

*Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayashev:*** **Genesis 39:1-23**
 Haftarah: **Amos 2:13-16**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 7:2-8**

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against the Holy One?
[Genesis 39:9]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 35:11-16;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #6, *B'racha* [Blessing]

In the course of recent readings from the Patriarchal Chronicles of Torah we saw young *Y'hudah* [Judah] - Ya'akov's fourth son - follow in his father's footsteps in an uncanny and downright uncomfortable way². As had been the case with Ya'akov before him, a serious bout of 'brother trouble' resulted in a son of the Covenant making an early departure from his father's household. And, as was the case with Ya'akov in his days of *galut* [i.e. exile], Y'hudah's adventures in **exile** wound up with him getting adopted into a pagan household and getting married. Like Ya'akov before him, Y'hudah then spent decades tending his father-in-law's sheep. Also like Ya'akov, we saw Y'hudah, in the course of his exile, take two wives. Like Ya'akov, he had to bury one of those wives before returning to his father's house. And like Ya'akov, during his exile Y'hudah begat a stable of children. But the latest edition of what I like to call the *Inspired Chronicles of Hebrews-in-Exile* added a significantly darker and more perilous twist to the **Galut** experience. Young Y'hudah sank his soul much, much deeper into the miry pools of dark energy in this fallen world than his father ever did.

An Even Darker and More Dangerous Response to the Crucible of Exile

While the younger version of Ya'akov definitely had some issues while in Laban's Lair, at least he never allowed himself to totally embrace the perverse worldview and lifestyle of the pagans among whom he was exiled. Ya'akov's Hebrew-in-Exile experience had been much like that of his father Yitzchak when the latter sojourned among the Ph'lishtim in the land of Gerar. Ya'akov had played the part of the prototypical Hebrew of the Diaspora – content to live in exile for a season,

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² See the Rabbi's son's *Shiur L'Yom Revi'i* (Wednesday's Study) from parsha Vayashev, on line at: <https://regionschristiancenter.org/uploads/bill/pdfs/09%20-%20Vayashev/5776/9Revi'i76.pdf>

but remaining true to most of what he knew of his identity as a son of the Covenant. While on occasion he succumbed to his fleshly passions and thereby got manipulated into following the perverse customs of culture in which he found himself immersed, he never voluntarily embraced the dark energy of the sensuous, materialistic, and self-obsessed ways of the Mesopotamians among whom he wound up living for a couple of decades.

Young Ya'akov's experience in Charan was thus prototypical of the kind of life-in-exile where a Hebrew at least keeps what he or she considers the 'basic elements' of Covenant Lifestyle in operation. Over the centuries that has included what I call 'the big 12':

1. *continuing to pray to YHVH*, privately and where possible publicly;
2. *veneration of Torah* [often supplemented with and interpreted through the lens of the writings of Jewish sages];
3. *keeping a diet consistent with Leviticus 11*;
4. *observing the Sabbath and Mo'edim* [i.e. Biblical Festivals] instead of the holidays, holy days, special times, and gift-giving, food-indulging celebrations of the culture-of-exile;
5. *resisting intermarriage* with foreigners to YHVH and the Covenants;
6. *refusing to renounce YHVH and His Covenants in order to accept the popular religions or philosophies of the people in whose sphere of influence they are exiled*;
7. *raising children in the traditions of their fathers*;
8. *modest and more traditional dress*;
9. *professing to high moral and ethical values*;
10. *championing philanthropy and benevolence to the poor*;
11. *longing for an eventual return to the land of Promise*; and
12. *often engaging in some form of social activism* on behalf of those they perceive as underdogs and oppressed persons.

Such was the kind of prototypical Galut experience made famous in ***Fiddler on the Roof***.

Y'hudah's experience in exile in Adullam of the Kena'ani, however, was much, much darker and more perilous. Y'hudah took the prototypical *Hebrew-in-Exile Experience* to a dangerous new level. He reacted to the exile experience by becoming, for a long season of life, *the ultimate anti-Maccabee*. The Maccabees – the most famous of which would carry Y'hudah's name – stood boldly against assimilation. Y'hudah, son of Ya'akov and Leah, assimilated without so much as a whimper of protest.

