

Introduction to Parsha #11: Vayigash¹

READINGS: ***Torah Vayigash:*** Genesis 44:18 - 47:27
 Haftarah: Ezekiel 37:15 -28
 B'rit Chadasha: Luke 6:6-49



I am Yosef, your brother!
[Genesis 45:4a]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 8, Mishpat [Doing What the Holy One Would Do]

Vayigash elav Yehudah – Then Yehudah came very close to him ***vayomer bi adoni yedaber-na avdeicha davar b'oznei*** – and he said: if you please, my lord, let your servant now whisper a matter in your ear **Genesis 44:18a.**

The Covenant Family's latest round of epic adventures in the land of the pyramids has brought Torah's narrative to a heart-stopping crisis point. A brazen crime has been committed against a high-ranking member of Egyptian society – and, of course, all the evidence points to a son of the Covenant as the perpetrator. Hmmm ... haven't we heard this story before? Don't worry too much about that now, though – because we are on the cusp of another major plot twist.

The Great Stand-Off

The powerful viceroy that everyone calls Tzafanat-Paneach has taken the Hebrew boy Binyamin captive ... and he is NOT about to let him go. Binyamin's brothers have made a commitment to their father not to return home without the lad ... so there is no way they are going to leave the boy in Egypt. It is quite a dilemma, isn't it? You could cut the tension with a knife. Neither side will budge. Nobody wants another *Sh'chem* episode [See **Genesis 34**]. But the status quo is unacceptable. Something has to give ... so **WHAT WILL IT BE?** Who among the players in the

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high-stakes drama unfolding in Tzafanat-Paneach's palace will stay level-headed enough to de-escalate the tension and resolve the dilemma? Don't worry – there will be no blood shed in the palace of Egypt's impetuous viceroy today. Will there be *tears*, you ask? Hush child! You wouldn't believe me if I told you!

Yehudah Steps Into the Breach

At the critical moment of the great standoff something 'clicked' in the heart of Yehudah – and he threw caution to the wind. Breaking ranks with his brothers, he stepped out alone. He put his life, and all his brothers' lives, at risk by approaching an Egyptian governmental official without a summons, invitation, or extended scepter. As Torah records it: ***Then Yehudah came near to him*** [i.e. Egyptian viceroy Tzafanat-Paneach]***and said:***

Adonai y'daber-na

"O my lord, please now ...

Av'deicha dabar b'oz'nei Adonai

May your servant speak a word in my lord's ear

[Genesis 44:18]

Each soldier in the viceroy's royal guard immediately went on high alert. Each one instinctively brought his spear to the 'launch' position, awaiting their leader's command to strike this brazen Hebrew down in his tracks. Didn't the rogue know that breaches of court protocol like this were not – *could not be* - tolerated? And what language was that he speaking to the viceroy anyway? Everybody knew that the official language of Tzafanat-Paneach's court and palace was EGYPTIAN, not HEBREW! How exactly did Yehudah expect this episode of brash behavior on his part to end – for him, for his brothers, for his father and family back in Kena'an, and for that matter for young Binyamin?

Throughout the Hebrew delegation, pulses were racing, heads were shaking in disbelief, and hearts were sinking like stones. ***NO, YEHUDAH! STAND DOWN!*** You are going to get us all killed! But there was no stopping him. The Covenant family was in crisis, and this was not the time to either play it safe or stand on etiquette. The family's patriarch, Ya'akov, had already lost one favorite son, and it had almost killed him; seeing him lose another on his 'watch' was not an option that Yehudah was willing to accept. He had to think – and act - 'outside the box'. He had to think like a son of the Covenant. He had to step up – calmly, confidently, and non-threateningly; not surrendering to the passions of the flesh, but responding to the gentle prompting of mature FAITH.

Yehudah had, you see, faced a critical situation much like this twice before. Decades ago, when he was still in the throes of adolescence, he had to deal with a threat to a member of his family that was somewhat similar to this. Dinah, his full-

blood sister, an innocent child, had wandered off unescorted into a city of pagans looking for other little girls to play with. It was a child's mistake – and it had terrible consequences. A young prince of that city saw her – and took her. The lusty pagan molested her, then held her captive. Yehudah did not respond to that situation like a lion, but like a wild wolf or hyena. He took a 'follower' role instead of a leadership role. He let his uncontrollably outraged older brothers Sh'mon and Levi talk him into a 'counsel-of-the-ungodly, way of sinners, and seat-of-the-scornful quality response in the course of which he and his brothers acted more like Nimrod than Avraham, more like Yish'mael than Yitzchak, and more like Esav than Ya'akov. Yehudah participated in a criminal conspiracy of his brethren that quickly escalated from covenant-breaking treachery to vastly disproportionate and irresponsibly indiscriminate acts of violence, to the slaughter of innocents, and to human-trafficking. He tasted vengeance – and his flesh reveled in it. He justified his rage – and his response – with the vague, self-righteous, virtue-signaling, emotionally-satisfying but spiritually bankrupt slogan "*He should not have treated our sister like a harlot.*" **Genesis 34:31**. As a result, the names of Ya'akov and his sons became a stench in the land.

