

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayigash:*** **Genesis 44:18-34**
 Haftarah: **Ezekiel 37:15-16**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Luke 6:6-11**

His soul is bound up with [the lad's] *soul!*
[Genesis 44:30]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 111:1-3;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 8, *Mishpat* [Justice]

Vayigash elav Yehudah – Then Yehudah came very close to him Genesis 44:18a.

We have completed the first 10 weeks of our study of the Holy One's *instruction manual* for human life on planet earth. To say we have *seen a lot transpire* over that 10-week period of time would be a drastic understatement.

From Whence Have We Come – and Why Are We Here?

So far in the course of our journey what have we seen? First, the heavens and the earth were created; then they were seemingly destroyed; ah, but then then they were made fresh and new again. The foundation for all God-man relations was then established in the form of the covenants the Holy One made with Noah and with Avraham. Over the course of the patriarchal leg of the journey, we have been placed in position to learn from Avraham and the other patriarchs a series of crucial lessons in how man is designed to *relate to* and *interact with* His Creator.

1. Lessons From the Life of Avraham

From our ancestor Avraham we have learned five primary lessons:

1. The *sh'ma* orientation to God-man relations - *i.e.* how to let the Words of the Holy One both *change us from the inside out* and *direct our life paths*;
2. The *b'rit*-centered lifestyle - *i.e.* how to recognize and deal with both the privileges and responsibilities of having the Holy One as our stronger covenant partner;
3. The *emunah*-development process - *i.e.* how to learn through real-life trial and error experiences over a lifetime to cast aside our lingering doubts concerning both [a] the Holy One's essential goodness and [b] His unshakeable faithfulness to His covenant partners;
4. The *beito achar* calling - *i.e.* that our relationship with the Holy One is

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not for our benefit alone, but is to be passed on to our *household after* through the process of training our children and all within our households to follow the way of the Holy One, doing righteousness and justice; and

5. The *shachah* [worship expressed as humble surrender of self-will to Divine Direction] life focus - *i.e.* joyfully making humility, submission, gratitude, and reverence a pervasive approach to every aspect of life, characterized by instead of something reserved a few moments a week in a shrine, temple, or religious meeting.

1. *Lessons From the Life of Yitzchak*

From our ancestor Yitzchak we have learned three more primary lessons:

1. The *suwach* approach to meditation on the Holy One and His Ways – *i.e.* to walk and talk with the Holy One in the Divine-energy infused atmosphere of a field, meadow, forest, etc.;
2. The *atar* methodology of prayer - *i.e.* as a supplement to our constant state of conversational prayer, to on occasions of special need plead on behalf of our family members and their covenant destinies passionately from a place of brokenness;
3. The *yachafar et-be'er* approach - *i.e.* the ‘re-opening the wells’ life focus, which teaches that a necessary part of fulfilling our calling is to *highly esteem, connect with, walk in, and make available to others* the revelation received by our fathers, taking up the torch passed down to us while making *it somehow uniquely our own* in the process;
4. The *yashev* life focus - *i.e.* to learn how to patiently *abide in* the Will of the Holy One and not over-react to challenges of life such as:
 - a. disappointment;
 - b. famine;
 - c. inter-family conflict; or
 - d. persecution.

2. *Lessons Learned Thus Far From the Life of Ya’akov*

From our ancestor Ya’akov’s experiences thus far we have learned:

1. The *abag* calling - *i.e.* to *abag* [wrestle] with the Holy One and with men, and suffer trauma, yet still hold on until a state of blessedness is experienced; and
2. The *teshuvah* response - *i.e.* how to make – and lead our households in – *repentance, return, receiving of forgiveness, and rededication to covenant* when there has been a straying from the pathway the Holy One has laid out for us.
3. The *willingness to forgive transgressions, offenses, and even*

betrayals, and move on – *i.e.* trusting the law of sowing and reaping, and therefore leaving it to the Holy One to judge the Esav's, Labans, Sh'chems, Reuvens, Sh'mon's and Levi's of this world rightly, vindicate those who are innocent, punish those who are guilty, restore whatever wrongdoers take or destroy, and bring about something truly good out of every situation instead of fretting over evildoers, stewing over offenses, publicly decrying any human being's actions of impropriety, immorality, or injustice, or seeking vengeance.