In the heat of his particular crucible of exile Y'udah apparently lost sight of the Great Avrahamic dream – the passionate quest for *a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. See **Hebrews 11:10**. Instead of clinging to the Presence and Promises of YHVH, walking in the Wisdom of His Eternal Ways, and bringing Divine sparks of light into every environment, Y'udah wholeheartedly immersed himself in and assimilated into the culture of the place where he lived. He embraced the dark energy. He embraced the sensuality. He adopted the unclean worldview of the Kena'ani wholeheartedly. He embraced as part of his identity their materialistic, animal-natured, appetite- and urge-obsessed approach to life. He embraced their priorities. He embraced their ways and their behaviors as normative. He descended to their futile ways of thinking. His heart became foolishly darkened just like the hearts of the people with whom he associated. He wallowed in their uncleanness. In lust, he dishonored his own body, exchanged the truths of the Holy One for the lies of the serpent. He made himself, his will, his self-righteous opinions, and his pleasure the gods of his life in the place of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov.

The Prophetic Time of Y'udah's Choice

But the Holy One is gracious. He did not give up on Y'udah. He worked behind the scenes to bring him to a critical point of reawakening to his true identity, his true reason for being given the gift of life, and his true destiny. And thus, in Y'udah's case, the assimilation into darkness he chose turned out to be merely a temporary descent for the sake of a much greater ascent – albeit with some serious collateral damage having been inflicted on others along the way. At the end of yesterday's aliyah we saw the Holy One arrange for Y'udah, like the prodigal son of Y'shua's famous parable, to finally have a moment of clarity. In that moment Y'udah finally saw the depths of thought, speech, and behavior to which he had fallen since leaving his father's house as the cataclysm-generating serpent-pit they really were – and had been all along. And, like the prodigal son in Y'shua's famous parable, when this stunning realization came, Y'udah responded appropriately. He came clean with himself and the world, bid a firm goodbye to his Kena'ani cohorts and their ways, made *t'shuvah*, and went back to his father's house and his father's God. The ***Prophetic Time of Y'udah's Choice*** came, and Y'udah responded in the only way a true son or daughter of the Covenant could.

How about you, Dear Reader? How intimately and affectionately have you been interacting with and relating to the culture in which you find yourself living?

Is the prevailing worldview of that culture influencing your thoughts, attitudes, priorities, speech, and behaviors? Have the materialism, sensuality, self-obsession, and foreign religions/paganisms that dominate the culture around you infiltrated

your way of thinking, relating to people, and living?

Has the way of foreigners to the Covenant captured your heart? Have the sentimentality and blatant sensuality of pagan celebrations seduced you? Have the lies that pervade and control the minds and wills of strangers to the Covenant imprisoned your soul? Has the ‘way we do things around here’ of the area in which you live induced you to lock the Covenant-faithful son or daughter you are created and called to be away in a dark closet, underfed, wallowing in filth, and condemned to die a slow, painful death?

All who forsake YHVH, the Covenant of our forefathers, and the Ways of the Holy One, are eventually put to a *Y’hudah’s choice*. Perhaps the *prophetic time of Y’hudah’s choice* for you is today. Set the captive son or daughter of the Covenant in you free this instant! Release the prisoner within, and let him or her burst forth like a calf released from the stall! The Father is calling. The Unseen Shepherd is leading. Your destiny awaits.

Compare Y’hudah’s Experience to A Season of Exile Completed the Holy One’s Way

In today’s aliyah we will leave Y’hudah and Tamar back in the land of Kana’an with a prayer that the Holy One will put their fractured lives back together. While they try to sort through the debris of their respective pasts without the pressure of the microscope of Torah watching their every move we will zoom off to the land of the pyramids - to *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] – and visit young Yosef as he goes about the process of settling into his new life as a slave.

Y’hudah’s near-disastrous experience in exile provides the backdrop for the revelation of what living in exile *the Holy One’s way* is supposed to look like. The actor of this part of the drama will be Yosef.

