

וַיַּעִשֶׂב Vayeishev

Genesis XXXVII: 1 - XL: 23

Haftara Vayeishev

Amos Chapter II: 6 - III: 8

The previous Sedrah, וַיֵּשְׁלַח Vayeshlach, ends with an enumeration of the leadership of the descendants of Esau who is described as the father of the Edomites. The Torah now turns to Esau's twin brother Jacob: Genesis Chapter XXXVII, Verse 1 "And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojourning; (where his father lived) in the Land of Canaan." One needs to ask right away why does the Torah feel it necessary to identify where Jacob was living as both "where his father (Isaac) lived" and as "(the Land of) Canaan?" The Torah is economical when it comes to words. Unless there is something for us to learn from something, the words to share with us are not included.

So, why do we need to know that where Jacob was living was both where his father (Isaac) lived and also that that place was Canaan?

The Torah is about to share a great deal with us about the relationship between Jacob and his son Joseph. Apparently, the Torah wants to set the stage properly before doing so by putting everything in place and space for us. We know that unlike Isaac, who never left the Land of Canaan during his entire life, Jacob experienced quite a lot of extra-Canaan mobility. That being said, the Torah apparently wants to make sure that we know that at this juncture Jacob was no longer "on the road" but, rather, was settled and in one place. And, to fully define the mind set of our forefather Jacob at this moment, the Torah makes it clear to us that he was living in the very special place where his father and grandfather had lived; the local that would eventually be called the "Promised Land" and, later still, "Zion" and, eventually, be known by his, Jacob's own "other" name; i.e. "Israel."

Knowing that, what will be shared with us by the Torah in the following verses took place in what would one day be our Holy Land; really everybody's Holy Land; then called Canaan. This sets the stage, if you will, for not only what we are about to learn but, it also establishes the

importance of it. Not only is Jacob in a very settled part of life, but he is settled in what, surely to him, must have been the singularly most important place on the entire planet. For those of us who are appreciative of this, the Torah, in alerting us in this way, is saying, "Be alert! This is very important."

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 2 begins, "These are the generations (or children) of Jacob" and we would be right to expect a nice neat list of names of the sons of Jacob. But, that is not what happens. Instead, the Torah jumps right into a bit of a "family situation" that could surely have raised the ire of those on the downside of the affair.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 2 continues "Joseph, who was seventeen years old, was feeding the flock of or, better, was a shepherd for his brothers' flocks and he was (still or, better yet) a lad (by comparison to) his (older) brothers; the sons of Bilhath and the sons of Zilpah, who were his (Joseph's) father's wives." Here, again, the Torah is providing us with a very precise understanding of the important elements of the situation about to be imparted to us.

To clarify: Joseph was seventeen years old. He was seventeen. That is, the first thing we learn about Joseph. He was seventeen. Of course, that means very different things depending on who might be reading that at any one moment. To youngsters of grammar school age, seventeen means a lot. Young, yes but looking ahead at the teen years and hearing of Joseph, who they may already know by reputation from memories of their own family Passover Seders, such young boys and girls might well be very impressed by such a young fellow, so close in age to themselves, to be front and center as the Torah is about to advance the story of the Jewish People; of the world really.

Adults are adults. Adults will look at a seventeen year old and, surely, frame everything they see and hear with a certain amount of skepticism. After all, seventeen is just a kid. Seventeen. What can a seventeen year old know?

The Torah actually goes a step further in its initial introduction of Joseph to us by including in its description that Joseph is a "lad." First, that he is seventeen and, then, that he is a shepherd for his (older brothers') flocks and, then, that he is a lad. So, just in case anyone might want, perhaps, to say that Joseph was "older than his years" or "advanced for his age,"

including the description of Joseph as a "lad" would, or at least be mentioned in order to stop that kind of "out-of-the-box" exploration into "genius" or anything like that regarding Joseph. He was, let us just say, a seventeen year old young man who was experienced as a shepherd. Of course, the responsibilities of a shepherd are significant. So, he was not to be thought of as frivolous, undisciplined or childish. Joseph was young but, still, a proven, capable and nurturing individual, which are bedrock requirements to be effective in the area of shepherding sheep.

The Torah notes that Joseph was a shepherd of his brothers' herds. We might want to consider this aspect of what the Torah has put forth in its effort to lay the groundwork for the situation to follow. When we think of the Avos, the (our) forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we recognize that their life style was somewhat different than what our typical family structure is today. Theirs was more of an extended family and in more ways than one. Having more than one wife was certainly different than we know today. Converts to the belief in one G-d were also part of the extended family of the Avos. It was, perhaps, closer to a kind of village or, even a tribe, where those who were in the "family" did what they could for the community and were, similarly, taken care of by the community as needed.

So, when, at this juncture, as we are being introduced to Joseph, an aspect of the life among the Avos and their family and of their followers is disclosed even if it is done on the oblique.

Depending on how you look at it, it may not have been "all for one and one for all" in the time of the Avos. If it was, then how could the Torah say that Joseph was a shepherd for "his brothers' flocks?" Community property would have been what we would have thought was the rule of the day. However, it might have been that the "responsibility" for the flocks over which Joseph served as a shepherd was that of his brothers. So, the flocks might not have "belonged" to his brothers as such. But, if that were the case, why are we apprised in the way that we were?

At the very least, we know from this verse that Joseph was what might be referred to as a neophyte as opposed to a leader or decision maker, where, his brothers were older and at a different, more advanced juncture in their lives; particularly as compared to where Joseph was at that time in his life.

The last aspect of the information that is shared by the Torah with us in this verse is that the brothers for whom Joseph was serving as a shepherd were the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, who were Jacob's wives. We can take it that all of their sons are in the mix. None were named, so, we can take it that none were left out.

But, let us first review fully the situation regarding Jacob's family and where his son Joseph fits in.

Jacob had twelve sons and at least one daughter by his two wives, Leah and Rachel and by their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah.

Here, in our Sedrah, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are mentioned and, more interestingly, Bilhah and Zilpah are referred to as Jacob's wives as well. There are those who still refer to Bilhah and Zilpah as "handmaidens." But, as we prepare to learn more about Joseph and his brothers, it would be wise to pay full attention to every word in the Torah, and, here we are told that Bilhah and Zilpah were Jacob's wives. So, they were.

With all this background, we are able to more fully appreciate who Joseph was at this juncture, how he fit into the family of the Avos and who all the "players" would be going forward as the Torah brings the verse to a conclusion by informing us that Joseph brought an evil report to their father.

We do not yet know what the details of Joseph's "evil report" might have been. But, the weight of the moment is clear to us and, surely, captivates our attention as we prepare to read the next verse.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 3 "And Israel loved Joseph more than all his (other) sons (or children) because he (Joseph) was the son of his old age. And, he (Jacob) made for him (Joseph) a coat of many colors."