A few years later the Holy One gave Yehudah a second chance to take up the mantle of familial/covenantal leadership. This one involved his younger half-brother Yosef, a very special coat, a couple of youthful dreams, seething jealousy over fatherly favor, and a pit. Yehudah did not respond to this challenge like a lion either – but like what Solomon, the writer of the Book of Proverbs, would later call a *k'sil* ['scoffer' - see e.g. **Proverbs 17:21 and 21:24**] and a *meira* ['evildoer' - see e.g. **Proverbs 17:4**]. Again he resorted to treachery, to violence, to theft, and to human-trafficking. His flesh-satisfying, pseudo-intellect justifying mantra this time was ***Mah beitzah*** – i.e. *how can I turn a profit? Let's sell him to the Yish'maeli!* **Genesis 37:26-27**.

Yehudah has now been given a third bite at the apple. This is a test from the Holy One - is the fourth son of Leah truly a lion, as his father sees him [see **Genesis 49:9**] – or is he just a petty, lying, self-obsessed braggart and brigand. Does Yehudah belong in a leadership role in the Creator's Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and for the Restoration of all Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, shalom, and harmonious interworking – or does he belong in chains, bearing stripes? The next few moments will set the tone for the stories we tell our children about Yehudah; but be aware, this is not just about Yehudah. Crisis situations are coming that will determine what will be written and said about you as well.

While the particular member of the Covenant family that is in serious trouble this time, Binyamin, has never by any means been Yehudah's favorite kinsman,

Yehudah finally realized that far more was at stake than the well-being of Rachel's youngest himself. Now a father himself – and one who had been bereaved of two sons as well - Yehudah was finally able to see and appreciate the bigger picture – if anything happened to Binyamin, he now really understood how devastated Ya'akov would be. For decades he had considered both of Rachel's children 'the enemy in the camp'. He had resented their closeness to – and special favor in the eyes of - Ya'akov. But he now realized how childish – even narcissistic – all that was. Now that he had a bit of gray in his beard, and a heavy dose of hard-knock life experience under his belt, he realized that there were more important things in this world than his feelings, opinions, or sense of what is and is not 'fair' or 'just'. He had finally begun to grasp the truth that sometimes what needs to happen for either the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven or the greater interest of one's family is not going to be anything either his self-absorbed flesh or self-righteous pseudo-intellect considers 'fair' or 'just'. Sometimes, he now understood, in a family the innocent must lay down his life, his comfort, and his inheritance for the sake of those who at least appear to be guilty. Sometimes the interest of the family - or the world – requires a humble, self-denying, *willing-to-surrender-it-all-for-the-sake-of-another* approach. Sometimes even a Ya'akov, a Yehudah, or a Yeshua with a greater destiny must swallow his pride, risk his life, and submit to a base, profane, and even cruel man – a man like Esav, a man like the Egyptian Viceroy Tzafanat-Paneach, or a man like Pontius Pilate, in order that others may go free.

Greater love has no man than this: that he should lay down his life for his friends. Yes, Yehudah has grown a lot over the course of his life. He is beginning to think, speak, and act like a son of the Avrahamic Covenant. His true colors are about to shine through. Watch out, world – this could change everything!

How Does a Son of the Covenant Bring About Meaningful Change?

As a son or daughter of the Covenant, what are you to do if/when you see a situation that cries out for Divine intervention? Watch Yehudah this week, and learn. If you want to do something to change the *status quo* in a positive, Kingdom of Heaven advancing way, don't scream; don't shout; don't rant; don't whine. Raising your voice or taking on an angry, sarcastic, or self-righteous tone makes you look small, desperate, and petty. All the bluster actually tends to reduce the weight and credibility of whatever it is you are trying to say. If you add a little profanity, spout a novel conspiracy theory, or regurgitate an ideological talking point, you may get an audience, but it will be an audience of users and takers. In the minds of the people who could actually do something about whatever it is you are talking about, things like profanity, conspiracy theories, and ideological or religious clichés take away all credibility whatever. Take on an air of moral superiority and climb on a soapbox and the people who matter will write you off completely. If you really want to be heard, stay calm, be respectful, keep it real

and personal, and when you speak, don't shout ... *whisper!*

Meet Yehudah - The Restoration Whisperer

Week 11 of the Torah cycle is upon us – and it finds us approaching a dramatic turning point in *the Grand Redemption Story*. Someone is about to do something to seriously shake up the *status quo*. Someone is about to throw caution to the wind and take *a step of faith that will shift the atmosphere in the world*. Someone is about to *pull the rug out from under all the intrigues of men and make a way for the Plan and Purposes of Heaven to swoop in and change everything*. Anger, suspicion, and anxiety-bordering-upon-despair will give way to tender compassion, transparency leading to trust, and peacefulness bordering on ecstasy. And the past, the present, and the future of the Covenant People are all going to look a *whole lot different* as a result.

Get ready for an atmosphere shift. Get ready for a stunning moment of clarity. Get ready for a *prophetic reconciliation* scene that will be *retold in all generations* – and *relived* in at least one.