The Divine writer of Torah has arranged the narrative of Torah in this manner to provide us the opportunity to directly contrast the two approaches taken by Y’hudah on the one hand and by Yosef on the other to the influences of *foreign culture*. We saw Y’hudah adopt *the way of assimilation*. His approach to his first taste of life outside the covenant family’s *shtetl* consisted of just blending in with the pagan society around him, and becoming like the pagans. ‘*When in Rome, do as the Romans do*’, as the saying goes.

In today’s aliyah of Torah we see Yosef outside the covenant family’s *shtetl* as well. Far away from his father’s household he will quickly find himself, as did Y’hudah, totally immersed in a pagan culture and society. But there will be some

major differences between Yosef's immersion in secular society and that of Y'hudah. First of all it must be pointed out that Y'hudah's immersion in secular society [in his case the perverse society of Kena'an] was *totally voluntary*, while Yosef's similar immersion [in the perverse society of Egypt] was *totally involuntary*. Yosef's immersion in foreign culture was foisted upon him completely *against his will* by conditions and circumstances totally beyond his control.

The question which presents itself to us as we see Yosef immersed against his will in a world he did not choose is this: *will Yosef assimilate into pagan society, and become just like the pagans, as did his older half-brother Y'hudah? Or will Yosef take a **different approach** to the temptations of secular society?*

Put another way the question is "In a world which neither acknowledges the Holy One as God nor accepts the Holy One's ways as guideposts for behavior, will young Yosef surrender to the ways of the pagans with whom he lives, **or** will he choose to walk with the Holy One and remain true to the Divine calling upon his life?' We will see, Dear Reader.

Welcome to Mitzrayim – the Land of Mysteries, Unheard-of Opportunities, and Intoxicating Distractions

In the Hebrew text of Torah Egypt is referred to by the name '**Mitzrayim**'. The Hebrew name for the country of the Pharaohs and the Nile means '*continually narrowing straights*'. If you want to get a vivid picture of what that name implies just picture *the violent contractions of the human womb and birth canal that occur when a pregnant woman is in labor*. There is a set time to enter and a set time to leave the birth canal. And while there is indeed a way out the process of exiting is *totally beyond the control of mother or child*, cannot be rushed, and *is not only uncomfortable but potentially traumatic*.

Egypt was destined to be to the Hebrew nation much like what a surrogate mother's womb is to a baby. The prophetic picture was first drawn back during the lifetime of Avraham when our beloved patriarch took Sarah to Egypt, she was taken into Pharaoh's harem. When that happened the Holy One shut up the wombs of the women of Egypt until Pharaoh let Sarah go.

With Yosef's arrival in *Mitzrayim* the process would start all over again. Just as Sarah upon her arrival in *Mitzrayim* was taken into Pharaoh's service, so will it be with Yosef. And as in the Holy One's good time Sarah emerged not only with her virtue intact but with the prospect of a new and more fruitful life so will it be with Yisrael.

Dealing With Pagan Society – the Holy One’s Way

Today’s aliyah shows how Yosef became caught up in and had to learn quickly to deal with the constraints of *Mitzrayim*. Here is how *the second Mitzrayim narrative* of Torah begins:

V’Yosef hurad Mitzraymah

And Yosef was brought down to Mitzrayim [Egypt]

V’yiknehu Potifar s’ris Par’oh

Potifar, an officer of Pharaoh’s,

sar ha-tabachim ish Mitzri

the captain of the guard, a Mitzrian,

miyad ha-Yishme’elim asher horiduhu shamah

bought him from the hand of the Yishme`elim that had brought him down there.

Vayehi Adonai et-Yosef vayehi ish matzliach

The Holy One was with Yosef, and he was a prosperous man.

vayehi b’veit adonav ha-Mitzri

and he was in the house of his master the Mitzrian.