There is a broad based discussion among various translators as to whether the coat or garment that Jacob made for Joseph was a "coat of many colors" or a "garment with long sleeves" or a "garment with various images on it," (i.e. a long robe with sleeves or a richly ornamented robe)

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yetzchaki, z"l, (1040 - 1105) gives us, perhaps a, if not the, most intuitive interpretations of כְּתֹנֶת פַּרְסִים (KeSoNess PahSeem) "a coat of many colors." Rashi says that פַּרְסִים (PaSeem) means "fine wool" as "fine cotton and blue," and he compares it to "the cloak of fine wool" of

Tamar and Amnon in the Book of Samuel, Chapter 13 Verse 8. It is the only other place in the Torah where this phrase is found. King David's virgin daughter wore such apparel; just like Joseph's special garment.

It is not pointed out by Rashi precisely but perhaps because we are expected to "see" the similarities in each instance on our own. The Israel Institute of Biblical Studies (see: www.israelbiblicalstudies.com) helps us gain a much more valuable appreciation of what the Torah is telling us here by making the following comparative observation:

Both the story of Joseph and the garment made for him by his father Jacob and the story of Tamar, King David's daughter, and the garment she wore, both end similarly and badly. Joseph was sold and Tamar was raped. Joseph's brothers stripped Joseph of his coat of many colors and Tamar tore her garment.

Something else is pointed out with regard to the special "material" of which both Joseph's "coat" and Tamar's "tunic" were made. Apparently, this kind of blue very finely made material was reserved to be worn by royalty.

Rashi digs deeper into the matter of wanting to fully explore what the Torah is sharing with us by using the word פְּסִים (PehSeem) by telling us of an Aggadic interpretation of the word, which is translated as "because of his troubles."

(An Aggadah is a non-legal narrative such as a parable, a maxim or an anecdote, in the Talmud and in other rabbinic literature used to illustrate the meaning or purpose of the law or custom or biblical passage under discussion).

For the letter "Pay" פּ, reminds us that he, Joseph, was sold to פּוֹטְפָר PoteeFar, which starts with the letter "Pay" פּ. The letter "ס" Samach reminds us that he was also sold "LehSoChahReem" (סוֹחָרִים) to the merchants; and, he was also sold to the Ishmealites (יִשְׁמְעֵאֵלִים) and to the Midianites מִדְיָנִים, i.e. (which is to say that the consecutive letters in the word פְּסִים (PehSeem) is equal to the initial letters of each of all those entities; סוֹחָרִים) Sochreem, פּוֹטְפָר PohTeefArr, (יִשְׁמְעֵאֵלִים) Ishmaelites, and to the (מִדְיָנִים) Midianites. This is the nature of Aggadic interpretation, but, it does make us think.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII, Verse 4 "And his (Joseph's) brothers saw that their father loved him (Joseph) more than all the brothers and they hated him (Joseph) and were unable to speak peaceably to him." Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz (b. 1937) in his new Chumash © 2015 and 2018, broadens our understanding by commenting that Joseph's brothers were so angry that Joseph was so favored by their father Jacob that they were unable to maintain any sort of peaceful dialogue with Joseph. Rabbi Steinsaltz says further that "the brothers avoided all conversation with Joseph and distanced themselves from Joseph as much as possible."

"The Rav," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z"l, (1903 - 1993), offers several observations that help us to gain a better or a clearer appreciation of Joseph himself and the relationship between Joseph and his brothers and to a certain extent, to shed light on the relationship between various segments of the Jewish community from one generation to another right up until today and, by all odds, ad infinitum.

The Rav notes that there was a familial resemblance between Joseph and his father Jacob that did not exist in the same way among any of Joseph's brothers. So, from that alone there may have been something that ingratiated Jacob to Joseph differently than what was seen towards Jacob's other sons.

But, beyond the physical, Joseph had something that was, or that made him, outstanding compared to anyone else. Joseph had, according to the Rav, ambitions to be effective in the world in two very distinct, if not normally thought to be divergent ways. One, he wanted to be super organized, which would lead him to be successful in the business of life to where he would become materialistically wealthy. Two, he wanted to be on par with the Avos; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; his great grandfather, his grandfather and his father; in terms of their spiritual abilities and moral enlightenment. The Rav looks forward to the dreams that Joseph later relates; one about sheaves of wheat the other about the stars in the sky and where Joseph is compared to his brothers in each. The Rav notes the divergences represented by each dream; farming and business towards financial wealth and, the out of the world heavenly and even spiritual superiority. The Rav asks if this is possible, for a person to be so outstandingly accomplished in both seemingly mutually exclusive areas in

one lifetime; i.e. one life. The Rav concludes that it is and explains that the "garment" or "coat of many colors" is symbolic of the weaving together of the many divergent parts of a person's personality and capabilities to one whole that allows that person to be all but miraculously able and all but perfect in both domains at the same time.

The Rav reminds us that it was the Ramban, Nachmanides, z"l, (1194 - 1270), who referred to the Book of Genesis as the Book of Ha SeeMoNeem; the Book of Signs or the book that foretells the future. The story in Parshas Vayeshloch (Genesis Chapter XXXII Verse 4 to Chapter XXXVI Verse 43) tells about Israel and Esau, which is a relationship that has remained difficult ever since. Our Parsha, Vayeshev, focuses on the difficulties between or among Jews in their own community, which is also continuing and, apparently, ongoing.

Sibling rivalry is a subject about which they write books, plays and movies; operas even. But, for some reason, the Torah does not seem to shine a light on these other areas that may have been driving the feelings that Joseph's brothers might have had about or towards their father with regard to how he treated them in comparison to how he treated Joseph. Could their feelings have been slighted by Jacob, their father, in the way that he favored Joseph over the rest of his sons? Possibly. We say possibly because, if we look forward in the Sedrah and focus on the way Joseph's brothers handle the way they told their father that Joseph was dead. Remember, after they listened to Reuben and decided not to kill Joseph outright, they decided, instead, to sell Joseph to passing slave traders. The brothers cover the "coat of many colors" with animal blood and take it back to their father, Jacob, and tell him that a wild animal had killed Joseph and they used the blood soaked "coat of many colors" as evidence or proof of Joseph's death.

Is that any way to treat one's father? How much of this meanness is payback for how they were treated by their father in relationship to how he treated their brother Joseph?

We have not found any commentator who has broached this subject or who entertains this as a driving force in these matters. But, logic tends to make us think that it is a distinct possibility.

Keeping the Rav's observation in mind, we can look at Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 5 "and Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren; and they hated him yet the more."

The Torah foreshadows what is to come by telling us not only that Joseph had a dream but that he shared its content with his brothers and that doing so, apparently, stoked his brothers anger towards Joseph even more.