More recently we have watched both Yosef and Yehudah interact with pagan society and culture, and have learned valuable lessons from each as to what *does* - and what *does not* - work in that regard.

A Paradigm Change Is Underway

You may have noticed that the Yosef and Yehudah narratives have a very different 'feel' than the previous eight parshot we read. From *B'reshit* through *Vayishlach* the Torah narrative dazzled us with dramatic 'God-encounter' narratives – narratives that captivated us, filled us with wonder, and stirred in us a hunger to know and commune with our Creator the way our ancestors did. Every circumstance about which we read seemed to either stem from or lead to the release of Divine Counsel from Heaven. All the stories we read in those first eight weeks either flowed out of or were framed by words spoken directly by our Bridegroom-King. We learned to hit 'pause' over, and soak in, the sacred writ's verbatim quotations of Divine speech. Our Creator's beautiful Words of Empowerment – from '**Yehi Ohr**²' to '**P'ru ur'vu ...**³' - absolutely mesmerized us. From the Holy One's '**Lech lecha ...**⁴' to His '**Al-tira anochi magen lach ...**⁵'; from His '**I'zar'acha eten et-ha-aretz ha-zot**⁶' to His '**Ani El-Shaddai hithalech l'fanai ...**⁷' He has awakened something magnificent in us – something primordial; something infinite; something eternal; something transcendent; something glorious. Every time the Great Communicator of Heaven speaks, it absolutely sets our hearts aflame – and we quietly start to vibrate in resonance, first in our hearts and minds, then in our perspective, our vocabulary, our behavior, and even our emotional reactions.

² From Genesis 1:3, this Divine Empowerment translates roughly into English as '**Light, BE!**'

³ From Genesis 1:28 and 9:7, this Divine Empowerment that was first released over us through Adam, and then through Noach and his sons, translates roughly into English as '**Be fruitful, and multiply**'.

⁴ From Genesis 12:1, this Divine Empowerment that was first released over us through Avram translates into English roughly as '**Go out; find your true self/identity!**'

⁵ From Genesis 15:1, this Divine Empowerment of Avram translates into English roughly as '**Fear not, I am your shield ...**'

⁶ From Genesis 12:7, this Divine Promise to Avram translates into English roughly as 'To your descendants I will give this land ...'

⁷ From Genesis 17:1, this Divine Empowerment translates into English roughly as '**I am El-Shaddai; walk before My Face ...**'

Reading over and meditation through episode after episode of Divine Speech was just delicious. Through situation after situation described for us in the chronicle of the Holy One's interactions with men and women over a couple of millennia we actually began to expect – and lean in with bated breath to hear – what He Who created the universe has to say. We learned to joyfully dote on, pour over, and savor; then meditate on, each phrase the Holy One spoke into our forefathers' lives. Every time He has spoken His All-powerful creative and prophetic Words to men in language they could understand, we have found, constituted a fresh and atmosphere-shifting injection of His manifest Presence into human experience – one from which is still changing our world forever, conforming it to His Will.

We have begun to get used to reading the actual Words of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. *Amazing words. Transforming words. Words that leap off the pages of Torah and veritably dance before our eyes. Words that awaken the neshama in us. Words that confound our minds. Words that divide our souls from our spirits and our joints from our marrow, and actually discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Words that offer life and hope and peace for whatever situation or circumstance we encounter. Words that offer wise counsel for – and give focus and direction to - every facet of our lives. Words that reshape our perspective on the past, our worldview relative to the present, our vision for the future – and virtually everything about us.*

