

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**



'Yosef is still alive . . .
[Genesis 45:26(a)]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 8, *Mishpat* [Justice]

Week 11 of the Torah cycle is upon us – and it finds us approaching a dramatic turning point in *the Grand Redemption Story*. The name given by the sages to this parsha is *Vayigash*. This Hebrew phrase means . . . ***and [he] drew very close.***

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 from anger, suspicion, and anxiety bordering upon despair to tender compassion, transparency leading to trust, and peacefulness bordering on ecstasy. 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. And the past, the present, and the future of the Covenant People are all going to look a *whole lot different* as a result.

Welcome to the Parsha of Glorious Reconciliation

I have come to call *Vayigash* the *Parsha of Glorious Reconciliation*. In the course of this parsha the festering sin pattern of inner-family jealousy that has brought heartbreak and redemptive judgment upon the Covenant Household and the world in general for generations will at last be exposed, dealt with, and overcome. After whole lifetimes of denial, of conspiracies and cover-ups, and of living in paralyzing fear and shame – not to mention inflicting immeasurable pain and grief

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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 as well.

May the words we read in this week's parsha of Torah not just be received by us as a *manual on how to facilitate and respond to reconciliation* between estranged brothers but as a significant down payment on the reconciliation between Mashiach and all twelve tribes in the *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.

A Look Back in the Direction From Whence We Have Come

We have now successfully 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. The heavens and the earth have been created – then seemingly destroyed – then made fresh and new again. The foundation for all God-man relations has been established in the form of the covenants the Holy One made with Noach and with Avraham.

We have learned from our patriarchs a series of crucial lessons in how man is designed to *relate to* and *interact with* His Creator. 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 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] principle - i.e. that worship is not at essence any particular action but is instead an attitude of submission, gratitude, and reverence in matters of ordinary life.

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

1. The **atar** methodology of prayer - i.e. how to plead passionately from a place of brokenness with the Holy One on behalf of our family members and their covenant destinies;
2. The **yachafar et-be'er** principle - i.e. the 're-opening the wells' principle, 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;
3. The **yashev** principle - 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.

From our ancestor Ya'akov we have learned:

1. The **abag** principle - i.e. how 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 **t'shuvah** principle - 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.

More recently we have watched both Yosef and Y'hudah 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.

Time for a Paradigm Change

We have discovered that the Yosef and Y’hudah narratives we have been reading for the past two weeks [parshot *Vayashev* and *Miketz*] have a very different ‘*feel*’ and the *center-of-gravity* than the previous eight parshot we read.

In prior parshot [from *B’reshit* all the way through *Vayishlach*] the narrative of Torah was chock full of both *dramatic ‘God-encounter’ narratives* and *verbatim quotations of Divine speech*. It was *just delicious*. From the initial ‘*Light, BE!*’ declaration of Genesis 1:3 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 *grew accustomed* to looking forward to, and then joyfully doting on and pouring over, savoring and meditating on, each place in the narrative when the Holy one *interrupted the affairs of the world and the events of our forefathers’ lives, injected His manifest Presence, and actually spoke His All-powerful creative and prophetic Words to men* in a language men could understand.

We got used to reading the actual Words of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. *Amazing words. Transforming words. Words that leapt off the pages of Torah and veritably danced before our eyes. Words that confounded our minds. Words that pierced our hearts. Words that reshaped everything about us.* For the first eight weeks of our study therefore we became accustomed to reading every narrative account of our ancestors’ life experiences with confidence and anticipation 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 . . .]*”.

We were being trained by the Master, you see, through those first 8 parshot, to learn to *live by the Voice of the Holy One* instead of just by responding to circumstances. The words the Creator so graciously spoke to our ancestors on so many occasions were thus made – by Divine Design - to become *life* to 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.

And then, suddenly . . . Silence!

Suddenly however in parshot *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 two weeks.

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 Y'hudah 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 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?

If It Were Not So . . .