The Torah could have just told us Joseph had a dream and, then, skipped right to the next verse to tell us of how Joseph got his brothers to listen to his recounting of the contents of his dream, then, the contents of the dream itself and, finally, how his brothers reacted to Joseph's dream. Why the foreshadowing? Why not have just gotten right to it?

We have not found among the commentators anyone who focuses on this question, which might lead us to wonder whether we are being too picky and should just move on ourselves. But, just in case what concerns us concerns our readers as well, we offer the following for consideration.

Sibling rivalry is a reality. We can say, "Big deal" and move on, or, we can carefully regard everything the Torah presents. By telling us what happened; i.e. that Joseph had a dream and that he told his brothers about what he had dreamt and that his brothers hated Joseph even more because he had shared what he had dreamt with them, we are informed in one moment that Joseph was not one who kept entirely to himself. His dream was, of course, completely personal and private and he could well have kept it private and he could have kept it to himself. No one would have ever known about his dream unless he chose to share it with others, his brothers, as he did. Did he understand the meaning of his dream? We know from what transpires later on in the Torah, that he eventually would develop a knack, if not an uncanny ability, to interpret the symbolism and, thereby, the meanings that are the underlying messages within a person's dreams. But, that is later on in the Torah. What about at this juncture of his life at seventeen years of age? Was he then, at seventeen, up to interpreting his own dreams?

Therein is an important aspect of dreams. The meanings or messages hidden within the stories or symbolic representations of dreams are not from anywhere nor are they from anyone other than the person who actually dreamt the dreams and who may relate the details of their dreams

to others for consideration. Dreams are a kind of representation of the inner feelings of the dreamer being communicated to him or herself in a completely unfiltered and uncompromised fashion. Dreams say what they say and it is up to us to appreciate them for what their message might be if we are able to do so.

Joseph had a dream. Did he understand and appreciate exactly the meaning of his dream? Perhaps he did. Or, if he was, as we believe he was at this juncture, a seventeen year old boy, perhaps he did not fully understand what his inner thoughts that stimulated his inner psyche and resulted in the dream as he dreamt it when, after all, he was still, as we would say today in our parlance, still just a kid.

So, we can now better appreciate how Joseph might well have wanted to better understand what the dream that he had dreamed meant. To whom could young Joseph have turned for help in "decoding" his dream? Who better than his brothers; his older brothers? Exactly! The Torah tells us that his brothers will hate him even more after he shared the details of his dream with them. But, did Joseph have even an inkling of how his brothers felt about him? The Torah does not indicate that the hatred or resentment that Joseph's brothers had for him because of how favored he was by their father Jacob over any of them was in any way conveyed to Joseph. Is there anything in the Torah that leads us to understand that Joseph was aware that he was hated by his brothers? There is not.

We know how Joseph's brothers felt about him because the Torah tells us how they felt. But Joseph did not get to read the Torah. He knew nothing of his brothers' hatred for him. To him, they were his loving brothers. That helps us, now; to understand why the Torah first informs us of what will transpire in "headline format" before it provides us with the details of the events themselves. It might be tempting for us to make the assumption that Joseph was aware of how his brothers were feeling about him and how their father tended to favor him over any of them. But, we would be wrong to do so.

In so many words, Joseph completely loved and trusted his brothers and, at this juncture in the Torah, he turned to them for help in understanding what his dream meant. That they would be able to interpret Joseph's dream might well have been something that Joseph could count on. In his

seventeen years to that point, they may have been helpful to him with other things and even other dreams. That his older brothers may have helped him understand; to get through; to learn about things that life presents is to be expected. The Torah is sharing this particular instance with us. But, younger siblings do learn from their older brothers and sisters. It is part of life. That Joseph's older brothers could see "themselves" in Joseph's dream as inferiors to him could well have been unsettling to them. How they would choose to react to what they learned from Joseph's dream would reveal more about each of them than anything else.

There are Biblical commentators, such as Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz (b. 1937) in his Steinsaltz Humash © 2015 and 2018 when on page 200 in his comment on Verse 8 in Genesis Chapter XXXVII "Now, in addition to dealing with the fact that Joseph was favored by Jacob, the brothers must contend with a person who entertained megalomaniacal aspirations."

One can try to interpret the Torah's words in any way one would like. But, to render a psychological diagnosis from what the Torah tells us about how Joseph related to his brothers and how they related to him, even in regard to a dream Joseph dreamt and how his brothers may have reacted to it, is, with all due respect, like pitching one's Torah commentary tent in sand. Such a commentary is doomed to failure.

Joseph's dream of the sheaves of wheat while he and his brothers were involved in harvest and how his (Joseph's) sheaf behaved and how his brothers' sheaves behaved may well "say" something about how Joseph's inner feelings or understanding were developing but one must be very careful when trying to "read into" what the Torah is telling us. In Verse 7 of Genesis Chapter XXXVII the commonly accepted translation when describing Joseph's sheaf of wheat is "and, behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright" but, וְגַם־נִצְבָּה (Ve Gam NeeTsaw Vah) does not mean "stood upright." It means, rather, "swollen" as in "became swollen" or "puffed up."

One may say, "arose and also stood upright" vs. "arose and became puffed up," what's the difference? Probably not much, as long as you don't want to, then, "twist" things in such a way as to serve your own and very slanted interpretation of what is going on and being able to denigrate certain

personalities based on your "convenient" translation. But, it is very significant if you are interested in gaining a better understanding of what the Torah is sharing with us.

The verse further tells us that Joseph's brothers' sheaves "came around" or "surrounded" Joseph's sheaf. But, the word תִּסּוּבְנָה (TiSooBehNaw) really means "approach" or "come near to," which makes a difference. "Surrounded" can be interpreted to be much more dramatic; threatening even, than "approached" or "came near."

Again, if you want to justify an interpretation that Joseph was an instigator or, in some way "deserving" of the hatred percolating in and among his older brothers, using more dramatic terminology to describe that was happening would go a long way to help set the stage and, in doing so, to influence one's readers to believe nefarious things about Joseph in this instance.

But, when we look at what the Torah is sharing with us at the simple or "Pashat" level without trying to force things into something that is not really there, but which might want to be saying for some reason, the real learning moment can happen for us.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 8, we learn of how Joseph's brothers reacted to his dream about the sheaves of wheat and of his rendition of his dream to them. "And his brothers said to him, do you think you will actually reign (as a King) over us even if you (eventually) do rule among us?" And, they hated him all the more because of his dream and because of his words." His brothers listened to Joseph's rendition of his dream and reacted as one might actually expect older brothers to react to their seventeen year old brother's innocent dream and his naïve and equally innocent description of that dream. It is as if they are humoring Joseph. Really!?! They are acknowledging that he will be joining them as one of the eventual leaders of their father's and of their grandfather's Covenantal Community. But, they all but laugh at his becoming the overall leader who would one day be calling the shots; i.e. the one to whom one day they all would turn for guidance and help.