Welcome to the Parsha of Glorious Reconciliation

The name of this week's transformational parsha is *Vayigash*. This Hebrew phrase means ... *and [he] drew very close*. This is going to be the *parsha of Stunning Forgiveness and Glorious Reconciliation*. In the course of its narrative the festering sin pattern of inner-family jealousy that has brought heartbreak and redemptive judgment upon the Covenant Household – and therefore the world - for generations will at last be exposed, dealt with, and overcome. After decades of denial, of conspiracies and cover-ups, and of living in paralyzing fear and shame – not to mention inflicting immeasurable pain and grief upon bereaved fathers and mothers - the household of the Covenant of Mankind's Redemption is finally going to find the pathway to peace. *Selah!*

As it happened in the lives of our forefathers may it happen in our day and in our lives as well. And may our eyes be open to see the prophetic script for the Ultimate Reconciliation of the Ages playing out before us on the pages of Torah. May the words of Torah we read this week be recognized and received for all they are: 1. as a *manual on how to facilitate and respond to reconciliation* between estranged brothers, and 2. as a significant *down payment on the reconciliation between Mashiach and all twelve tribes* in the coming Age of Redemption. And may we – with all Israel and all mankind - look upon Him Whom we have pierced, mourn for him as an only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

Before we get to that, however, it probably behooves us as we stand on the precipice of such a great reconciliation to take a step back a moment, take a deep

breath, and consider how it was that we got here – and why we find ourselves in such desperate need of things like reconciliation and redemption in the first place.

If It Were Not So ...

This is a fitting time, I believe, to revisit some of the things we said at the beginning of our journey through the Torah together. First of all, at the beginning of our journey through Torah we warned the reader that these lessons are not designed as or intended to be just another Bible study. We warned in the introductory *shiur* that from its opening word the Hebrew text of Torah was going to *assail us like a two-edged sword*, and that it would be used by the Holy One with surgical precision to *confront* our complacency, to *expose our hypocrisy*, to *challenge* every element of our self-image and worldview, to *disarm our petty attempts at systematic theology*, to *debride our dead and diseased flesh*, and to *change us forever*. We suggested that the purpose of the Holy One in doing all these things was to transform us into a people who know His Voice and who live only to *sh'ma* [listen for, discern, hear, receive, internalize, understand and walk out in rubber-meets-the-road real life situations] His instructions for living.

Secondly we stated from the beginning that the study of Torah tends to – because it is *designed to* - leave the student with many, many *more questions than answers*. We suggested that the Holy One intentionally jam-packed the Torah with mysteries we cannot – however much we study or pray – even come close to comprehending. We posited that the Holy One gave the Torah to us in the rather unorthodox and question-provoking form He did because He did not want us to fancy ourselves as theologians who could through study *figure Him out, put Him in a tidy little box, remake Him in their own image, and treat Him like a genie that grants our selfish wishes*, but instead was calling forth a people who like little children would constantly *gaze up at Him with wide-eyed wonder* and *trust Him with child-like confidence to always know – and tell us - what is best* and what is *right* and what is *just* and what is *expedient* and what is, in the long-range plan of the Holy One for His creation, *good*.

Vayigash is going to bring this point home for us. *Vayigash* will witness the return of the God-encounter. In the approximate center of the *parsha ha-shavua* we will finally – and for the last time in the Book of Genesis – read the glorious words “*And the Holy One said ...*” We will not see that phrase – or hear that Voice - again until the burning bush encounter of Exodus 3. *Selah!*

What, then, will the Holy One say this week? How will He prepare us for what He knows is coming – though we do not? What words of empowerment will He brand on our DNA to get us – and our progeny – through the approaching *era of eerily*

silent nights? What words of awakening, inspiration, and direction does He plan to release into earth's atmosphere at – and for - such a time as this? Let's let Torah tell us, shall we?

Vayomer Elohim l'Yisra'el b'mar'ot ha-laylah

And Elohim spoke to Israel in a night vision,

vayomer Ya'akov Ya'akov vayomer hineini

and said, 'Ya'akov! Ya'akov!' And he said "I am here."

Vayomer anochi ha-El Elohei avicha

And [Elohim] said, 'I am the Omnipotent One, the God of your father.'

al-tira mer'dah Mitzraymah

Do not be afraid to keep going down to Egypt

ki-l'goy gadol asimcha sham

for it is there that I will make you into a great nation.

Anochi ered imcha Mitzraymah v'anochi a'alcha gam-aloh

I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will also bring you back again.

V'Yosef yashit yado al-eyneicha

Yosef will place his hands on your eyes.'

[Genesis 46:3-4]

The final message of the Holy one in the book of Genesis is simply that the stage is now set, that all conditions precedent are now met, and that it is now time, *for Israel to go into exile in Egypt* – and then to come forth from that exile better, stronger, wiser, and more connected to and flowing in the *Yosef vision* than ever.

Wait A Minute – Did You Say Exile?

Yes, Dear Reader, that is exactly what I said. The Covenant Household is about to follow the pathway of Yosef *en masse* and take up a new life as wayfaring strangers in a strange and often unfriendly land. The Holy One had told Avraham that this was going to happen a long time ago. Now as the appointed time approaches the Holy One appears to Ya'akov/Yisrael to assure him [and us] that whatever horrible things might await the children of the Covenant in the land of Exile, well ... *it is all going to turn out all right*. Though the embrace of one Pharaoh will turn into enslavement by another, He was going to make sure that it is still going to turn out all right. Though many men with Ya'akov's blood and DNA are going to die under the cruel taskmaster's whip before the sojourn in Egypt was over, He is still going to work all things together for good for all who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. Though untold numbers of Ya'akov's descendants will be drowned in the Nile before the Holy One brings them and a mixed multitude of all nations of the earth out of bondage by His mighty Arm and His strong Right Hand, He is going to make sure that His Covenant with Avraham is fulfilled, and that when we come forth from captivity our mouths will be filled

with laughter, our tongues with singing, and that we will come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves, as the nations proclaim: the Holy One has done great things for them!