As a shepherd trains his sheep to respond only to his voice and to *lo sh'ma* the voice of another, so the Holy One has been training us to *know* His Voice, to *hear* His Voice, and to *follow* His Voice. For the first eight weeks of our study therefore we became accustomed to reading every narrative account of our ancestors' life experiences with confidence that at the point when our forefathers needed it most the text would be interrupted by the phrase “*vayomer Adonai ... [i.e. and the Holy One said ...]*”. Through those first 8 parshot, you see, we were being trained by the Master to *live by the Voice of the Holy One – selah!* - instead of by responding to people and circumstances either as our flesh urged us to [*i.e. panic, fear, anger, offense, outrage, disgust, jealousy, vengeance, shame, etc.*] OR as our fallen minds, handicapped as they are by our limited and frame of reference, whimsically suggest⁸. The

⁸ Only the words and wisdom of the Holy One can be trusted. Our fallen minds, in contrast, operate under the influence of a veritable storm surge of both *dark energy* and *disinformation*. This is what Shaul of Tarsus refers to as ‘the law of my mind’, which constantly wars against the ‘law’ – i.e. Torah, or teaching/instruction/wisdom - of the Holy One. **Romans 8:7: *The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*** The problem with human logic, reasoning, and opinion is that our thinking is adversely impacted by: a *very limited perspective*; by *short-sightedness*; by a continuous flow of *inadequate – if not intentionally inaccurate – information* provided to us by people, institutions, and governments working to promote of their own self-serving, self-perpetuating agendas; by *emotional manipulation*; and by the polluted lenses of *cultural prejudices and predispositions*; and by

magnificent Hebrew words the Creator spoke into the lives of our ancestors – and thus imprinted on our DNA – thus became every bit as critical to our *life-mission* as water and oxygen are to our *physical bodies*.

And then, suddenly ... Silence!

Suddenly, however, in *Vayashev* and *Miketz* the Voice of the Holy One went *strangely silent*. Since Genesis 35:11-12 the narrative of the Torah has been totally devoid of ‘God-encounters’. The phrase ***Vayomer Adonai ...*** [*i.e. and the Holy One said ...*] has not appeared even once in our readings the last fortnight. Indeed for the last 2 weeks of readings the Holy One’s manifest Presence *seems* to have totally disappeared from the world. No matter how badly Yosef or Yehudah or Sh’mon or even Ya’akov/Yisrael seemed to our perspective to need a God-encounter, *none was forthcoming*. Hmmm. Just when we thought we were beginning to figure out what relationship with the Holy One was all about ... He seems to have *pulled the rug out from under us*.

Hopefully we have realized over the past two weeks that *we do not know the Holy One nearly as well as we thought we did*. And hopefully we have come to the recognition, painful though it may be, that the Holy One does not – will not - inject Himself into our life situations or speak His prophetic words over us based upon our *perception of need* [ours or anyone else’s] – but only according to a Divine schedule incorporated in His eternal and unchanging plan for mankind. We have, I hope, begun to learn that the Holy One is not like a genie who [theoretically, at least] has to appear just because someone somewhere rubs the right lamp. He is God ... and *we are not*. And that is the way it should be – indeed, *must* be. The world revolves around Him and His plan, not around *us* or our twisted, flesh-driven perception of human need. Sometimes, we have now found, it actually serves His Divine purposes better for Him to hide from our view, and be silent - even in the face of what appears to us to be horrible suffering - than for Him to dazzle us with His glory, rescue us by His power, or even comfort us with His Words. Now – now that this truth is out in the open - can you handle it, Dear Reader? Can you handle a relationship with the Holy One like Yosef had? Can you still worship, indeed love with all your heart, soul, and strength, a God Who may, when you think you most need Him to appear and rescue you or vindicate you, actually hide His Face from you – and Who at times chooses to stand in complete silence while terrible things are said about, and horrible things are done to, His people?

conflicts of interest generated by the *selfish, sensual urges, drives, and appetites of our flesh*. That is why all human opinions, all human criticisms, and all theological doctrines, creeds, and principles designed by the human brain are not just useless, they are often actually dangerous.