The Torah finishes the verse by telling us that they (Joseph's brothers) hated him all the more because of this dream and because of his words.

We must ask, "Why do we need to know that both the dream itself and the words Joseph used to relate it to his brothers motivated their hatred." The dream they knew was the product of his (Joseph's) inner understanding of what he saw as the inevitable outcome or development of his life among his brothers. He just reported it to them as it played out and sought their interpretation of it; if not a confirmation of what one might see as the simple meaning of his sheaf of wheat is being basically paid homage to by his brothers' sheaves of wheat. His words were straight forward and not vindictive or hurtful in intent; just simple and matter of fact. His innocence was honest and could not have been faked. He, Joseph, was just reporting things as they were and was not looking to cause anything in the way of a reaction from his brothers other than for their corroboration of the meaning of his dream. Joseph was ready to take life as it came and was not at all being a braggart or trying to laud it over his brothers. But, his brothers, perhaps because of their feelings of inadequacy generated by how they have been noticing that their father, Jacob, had been treating Joseph with much more reverence than he showed to them, and they resented that treatment and saw Joseph's "dream" as a proof or confirmation of their observations. But, we must reiterate that nowhere in the Torah are we told that Joseph's older brothers conveyed the hatred they were feeling toward Joseph to Joseph.

Proof positive of this is found in the very next verse, Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 9, when we see where Joseph shares yet another dream with his brothers. If he had been made to feel at all, or shall we say significantly made to feel uncomfortable in front of his brothers regarding the first dream he had presented, he would certainly not have presented another dream to his brothers. So, it is clear that though Joseph's brothers were deeply hurt by how they were "marginalized" by the way their father treated Joseph as compared to how he treated them, they did not allow those feelings of what the Torah refers to as hatred towards Joseph to be transmitted, or at all communicated, to Joseph himself; at least not at this juncture in the Torah.

Verse 9 is not without intrigue though; far from it. "And he dreamed yet another dream and told it to his brethren, and said, "Behold I have dreamed yet a dream and behold the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me." It does not take much in the way of sophistication to be able

to "read into" or to interpret what this second dream of Joseph might be saying. If he had just shared it with his brothers, it would be, perhaps, just more of the same. But, in Verse 10 we learn that Joseph also shared this dream with his father, Jacob, along with his brothers. Again, we must keep in mind that at this juncture Joseph was just a lad of seventeen years of age. He dreamed these dreams and, in his youthful innocence, he shared them with his family. Did Joseph appreciate what these dreams might mean to others who heard him relate the dreams to them? He might have. But, at his stage of life and feeling as loved as he must have felt based on how special we have learned that his own father treated him and how special it must have been to understand, as he must have, that he was part of the Covenantal Community, he might have just taken the dreaming of these dreams with a grain of salt; i.e. that is was just normal.

But, as Verse 10 continues we learn that "his father reproached him and said to him 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brother indeed come to bow down towards the earth to you?' And his father Jacob was right. Who could ever have imagined while things were going so well for the Covenantal Community that there would ever be a time when his entire family would, indeed, be so beholding to Joseph as foreshadowed in his dream about the sun and the moon and eleven stars that bow down towards the earth to pay homage to Joseph?

Let us please put this into perspective though so we may get as much out of this rather unusual story as possible. To do so, we must, again, remember that the young lad, Joseph, who dreamed this dream about luminaries in the night sky paying homage to him, a young kid, is reflective of something Joseph must have felt inside and which came to the fore in his simply told and, yes, rather shockIng dream. From where in his "awake" or "daytime life" did these feelings that motivated his dream emanate? Joseph somehow conjectured or imagined situations, or perhaps just one situation, where he would have to be ready to "step up" as they say, and be able to assume a leadership position. How did this amazing but, as we would learn later in the Torah, accurate, prediction of the future develop inside young Joseph's psyche?

The major focus on caring for and raising sheep, which was so much of Joseph's "awake life" comes to mind. A sheep herder or shepherd is one

very special person. He or she must be ready at a moment's notice to care for a sick sheep, to save a sheep in imminent danger or dealing with a natural threat such as a wolf looking for dinner. Sheep herding was, in a way, the family business, and he, Joseph, must have excelled in it since we know he was already in charge of one entire flock. What would ever happen if not one flock of sheep, but if all the flocks of sheep became endangered in some way? Might young Joseph have asked himself such a question? Perhaps he did. And, surely, if he did, there may have been an answer that percolated to the top of his mind and permeated his inner self.

Our dreams come from somewhere. It does not seem that the Torah is telling us that these dreams of young Joseph were in some way magical. And, when we look at Jacob's reaction to hearing Joseph's dream where the sun and the moon and eleven stars bow down in homage to Joseph, we can see where Jacob, in reproaching Joseph, does so in what is a much less than harsh manner. Jacob simply asks two questions of his young son:

"What is this dream that you have dreamed?" Is this scolding? Not really. Frankly, it is expressing more shock than being critical. And, in Jacob's second question, that shock is more explained than contested.

"Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down towards the earth to you?" Jacob was certainly not happy to learn that his beloved young son Joseph, who we can see he felt was on par with royalty (i.e. the coat of many colors is possibly the coat made of the fabric and of the color reserved for royalty), was, in a way, predicting some kind of revolution or coupe against him, but rather, it seems more that Jacob was surprised that Joseph had apparently been seeing their Covenantal Community and its infrastructure as being frail enough that, in time, there could be such a development there Joseph's dream could actually come to fruition; i.e. that Joseph would be found in a position where the entire leadership of the Covenantal Community would be turning to Joseph in the capacity of the "head man."

We really must be careful as we read each passage, really each word, in the Torah. Here, in Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 11, two reactions to Joseph's telling of his second dream; the one about the sun and the moon and eleven stars paying homage to Joseph. "And his brothers were

envious or jealous of Joseph and his father remembered the incident (or "happening").