Of course, it does not seem possible to us - considering all the pain and personal tragedy that was coming in just a few years - that it is still going to turn out all right. Whether it seems so to us or not, though, it will, indeed be all right – actually, far better than all right. It may take a glance at the Haftarah of the week, however, to understand why that is so. What is at stake, you see, is much, much bigger than a few decades, or even centuries, of injustice, oppression, and human suffering.

The Call Goes out: “Gentlemen, Place Your Bets!”
Yehudah’s Response: “I’m All In”

Are you familiar with the game of *Roulette*? *Roulette* is a French word meaning ‘small wheel’. The game by that name involves placing a ball on a spinning wheel around the circumference of which 37 or 38 numbers are inscribed in alternating red and black squares. As the wheel spins, the ball bounces from square to square. When the wheel stops spinning, the ball settles in one of the squares. Historically, in casino roulette, before the wheel is spun, the operator of the wheel would call out to all players ‘*Gentlemen, Place your Bets!*’ This meant it was everyone’s final opportunity to place his or her bets on which square [or at least which color square] the ball would land on at the conclusion of the wheel’s next spin.

The odds against a player in the game of *Roulette* are, of course, very, very high. It is never a good idea for anyone bet to anything on the wheel that he truly cannot afford to lose. But every so often the wheel spins just the right number of times, the ball comes to rest in just the right square, and the mighty odds surrender humbly to what some people call *blind luck* - and the pay-off is 35 to 1. And when that happens, a man who risks it all, and ‘bets the farm’ on just the right square on the wheel, suddenly looks to the world like an absolute genius.

So, I hear you saying, *what on earth does that have to do with Torah in general or parsha Vayigash in particular?* As you will recall, last week’s parsha ended with *Tzafanat Paneach*, Pharaoh’s second in command, springing an ingenious trap to make Binyamin his slave. *Tzafanat Paneach* made sure a precious silver cup from his palace was found in Binyamin’s pack; he then arranged for Binyamin to be arrested; whereupon he sentenced him to serve as a bondservant for life.

Of course, unbeknownst to the brothers, *Tzafanat Paneach* was actually Yosef – the brother they sold into bondage – for silver – a little over two decades

previously. And, of course, Yosef had no intention of making Binyamin his slave. He wanted to free him, and bless him - not harm him. No doubt Yosef had planned that as soon as the stunned half-brothers were safely out of sight he would reveal his true identity to Binyamin, break his bonds, and start being the big brother/mentor to the young man that he had never had a chance to be. No doubt Yosef expected his half-brothers to be more than happy to part with Binyamin, much as they had been more than happy to part with him over twenty years ago.

It was all just a sophisticated game of *Roulette*, you see. Yosef was the ‘house’, and the game was played by the ‘house’ rules. He never, for a moment, considered the possibility that the ‘house’ might lose. At the last minute, however, something went *terribly wrong*. Suddenly what started out as a ‘*can’t miss*’ game, in which Yosef held all the cards, turned into a high-stakes game of ‘chance’ that threatened to bring the ‘house’ crashing down. It seemed as if a voice somewhere said: “*Gentlemen, place your bets!*”

Who did Yosef have to thank for this turn of events? It was the Holy One, of course. But as He so often does the Holy One used an earthly vessel - in this case, Yehudah. So, after Yosef announced that Binyamin would be his slave and the other 10 Hebrews were free to leave, Yehudah refused to go. Instead, he stepped up right in the man’s personal space and spoke in a way that changed the atmosphere in the room.

Vayomer Yehudah mah-nomar l’adoni

What can we say to my lord?’ replied Yehudah.

mah-nedaber umah-nitzதாக

‘What words and what defense can we offer?’

ha-Elohim matza et-avon

God [or ‘the gods’] has [or have] uncovered our guilt.

avadeicha hineinu avadim l’adoni

Your slaves we will be, slaves to you, lord;

gam-anachnu gam asher-nimtza ha-gavia b’yado

we along with the one in whose possession the chalice was found.’

[Genesis 44:16]

The very one who twenty-two years previously authored the plan to sell Yosef into slavery – who considered the eldest son of his mother’s rival Rachel a *spy of his father* to whom all he thought he owed was a good thrashing and a ‘good riddance’ - now will have nothing to do with leaving Rachel’s youngest son Binyamin behind. Yehudah absolutely insisted that instead of returning to Kena’an with the food they had purchased for their hungry family members - as Yosef had obviously thought would be their only alternative - he and all 9 other stepbrothers were going

to remain in Egypt as *Tzafanat Paneach's* slaves.

What on earth – or in Heaven - has gotten into Yehudah? Has he gone *meshuga*? Or is he perhaps ‘*crazy like a fox*?’

A Fool's Gambit – Or a Brilliant Ploy?