[Genesis 39:1-2]

Yosef was not at this stage of his life at least stuck in some lonely prison cell where he had nothing to do but meditate on his father’s covenant with the Holy One day and night. He was not put to work in some field where he could focus on the beauty and wonder of Creation and thereby connect with the Creator. He was instead *plunged into the heart of the depraved culture of Egypt*.

24 hours every day, 7 days every week, and 365 days every solar year Yosef had to deal with the foreign culture of his new owner - with every one of the *perversions* and *demand appurtenant thereto*. He was thrust headlong into a situation in which he was *virtually overwhelmed* with the affairs of Egyptian life. Because his Hebrew garments were all back in Eretz Kena’an Yosef had to wear *Egyptian garments* or none at all. Even the language he had to speak in order to communicate with other human beings was not his own.

Please note that Yosef had *no Torah scroll* and *no prayer book*. He had no *tallit*, no *tefillin*, and no *tzit-tzit* to wear on the corners of his garment. He had no rabbi, no study partner, and no *yeshivah* or *synagogue*. He had no ‘youth group’, nor ‘church’.

In *Mitzrayim* not even Yosef’s *time* was his own. Moreover, as incredible as it

may seem Yosef did not even have a single God-encounter³ in any way comparable to those experienced by Avraham, by Yitschak or by his father Ya'akov from which to draw strength.

Indeed Yosef's *neshamah* [God-breathed soul] was all that he had to remind him who he was, what covenant he had with the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and what his purpose in life was. And for this young man, that was *all he needed*. Why was this so? Was it because Yosef had a 'strong' personality? No, Dear Reader. Yosef was able to maintain his integrity despite immersion in the world of pagan culture for one reason, and one reason alone: because he *yielded his will to the covenant-keeping power of the Holy One*.

Yosef was, you see, no stronger of personality than his kinsman Y'hudah. Yosef just *chose to yield to the Holy One - and to exchange his weakness for the Holy One's strength* - a lot sooner than did his half-brother. Both the brothers eventually found the place of surrender. All roads in life eventually end there. Y'hudah only got there after much struggle with stubbornness and his sin. Yosef was forced to go there early by the persecution of his brothers, all of whom were stronger than he.

A Look Around Yosef's First Stop in the Land of Mitzrayim

Permit me to introduce you to Yosef's new place of residence – the *house of Potifar*. This place is of course not anything like “home” – and yet it is going to turn out to be for Yosef a *pleasant enough sort of prison* – at least for a little while.

Mitzrayim is a land of *pleasant distractions*, a country of *conscience-numbing diversions*, and a culture chock full of very, very rich dead men walking.

The head of house in Yosef's new abode is Potifar, the captain of Pharaoh's palace guard. Potifar is nothing like “Father Ya'akov” of course – but he is a *decent-enough man* as Egyptians go. And for some reason Potifar *took a genuine liking* to Yosef – so much so that he believed in and encouraged the young Hebrew not only in his work but also in the process of maturation from boy to a man and from “dreamer” to productive member of society. Here is how Torah describes Potifar and Yosef's relationship:

Vayar adonav ki Adonai ito v'chol asher-hu oseh

His master saw that the Holy One was with him,

Adonai matzliach b'yado

and that the Holy One made all that he did prosper in his hand.

³ At least a God-encounter referenced by the Torah.

Vayimtza Yosef chen b'eynav
Yosef found favor in his [Potifar's] sight.

v'yesharet oto v'yafkidehu al-beito
He ministered to him, and he made him overseer over his house,

V'chol-yesh-lo natan b'yado
and all that he had he put into his hand.
[Genesis 39:3-4]

The food was good. The work was honest labor. The skills were transferable. For the first time in his life, Yosef did not have a single jealous brother to contend with. Perhaps this new life in Egypt was not going to be all that bad. But then . . . the *lady of the house* came calling, and everything changed.