***Far Beyond the Headlines Narratives, and What is Trending
on Social Media, Lies the REAL Story:
The Stage is Being Set for a Great Redemption Story
That Will be Told and Retold in All Generations Forever***

The events about which we will read this week all occurred in the second year of the Great Famine of Ya'akov's day. The black horse will ride throughout the known world for five more long years before it fades from view. As we begin our studies in Torah's 11th parsha, however, food supplies are already dangerously low throughout the world. If food can be found in places other than Egypt, the prices charged for that food are very, very high. Tension is mounting. Depression is epidemic. Panic is setting in.

What is it then, that is about to happen within the Covenant Family that will ultimately eclipse the story of their rescue from the throes of a great famine? Forgiveness is about to happen. Healing and restoration are about to happen. The reconciliation of the house of Ya'akov and the house of Yosef is about to happen. Sin is about to be blotted out. Guilt is about to be offloaded. *Longstanding patterns of deception* are about to be revealed. *Paralyzing layers of jealousy, hatred, fear, guilt, grief and shame* are about to be lifted. *False senses of identity* are about to be turned on their ear. Sin – and the sense of fear, guilt, and shame that comes with it – are about to be exposed. It is going to be a week of intense crisis. But in the end - by the grace of the Holy One - *truth will triumph, and love will empower us, and we will overcome.*

Keep in mind that the things I am talking about are not just *historical* or *literary*, nor are they merely *spiritual allegory*. I am talking about *events authored, orchestrated and choreographed by the Creator of the Universe*. The events about which we will read are all the more stunning because they clearly *have tremendous prophetic implications*. They are not just tidbits from our collective past - they provide us a sweet foretaste of a similar series of events that are pre-programmed to transpire in the latter days of the descendants of Ya'akov on the one hand and of Pharaoh on the other hand.

So let us look very carefully at what we will witness this week. First, we will see *Yosef* [Joseph] finally reveal his true identity to his brothers, ushering the first phase of glorious reconciliation between the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Second, a place of temporary sojourn outside the land of promise, with all necessary provisions to sustain the covenant family through the famine years – a place called *Goshen* - will be prepared and readied for Avraham's descendants.

Thirdly Ya'akov will have his final 'God-encounter', in connection with which the Holy One will promise him that He will yet make his descendants into a great nation and will surely bring them back up from Egypt.

Fourthly we will see the prophetic precursor to the economic policy of the *Beast* of the book of Revelation, as Torah describes a multi-phase economic restructuring where first all *crops*, then all *personal possessions*, then all *land*, then all *human beings* in Egypt become the 'property of the State'. Keep in mind that though this all takes place through Pharaoh's power and under Pharaoh's seal, the mastermind and overseer of the program is actually one of Ya'akov's descendants: Yosef. Understand, therefore, that in charge of whole program is a man who knows how to *ameliorate the harsh decree when the Grand Plan of Redemption calls for it!* Ah, but let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. The curtain is rising on the next act in the great drama. The actors are in their places. The action is about to begin.

If I Perish, I Perish!

As we concluded our study last week the mysterious young Viceroy of Egypt [i.e. Yosef in Egyptian disguise] had just announced some horrifying news to the Hebrew delegation that had come to purchase grain from Egypt's storehouses. He had announced that in punishment for the theft of his silver cup he was going to keep Benjamin with him in Egypt as his personal slave.

Exactly what Ya'akov had feared – the loss of his youngest son Benjamin – appeared to be about to happen. But not so fast! Before Yosef can say "*So let it be written, so let it be done!*", *Yehudah* [Judah] steps forward.

Bi adoni y'daber-na av'decha d'var b'oznei adoni

If you please, your highness, let your servant whisper a matter in my lord's ears
[Genesis 44:18(a)]

The name of this week's parsha is *Vayigash*, meaning "*and he drew near*", or "*and he approached*". The operative Hebrew verb root in the word "drew near/approached" is *nagash*⁹. The first Biblical usage of this verb is in Genesis 18, when our ancestor Avraham "drew near/approached" the Holy One to earnestly plead for Sodom and G'morah. The verb is used several times in Genesis 37 when Yitzchak repeatedly asks the one who is seeking his blessing (Ya'akov in Esav's clothes) to "drew near" so he can discern his true identity.

