness afterwards. To finite

human minds and fragile human frames the methods the Master of the World employs to shift around the world's food resources, wealth, water, power, and populations are often terrifying. They include climate change, atmospheric shifts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, typhoons, cyclones, forest fires, mudslides, floods, famines, pestilences, wars and rumors of war, the rise of greedy and/or bloodthirsty tyrants to power, and every kind of disaster that can possibly arise out of man's folly or bent toward selfishness. But while these tools both offend man's sense of self-importance and frustrate his craving to control the world with his mind, his emotions, his will, his illusion of 'science', his money, and his smug sense of moral superiority, they are absolutely essential for the greater good of the planet and the generations to come. The Holy One knows that man, in his fallen state at least, is simply not capable of managing the earth. Only He Himself is. And whatever it takes for the long term good of the ecosystem, that is what he will do. That is why weather patterns and climactic conditions change. That is why water and wealth keep getting moved around. That is why the *status quo* keeps morphing. That is why seasons of boom and bust, plenty and poverty, keep coming in cycles. That is why nations rise and fall. That is why cultures trend for a while, then fade into oblivion. That is why economies grow and shrink. That is why people leave one land in search for greater opportunities in another, spreading pestilence, violence, and filth everywhere they go. The process is almost always messy - and uncomfortable for everyone involved. Narcissistic and shortsighted men - especially demagogues, politicians, and social justice activists - decry it as evil', 'unjust', and 'unfair'. But it is none of the above. It is all just part of the Creator's brilliant, on-going '*cleanse-and-renew*' plan for the planet He has designed for mankind to inhabit. It is all about the Creator's brilliant, beautiful, but often terrifying rhythms of *seedtime and harvest, bloom and wither, ebb and flow, dawn and dusk, rise and fall, etc.* The ecosystem the Holy One has created for us gives - and then the ecosystem takes away. Blessed be the Holy One! Some might see all this as '*the House always wins*' - but in reality, *it is always mankind as a species who winds up being the ultimate beneficiary.*

Fault!!!! Advantage Mitzrayim?

This time, for this phase of the Holy One's 'cleanse-and-renew' Plan, the land of Pharaohs has been chosen as the beneficiary of climate change and wealth transfer. That meant that the land of Sphinxes and Pyramids was also about to become the destination location of the next great massive migration of human beings. Wherever there is wealth, you see, there will always be people taking note, and getting in line to claim a piece of it. As the Nile Valley prospered, people and goods from all over the world started to flood into Egypt like locusts. The wealthy of Egypt - which now included men like the young hero *Tzafenat-Paneach* and his beautiful wife *Asenat* - lived the 'high life' to the fullest - but even the average

working people ate well and enjoyed a higher standard of living and a sense of well-being. It was, in fact, one of the greatest economic ‘boom’ times- and mass migrations - in world history. It ranked right up there with what happened at Babel, Sodom, Gerar, and Yericho. And Susa. And Athens. And Rome. And Constantinople. And London. And Paris. And Berlin. And places like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley. Hmmm. Don’t look now, but I think we are seeing a trend developing here.

It seems that every ‘boom’ season has a *dark side* – and, in the long term, that never seems to bode well for the people, city, and culture at the epicenter of the boom. Unfortunately, every nation and region that experiences a boom season eventually comes to resemble a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, arrayed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations. As they say in New Orleans at *Mardi Gras* time “*Laissez le bon temps roller* [Let the good times roll!]” It is quite a ride; but it only lasts a moment, and then the word of the day becomes ‘*Sorry - Game Over!*’ And people get depressed, and say things like:

*Out, out, brief candle! Life is but a walking shadow,
a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more;
it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing².*

The Dark Side of An Abundant Supply of the Material Elements That Make Up Most People’s Idea of ‘Prosperity’

Alas, the history of mankind reveals that times of prosperity always tend to bring their own set of problems. First of all, an interesting phenomenon begins to occur in the people who are experiencing a ‘boom’. Instead of being grateful for and enjoying what they have, people tend to *become obsessed with a hunger for more and more*. They covet. There is always someone richer or more blessed, it seems. The grass on other side of the fence is always greener. So when people have a little leisure, and start to compare the quality of their possessions to the quality of things others, and think about the ‘irrelevant disparity’, their animalistic instincts come out and they start to get jealous. They stress and fret over the fact that the distribution of wealth is not in their favor – or at least equal – and they fume. Though they have more than they have ever had before – and far, far more than they need – they eventually start to *become paranoid*. They begin to fear that someone will come along, see their prosperity, want it the way they want the prosperity of the richer ones in their society, and take some of what they have away from them. Some work harder, to acquire more things they will enjoy less.