Please stop for a moment and think about the consequence of Yehudah's refusal to return to Kena'an with the food he and his brothers had purchased. Remember, *a famine is raging* throughout the Middle East. People are starving. The only reason these men came to Egypt in the first place was food. Their father, mother(s), wives and children were in desperate need for food, or Ya'akov would never have let them come and bring Binyamin in the first place.

For Yehudah and the brothers to stay in Egypt with Binyamin as *Tzafanat Paneach's* slaves meant Ya'akov, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and all the wives and children of the ten elder brothers [including Yehudah's own wife and sons] – all those who had been left in Kena'an unprotected and without food – were virtually condemned, absent some miracle, to die of starvation ... or worse. One old man, a bunch of women, and a gaggle of small children all alone in the desert without provision or protection in a lawless world whose inhabitants were going mad with hunger? Even if Yehudah was just buying time, hoping for an opportunity to rescue Binyamin and then high-tail it back to Kena'an where they belonged, hopefully before it was too late, surely this was *a fool's bet* - the kind of bet some hopeless sap makes who bets the family farm, his wife's virtue, and his children's future, not to mention his own life, on a turn of the roulette wheel.

As I said earlier however every once in a while after the bets are placed and the roulette wheel has spun fate smiles as the little ball falls – and what appeared to the world just a few seconds earlier to have been a fool's bet suddenly looks like *an absolutely brilliant ploy*. Yehudah did not know who *Tzafanat Paneach* was. He did not know that his refusal to leave Binyamin – thus sentencing Ya'akov and the rest of the covenant family to almost certain death - was the one bet that *Tzafanat Paneach* could not cover. And while *Tzafanat Paneach* kept a poker face and appeared to be totally in charge, inside those Egyptian robes a Hebrew lad named Yosef, who loved his father more than life itself, had to be getting a little nervous.

Open the curtain on parsha known as *Vayigash*. As the Egyptian Roulette wheel Yehudah set in motion so recklessly at the end of *Miketz* is spinning, he steps forward and ups the ante for the game yet one more time.

V'atah yeshev-na av'deicha tachat ha-na'ar eved l'adoni

Let me remain as your slave in place of the lad.

V'ha-na'ar ya'al im-echav

Let the lad go back with his brothers!

The gentlemen have now all placed their bets. The odds are long. The stakes are *high*. The little wheel spins – and spins – and spins. Here and there and everywhere bounces the ball. The colors and numbers in the little squares become a blur. Round and round and round she goes, and where she stops well, that is what we are all about to find out, isn't it?

A Vayigash Travelogue

This week's parsha begins with Yehudah's stunning proposal to the man he knows as Tzafanat Paneach. Here is a travelogue.

1. Yehudah's Proposal of Substitutionary Atonement [Genesis 44:18-34]

The essence of Yehudah's plea is that he be allowed to substitute himself for Binyamin and take upon himself the punishment which Binyamin's crime deserved. He explains that if Binyamin does not return with the rest of his brothers, their aged father will die of bereavement. The casual reference to the 'aged father' turned out to be the wildcard. At the mention of the grief of Ya'akov – who, of course, was his father, Yosef ... er, Tzafanat Paneach ... lost his appetite for the game.

2. A Son of the Covenant Awakens [Genesis 45:1-8]

It is at this point in the narrative that Yosef reveals his true identity to his brothers. He lets them know that he holds no grudge against them for the wrongs they did to him many years ago because he now sees that it was through those very wrongs against him that the Holy one had placed him in a position to not only sustain his family but also *feed the world* during these years of famine.

3. Yosef's Instructions to His Brothers [Genesis 45:9-13]

Yosef then directed his brothers to go back to Kena'an, tell Ya'akov all that had happened, and bring the old man down to live in Egypt, in the land of Goshen. Yosef agreed to provide food from Egypt's storehouses for the entire family for as long as they needed it.

4. The Emotional Reunion [Genesis 45:14-16]

After revealing his true identity and promising provision for his entire family, Yosef went to each brother, one by one, beginning with Binyamin. He embraced them and he wept with them.

5. Pharaoh's First Decree Concerning the Covenant Family [Genesis 45:17-20]

Pharaoh soon heard that *Tzafanat Paneach's* brothers were in his country, and he issued an invitation to the entire covenant family to come to Egypt. He invited them to live on the best land in Egypt and 'eat the fat of the land'.

6. Yosef Sends His Brothers Back to Kena'an Bearing Gifts [Genesis 45:21-24]

Yosef then sent his brothers back to Ya'akov with a caravan of donkeys and wagons loaded down not only with provisions but also with extravagant gifts of the finer things of Egypt.

7. The Brothers Relay to Ya'akov the Amazing News [Genesis 45:25-28]

Upon arrival at the ancestral camp near Hebron the brothers gave their father the good news that Yosef was still alive and was now a ruler of Egypt. At first Ya'akov did not believe them, but *when he saw the wagons* he acknowledged that what they had told him must be true. He agreed to go with them to Egypt, if not to live, at least to see Yosef again before he died.