Dr. J.H. Hertz, z"l, (1872 - 1946), the late Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, was of the opinion that his father, Jacob, "Kept the saying in mind." It is interesting, of course. But, how that translation of the Hebrew text was coaxed out is a bit of a mystery. But, in a footnote to his commentary and translation Rabbi Dr. Hertz seems to use that "translation" as a way to interpret the verse to indicate to us that "Jacob noted with satisfaction that his (Jacob's) designation of Joseph as the future ruler of the family seemed to have the Devine approval." Certainly very nice thinking but not really substantiated by the text; merely conjecture depending on "creatively" translating the text.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 12, the Torah brings us back to the "everyday life" in the continental community. The flocks of sheep need tending. "And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem." And, then just as simple as that; they all go back to work. Again we must ask, does Joseph have even the slightest inkling that his older brothers harbor such hatred for him? There is nothing in the text that can be said to show us that he did. We should take a moment to note that the flock of sheep that Joseph's older brothers went off to tend is referred to as "their Father's flock," which can, perhaps, clarify things for us regarding the Covenantal Community from a socio-economic point of view. Earlier in the Sedrah, certain flocks were referred to as belonging to Joseph's older brothers. Here, it seems at least this one flock is owned by Jacob. We can conjecture that all of the flocks were owned by Jacob and, when flocks were referred to as "belonging" to the older brothers of Joseph, the Torah may just have been referring to the "responsibility" to care for those flocks that made them "belong" to Joseph's older brothers. In reality, the flocks, all of the flocks, belonged to the Covenantal Community, which, for all intents and purposes, means they belong to Jacob at that point in time; i.e. the leader of the Covenantal Community of the day. And, just to cover all the bases, in case someone wants to say that the flock referred to as "Jacob's flock" was the one that was his and that he, himself would normally be the person who would tend that flock, we would respond, "Really? Please!" At his stage of life, that would be the last thing we would project as being part

of Jacob's life at this juncture. Own the flock? Absolutely. Tend to the flock; any flock? Absolutely not.

So, when Joseph's older brothers went off to tend to Jacob's flock in Shechem, it was indeed, Jacob's flock. But, we believe, so were all of the flocks.

Now, the question we really should ask is if Joseph, a seventeen year old lad, was all who was needed to tend to a flock of sheep all by himself, why are all eleven of Joseph's older brothers going off to tend to the flock in Shechem?

We should probably not make an assumption about the size of a flock of sheep or about the degree of difficulty connected with any particular area where any flock of sheep might be located when pondering how many shepherds might be needed to effectively tend to the needs of a particular flock. Jacob's flock in Shechem could have been monstrously huge and in a local that presented a great deal of difficulty all of which could have added up to a need for the attention from the full complement of Joseph's eleven older brothers.

That said, we must confess that no absolutely clear answer to our question comes to mind. The only thing that we can say is that Joseph's eleven older brothers were apparently feeling so much angst towards their brother Joseph that whatever they would be doing next would be taking a back seat to their desire; need almost, to commiserate about and against Joseph.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 13 we are shown a certain dynamic that apparently existed between Joseph and his older brothers and with their father Jacob that may help us understanding things a little better. "And Israel said unto Joseph: Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? And, I will send you unto them."

Right away we see the phrase "the flock in Shechem" and not referring to Jacob's flock or your brothers' flock, which tells us; we would think fairly clearly, that, as we proposed earlier, that the flocks were the property of the Covenantal Community. Surely everything ultimately belonged to the Avos, the Fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as they succeeded one to and from

the other. But, their Covenantal Community would always be their continual and ongoing concern.

The verse, Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 13, continues, "And he said to him: Here am I." Surely, it is Joseph acknowledging his father's decision and directive. Verse 14 continues along these lines, "And he (Jacob) said to him (Joseph): 'Go now, see whether it is well with your brethren and with the flock; and bring me back word. So, he, Jacob, sent him (Joseph) out of the valley of Hebron and he (Joseph) came to Shechem.'" The vale or valley of Hebron also referred to a Mamre, is where we understand Jacob lived.

Now, the Torah changes the scene. Joseph heads off to Shechem on a mission to help his older brothers feed and tend to the flock. When he gets to Shechem, a man discovers Joseph, and, behold, he (Joseph) is wandering in a field. And, the man questioned him saying, "What are you seeking?"

Verse 16, "And he, Joseph, said, "I am looking for my brothers. Tell me, I pray you, where they are feeding the flock." Can you imagine coming upon a total stranger and asking that person, "Where are your brothers?" or, for that matter, anyone really, might be, even if it is with their flock of sheep? And, this was taking place not on a main road, or pathway, but "wandering in a field?" First, "wandering in a field." What was Joseph doing "wandering in a field" to begin with? Perhaps we tend to think things then were as things are now. Now, we have extremely large populations almost anywhere we may go; with well-established roadways, complete with signage guiding us from one settled area to another. Then, we might be talking about remote populations with next to no established roadways; if any at all. "Head toward that reddish colored mountain to the south" might be your directions for your journey to the next town or city; over yonder!

So, the chances that Joseph might have been "wandering in a field" are great; particularly the closer he might have been to the enclave or population center he was seeking to find; in this instance, Shechem. The chances, most probably, for Joseph to have come across anyone else while "wondering in a field" on his way to Shechem must have been rather low. But, the Torah reports that it certainly did happen, which is really all we need to know at this juncture.

Who spoke first at the meeting of that certain man who came across Joseph while wandering in a field is interesting even though a single man wandering in a field, he, Joseph, is, one, clearly, unknown by this certain man, which tells us that everyone in Shechem knew everyone else in that enclave at that time. The flock of sheep owned by Jacob was there as a normal happening, which would have meant that people connected with the Covenantal Community would have been known quantities as well. But, for some reason, Joseph was not one of those known personages. So, we can surmise that this was the first time he, Joseph, was coming to Shechem at least as an adult; even if as a young adult and alone.

That "certain man" who "came upon Joseph while wondering in a field" spoke first, which tells us that to some extent that "certain man" was thinking in terms of the defense of Shechem from someone who might be a potential threat or, who might be the advance guard of a larger force of people heading to his home enclave; Shechem.

Joseph's response tells us, further, just how small the "small town" Shechem must have been. Joseph says he's looking for his brothers and the flock of sheep they were to be tending. That is simple enough. Apparently, anyone in Shechem would have known of such a development; i.e. the arrival of a group of men; i.e. Joseph's older brothers, to tend to the flock of sheep that was theirs: Just as simple as that. Joseph expected the "certain man" to not only be able to know this but to absolutely know it.

And why not? The sheep surely must have been tended to while Joseph's older brothers were away at Hebron. The inhabitants of Shechem, though not necessarily members of the Covenantal Community, may have - read "must have" - been employed or otherwise "engaged" to "watch" Jacob's flock of sheep. Surely, Joseph's older brothers would not leave their (Jacob's) flock unattended. Perhaps there was a type of monetary understanding. So many measures of gold or silver for a certain amount of time watching the flock may have been the contract. Or, the contract might have been so many sheep to be given over to the shepherders from Shechem in lieu of money for their needed services. So, if that be the case, then the importance of the very presence of Jacob's flock and of the members of Jacob's family, his sons, would be, in essence, a key and important industry of sorts in the community of Shechem. And, if that was

the case, then it would be something that Joseph would expect for a "local" guy know the whereabouts of Joseph's older brothers and their flock.