Introducing the Lady of the House

In our reading today we will see that Yosef was not only looked upon with favor by his new master Potifar but was also admired - for very different reasons - by the lovely, charming, and demanding Mrs. Potifar. Torah tells us:

Vatisa eshet-adonav et-eyneyha el-Yosef
his master's wife cast her eyes on Yosef.

v'tomer shichvah imi
And she said: 'Lie with [i.e. pour yourself into, and mix your seed and essence with] me,'
[Genesis 39:7]

Potifar's wife's brazen advances provides the first real test of young Yosef's mettle. First of all, the one deep-seated wound in his life was the loss of his mother, Rachel, during his childhood. He wound up being raised by Rachel's adversary, Leah, and two handmaids. He lived Cinderella's story before it even was Cinderella's story.

One might therefore expect that the first temptation Yosef might have to deal with in his new life would be the *attentions, affections, adoring gazes, and flattery* of a matronly figure. That is just the way the serpent – and the cultures of the serpent – work. They find an area of woundedness and weakness, and look for a way to exploit and manipulate it.

Enter Potifar's wife, state left. The admiration and the compliments of Potifar's wife will be a significant test as to *how the young man will handle attention, flattery, pride and with ego*. But even more than this the temptation to surrender to Mrs. Potifar's sweet seduction is a test of *whether Yosef's relationship with the*

Holy One is real - or just for outward appearances and utilitarian purposes.

Where, we will find out today, do this young man's deepest loyalties truly lie? Just what are *the principles that really matter* to him? How is he dealing with *the rejection he suffered at the hands of his brothers and the emotional wounds their hatred – as well as his mother's untimely death -has inflicted on him?* How is he handling the *exploding hormones of his youth?* How is he going to respond to *the blessing of God on his life?* What voice – among all the *competing voices* in the marketplace of possibilities – is he going to listen to [Hebrew *sh'ma*], and heed?

The Road Less Traveled

We will see in today's aliyah something *remarkable* about Yosef. We will see that *flattery does not move him*. We will see that neither *appeals to his ego* nor *hormones crying out for romance* shake his resolve. We will see that he *fears the God of his father Ya'akov, his grandfather Yitschak, and his great-grandfather Avraham*, much more than he fears Potifar – and much more than he desires Potifar's wife.

As a result we will see Yosef stripped of a garment for the second time in this parsha. And we will see him falsely accused, and wrongly imprisoned, for a crime he did not – *would not* - commit. And we will have to acknowledge - unpleasant as it all seems - that *it was all part of the Holy One's plan of redemption for His people*.

Garments to Cover the Naked

Part of the morning prayer recited by those who follow the traditions of the ancient Hebrews is a phrase that is translated into English as:

*“Blessed is the One who . . .
. . . provides garments to cover the naked, brings freedom to the captive,
and lifts up the fallen by his strong right hand.”*

These words certainly can be said to relate and apply to many persons in Scripture - and even in our acquaintance - but surely they relate to no one any more literally than Yosef. The man who was stripped of his garment by his brothers and sold into slavery naked, finds himself clothed, stripped again, and clothed again. He has been a captive in a cistern, in a caravan, in Potifar's house, and, beginning in today's aliyah, in a prison *for enemies of the State*. In each case the strong hand of the Holy One has caught Yosef even as he was falling, accomplished Yosef's redemption, assured his sanctification, and delivered his blessing.

Such a God is worthy to be revered more than earthly rulers, more than

employers, and more than executioners. And when the strong right Hand of such a God is upon us . . . well, let's just say that the beauty of Potifar's wife *pales by comparison*. Hence the heart of today's aliyah is found in verse 9, where Yosef rejects the amorous advances of Potifar's wife by saying:

v'eych e'eseh ha-ra'ah ha-g'dolah hazot
"How . . . could I do such a wicked thing

v'chatati l'Elohim
and sin against the Holy One?"

The word our English Bibles translate as "sin" in this verse is the Hebrew word ***chata'***⁴. This word means to *stray from the path of blessing, to go a wrong way, to incur guilt, and to forfeit (or exchange) something pure and good for something impure and lethal, and to miss the mark or goal of life*. If we could truly understand and internalize the nature of this concept we would be far less susceptible to temptations, in whatever form. We do not merely "fall victim" to temptations, Beloved - we are *actors* exercising free will, not victims. We are not *overcome with passions and desires*. We simply come to a "fork" in the road, and consciously choose which path we will take - and what we will *value* and what we will not.