This is a fitting time, I believe, to revisit some of the things we said at the beginning of this enterprise. First of all, at the beginning of this enterprise we warned the reader that these lessons are not designed as or intended to be just a friendly little Bible study. We warned in the introductory *shiur* that from its opening parsha the Torah of the Holy One was going to *assail us like a two-edged sword* and be used by the Holy One with surgical precision to *confront* our complacency, to *expose our hypocrisy*, to *challenge* our worldview, to *judge 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* [i.e. 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*.

Parsha *Vayigash* is going to bring this point home for us. Parsha *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 words “*And the Holy One said . . .*” What will the Holy One say? What will be the Holy One’s last direct spoken message to mankind prior to the burning bush encounter of Exodus 3? Let’s let Torah tell us, shall we?

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

V'Yosef yashit yado al-eyneycha

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*.

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 for the Exile 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 would 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 would die under the cruel taskmaster's whip before the sojourn in Egypt was over, He was going to make sure that it is still going to turn out all right. Though vast numbers of the children of Ya'akov's descendants would be drowned in the Nile before the Holy One brought them out by His mighty arm and His strong right hand, He was going to make sure that it is still going to urn out all right.

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. But it may take a glance at the Haftarah of the week to understand why that is so. What is at stake, you see, is much, much bigger than human suffering.

Gentlemen, Place Your Bets!

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 parsha Vayigash?* Let me explain. As you will recall, last week's parsha ended with all Ya'akov/Yisrael's sons, including young Binyamin, in deep distress in Egypt. Yosef, now known as *Tzafanat Paneach*, and second in command under Pharaoh, has just sprung an ingenious trap designed to get Binyamin away from his elder half-brothers. *Tzafanat Paneach* has had his servants plant a precious silver cup from his palace in Binyamin's pack, and has arranged for the cup to be found. *Tzafanat Paneach* has also arranged for Binyamin to be arrested for the theft, brought before him, and sentenced to serve for life as *Tzafanat Paneach's* personal slave.

Yosef, of course, had no intention of making Binyamin his slave. No doubt he figured that as soon as the stunned half-brothers were safely out of sight on their way back to Kena'an he would reveal his true identity to Binyamin, set him free, and start being the big brother and mentor to Binyamin 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 *a game*. Yosef was the 'house', and the game was played by the 'house' rules. He never considered the possibility that the 'house' might lose. But at the last minute, 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 Egyptian *roulette* 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? He had the Holy One to thank, of course. But as He so often does the Holy One used an earthly vessel. In this case, the vessel the Holy One chose to use was Y'hudah. And so at the conclusion of last week's parsha, immediately after Yosef announced that Binyamin would be his slave and the other 10 Hebrews were free to go home, Y'hudah stepped up and blew Yosef's whole scheme out of the water.

Vayomer Y'hudah mah-nomar l'adoni

What can we say to my lord?' replied Y'hudah.

mah-nedaber umah-nitzadak

'What words and what defense can we offer?'

ha-Elohim matza et-avon

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

avadecha hinenu 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. Y'hudah 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 alterative - he and all 9 other step-brothers were going to remain in Egypt as *Tzafanat Paneach's* slaves.

What on earth – or in Heaven - has gotten into Y'hudah? What is he thinking? Has he gone *meshuga*? Or is he perhaps 'crazy like a fox?'

A Fool's Bet – Or a Brilliant Ploy?

Please stop for a moment and think about the consequence of Y'hudah'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 Y'hudah 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 Y'hudah's wife Tamar and his two 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 Y'hudah 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 awhile 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*.

Y'hudah 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.

As the wheel is still spinning, as it were, Y'hudah steps forward, breaks all the rules, and ups the ante for the game yet one more time. Here is how Torah records it:

Vayigash elav Y'hudah vayomer

And Y'hudah drew near, and said,

bi adoni yedaber-na avdecha davar b'oznei adoni

'Please, my lord, may I speak something to you privately?

* * *

V'atah yeshev-na av'decha 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. 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.

A Parsha Vayigash Travelogue

This week's parsha and the first aliyah begins with Y'hudah stepping forward to approach *Tzafanat Paneach* with a stunning proposal.