8. The Final God Encounter of the Patriarchal Era [Genesis 46:1-6]

While the covenant family's caravan was stopped in *Be'er Sheva* Ya'akov experienced the final God-encounter of his life. In what Torah calls a 'night vision' the Holy One appeared to Ya'akov. The Divine Voice Ya'akov now knew well told him not to be afraid to go down to Egypt. The Unseen Shepherd of His Soul promised once again that He would always be *with* Ya'akov. Remember, the Covenant contains, as an essential element, an eternal '*with-ness*' factor – a factor that applies even in times of the Silent Heaven and the Hidden Face. Furthermore, the Holy One promised that while Ya'akov and his family are in Egypt He would finally make good on His promise to Avraham to make of him a '*great nation*'

9. The Listing of All Who Go Down to Egypt [Genesis 46:7-27]

Torah will then list all the persons who made the trek from Kena'an to Egypt, naming for the first times the grandsons and granddaughters of Ya'akov/Yisrael, by their clans. The covenant nation is shown to consist of seventy (70) people in all, not counting the wives, when the sojourn in Egypt began.

10. Yehudah Is Chosen to Act as Forerunner [Genesis 46:28]

Ya'akov will send his son Yehudah out ahead, on behalf of the family, to go the land of Goshen and get things set up there.

11. Yosef's Reunion with Ya'akov [Genesis 46:29-34]

Yosef will take a leave of absence from his responsibilities as Second-in-Command to Pharaoh to go to Goshen and welcome his father personally. The

reunion will be emotionally charged and cathartic. Torah says that when the two saw each other for the first time in over twenty years they cried for a long time. Yosef then gave his family instructions on how to meet and deal with Pharaoh.

12. *Ya'akov and Family Meet Pharaoh* [Genesis 47:1-12]

A delegation of five of the brothers will then be selected for an audience with Pharaoh. As instructed by Yosef the brothers will tell Pharaoh that their family's vocation is shepherding. Pharaoh will welcome the brothers and assign them the land of Goshen to practice their vocation.

Next, Yosef will introduce Pharaoh to his father, Ya'akov. After a brief conversation about Ya'akov's age Ya'akov will bless Pharaoh. Remember, it is through the descendants of Avraham that all families of the earth are blessed.

13. *The Details of the Effects of the Famine are Described* [Genesis 47:13-26]

The remaining sections of the parsha will describe in some detail the radical economic and social policies Yosef is going to institute to deal with the 5 remaining years of the famine. These policies are highly prophetic of the end of days. Here is how the end-times monetary policies of the one world order will fall out: At first people will come with money to buy food to survive. After the money runs out, however, they will start to barter away their material possessions to the one-world government in exchange for life-sustaining grain. As things continue to get worse, those who seek food will wind up *offering their homes, farms, and lands* in exchange for food. Finally, after all the land is under the control of the one world government the people will have no choice but to *sell themselves into servitude*.

As long as Yosef is alive and in charge, the servitude of the Hebrew people will be of a very benevolent kind. Once he is out of the picture, however, the one-world government will show its true colors, and the great season of tribulation will begin.

14. *The Covenant Family Settles Into Its New Home* [Genesis 47:27-31]

Meanwhile in the land of Goshen the Covenant family kicks off its season of exile in style. Everything they put their hand to was fruitful. Their number – and their strength as a people - began to multiply exceedingly. But, alas, in exile, things are never quite as they appear! With that hint of revelation, *Vayigash* will conclude.

A Brief Look at Haftarah Vayigash

Ezekiel 37:15 -28

Again the word of the Holy One came to me, saying,

As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it:

'For Yehudah and for B'nei Yisrael, his companions.'

Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Yosef, the stick of Ephraim, and for all Beit Yisrael, his companions.'

The Haftarah consists of a prophetic message given by the Holy One through *Yechezkiel*, known by most English speakers by the Anglicized name of *Ezekiel*. Just before receiving this particular prophetic message, Yechezkiel experienced one of his most dramatic ‘God-encounters’ – the famous prophetic vision of *the Valley of Dry Bones* [Ezekiel 37:1-14].

In connection with the stunning ‘*Valley of the Shadow of Death*’ God-encounter, Yechezkiel witnessed by way of open prophetic vision the Holy One calling forth, from the dry bones of generations of dead Hebrews that had been scattered throughout the Valley over millennia, a mighty end-times nation. Yechezkiel was shown that the scattered multitudes of Avraham’s seed would, in the end days, be raised up by the Holy One as a vast multitude of living, breathing *sh’ma*-people, shaped by the Word of the Holy One and powered by the breath of the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

As spectacular as the image of the dry bones of Israel coming together and coming to life was, however, the resurrection of the dry bones merely represented *phase I* of the great restoration of Israel which the Holy One has planned. This week’s haftarah reading reveals the substance of the glorious “*second phase*” of the restoration vision, and reveals the *purpose* and *grand end-times destiny* for which the Voice and Spirit of the Holy One brought resurrection life to Israel in phase I.

The Vision of the Two Sticks

The Holy One will begin this second phase of the revelation by asking Yechezkiel to take in his hand, and write prophetic messages on, two “sticks” [Hebrew, *etzim*]. One of these sticks is, according to the Holy One’s instructions, to be inscribed with the prophetic message “*for Yehudah and for the ‘children of Israel’ his companions*”. The other stick is to be inscribed with the message “*for Yosef, the stick/tree of Efrayim, and for all the ‘house of Israel’ his companions*’.