² The words are from the play ‘*Macbeth*’, Act V, Scene V. Shakespeare imagined these words being uttered the Scottish tyrant Macbeth, right after he learned of the death of his wife, Lady Macbeth’s, and right before his fatal confrontation with Macduff, whose family Macbeth had murdered.

Others slack off, or quit, thinking ‘what is the use?’ On all sides people start to *complain, argue, accuse, and assign blame* instead of rejoicing and giving thanks. They become addicted to *leisure, to comfort, to convenience, to connoisseurism, to building collections, and to indulging luxuries*. They cannot resist indulging their *fleshly appetites, urges, drives, and lusts* – and doing so in ever more nontraditional, unnatural, ostentatious, outrageous, and destructive ways. They substitute government programs run by bureaucrats and high-profile philanthropic organizations who compete for publicity and donations in the place of real-time kindness. Husbands and wives become strangers to one another. The sacred trust of raising up, educating, and caring for children is turned over to public institutions. People start to focus on *concepts and causes and ideologies and wealth-strategies* instead of on knowing, loving and serving God, being good stewards of Creation, and respecting their fellow men. Both the liberal and the conservative elements in the society begin to spin wildly out of control, spewing vitriol at each other. And not long after that the bubble always bursts.

The Bubble Bursts – and A Devastating Season of Famine Begins

After seven years of plenty, famine struck Egypt – and the rest of the world - right on schedule ... just as the young Hebrew slave Yosef had predicted. Rain just seemed to quit falling on the earth – at least in the areas that usually produced the most food. Seed simply ceased to germinate. Stalks refused to produce grain. It happened all over the world – including Egypt. Those who had been living the ‘high life’ suddenly had to learn to scrimp and save – or die.

It was as if the earth had been stricken by a plague. And that plague - called simply *ha-ra'av* [i.e. ‘the famine’] by the Torah - *took its toll* on everyone. Everyone that is except Pharaoh and his young ‘food czar’ *Tzafenat Paneach*. These men were prepared. With Pharaoh’s blessing *Tzafenat Paneach* had used the abundance of the seven years of plenty wisely, as the Holy One had counseled him to do. He had amassed great storehouses of grain – enough to feed the entire world. And suddenly favor with *Tzafenat Paneach* meant life or death to all inhabitants of planet earth. The following verses from today’s aliyah tell us the state of world economy of the world as the first year or two of famine begins to take its toll:

V'ha-ra'av hayah al kol-p'nei ha-aretz
The famine was over all the surface of the eretz.

vayiftach Yosef et-kol-asher bahem vayish'bor l'Mitzrayim
Yosef opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Mitzrim.

vayechezak ha-ra'av b'erezt Mitzrayim
The famine was severe in the land of Mitzrayim.

V'chol-ha-aretz ba'u Mitzraymah l'sh'bor el-Yosef

All countries came into Mitzrayim, to Yosef, to buy grain,

ki-chazak ha-ra'av b'chol-ha-aretz

because the famine was severe in all the eretz.

[Genesis 41:56-57]

The text says all countries went to Egypt to buy grain. All countries? *Really?* But what about Ya'akov, Leah, Reuven, Sh'mon, Levi, Y'hudah and all the covenant seed back in Kena'an? Surely the *covenant family* was exempted by the Holy One from the Great Famine ... right? After all, up to this point neither Ya'akov nor any of his sons, daughters or grandchildren had ever once lacked for food. Ya'akov's "deal" with the Holy One had included ample provision. At *Beit-El* (Bethel), when he had his first "God-encounter", Ya'akov had said:

*If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go,
and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to put on,*

so that I come again to my father's house in shalom, the Holy One will be my God

The Holy One had from that point forward amply provided for Ya'akov. Abundance had been his lot. The Holy One had richly *blessed him* and had *made him very wealthy*. His family simply did not know what it was like to lack. They could not conceive that they would *ever* lack. They believed life would go on forever *just as it had during their lifetime*. But the Holy One *knew better*. And Ya'akov, though not understanding everything, and fully confident that the Holy One would always provide all that they needed, also knew that the world was changing dramatically before his eyes.