We do not merely "fall into sin". No, no indeed. To leave the pathway the Holy One has marked out for us we have to *consciously decide to turn our backs on God . . . and run away from Him*. And Yosef – unlike his half-brother Y'hudah in yesterday's aliyah - was not prepared to take that kind of plunge.

The Fateful Day of Ultimate Testing

On a particular day near the time of the Winter Solstice [specifically, on December 25], a day the ancient Egyptians called "*Nital*", the Egyptian people used to make a huge outdoor celebration in honor of the forces of darkness. According to Hebrew *midrash* it was on this day - when Potifar's wife [who was not, according to the *midrash*, an Egyptian] knew all the men would be out participating in pagan rites, and that the house would therefore be totally empty except for her and Yosef - that Mrs. Potifar decided to make her boldest move yet on the handsome young Hebrew.

Vayehi kehayom hazeh vayavo ha-baytah la'asot melachto
One particular day, [Joseph] came to the house to do his work

v'eyn ish me'anshei ha-bayit sham b'bayit
None of the household staff was inside.

Vatitpesehu bevigdo

⁴ Chata' is *chet, tav, alef*. Strong's Hebrew word #2398, it is pronounced *khaw-taw'*.

[The woman] then grabbed [Yosef] by his cloak.

l'emor shichvah imi

"Lie with [i.e. pour yourself into, and mix your seed and essence with] me!" she said.

Yosef had to think fast. What could he do? Here is how Torah puts it:

v'ya'azov big'do b'yadah v'yanas vayetze ha-chutzah

He ran away from her, leaving his cloak in her hand, and he fled outside.

[Genesis 39:12]

Yosef ran. He fled.

'Not exactly a *'faith' response*', you snicker? 'Not a very *'macho'* thing to do', you say? Oh *really*? If you believe those things about Yosef's flight from the embrace of Potifar's wife then you have no idea what the covenant of the Holy One with Yosef's great-grandfather Avraham was all about.

Think seriously for a moment about Yosef's options in that moment – and the consequences of each. Go back and read the advice of Sh'lomo in Proverbs 5:1-14. Then go back and re-read the stories of Y'hudah and *bat-Shuah* and of Y'hudah's indiscretion with Tamar from yesterday's aliyah.

Just where do you think yielding to Mrs. Potifar's advances would have ultimately landed Yosef? How far do you think hanging around and trying to engage the excited Mrs. Potifar in a theological discussion about the proper application and implications of Genesis 2:24, or convincing her she should 'back off' and cleave only to Potifar, would have gotten the young Hebrew?

To run, to flee, was not only the wisest course Yosef could have followed, but actually was the course that took a whole lot more *faith* and *chutzpah* than anything else Yosef could have done in that given circumstance. Think back to Adam and Chava in the Garden. A whole lot more running, and a whole lot less staying and engaging in conversation with the Serpent, could have made a *world* of difference, no? Good move, Yosef.

You can forget many things in life, Dear Reader. But never, never, forget the following three things that Yosef taught us about how to deal with the Mrs. Potifars of this world. He taught us that when they *flatter us*, we should be on our guard. He taught us that when they *feign affection for us*, we should ignore it. And he taught us that *when they reach for us to pull us down to their level*, we should *run as far away from them as we can get and as fast as our feet can fly*. This is the only way we can preserve our integrity.

Alas there will be some rather unpleasant consequences even for this. A scorned woman always exacts her revenge. It did not bode well for Yosef when Potifar's wife pulled off Yosef's garment as he fled her advances.

Vatikra l'anshei veytah vatomer lahem l'emor

And then she called her household servants, and said

re'u hevi lanu ish Ivri l'tzachek banu ba elay l'sh'kav imi

Look here, this Hebrew slave mocked my authority and tried to rape me!