1. Y'hudah's Proposal of Substitutionary Atonement

The essence of Y'hudah'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.

2. A Son of the Covenant Awakens

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

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 of Yosef With His Brothers

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

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

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

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. Ya'akov's Final God-Encounter

While the covenant family's caravan was stopped in Beersheva 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 Covenants the Holy One made with the descendants of Avraham contained, as an essential element, an eternal '*with-ness*' factor, 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

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. Y'hudah Is Chosen to Act as Forerunner

Ya'akov will send his son Y'hudah 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

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

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

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 Prospers and Multiplies in Its New Home

Meanwhile in the land of Goshen the family of Ya'akov starts out the exile in style. Everything the Hebrews put their hand to is, at first, very fruitful. Their number will begin to multiply exceedingly. All will seem to be just fine. But in exile, things are never what they first appear! With that revelation, parsha *Vayigash* will conclude.

A Brief Look at Haftarah Vayigash

Ezekiel 37:15 -28

The Haftarah for parsha *Vayigash* explains in significant part why what is about to happen to Ya'akov's descendants in Egypt is going to turn out 'all right' in the end of days. The substance of this 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 which 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 Y'hudah 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 Y'hudah 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* [known to most English translations by the Anglicized name *Jeroboam*], rebelled against the Y'hudan dynasty based in Y'rushalayim [then headed by Sh'lomo's son Rehovo'am], seceded from the united kingdom and set up a rival kingdom with its capitol in

Samaria². This left the Holy One's covenant people divided into two kingdoms – one consisting of the tribes of Y'hudah and Binyamin, and the other consisting of the other 10 'Northern' tribes. The historical details of this schism are found at I Kings 9-12. Basically, after Sh'lomo's death his evil and idol-worshipping son Rehovo'am advised the leaders of the Northern tribes he intended to rule them harshly. Here is how the TaNaKh records it.

Then the king answered the people roughly,
* * *
*saying, "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!"*

*. . . and 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 which followed Yerovo'am in the secession – wound up setting up not only their own completely separate kingdom, but also their own completely separate *religious system*. The 'Northern' tribes ceased to regard the Temple of Sh'lomo as the dwelling place of God; hence they refused to go up to Y'rushalayim for the pilgrimage festivals. In place of the Y'rushalayim-centered system, the Northern Kingdom instituted a religious system that involved two primary temples – one at Beit-El, near the border dividing the two kingdoms, and the other at Dan, near Mount Hermon in the far north. At these temples, Yerovo'am introduced the worship of a calf image, reminiscent of what the children of Israel were judged for worshipping the first time Moshe ascended Mount Sinai receiving the Torah. **II Kings 12:26-33.**

There does not appear to have ever been a significant reunion of the Northern and Southern tribes. Some believe that when the Northern Kingdom was besieged and overrun by Assyria in 722 BCE [see II Kings 17], surely some of the descendants of

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'.

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, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim,
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 Y'shua 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 Y'hudah 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 Y'hudah 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 Y'hudah, and rejoined their brethren in one level or another of Torah observance. It is, therefore, believed that within the present day 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

In the B'rit Chadasha reading selected for parsha *Vayigash* Y'shua 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.

Y'shua Disrupts Yet Another Religious Service

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 Y'shua 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 go there, instead, to *totally disrupt the "service"*.

Y'shua Calls and Begins the Training of Twelve

After disrupting the service Messiah will leave the incensed people in a tumult and uproar, shaking off the dust of His feet as it were, and will *head for the hills*. After praying all night Y'shua will call his *talmidim* [i.e. disciples/personal assistants/devoted apprentices], and will choose 12 of them to serve as *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*.

Y'shua and the Torah

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

Y'shua Prophecies of the Calling Forth of Sons of God

Towards the end of this lengthy reading from the Brit Chadasha Y'shua will make reference to a very special group of people which 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 of God".

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week
The 8th Petition: Mishpat [Justice/Judgment]

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