Divinely Assisted Vision

And in this context Torah tells us something *very* interesting. In verse one of today's aliyah Torah tells us that Ya'akov – who had never been to Egypt and who lived several days' journey from Egypt *saw* that there was grain in *Mitzrayim* [Egypt]. **Genesis 42:1.**

Vayar Ya'akov ki yesh-sheiver b'Mitzrayim

Ya'akov saw that there were provisions in Egypt

Ya'akov obviously could not see with his *physical eyes* all the way from his home in Kena'an that there was food to be had in the faraway land of Egypt. And yet Torah says clearly that Ya'akov *saw* this. How can this be? How did Ya'akov — in Kena'an - see grain far, far, away – indeed, several days' journey away in the land of *Mitzrayim*? Remember that neither Ya'akov nor any of his sons [except, unbeknownst to him, *Yosef*] had ever even *been to Egypt*. Neither had his father Yitzchak ever traveled that way. The last Hebrews to visit that mysterious land - a couple of *centuries* previously - had been Avram and Sarai.

So how is Torah's declaration that Ya'akov 'saw' that there was grain in Egypt

even remotely possible? It was possible in the same way that it was possible for a much younger Ya'akov to *see* angels ascending and descending a ladder at *Beit-El*. It was possible in the same way it would later be possible for Moshe to *see* all of Kena'an, the land of promise, height and breadth, from a perch on top of Mt. Nebo.

The only way Ya'akov could see that there was food in Egypt was with spiritual eyes of prophetic insight specially granted to him by the Holy One. What Ya'akov saw in his spirit he reported. And he directed his sons to *take silver with which to buy food* and to embark on a journey to the land Egypt where he now realized the Holy One had stored the food with which He intended to sustain the world through this dark season of famine. The Hebrew verb English Bibles translate as *saw* is *ra'ah*³. The first usage of this verb in Torah is at Genesis 1:4, when we are told at the dawning of Creation, after the Holy One said "**Light, Be!**", and Light was, that the Holy One "saw [Hebrew, *ra'ah*] *the Light, that it was good.*" The Holy One did not see this Light and its essential eternal goodness with natural, human eyes – He saw it with "God-eyes". And that is the way Ya'akov *saw* grain in Mitzrayim – with "God-eyes". The Holy One *revealed it* to him. It was all part of *the Plan*. It was all pursuant to *the covenant* the Holy One had made with Ya'akov's grandfather Avraham.

Note what Ya'akov did and did not allow Ya'akov to see. He allowed him to see that there was grain in Mitzrayim, but he did not allow him to see that his beloved son Yosef was still alive and was actually in charge of Egypt's storehouses. There was much more, in fact, that he could NOT see than that he *could* see. That is the way it is with Inspired Vision. The Holy One does not let us see everything through His eyes – only those things that we need to know in order that we may follow His Divine Plan. Does that *frustrate you*, Dear Reader? If so, perhaps that is because you do not trust the Holy One to *be God*. If He knows what is *tov* [good, and productive of good, over and over again] and chooses to reveal only a little of what is going on, *be thankful for the little He reveals*.

Trust Him to reveal anything else you need to know. And trust Him as well to keep hidden from you all things you do *not* need to know - and of which your knowledge would not be *tov*. To desire knowledge beyond what the Holy One chooses to reveal, you see, is the basis of all *witchcraft* and *every occult practice*. All occult practices – from witchcraft to augury to spell casting to necromancy - are *ra*. They are products of pathological self-obsession, which bring only harm and suffering to the world because they birthed out of rebellion against the Holy One. Witchcraft and occult practices say to the Holy One "*you have not revealed enough to me, so I will seek knowledge [and power] elsewhere!*" Such things are *lo*

³ Ra'ah is Strong's Hebrew word #7200. It is pronounced *raw-aw'*.

tov [not good].