Based upon the testimony of his wife and the damning evidence she held in her hand Torah tells us that Potifar had no choice but to have Yosef arrested and thrown into a dungeon where enemies of the state of Egypt were imprisoned. **Genesis 39:20.**

Do not get me wrong. A foreign country's prison is not exactly a place Yosef – or anyone in his right mind - would choose to go on his own accord. But considering *who Yosef is*, where he has just been, and *what all has happened to him thus far in his life*, suffice it to say that there are in this world – and in the next – far, far worse places Yosef could have landed than this particular Egyptian prison. For Torah tells us:

Vayehi Adonai et-Yosef vayet elav chased

The Holy One was with Yosef, and He showed him kindness,

vayiten chino b'eynei sar beyt-ha-sohar

And he gave him favor in the eyes of the warden of the prison.

Vayiten sar beyt-ha-sohar b'yad-Yosef

Soon, the warden had placed in the hand of Yosef

et kol-ha-asirim asher b'veyt ha-sohar

all the prisoners that were kept in the dungeon.

v'et kol-asher osim sham hu hayah oseh

And [Yosef] took care of everything that had to be done.

Eyn sar beyt-ha-sohar ro'eh et-kol-me'umah b'yado b'asher

The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care.

Adonai ito v'asher-hu oseh Adonai matzliach

And the Holy One was with [Yosef], and He granted him success in all he did.

[Genesis 39:21-23]

For a child of the Holy One even what the world intends as a punishment can become a springboard to a new and greater opportunity. In the Holy One's economy one who is faithful in small things, it seems, really does find himself not only blessed for his trouble, but also afforded greater and greater kingdom

privileges and entrusted with larger and larger kingdom responsibilities.

And so as we conclude today's study the questions hanging in the air have less to do with Yosef and more to do with **us**. The questions that hang in the air are [1] *To what 'prison' have you been assigned?* and [2] *What are you going to do while you are here with whatever opportunities of service you have been provided?*

Many times in life you cannot control where you are planted. But you can always control how much you grow personally – and how much you glorify the name of the Holy One - while you are there. Quit *complaining about your circumstances*. They may well be unpleasant or even disastrous, but complaining is not going to help. Quit *whining over who did what to hurt you*. Others you have met in your life journey may have treated you badly indeed, deceiving you, taking advantage of you, oppressing you, manipulating you, falsely accusing you, attacking you, physically injuring you, abandoning you, even molesting you. But whining about it just prolongs and expands the agony. Quit *beating yourself up over your own mistakes, failures, missed signs, squandered opportunities, and blown chances*. You may have played the prodigal indeed – but that does not by any means have to be the end of the story.

All the focus needs to be directed to the Holy One and His Glorious Redemptive Plan for you and for the world. As soon as and to the extent you can redirect your focus there, healing and dramatic deliverance can occur. Until you redirect your focus there, however, matters will just get worse – for you and everyone around you - with every episode of rehashing, complaining, moaning, and self-deprecation.

Learn from our ancestor Yosef. Be faithful and diligent in whatever you put your hand to. Do something—any little thing within your power — to *help someone else less fortunate than you*. And then just watch and see what wonderful things the Holy One will do *in, through,* and *for* you.

Questions for Today's Study

1. The secret to Yosef's defiant refusal to “sin” with Potifar's wife is actually found in verse 10. It is hidden in the English translations. In the Hebrew, it says he *would not sh'ma* Potifar's wife. Why? How? Because He was *sh'ma*-ing the Voice of God. His sheep *sh'ma* His Voice; the voice of another they will not *sh'ma*. Follow the Voice, Beloved!

[A] Torah records that, in the midst of his slavery, the Holy One was “with” Yosef. What do you think this means?

[B] List all the different things that occurred, according to verses 2-5, because the Holy One was “**with**” Yosef.

[C] When Potifar’s wife desired Yosef, what was Yosef’s response?

[D] When Yosef explained why he could not do what Potifar’s wife wanted, against whom did Yosef say what she wanted would be a sin?

[E] In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the words translated as “wickedness” and “sin”[KJV] in verse 9. Write the Hebrew words and their meanings.