And, sure enough, just as simple as that, the man tells Joseph that they (Joseph's older brothers) had departed from there. But, he tells Joseph even more than that. He says, "for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'"

Dothan was located north of Shechem and about 60 miles north of Hebron. So, apparently, it was not too far from Shechem where Joseph had apparently come in contact with the man who came upon him wandering in a field. But, Dothan was a distinct and different local from Shechem.

Given the dynamics connected with relocating a flock of sheep and those in charge of caring for the sheep, we would surmise that a certain amount of preparation would be needed to get ready for the move. There may have been a need for local people living in Shechem to help Joseph's older brothers prepare for their move to Dothan. One of those helpers may have been the man who came upon Joseph wandering in a field. No magic needed here.

Why Joseph's older brothers had decided to relocate the flock to Dothan is not at all discussed by the Torah. Whether it matters at all that they did is hard to say.

We should also note that Joseph's older brothers were not aware that Joseph would be dispatched by Jacob to help them with the flock.

The Torah continues in Verse 17 to tell us, "And Joseph went or walked after his brothers and found them in Dothan." If we were completely unaware of what was about to transpire in this early part of Joseph's life, we would still be correct to note just how pivotal a moment we are about to observe or about which we are to learn. Joseph is absolutely alone. Other than his brothers, who he is about to reencounter, there is no one else for miles who would be, shall we say, a neutral observer; let alone someone who might be a possible friend of the family or even an employee who might have been in charge or who had tended to the flock until Joseph's older brothers arrival and their decision to relocate the flock to Dothan. Joseph, remember, is just seventeen years of age and has not even an inkling as to just how his older brothers are feeling about and towards him.

As we read the end of Verse 17, we can see just how potentially dangerous this situation could be for young Joseph. Surely, we suspect that Joseph's older brothers might do something to actually harm their younger brother. A heavy sense of drama is in the air as the verse ends. We are on the edges of our seats to where we almost want to scream out to Joseph: "Stop! Get out of there! Go back to your father! Go back to Jacob!"

And then, in what must be the greatest example of economy of words, the Torah, in Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 18, tells us almost exactly of what we were most afraid to hear. "And they (Joseph's older brothers) saw him from far off and, before he (Joseph) came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him."

Now, for the duration of this briefly stated verse, we are completely focused on Joseph's older brothers, as a unit, yes, made up of eleven different men, but, now, in a horribly but very unifying way, we observe what might be termed group contagion; men sick with the feeling of complete inadequacy, which easily and rapidly morphs into murderous rage. And their younger brother Joseph is completely in the dark about their deadly plan and how his advancing towards his older brothers to help them tend the flock of sheep could become the last walk he ever takes.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 19 begins the dialog of Joseph's older brothers, "And they said (one) each man to his brother, "Here is (or here comes) the Lord or Master of dreams; that one or that guy there; here he comes." These men are clearly resentful of their younger brother Joseph. The dreams he related to them were apparently a great source of resentment to them. Do we dare ask why? After all, they are all by birth Joseph's older brothers. Being older must surely come with certain benefits. We saw the "pecking order" thing in the example of Joseph tending his older brothers' flock. Joseph was a shepherd and just a mere lad of seventeen. His older brothers were proven men in the Covenantal Community with important work that they did and responsibilities. Knowing that, why and how could they feel denigrated or put down by the dreams related to them by their kid brother Joseph?

There is clearly more here than meets the eye. We must go back to their father, Jacob, and take into account how he treated Joseph as compared to how he treated Joseph's older brothers. It is not that Jacob denigrated or

spoke badly of Joseph's older brothers, because we see no direct evidence to that in the words of the Torah. Rather, it is all in the way Jacob treats Joseph as compared to how he treats Joseph's older brothers that generate this tremendous and growing resentment and hatred that they have for their younger brother Joseph.

When Jacob gives Joseph the coat of many colors, which we have learned has "royalty" overtones, he may have been trying to acknowledge something he saw in his son Joseph that distinguished him as a future leader with the potential to become far more important than the young man we see in front of us today; i.e. at that time.

But, Joseph's older brothers saw Jacob's actions as insulting to them rather than just simply being laudatory towards their younger brother. Their self-respect was surely much more fragile and weak than one would think it should be given their individual and joint station in life as key personages in the Covenantal Community created by their father, their grandfather and their great grandfather Abraham with the L-rd Himself. As special as these men clearly were in the world of that day, it is downright amazing to us as to how they could have "missed the boat" so to speak in letting the way their father Jacob treated their younger brother Joseph be interpreted or taken as a put down about them. But, that is apparently what transpired and, in the next verse, is about to flower in the worst possible way.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 20 tells us that the feelings of anger and jealousy on the part of Joseph's older brothers foment into a clarion call from one of them to the others in a call to action. "Come now therefore and let us slay him and cast him into one of the pits; and we will say 'an evil beast has devoured him,' and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

This is the commonly accepted translation of Verse 20, however a key word in the Hebrew is רָעָה "RahAwh," which is translated as "evil" to make the phrase "an evil beast devoured him" But, "RahAwh" does not really translate as "evil." A better translation of "RahAwh" would be "misfortune," which, in this instance, would actually make better sense. After all, whichever one of Joseph's older brothers it was who came up with this "plan" of how to eliminate Joseph from their lives and to help them all deal with the frustration they apparently felt from the way their father Jacob

treated their younger brother Joseph and at the same time diminished, in their minds, their importance and increased their feelings of negative self-worth. .

It would have been complete conjecture and fabrication for Joseph's older brothers to characterize the way a wild beast might have killed their younger brother Joseph as "evil" since nothing that any wild animal does is ever done with malice or with evil intentions of any kind. Wild animals act of their need for food or to protect themselves from what they perceive as potential danger. The Torah, in reporting to us the private discourse that transpired among the Joseph's older brothers, is doing so to help us better understand the dynamics of the relationships involved and to allow us to fully appreciate the importance of all involved and how what transpired effected everything from then and onward right up until today.

If Joseph's older brothers had planned to say, "A wild beast unfortunately devoured him," it would have made much more sense and would have been describing more accurately what they would have been claiming to have taken place. Of course, either way, Joseph's older brothers would be masking their own "evil" deed with a story that they would hope their father Jacob would accept as what happened regarding the death of their younger brother Joseph. There was surely no way in their minds that their father would ever suspect them of telling an untruth to him and certainly never would Jacob ever conceive that Joseph's older brothers would do anything to harm, let alone to kill, their younger brother Joseph.

Verse 20 ends with one of Joseph's older brothers saying, "And we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Dreams are interesting. When we dream of becoming an architect, for example, it can be the motivating or driving force that helps us choose what schools we might want to attend, what courses to take, what famous buildings to visit and tour while we are on a vacation, what biographies we will read, what organizations we might join, and, even, with whom we might mix and mingle. (Who said, "Birds of a feather flock together?"). Those kind of dreams are expectations or hopes, but, they are very much part of our consciousness; not the kind of "dreams" we have while we are sleeping, which was the kind of dreams that Joseph had.