Silver for Bread

In today's aliyah from parsha ***Miketz*** *Ya'akov* [Jacob] sends his sons to the land of ***Mitzrayim*** to “buy food”. He said to them:

L'mah titra'u

'Why are you looking at each other?'

Vayomer hineh shamati ki yesh-shever b'Mitzrayim

'I have heard that there are supplies in Egypt,' he explained.

redu-shamah v'shivru-lanu misham v'nichyeh v'lo namut

'You can go there and buy food. Let us live and not die.'

[Genesis 42:1-2]

L'mah titra'u - “***Why do you just keep looking at each other?***” *Ya'akov* asked his sons. *Go buy food now - while you still can!* In today's world *Ya'akov* might have said “Do not expect the Holy One to drop Happy Meals and Enchiladas from Heaven for you, while you sit and congratulate each other on your covenant “rights”! He has given you strong backs and the silver necessary to prepare for the time of famine. Go - do something about it! Act on the Holy One's provision with wisdom and discretion. The Holy One will lead you, but you must go! Where, you ask? To Egypt, my sons! Where there is grain, go! Buy! Hurry! So that we may *live* and not *die!*

Ya'akov thereby sets in motion a process which will ultimately result in the Holy One's chosen people first being delivered from famine, and then being enslaved in the land of the Pharaohs for hundreds of years. *Ya'akov* understood the responsibility of being a “father” in the face of the imminent judgment of the Holy One. His task was to motivate his sons to drop their smug religious attitudes and unrealistic expectations and get *real*.

Vayirdu achei-Yosef asarah l'sh'bor bar mi-Mitzrayim

Yosef's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.

[Genesis 42:3]

Yes the Holy One is our provider. But even those in covenant with the Holy One have to *go where He pours out the provision* and *take possession of it*.

A New and Stunning Episode in the Narrative Of Torah

And thus the stage is set for a new and troubling episode in the narrative of Torah—the narrative of the mysterious interactions between the sons of *Ya'akov* and *Tzafenat-Paneach*, Viceroy of Egypt. *Tzafenat-Paneach* – who the reader knows to be *Yosef* – is going to behave very strangely in the course of these encounters. He will assume the role of deceiver and hide his true identity from

them. His actions will inflict even more grief upon his already heart-broken father. And he will do things to his brothers that no son of the covenant should do to another son of the covenant.

Yosef will play what will seem to us to be cruel games upon his brothers' minds and consciences. He will subject them to false accusations of spying when he knows they are doing nothing of the sort. He will wield the scepter of his new position whimsically, taking one of his brothers hostages and demanding that they bring their younger brother, Binyamin, to ransom him. He will alternately treat his brothers as royal diplomats upon whom he lavishes favor and gifts and as common hoodlums upon whom he heaps disdain and disgrace. He will entrap his own little brother in an elaborate scheme of false accusation of theft.

Whenever you come to a part of the narrative of Torah that you do not understand, and which seems to be totally inconsistent with what seems right and just, always stop and ask yourself *why does the writer of Torah deem it important to tell us these things?* What does Torah want us to learn from these sordid and unpleasant details? Is Torah only speaking of Yosef and his brothers – *or is it prophesying of a time and a circumstance yet to come?* Is it merely reciting a story of brotherly interaction or is it *whispering secrets about how to make sense of events that are scheduled to recur at the end of days?*

Keep your eyes and ears open. And ask for Divinely aided vision such as Ya'akov received. Meanwhile, back to the text we go.

Ya'akov Clings To None But Binyamin

Ya'akov now has (he thinks) only 11 sons. He sends ten of them on this journey. The sons Ya'akov sends to Egypt are, of course, the exact same 10 sons who a few years earlier orchestrated two of the most painful moments of Ya'akov's life. These are the same men who engaged in the deception, destruction and slaughter and spoliation of the Kena'ani city of Shechem which made Ya'akov's name a stench in the land of Kena'an and the same men who assaulted, abducted and sold into slavery their half-brother Yosef, and covered up their treachery with a conspiracy relying upon lies, goat's blood, and a despoiled garment.