The Holy One will then instruct Yechezkiel to “bring together”, in his hand, these two sticks. If and when this was done, the Holy One told him, the two sticks would *become one in his hand*.

The Divine Interpretation of the Two Sticks Vision

But as we continue to read the haftarah, we discover that the Holy One was not, in causing the two sticks to fuse together, just putting on a magic show. The Holy One reveals quickly that the ‘sticks’ he fused together are *prophetic images representing a future reunion* He will bring about of the descendants of Yehudah and Binyamin [the Southern Kingdom] on the one hand and the descendants of Yosef/Efrayim, and the tribes associated with Efrayim’s leadership [the Northern Kingdom] on the other hand.

A Little Historical Perspective

As you will recall, after the death of King Sh'lomo the kingdom established by David suffered a severe and seemingly irreconcilable split. This split occurred when descendants of Yosef under the leadership of a man named *Yeravo'am* [KJV 'Jeroboam'], rebelled against the Y'hudan dynasty based in Y'rushalayim [which was then headed by Sh'lomo's son Rehovo'am]. Yeroboam set up a rival kingdom with its capitol in Samaria². This left the Holy One's covenant people divided into two kingdoms. One consisted of the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin; and the other consisted of the other 10 'Northern' tribes. The details of the schism are found at I Kings 9-12.

Rehovo'am had made a critical mistake. When he took over for his deceased father Sh'lomo, he let the Northern tribes know that he intended to rule them harshly. The TaNaKh records his fateful introduction to them as follows:

*My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke;
my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!*

... Then the people answered the king, saying: "What share have we in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel!

Now, see to your own house, O David! So Israel departed to their tents.

So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

[I Kings 12:14-19]

The enmity that accompanied this split was so intense that the 'Northern' tribes – *i.e.* those who opted to follow Yerovo'am instead of Rehovo'am – wound up setting up not only their own completely separate kingdom, but also a completely separate *religious system*. They refused to regard the Temple of Sh'lomo as the exclusive dwelling place of God; they thus refused to go up to Y'rushalayim for the festivals. In place of the Y'rushalayim-centered system that David and Sh'lomo had put in place, they set up temples at Beit-El, near the border dividing the kingdoms, and at Dan, near Mount Hermon. It was at these shrines that Yerovo'am re-introduced the idolatrous worship of a calf image. **II Kings 12:26-33.**

The rift between the two kingdoms – Judah and Israel – grew wider and wider over the ensuing years. There never a significant reunion of the tribes. Some believe that

² The so-called 'Northern Kingdom', called 'Israel' in the books of Kings, is also known in some Hebrew writings as *Shomron*. It existed as a separate entity for only a couple of hundred years, until it was conquered by the Assyrians, and then the Assyrians took all of the inhabitants, the overwhelming majority of them, at the least, and exiled them to different places in the Assyrian empire. What happened to the captives once they were removed to Assyria is a matter of controversy. Some believe they eventually migrated back to the Southern Kingdom. Others believe they died out. Still others believe they became immersed in the culture of their captors, lost awareness of their identity as Hebrews, and became what is known to some as the 'Ten Tribes of Israel'.

when the Northern tribes was besieged and overrun by Assyria in 722 BCE [see II Kings 17], surely some of the descendants of the Northern tribes had to have fled to and received asylum from the Southern Kingdom³. The narrative of the TaNaKh, however does not record this. Instead, it says:

*In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria
and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah
and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.*

*Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon,
Cuthah, Ava, Hamat, and from Sefarvaim,
and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel;
and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.*

[II Kings 17:5-6, 24]

We know that there was at least some preliminary reunion between the separated tribes in the initial days of Mashiach, because we are specifically told that the prophetess who spoke over Yeshua at the time of his presentation at the Temple was a lady named *Chana* [Anna], whom Luke wants us to notice is not a Yehudi or Binyamini, but is from the tribe of Asher – a tribe which was, of course, a part of the Northern Kingdom. See **Luke 2:36**.

The Great Reunion to Come

Yechezkiel will prophesy of a much greater reunion of the two kingdoms that have been separated since the days of Rehovo'am and Yerovo'am. He prophesies that the house of Yehudah and the house of Yosef will in the end of days be *reunited supernaturally* and *made to form one indivisible unit under a shepherd-king* like unto, and of the physical lineage of, David.⁴ The re-unified nation's sense of kinship will bear no trace of the previous dissension, but will be as one solid piece of wood, void of all factions and fragmentation.

The Holy One's end-times plan is not merely for the house of Yehudah and the house of Yosef to be reunited, however. Yechezkiel makes it clear that the Holy One prophesied He will also bring this unified people, under their shepherd-king, back to dwell in the land of Israel, where Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov sojourned. The Holy One further prophesied that once the unified covenant people

³ Prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom it is speculated that there were groups refugees from all parts of the Northern Kingdom who ran away from the hostilities Southward, received asylum from King Hezekiah of Yehudah, and rejoined their brethren in one level or another of Torah observance. It is therefore believed that within the present people-group the world knows as 'Jews' there probably exists a small remnant from each of the original tribes.