The pictographic mural formed by the Hebrew letters of this *shoresh* [verb root] tell the story very well. The first Hebrew letter/pictograph is the *nun* ['n' sound], which pictographically revealing a son or heir. The second Hebrew letter in *nagash* is the

⁹ *Nagash* is *nun, gimel, shin*. Strong's Hebrew word #5066, it is pronounced *naw-gawsh*'.

gimel [the hard ‘g’ sound], pictographically showing a man walking. The last Hebrew letter in *nagash* is the *shin* [‘sh’ sound], which pictures ascending flames of fire, most often the *fire* manifestation of the Holy One’s Presence [*i.e.* the ‘smoking firepot’ of Avram’s vision and the ‘burning bush’ of Moshe’s call]. Putting those three images together we see *a son or heir walking into flames of fire* – or into the very fiery Presence of the Holy One.

Nagash involves drawing *very close* to someone as if to embrace that person, greet them warmly in the Middle Eastern style, and perhaps whisper in that person’s ear. It is not a *diplomatic* approach, but a very *intimate* one. For our ancestor Yehudah making *nagash* to the temperamental young Viceroy of Egypt was a *dangerous* move – but one he felt he had no choice but to take. Much like Queen Esther in chapter 4 of the book that bears her name, Yehudah threw caution to the wind - effectively saying to himself, **“If I perish, I perish.”** [Esther 4:16.]

Yehudah’s Personal Plea

Yosef, of course, extends his scepter and allows the intimate approach of the one he alone knows to be the chief of all his brothers. That intimacy is, after all, what he has hungered for all his life. *He once enjoyed closeness to his father* – but he has never experienced such a thing with any of his brothers.

Yehudah had an agenda. He intended to bargain with *Tzafanat Paneach* – his soul for Benjamin’s soul. He then whispered in the powerful man’s ear: ***do not let your anger*** [*Hebrew af, referring to the apparatus of breathing, be it a breath of life or a blast of death*] ***burn against your servant.*** Genesis 44:18[b]. Yehudah then presented his personal perspective on the events we read about last week in *Miketz*. He then described his father’s Ya’akov’s anguished response to the news that Sh’mon had been imprisoned and that the only way he could be set free would be for Benjamin to be surrendered.

V’yomer av’decha avi eleinu atem

‘Your servant our father said to us:

y’datem ki sh’nayim yal’dah-li ishti

‘You know that two sons were borne by my wife [i.e. Rachel].

Vayetze ha-echad

One has already left me,

me’iti va’omar ach tarof toraf

and I assume that he was torn to pieces by wild animals.

V’lo re’itiv ad-henah

I have seen nothing of him until now.

Ul'kachtem gam-et-zeh me'im panai

Now you want to take this one from me too!

V'karahu ason

If something were to happen to him,

V'horadetem et-seyvati b'ra'ah she'olah

you will have brought my white head down to the grave in evil misery.'

Note that Yehudah remembered the words his father used to describe his long years of anguish very, very well. No doubt those words had haunted him – especially the reference to the disappearance of Rachel's firstborn son Yosef '... and I assume that he was torn to pieces by wild animals. I have seen nothing of him until now.' Yehudah knew, you see, what had made Ya'akov 'assume that Yosef was torn to pieces' by wild animals. He knew the reason was that 22 years ago he and his brothers [except Benyamin] had presented Ya'akov with the blood-smearred garment of Yosef and asked him: *Haker-na*– can you identify this? He knew the full pain his and his brothers' conspiracy had inflicted on his father. And now Yehudah's own words testify of his guilt.

The Power to Cause Others Hurt

Yehudah's words point out a very important aspect of life. Every human being possesses, by virtue of *the power of human relationship*, a very frightening power – the *power to hurt others*. I am not at this juncture talking of the power to inflict physical injuries on *enemies* or *strangers*. I am talking about the power to cause untold pain and suffering *to the people one loves* – and *by whom one is loved* – the most. Yehudah and his *gang of 9* inflicted decades of unbearable anguish upon their father, Ya'akov. The one their anger was directed toward and the one they were trying to hurt had been Yosef. But the one who suffered most was the one they called 'father'.