The departure of these ten oldest sons will leave only Ya'akov – now an old man - and Binyamin – the youngest son, who is still regarded as a 'lad' - to '*hold down the fort*' so to speak, in Kena'an. Those two will have to protect the women, the children (we will find out, next week, that there are several), the livestock, the water sources, and all the supplies with which they are all sustained on a day-to-day basis.

The fact that Ya'akov chooses to send 10 of his sons – all except the youngest, Binyamin - to the Holy One's 'grocery store' is interesting. Why did he not just send two, or four, or five, or six? Why did he stretch himself so thin on the home front? Of course, there is safety in numbers, as the adage goes. There was to be sure a lot of desert between Kena'an and Egypt, and there were probably bands of robbers, pirates, outlaws, and desperados out there along the way. Perhaps the fact that a significant quantity of silver and a caravan of pack animals made tempting targets made Ya'akov feel he had to send as many men as possible to act as guards. Or perhaps Ya'akov figured that there was, in comparison, not going to be as much to steal at home [because of the ravages of the famine]. Or perhaps he felt he could rely upon the goodwill of his Kena'ani neighbors - who were, after all, now his in-laws in light of the dalliances of Y'hudah with Kena'ani women we read about last week in parsha *Vayashev*.

I suspect that Ya'akov felt pretty confident by now, having walked with the Holy One all these years, that the Holy One would protect *him*. But in light of past experience perhaps he was not anywhere near as sure that the Holy One would keep his eldest sons out of trouble – or protect his youngest from *them*. Hence, Torah tells us:

V'et-Binyamin achi Yosef lo-shalach Ya'akov et-echav
But Ya'akov did not send Yosef's brother Binyamin along with the others.

ki amar pen-yikra'einu ason
'Something might happen to him,' he said.
[Genesis 42:4]

Ya'akov has learned, you see, that *bad things can indeed happen to good people*. And as he had once prepared himself for the great showdown with Esav by dividing the indivisible and assigning priorities to lives which were all equally precious and indispensable, so he prepared for this new challenge of life. He separated his family into two groups – one to take silver and animals ahead and incur the greatest risk and the other to linger behind and carry on – just in case things went badly with the 'advance team'.

The Initial Down Payment on the Fulfillment of Yosef's First Dream

You will remember back at the beginning of *Vayashev*, which we studied last week, that Yosef, then a lad of 17 and still living at home, had a dream. Here is how Torah records the first of Yosef's dreams:

*... behold, we were binding sheaves in the field,
and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright;
and behold, your sheaves came around, and bowed down to my sheaf."*

When Yosef told this dream to his brothers they were not impressed. They interpreted the dream in a manner very personal to them – never even considering the broader prophetic implications that the dream contained. In their paranoia and jealousy the brothers saw Yosef as the one who was ‘standing upright’ and saw themselves as the ones who were bowing down. They missed the critical detail that the dream did not involve people standing and bowing at all, but instead involved SHEAVES [Hebrew, *alum'im*]. The brothers had no understanding that the ultimate meaning of the dream had to do with their progeny, many generations and centuries later. They took the dreams personally, got highly offended at the idea that young Yosef might one day be more prominent than they, and responded in anger. They said to him: *Will you indeed reign over us? Or will you indeed have dominion over us? They hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words.*

It is very interesting that when the brothers get to Egypt the first thing that happens is that their angry misinterpretation of Yosef’s dream actually attains a level of reality. Torah tells us that when they went to buy grain and encountered the man they would later discover was Yosef, *vayish'tachavu-lo apayim ar'tzah* – i.e. *they prostrated themselves to him, with their faces to the ground.* **Genesis 42:6.**

Never make fun of anyone else’s dreams, Dear Reader. You may one day become an unwilling participant in some level of the fulfillment of the very dreams you ridiculed.

Yosef’s Accusation: You are SPIES!

Consider *the irony* of this situation. After many long years of suffering Yosef now has *the power of life and death* over those who have hated and abused him early in life. He could order their heads severed at this moment - and no one would ask a single question. But that would not be a punishment fitting for their crime against him. And that would not be *the Torah way*.