⁴ The sages have long viewed the ingathering of the exiles and the establishment of a Torah-based state as a two-part process. First, *Mashiach ben Yosef* (the Messianic descendant of Joseph) will arrive on the world's stage and re-unite the scattered and dispersed seed of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Then, *Mashiach ben David*, the Messianic descendant of King David, will arise and unite all of mankind in one family, in which all proclaim the name of the Holy One.

have returned to the land of the patriarchs they will, under the reign of their Shepherd-King, dwell forever together in that location, with His sanctuary and manifest Presence in their midst, under a renewed form of the ancient covenant of Torah.

Yechezkiel will even prophesy of a sign by which the peoples of the earth are to know that the Holy One has brought these things to pass. What is the sign? Here is what the prophet tells us in the name of the Holy One: ***Then nations will know that I, the Holy One, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever. May it occur quickly, in our day.***

A Look Ahead at Brit Chadasha Vayigash

Luke 6:6-49

And it came to pass on another Sabbath also, that He [i.e. Yeshua] entered the synagogue and taught

In the B'rit Chadasha reading selected for the week of *Vayigash* Yeshua will *approach the religious system in place in his day, will disrupt the services of that system, and will then go outside that system entirely to teach the truths He wants His people to live by.* No religious system, we will discover, can even handle the message, much less stand up under the power, of Torah made flesh, dwelling in its midst.

On Another Sabbath Also

The Master was a man of wisdom and understanding. He was fully briefed on the Creator's plan for the Seventh Day. He knew the power of – and the special *kedusha* energy that the Creator had infused into and made an eternal part of - the Sabbath. He understood the special nearness of the manifest Presence and healing/redemptive/restorative that hovers over the earth between sundown on what the world now knows as 'Friday' [*or Viernes, or Frietag, or Byerenes, or Vendredi, or Payatnitsa'*] and sundown on what the world now calls 'Saturday' [*or Sabado, or Samedi, or Samstag, or Subboto*]. He never let a Sabbath pass without first embracing that *kedusha* energy in His mind, body, and soul, then releasing it in measured doses as the world and the people around had need.

The narrative we will read begins the action on a *Shabbat* [either Friday evening or Saturday morning]. The man the B'rit Chadasha presents as the promised Messiah will walk into the regular Sabbath meeting held at place where good people who believed in the One True God met to pray and worship in community. What Yeshua will do at this meeting may come as a bit of a surprise to you. He will not "join up". He will not *fit in*. He will neither *bless* nor *support* nor *contribute to* the system. He will not even try to institute *reform*. He will not look for trouble; but, alas, He will find plenty of it.

Yeshua Calls and Begins the Training of Twelve

After healing a man during the Sabbath gathering Messiah will leave the synagogue in a tumult and uproar. Shaking off the dust of His feet as it were, He will *head for the sprawling hills outside the village* to delight in and be re-energized by the remainder of the Sabbath. After beginning the first day of the week with *tefillah* [the discipline of self-surrender that some call ‘prayer’] Yeshua will call his followers to His side, and will appoint 12 of them to serve the world as His *specially appointed messengers*.

Messiah will then begin teaching His specially appointed messengers and all who followed Him out of the religious system of the day, the true Torah lifestyle, as it was to be given practical application by them in the political and spiritual environment in which they lived. He will speak to them of such things as *loving one’s enemies*, of *turning the ‘other cheek’*, of *lending to those who one does not expect to be able to repay*, and of *doing unto others what one would want others to do to him or her*.

Yeshua and the Torah

Some see what Yeshua was teaching as contrary to, and in substitution for, the Torah of Moshe. But that is not the case at all. What Yeshua was teaching was *the practical application of the Torah* as it was given by the Holy One to Moshe.

Yeshua Prophecies of the Calling Forth of Sons of God

Towards the end of this lengthy reading from the Brit Chadasha Yeshua will make reference to a very special group of people that He will call “the sons [Greek. “*huios*”] of God [Greek. “*hupsistos*”, the “Most High”]”. In doing so He will pick up on a theme that runs throughout the Torah and the TaNaKh - that the people called forth by the Holy One are a people who are *distinctively different from the rest of the world*, a people *whose very presence in the world is the key to His plan of redemption*.

Such a people understand and accept things that others will not. Such a people can handle a relationship with the Holy one like Yosef had, and know it will indeed turn out ‘all right’. Such a people will be Divinely-empowered to worship - indeed *love with all their heart, soul, and strength* - a God Who may, when they think they most need Him to appear and rescue them or vindicate them, actually *hide His Face from them* – and Who at times may choose to stand in complete silence while terrible things are said about, and horrible things are done to, His people.

*May you know what it means to be called,
and to live your lives as, sons and daughters of God.*

The Rabbi’s son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

The 8th Petition: Mishpat [Seeing/Acting as the Holy One Sees/Acts]

Ha-Shivah Shof'teinu k'varishonah

Restore to us leaders like You gave us in years past

v'yoetzeinu k'vatechilah

and counselors as You provided in our best days

v'haser mimeinu yagon v'anochah

remove from us our sighing and our sorrow

u'm'loch aleinu atah Adonai l'vadechah

come and reign over us; Holy One; be our only ruler;

b'chesed uv'rachamim v'tzadikeinu b'mishpat

(rule us) in covenant love and in compassion and with righteous judgment

Baruch Atah Adonai Melech ahev tzedakah u'mishpat

Blessed are You, O Holy One, King Who loves righteousness and judgment