The dreams we have while we are sleeping are, perhaps, part of our "unconsciousness," and, perhaps, also always there, but not on the tip of our mind's tongue, to coin or to manipulate a phrase; but, perhaps just below the surface. What causes the dreams we have while we are asleep to happen? Yes, they might well be caused by something we ate that is not agreeing with us. Nightmares perhaps come from such situations. But, under normal circumstances, the dreams we have while we are asleep are the result of our resting mind, which we have been using to work out or work on some kind of situations that is perplexing us and, which remains unresolved as we drift off to sleep.

How dreams work is, indeed, mysterious. The stories that get woven into dreams by our minds are likely our way of working through or understanding the complexities of the situations, which perplex our waking self. But, to interpret our dreams might be an exercise in and of itself. The elements in our dreams may have all sorts of meaning attached to them, or, they may not. What happens during the playing out of the dream may be telling us something; or, they may be telling us nothing at all.

But, sometimes, as in the case of Joseph and the two dreams he related to his family, the simple level may be all that is needed.

But, are dreams foretelling the future for us? Or, are they pointing out to us what the future may possibly be; at least in the admittedly limited way or ways that we, the dreamer, him or herself, may be able to see things developing.

In the case of Joseph, his dreams were apparently not as clear to him as they may have been, say, to his older brothers. Joseph would not have even shared his dreams with his older brothers or, later, with his father as well if he, Joseph, could have understood them. But, he did share them because they must have seemed to have been way out of line, impossible, really, for such happenings to occur in real life; i.e. for his family to pay homage to him. He must have seen that simple interpretation of his dreams as preposterous; unbelievable.

But, his older brothers were apparently deeply troubled by their younger brother Joseph's dreams.

Let us not leave Verse 20 without mentioning the pits, or, really cisterns, which were not naturally formed, but, rather, were carved into the kinds of stone that apparently lent themselves to the various purposes for which these pits were to be used. Mostly, the pits were formed to be huge jug-like storage places for water and were made to have very small openings at the top that would be just large enough to allow a man to enter the pit to do maintenance of some kind or to retrieve something that may have fallen into it. There are references in biblical texts that indicate that such pits, perhaps ones no longer being used to store water were used to hold prisoners. There is evidence that the walls of these pits were covered with a plaster type of material to help prevent water from leaking out, so, the importance of these pits was rather significant. What is not discussed very much is how the water from rainy times was channeled or directed to the openings of these pits so as to capture it. There may have been an array of tarpaulins set up around the pits that would have captured the rain and, rather than allowing it to simply fall to the earth and disappear later into the atmosphere, it would be directed to flow by gravity to the mouth of a pit and drain into it. The water would be stored and available when the seasons changed and rain would be less plentiful. The people would use buckets attached to ropes to reach down to the water and, then, hoist it up to the surface so it could be transferred or poured into jugs for use elsewhere.

The older brother of Joseph who suggested that he and the older brothers of Joseph should put Joseph into one of these pits as part of their plot to kill him must have known that the pits were empty. This can easily lead us to believe that the pits were apparently no longer being used, which would lead us to believe further that no one was living in this area at that time, which meant that their flocks of sheep could graze there. They would have to have had their own water with them. But, that would have always been true.

The question we might ask is why Joseph's older brothers decided to graze their sheep in such a location. Joseph's older brothers were not aware that Jacob was going to direct Joseph to go help them as he did. So, the question is, why here? And, another question is, why now?

There is a kind of approach to reading and studying Torah where everything must have a reason or a "hidden" meaning. And, that approach

motivates some of us to come up with "answers." And, then, when we repeat the answers often enough, we might take them as being true. That is not the kind of commentary that is of interest to us. Why Joseph's older brothers decided to graze their flock where they did is not something we can determine from the Torah text. The fact that there were pits or cisterns in this particular area that would become involved in the way Joseph's older brothers "dealt with" Joseph and their jealousy and the resentment they had for him is also unexplained. But, we could easily "guess-timate" that wherever Joseph's older brothers might have taken their flock to graze would have had such pits or cisterns as they were very common in that area and at that time in history.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 21, "And Reuben heard (it) and (he) freed him or "let him go" from their hands. (Note: The word וַיִּצְלֶהוּ (Veh Yatsee Lay Whoo) comes from the same root word that gives us the phrase Yeh Tsee Ahse Meets Raheem which means Exodus from Egypt. Interesting, no? It is as if the seeds of the story of the Exodus from Egypt were sewn right here). The verse continues "and he (Reuben) said, "Let us not take his life." Here, perhaps for the first time, we see that Joseph's older brothers were not of one mind; were individuals, who thought for themselves, even if they did have a certain amount of shared feelings when it came to how they perceived the way their younger brother Joseph was treated by their father as compared to how Jacob apparently treated them.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 22 "And Reuben said to them (his brothers) 'shed no blood. Cast him into this pit, which is in the wilderness; but lay no hand on him." He said this in order that he (Reuben) might redeem or deliver him (Joseph) out of their (his brothers') hands (in order) to restore him (Joseph) to his father (Jacob)."

It is interesting. It is as if there is a verse that is missing between Verse 21 and Verse 22. After all, what was the reaction to Reuben's admonition of Verse 21 his by ten other brothers? The Torah does not report to us that they were stunned by his words or if they challenged him in any way, or if they made any kind of statement or indication that his message was heard and understood. "Sign counter sign." "Roger - Wilco." (Understood - Will Comply; as commonly spoken from airplane pilots to the tower). What the Torah is apparently telling us, is that Reuben's message and request to his

brothers regarding the preserving of their younger brother Joseph's life fell on deaf ears. He (Reuben) was ignored by them. The confirmation of this non-statement statement on behalf of Reuben's other brothers comes with the enhanced message in Verse 22, where Reuben reiterates his request that he and his brothers do no harm to Joseph but, this time, in the form of a command. The Torah adds the reasoning behind Reuben's motivation; i.e. to return Joseph to his (their) father Jacob. What goes unstated in words but solely in his action of doing this, was that he had somehow overcome whatever disillusionment or anger that had made him be a part of the destruction planned for his brother Joseph as was still being felt by his other brothers.

Now, whether Joseph's older brothers killed Joseph or not, it is clear that Reuben's courage and forthrightness in face of what amounted to a small but angry mob of men bent on no good, was absolutely pivotal; a game changer of the first order and, we would probably be safe to say that his actions were extremely courageous. Let's face it. If his brothers were so willing to do harm; i.e. to kill their own younger brother Joseph, how far would they have to have gone to include Reuben in their murderous plan? Not very far we suspect.