Guilt, according to the Torah way, must be adjudicated *according to principles of due process of law, and punishment, if appropriate, must be administered measure for measure.* These men had not killed Yosef. But they had in order to justify their treatment of him considered him a ‘spy’ against them. To them he had never been viewed or treated as a *brother*. He had instead been viewed and treated as a *spy* sent by their father to check up on - and tell off on - them.

In the brothers’ accusation of ‘spying’ lay the very seed and bitter root of the enmity between them. And so Yosef *goes right to the bitter root* - and turns the old accusation of ‘spying’ back on the heads of his older brothers.

Vayomer aleihem meraglim
And he said to them “You are spies!”

atem lir'ot et-ervat ha-aretz batem
'You have come to see where the land is exposed to attack.'
[Genesis 42:9b]

Some look at what Yosef did and said in his dealings with his brothers and think he was being *vindictive* and *cruel*. They apparently think he should have just gone through some kind of '*forgiveness*' ceremony relative to his brothers on the spot. The people who feel that way, however, do not understand the Hebrew concept of *genuine love* – which involves *rebuking your neighbor* when he is wrong every bit as much as it involves feeding him when he is hungry, visiting him when he is in prison, and clothing him when he is thirsty.

Those who think that Yosef should have immediately and magnanimously said "***Ani Yosef!***" [i.e. I am Yosef!], and "*I forgive you for everything you ever did to me!*" simply do not understand the teaching of Torah regarding the pathways of forgiveness and reconciliation. According to Torah, you see, forgiveness for wrongdoing is neither a *mushy, sentimental feeling* nor a *momentary act of generosity or 'good will toward men'*. Those types of emotions are *superficial* and *transitory* - and essentially self-centered - and in the long run actions performed and words spoken out of such superficial and transitory emotions often wind up *doing more harm than good both to the wrongdoer and the person who was wronged*.

According to the Torah forgiveness and reconciliation consist of a *scripted and sometimes protracted process consisting of a series of steps that must be taken by both the wrongdoer(s) and the wronged person, all of which are designed to bring real and lasting closure of old wounds, removal of guilt, and permanent and meaningful reconciliation*.

Tzafenat Paneach's official accusation of spying against these ten men of Kena'an actually constitutes a positive *initial step* in the forgiveness and reconciliation process. Look at the brothers' response to this accusation carefully, line by line.

Vayomeiru eilav lo adoni

'No my lord!' they replied.

v'avadeicha ba'u lish'bor ocheil

'We are your servants who have come only to buy food.'

Kulanu b'nei ish-echad

We are all the sons of the same man.

nachnu kenim

We are truthful/trustworthy men.

anachnu lo-hayu avadeicha meraglim

We would never think of being spies!'

Vayomeiru shneym asar avadeicha achim

We are twelve brothers, they pleaded.

anachnu b'nei ish-echad b'ereetz Kena'an

We are the sons of one man who is in Canaan.

V'hineh ha-katon et-avinu hayom

Right now the youngest brother is with our father,

V'ha-echad eyneinu

and one brother is not.'

In these words Yosef hears all he needs to hear to know these men's hearts and minds. He hears more than he needs to hear to know that *these men are not by any means ready to receive forgiveness* – because they simply do not think of themselves as having done – or being capable of doing - anything wrong. First of all, the brothers clearly think of themselves as *kenim*, men who are truthful and trustworthy – *i.e.* men whose *ken* [*i.e.* 'yes'] is *ken*, and whose *lo* [*i.e.* no] is *lo*. Some English translations render the term *kenim* as 'honorable'. These men clearly do not see themselves as the deceivers they really are. Secondly, the brothers clearly think they are above tale-bearing and gossip. They say they would never *think* [English approximation] of being *meraglim* [literally, meaning talebearers and slanderers]. They do not yet see that what they hated most about Yosef when he was living at home was actually a trait that lay at the core of their very own souls. They do not see that both their rash judgment against all men of Shechem and their labeling of their own brother as 'that dreamer' to whom they could not speak a peaceable word, were most definitely the actions of *meraglim* [talebearers, slanderers]⁴. These are the same men who rationalize such things as '*the men of Shechem had it coming*', that '*that dreamer Yosef got exactly what he deserved*', and '*what father does not know does not hurt him.*'