Which brings up a very important matter. I have a very pointed question to ask you. Have you, like Yehudah, caused years of anguish to another human being? Have you by your words or by actions or by uncaring silence and/or inaction at a propitious moment inflicted misery on a parent? or a spouse? or a brother or sister? or a child? or one who considered you a friend? Think about it. Think long and hard. Be honest with yourself. Think of all your family members, and think of all your closest friends over the years. What wounds and scars have you left on these people in your wake? How dangerous has it proven for other people to be in relationship with you?

If you have caused others anguish it is does not mean you are the 'scum of the earth'. But it does mean that it is time to take responsibility for the harm you have done, and seek to make reparation or restitution, as far as possible, for the damage

you have caused. And it means it is time to ‘*nagash*’ [i.e. draw very near] the Holy One, to *acknowledge your errors* and to *petition Him to release healing power into the lives of those you have wounded*. Then, when you have done that, wait patiently upon the Holy One. If, as, and when He tells you what else you need to do, make sure you *do it with all your heart* - whatever the cost.

***Yehudah Offers A Great Substitution;
He will Bear the Punishment for Binyamin’s Sin***

What happens after Yehudah tells the young Viceroy of Egypt of his elderly father’s sad tale of bereavement is truly stunning and beautiful. Yehudah offers to take Benjamin’s place and bear Benjamin’s punishment in his stead by himself volunteering to serve as the young Viceroy’s slave for life. Here are the precise words Torah records Yehudah as saying:

Ki avdeicha arav et ha-na'ar me'im avi

... your servant became collateral for the boy [Benjamin] to my father,

l'emor im-lo avi'einu eleicha

saying, 'If I don't bring him to you,

v'chatati l'avi kol ha-yamim

then I will bear the blame to my father forever.'

Is this the same man that the traumatized 17-year-old Hebrew boy Yosef saw gleefully counting silver as the Yishmaeli merchants pulled him out of the pit at Dotan? Two decades have passed – is it possible that Yehudah has changed? Yosef does not know the story of Yehudah’s travels in Kena’an. He does not know the pain Yehudah had felt for his own lost sons. He does not know what deep transformations were wrought in Yehudah in connection with the wayward lives and premature deaths of Er and Onan. He does not know the humility that Yehudah’s experience with Tamar has wrought in the man who is speaking to him. But his curiosity has been awakened. And thus he does not laugh. He does not command Yehudah to silence or order him removed from his presence.

V'atah yeshev-na av'deicha tachat ha-na'ar

Now therefore, please let your servant stay instead of the boy,

eved l'adoni v'ha-na'ar ya'al im-echav

a bondservant to my lord; and let the boy go up with his brothers.

Ki-eych e'eleh el-avi v'ha-na'ar eyneinu iti

For how will I go up to my father, if the boy isn't with me?

pen er'eh v'ra asher yimtza et-avi

Lest I see the evil that will come on my father."

[Genesis 44:32-34]

With those words Yehudah falls silent. He has nothing more to offer and nothing

more to say. There is nothing at all more that he can do. His fate, and that of Benjamin, Ya'akov, and the rest of the brothers, now rests in the hands – and the power to hurt or to heal – of the young Viceroy of Egypt in whose ear he has dared to speak.

Of Tables Turned – And Second and Third Chances

The last time Yosef was this close to Yehudah, as you will remember, it was Yehudah who held “all the cards”. On that occasion some very unpleasant things happened to Yosef – he was attacked, beaten, stripped of his garment, and thrown into a pit with vipers from whence he cried out for help to no avail. From the pit into which he was thrown Yosef had heard not only the sounds of Yehudah’s cruel laughter but also his announcement of the plan to sell Yosef into slavery – and to tell their father he had been killed by wild animals. Yehudah had NOT offered himself in Yosef’s place. He had led the charge for cruel vengeance masquerading as ‘social justice’. He left his brother behind – and proclaimed the equivalent of ‘good riddance to bad rubbish!’