2. After Potifar’s wife made her false accusations concerning Yosef, he was put in a prison, where, according to the Hebrew sages, he would remain for twelve years.

*Yosef's master took him, and put him into the prison,
the place where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in custody.
But the Holy One was with Yosef, and showed covenant faithfulness to him,
and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

*The keeper of the prison committed to Yosef's hand
all the prisoners who were in the prison.
Whatever they did there, he was the doer of it.
The keeper of the prison didn't look after anything that was under his hand,
because the Holy One was with him;
and that which he did, the Holy One made it prosper.*

[A] According to verse 21 the Holy One was also “with” Yosef in this prison. List the effects of the abiding of the Holy One’s manifest presence with Yosef in this prison.

[B] How does the punishment of Yosef for the sin of Potifar’s wife point to Messiah? Explain.

3. In today’s Haftarah the Holy One, through his prophet Amos, warns Israel of the consequences of the sins listed in verses 6-9 AND the adding to those sins by giving wine to the Nazirites sent to them by the Holy One and by commanding the prophets sent by the Holy One to them not to prophesy.

***Behold, I will crush you in your place,
As a cart crushes that is full of grain.***

***Flight will perish from the swift;
and the strong won't strengthen his force;
neither will the mighty deliver himself;
neither will he who handles the bow stand;
and he who is swift of foot will not escape.
Neither will he who rides the horse deliver himself;
and he who is courageous among the mighty
will flee away naked in that day," says the Holy One.***

[A] Why do you think the Israelites who had committed the sins listed in

verses 6-9 would give wine to Nazirites?

[B] Why do you think the Israelites who had committed the sins listed in verses 6-9 would tell prophetic people not to speak their visions and words?

[C] List the things that the Holy One says will happen to Israel on the day He judges Israel for the sins of verses 6-12.

[D] What does the Holy One say a truly courageous man will do prior to the day of Judgment for such sins?

[E] Can you see a connection between verse 16 and what Yosef did in today's Torah aliyah? Explain.

4. In today's reading from the apostolic Scriptures Stefanos [Stephen], as part of his response to his accusers, gets his turn to testify. His testimony is not in his own defense. He neither mentions the charges against him nor argues his innocence. He *ignores the charges against him altogether* and instead gives a "defense" of the Holy One, blessed be His Name! Here is how our Bibles record the beginning of his speech:

He said, "Brothers and fathers, listen [Hebrew, sh'ma!].

The God of glory appeared to our father Avraham, when he was in Aram-Naharayim, before he lived in Haran, and said to him,

'Get out of your land, and from your relatives, and come into a land which I will show you.'

Then he came out of the land of the Kasdim, and lived in Haran.

From there, when his father was dead,

God moved him into this land, where you are now living.

He gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on.

He promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he still had no child.

God spoke in this way: that his seed would live as aliens in a strange land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.

'I will judge the nation to which they will be in bondage,' said God, 'and after that will they come out, and serve me in this place.'

He gave him the covenant of circumcision.

So Avraham became the father of Yitzchak, and circumcised him the eighth day.

Yitschak became the father of Ya`akov, and Ya`akov became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

[A] What was the "text" for Stephen's sermon to the Sanhedrin?

[B] How does Stephen describe the Holy One in verse 2?

[C] According to verse 7, for what purpose were the descendants of Avraham brought to *Ha-Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]?

*May the Holy One be "with" you this day as He was with Yosef;
may the Holy One speak through you this day as He spoke through Amos;
and may the Holy One be vindicated in you this day as He was vindicated in Stephen.*

The Rabbi's Son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 35:11-16

*Unrighteous witnesses rise up. They ask me about things that I don't know about.
They reward me evil for good, to the bereaving of my soul.*

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth.

I afflicted my soul with fasting.

My prayer returned into my own bosom.

I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or my brother.

I bowed down mourning, as one who mourns his mother.

But in my adversity, they rejoiced,

and gathered themselves together.

The attackers gathered themselves together against me,

and I didn't know it. They tore at me, and didn't cease.

Like the profane mockers in feasts, They gnashed their teeth at me.