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly it should be noted that *these men are all still spouting the same old deception about what happened to their missing brother*. About the missing brother they say "***v'ha-echad eyneinu*** [and one 'is not'⁵]." What

⁴ The reader should also note the prophetic aspect of Yosef's accusation that his brothers are '*meraglim*'. The sin that would lead to the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness a few generations after this confrontation would be called the *chet ha-meraglim* –, the sin of the spies. The sin itself would consist of ten men [as here], all descended from the men who now knelt before Yosef, opposing a descendant of Yosef [Y'hoshua son of Nun] and a man suspected of being an engrafted foreigner [Kalev son of Y'funneh], publicly spouting and causing people to believe a slanderous report about the land of promise to which the Holy One was leading the children of Israel.

⁵ The phrase the brothers choose to employ to describe the missing brother [who, of course, is Yosef] – *eyneinu* – is the same phrase Torah uses to describe Noach's ancestor Hanoach [Enoch], who was *eyneinu* because the Holy One 'took' him.

do they mean he *'is not'*? *Who do they think they are kidding?* These men – like most of us I am afraid - think of themselves much more highly than they ought. The process of forgiveness for such men is not going to be either easy or quick.

Taking the 'Long Road' to Redemption

In light of the continuing hardness of the brothers' hearts Yosef sets in motion a *long-range plan of redemption*. The first thing he does is *arrest and imprison all ten of these men for 3 days*. In this manner he makes sure the brothers all get an ever-so-slight taste of what their callous actions toward him caused him to endure for many long years. On the third day of their imprisonment, however, Yosef gave them a respite, saying:

Im-kenim atem achichem

We will see if you are really being candid.

echad ye'aser b'veyt mish'marchem

One of you will be remain in the same building where you have been kept.

v'atem lechu havi'u sheiver ra'avon bateychem

The rest can go and bring supplies to your hungry households.

V'et-achichem ha-katon tavi'u elay

Bring your youngest brother back here,

veye'ameinu divreichem v'lo tamutu

and your claim will be substantiated, and you will not be killed.

The first stage of Yosef's plan to bring his brothers to redemption works like a charm. As they leave Yosef's presence they finally speak the truth – at least among themselves:

Aval ashemim anachnu al-achinu

We deserve to be punished because of what we did to our brother

asher ra'inu tzarat nafsho b'hitchaneino eleinu

We saw his suffering of his soul when he pleaded with us,

V'lo shamanu

but we did not respond.

al-ken ba'ah eleinu ha-tzarah hazot

That is why this great misfortune has come upon us now.'

Vaya'an Re'uven otam l'emor

Reuven interrupted them, saying:

halo amarti aleichem l'emor al-techeit'u vayeled

'Didn't I tell you not to commit a crime against the boy?'

v'lo shematem

'But you wouldn't listen.

v'gam-damo hineh nidrash

So now an accounting is being demanded for his blood!'

[Genesis 42:21-22]

The first step in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation is now complete. Yosef now knows *there is hope* for his brothers. But he also knows that their sin has not just been against the Holy One and against him, but has also been against their grieving father and young Binyamin.

While they have acknowledged to themselves the sin they committed against the Holy One and against him they have yet to acknowledge the horrible offense they have committed and the trauma their misdeeds have inflicted upon Ya'akov and Binyamin. Yosef – er, *Tzafenat Paneach* - therefore sends them back to Kena'an with ample supplies of food but without Sh'mon. He is arranging it so that they have to confront and deal with the rest of the consequences of their self-obsessed and violent past. You see, Dear Reader, the next essential step in the forgiveness and reconciliation process Yosef has initiated cannot occur outside the presence of the other parties these ten *kenim* have horribly wronged – the very men who will come out to greet them upon their return to Kena'an.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's continue our study by answering a few questions.

[A] What was Ya'akov's stated reason for sending 10 of his sons to Mitzrayim?

[B] Which son did Ya'akov keep with him, and what was his reason?

[C] According to verse 6, what was Yosef's official position in Mitzrayim?

[D] How does verse 6 describe Yosef's job responsibilities?