Twenty-two years later, when his own whole-blood brother Sh'mon was being put in chains and thrown into prison before all the brothers’ eyes, Yehudah once again did not lift a finger to help him. He once again left a brother behind. He walked away as fast as he could and went back to his home, his wife, and his children – brotherless, but without blinking an eye.

Ah but the Holy One has now arranged circumstances so that *the tables are turned*. Will Yehudah again be content to walk away brotherless? No. This is his ‘third chance’. And this time, something in him says: “*Never again! Not on my watch.*”

Yehudah approaches/draws near to Yosef, who now “holds all the cards”. Yosef could *crush* Yehudah now. Or he could *force him into a lifetime of slavery*, as Yehudah had tried to do to him. What will he do? What would you do?

Questions for Today’s Study

1. Let’s begin our study of parsha *Vayigash* with a few questions:

[A] For what purpose did Yehudah ‘approach’ Yosef at the beginning of this week’s parsha?

[B] Why do you think Yehudah approached Yosef ‘privately’, rather than speaking in front of all the brothers and Yosef’s servants?

[C] What did Yehudah say would be the effect of losing Benjamin on their father, Ya’akov?

[D] What was there about Yehudah, at this stage in his life, that made him the most qualified to explain the effect on a father of the loss of two children?

[Hint: see Genesis 38:6-10]

[E] Which descendant of Yehudah lost two of his sons? [Hint: see II Samuel 12:15-19 and II Samuel 13:28-29; see also II Samuel 18:9-15].

[F] What prophetic significance do you see in the fact that Yehudah [from whom the Messiah came] offers himself to bear the punishment on behalf of his brother?

2. In today's Haftarah Yechezkiel [Ezekiel] has just experienced the vision of the *Valley of Dry Bones*, where he saw the Holy One regather Israel as a nation, powered by the breath of the *Ruach HaQodesh*. This week's haftarah reading is the "second phase" of the restoration vision that began in the *Valley of Dry Bones*. The Holy One reveals to Ezekiel two "sticks" – one representing Yehudah's companions [called 'the children of Israel'] and one representing Yosef's companions [called '*the house of Israel*']. Here is the way the prophet opens his description of the so-called 'vision of the two sticks':

Vayehi d'var-Adonai elai l'emor

The word of the Holy One came again to me, saying,

V'atah ben-adam kach-lecha etz echad uch'tov alav

And you, son of man, take one stick, and write on it,

L'Yehudah v'l'vnei Yisra'el chaverav

"For Yehudah, and for the children of Yisra'el his companions"

ulekach etz echad uchetov alav

then take another stick, and write on it,

l'Yosef etz Efrayim

"For Yosef, the stick of Efrayim,

v'chol-beit Yisra'el chaverav

and [for] all the house of Yisra'el his companions"

[Ezekiel 37:15-16]

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated as "stick". [It is Strong's Hebrew word #6086, transliterated as `etz, and pronounced *ates*.] Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings, and describe the word picture of that word and its verb root [which is Strong's Hebrew word #6095 (*atzah*, pronounced *aw-tzaw*)].

[B] What was Ezekiel told to write on the first "stick"?

[C] What was Ezekiel told to write on the second "stick"?

[D] What does today's Haftarah aliyah have to do with today's Torah aliyah?

[E] What group of people do you think the Holy One [through the prophet] was

referring to as the companions [Hebrew *chaverav*¹⁰, *chet, beit, resh, vav*] of Yehudah [Judah]?

[F] What group of people do you think the Holy One [through the prophet] was referring to as the *companions* [Hebrew *chaverav, chet, beit, resh, vav*] of Efrayim [Ephraim]?

[G] Who is the person identified by the Holy One [through His prophet Ezekiel] as the head of the '*children of Israel*'?

[H] Who is the person identified by the Holy One [through His prophet Ezekiel] as the head of the '*house of Israel*'.

[I] What do you think is the difference between the '*children of Israel*'¹¹ – a group first mentioned in Genesis 32:32 as those who do not eat the thigh muscle/sciatic nerve of kosher animals, and the '*house of Israel*'¹² - a group first mentioned in Exodus 16:31, as those who ate manna in the wilderness, prior to arriving at, and receiving the revelation of Torah at, Mt. Sinai?

3. In the B'rit Chadasha reading selected for *Vayigash* Messiah Yeshua approaches the religious system in place in his day. On a Shabbat [either Friday evening or Saturday morning] Messiah walks into the regular meeting held at a local 'worship center' – a place very much like one of our present day local churches or synagogues. Here is how Lukas [Luke] records the event for us:

It also happened on another Shabbat that he [Yeshua] entered into the synagogue and taught. There was a man there, and his right hand was withered.

The Sofrim and the P'rushim watched him to see whether he would heal on the Shabbat, that they might find an accusation against him.

But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man who had the withered hand,

"Rise up, and stand in the middle."

He arose and stood.

Notice that Yeshua has just rather shockingly 'taken over' the meeting. He has disrupted the order of service, and has in the process totally dishonored the officials in charge. And the Master is just getting warmed up.

Then Yeshua said to them, "I will ask you something:

Is it lawful on the Shabbat to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to kill?"

With this unanswerable challenge Yeshua has added insult to injury. Not only has He dared to interrupt the service and dishonor the officials of the local worship

¹⁰ This is a noun form of the Hebrew verb root *chabar, chet, beit, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word # 2266, meaning to *unite with, join with, or to be allied with* someone or some cause.

¹¹ Note: the Torah, in this very *parsha* [*Vayigash*] is going to identify the '*children of Israel*' for us. See Genesis 46:8-27.

¹² Other Scriptural references to the House of Israel include, but are by no means limited to: Exodus 40:38, Leviticus 10:6, 17:3, 8, 10; Ruth 4:11; I Sam 7:2-3; II Sam 1:12, 6:5, 12:8, and 16:3; I Kings 12:21; Psalm 115:12, Is. 5:7, 14:2, 46:3, and 63:7]. Jeremiah 3:18,20, 5:11, 15, 11:10,17, and 31:27, 31, Ezekiel 39:12, 22, 23, 25, and 29; Hosea 1:4, 6 and 11:12; and see Matthew 10:6 and 15:24.

center by taking over their meeting, but has deliberately embarrassed them in front of the people. And next He will, by healing the man's hand, go one step beyond - exposing them to everyone as enemies of the Holy One.

*He looked around at them all, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."
He did, and his hand was restored as sound as the other.*

Who healed the man's hand? No man did. Healing is not the province of a man. Healing is the province of the Holy One, and the Holy One alone. The Holy One clearly wanted this man's hand healed. Those who objected were thereby clearly shown to be resisting God's will.

[A] For what purpose did Yeshua go into the 'local worship center' – in this case a synagogue - on the Shabbat in question in today's aliyah?

[B] Does the Bible say that Yeshua was *invited*, or even called upon, by the leaders of the synagogue to teach there?

[C] In the local worship center in question that day was a man with a shriveled right hand. Was his presence there allowed by Torah? Explain.

[D] Why do you think the man with the shriveled right hand was there that day?

[E] Which of the persons involved in today's aliyah were concerned about the man with the shriveled right hand?

[F] Where in Torah or TaNaKh was Israel instructed to build local worship centers like synagogues?

[G] What does Torah say about local worship centers? Read carefully Deuteronomy 12, where all public worship activities are assigned to *one particular location* where the Holy One would 'choose to place His Name' – *i.e.* Jerusalem.

[H] How are our 'local churches' or 'Messianic synagogues' *like* and how are they *different from* the synagogue whose service Yeshua totally disrupted, and whose officials He publicly shamed, in today's reading?

*In your search for truth, may you never cease to care
about the pain of the bereaved or the feelings of the infirm.
And may you, like Yeshua, never "fit in" at the meetings of organized religion.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 111:1-3

*Praise the Holy One!
I will give thanks to the Holy One with my whole heart,
In the council of the upright, when the called-out ones are gathered.
The Holy One's works are great,
pondered by all those who delight in them.
His work is honor and majesty. His righteousness endures forever.*