[E] What did Yosef's brothers do when they came into Yosef's presence?

[F] Of what did Yosef accuse his brothers?

[G] What "test" did Yosef come up with to determine if his brothers would be truthful?

[H] After three days, Yosef changed the "test". How did he change it?

[I] Read verses 21-22 carefully. In these verses, the brothers have a conversation - not about buying grain - in Hebrew (which they did not know the man in charge of the grain understood because they did not know who he was). What was the subject of this conversation? What did it have to do with what was happening to them at this time?

[J] Yosef released 9 of the brothers to go back to Kana'an. Which one did he keep in custody? Why do you think Yosef chose to keep this brother rather than Reuven, the firstborn?

[K] What surprise awaited the 9 returning brothers when they stopped at an inn for the night? What was their reaction to this surprise?

[L] Read Isaiah 55:1-2. What comparison do you see between those verses and today's aliyah?

2. In today's Haftarah we continue to examine the early days of Shlomo's reign, when he was walking in the revelation of the wisdom of the Holy One after a divine visitation. Shlomo saw the house he was about to build through "God-eyes" – *partially*, of course. He saw that it was not a temple in which a local deity would dwell. He saw it as a *portal to heaven* – at the location where one of his ancestors had *seen*, with "God-eyes", a ram appear out of nowhere, with its horns caught in the brush, and where another of his ancestors had seen, with "God-eyes", angels ascend and descend on a ladder. No voice whispered to him "*if you build it, they will come*".

Look with me through the following verses of Scripture into Shlomo's mind and heart. He is not building a shrine for his people to visit, a monument to his ancestors, or a "house of worship". He desires merely to build a place set apart where *Torah* is the constitution – an earthly foyer for the Holy One's heavenly throne room.

*Behold, I am about to build a house
for the **shem** of the Holy One my God, to dedicate it to him,
and to burn before him incense of sweet spices,
and for the continual show bread,
and for the burnt offerings morning and evening,
on the Shabbatot, and on the new moons,
and on the set feasts of the Holy One our God.*

*This is [an ordinance] forever to Yisra'el.
The house that I build is great; for great is our God above all gods.
But who is able to build him a house,
seeing heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain him?*

Who am I then, that I should build him a house, save only to burn incense before him?

[A] List the 4 purposes for which Shlomo tells king of Tyre that he is going to build the Temple.

[B] How would you describe Shlomo's attitude toward himself and towards the Holy One at this stage in his life?

[C] As Shlomo meditated upon, and planned out, the building of the Temple, the Holy One knew that the physical structure Shlomo was about to build would last only a few hundred years, then be totally destroyed. Do you think the Temple was the Holy One's idea, or Shlomo's? Explain *why* you think the Holy One permitted – and ultimately blessed – the building of the Temple, when He had neither requested nor commanded it (all He ever specifically told anyone to build was the *Mish'kan* – a "tent of meeting").

[D] In this season of *Chanukah*, we remember the cleansing and rededication of the Temple and its altar – its being made ready for Messiah to come. Why do we commemorate the cleansing and rededication of something that was destroyed only a couple hundred years later, and has not been rebuilt since?

3. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha Shaul of Tarsus describes the attitude that he had in him when he was first introduced to the believers in the Greek city of Corinth.

*I was with you in **weakness**, and in **fear**, and in **much trembling**.*

[A] In Strong's Concordance look up the words translated "weakness", "fear" and "trembling" [KJV] in verse 3. Write each such Greek word and its meaning.

[B] How does Shaul's attitude as reflected in verse 3 compare to the attitude of Yosef's brothers in today's aliyah?

[C] How does Shaul's attitude as reflected in verse 3 compare to the attitude of Shlomo in today's haftarah verses?

*May your heart be as tender toward the Holy One this day
as was the heart of Shlomo at the beginning of his reign, **AND**
May your heart be as tender toward your fellow man this day
as was Shaul's toward the people of Corinth
at the beginning of his ministry there.*

The Rabbi's Son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 75:6-7

*For neither from the east, nor from the west,
nor yet from the south, comes exaltation.
But the Holy One is the judge.
He puts down one and He lifts up another.*