The Torah has set the scene very well for what was now about to transpire. Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 23 "And it came to pass when Joseph came upon his brothers (and) they Joseph's older brothers) stripped Joseph of his coat (that is) the coat of many colors, that was on him." Joseph's older brothers may have paid a certain amount of homage to Reuben. There is no mention of any argumentation or debate between Reuben and his ten other brothers. So, it may have been that they had come to an agreement to not harm Joseph after all. What we know for certain from this verse is that Joseph's older brothers did not go out and look for Joseph. They had come to this area and were apparently going through the motions of tending their flock. "Joseph came upon them" it says. They were doing whatever it might be when this took place. But, apparently, all of the brothers seem to have been of one mind and, when Joseph did "come upon them" they acted as one. They stripped Joseph of his quote, and the Torah does not want us to question as to which coat it was, by stating categorically that it was "the coat of many colors." But, the Torah goes a step further by adding a clarifying phrase; i.e. "that was on

him." Well, that is how אֶשֶׁר עָלָיו (Ahsher AwLove) can certainly be translated. However, under the circumstances, the word עָלָיו (AwLove), which comes from the root word meaning to "go up" or "to arise" and when a person goes to Israel we say they are maKing "AhLeeAh or are "going up," which is the literal translation, because where Israel, by which we are always referring to the Holy City of Jerusalem is located, it is on a mountain top that is higher than the surrounding local. So, when one goes to Jerusalem, one "goes up." But, here, the coat of many colors is not so much "on him," i.e. that he wore it, but, rather, that it "elevated" him in the way that was discussed earlier; i.e. that it was of a bluish color that was reserved for royalty and that it was clearly very special and made Joseph stand out and, was, in that sense, "uplifting." And, this, this class distinction, if you will, is what got under the collective skin of Joseph's older brothers and on which, at least in part, was what motivated Joseph's older brothers to want to eliminate him from their lives one way or the other.

With that understanding in mind, Verse 23 comes more sharply into focus. Now, it reads, "And it came to pass when Joseph came to (upon) his brothers that they stripped Joseph of his cloak or coat, which is to say the coat of cloak of many colors; the coat or cloak that elevated him (above everyone else around him).

The drama continues to unfold in Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 24 when we learn "And they (Joseph's older brothers) took him (Joseph) and cast him into the pit, and the pit was empty; there was no water in it." Rashi tells us that though there was no water in the pit there were snakes and scorpions in it.

Let's put ourselves in Joseph's shoes for a minute. Or, maybe sandals would be more accurate. Does Joseph know how his brothers feel about him and the very special way that their treats Joseph as compared how he treated Joseph's older brothers? No. He does not have the slightest clue that his older brothers are so resentful of how their father treats Joseph that they hate him and were just then and shortly before his arrival at their local were planning to kill him. When Joseph's older brothers greet Joseph by stripping him of the coat of many colors that had been given to him by their father and then taken him to a nearby pit into which his older brothers threw him.

Joseph must have been shocked down to his toes when his older brothers treated him in this horrible way. We were not told that only a few of Joseph's older brothers participated in this attack on Joseph. So, we can surmise that everyone, including Reuben, who had spoken and implored his brothers not to do any harm to Joseph, was apparently also involved. Of course, it was good that Joseph's older brothers did not throw him into a pit filled with water. But, a pit is still potentially a dangerous thing. Remember, Rashi alerts us to there being snakes and scorpions in such a pit. There would have been no way out unless someone would throw down a rope into the pit to allow the person inside the pit to climb up or to be somehow hoisted up and out of the pit. Also, being thrown into a pit that we understand was typically some twelve feet in depth, would mean falling from a height of that distance, twelve feet, on to what we understand would have been a limestone floor. The possibility of someone landing on a stone floor and breaking a bone or getting injured in some way would have been great indeed. We are not told of any injury that Joseph may have sustained.

Besides the initial feeling of shock that his older brothers would treat him in this way, Joseph must have been wondering what else lay in store for him. He may not have been bleeding or, thankfully, had not been severely injured in the fall to the bottom of the pit, but he had to be one very frightened seventeen year old kid.

While Joseph remained imprisoned at the bottom of the pit and surely worried about what fate and his older brothers had in store for him, we learn in Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 25, "And they (Joseph's older brothers) sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold a caravan of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and ladanum, going to carry it down to Egypt."

We would guess, as does Rabbi Dr. J.H. Hertz, z"l, the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, in "Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftorahs," 1961 that Joseph must have been yelling and even screaming up to his brothers from the bottom of the pit to let him out of there. That is almost a given. What is absolutely repulsive is that Joseph's older brothers, after scaring their younger brother Joseph half to death by striping him of his special cloak and throwing him down into a deep pit, are able to gather

around and enjoy a meal of some kind; if there is bread there surely are other food stuffs to go with the bread, and, all while listening to the surely frantic cries of their younger brother Joseph.

Who are these men? Are these callous people also our relatives? The whole thing is shocking. And, the Torah describes the approaching caravan in some detail; who is in it; even down to what they are carrying; but more importantly, to where they are headed; to Egypt. Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in his "Humash" of 2015, helps us appreciate in some detail the typical travel route of the caravans of the day, he says, "Until recent times, it was common practice for those traveling from the north down to Egypt, to cross the Jordan River and continue through the Dotan Valley, which borders the Yizre'el Valley, and then on toward the coastal plain." Rabbi Steinsaltz also points out that what the caravan is carrying includes some extremely valuable items used in making perfume. So, their objective would be to sell their goods in Egypt.

What we can take away from Verse 25 is far more informative than the words themselves can convey; even more than the shocking knowledge that Joseph's older brothers were clearly so callous that they were able to sit down for a meal while their own brother was frightened out of his mind within earshot as he surely continued to call, cry and beg them to free him from the deep dark earthen pit into which they themselves had imprisoned him. Then, into this picture, the Torah presents that approaching in the distance is a mercantile group of people on their way to the financial capital of the world at that time. Were these times known for justice and civility? Not by a long shot. The Torah has provided the introduction to what is about to happen next; all in one single verse.

And it all starts to fall into place at Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 26 when the Torah tells us, "And Judah said unto his brethren: "What do we gain (or profit) if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?" Perhaps Reuben's thinking made more of an impact than to just save Joseph's young life temporarily. Perhaps, with the help of Judah, Joseph's older brothers will be able to take murder off the table in favor of some other option that will get Joseph out of their lives but not to do so at the expense of Joseph's life being lost completely.

Joseph's older brothers were shepherds, which means they needed to have a working knowledge of business. They were sensitive to what goes into making a profit in a business transaction. So, as Judah so aptly put it, profit will not be made if they kill their younger brother Joseph. That said, we can see how Judah's challenge regarding the relative wisdom connected with killing their younger brother Joseph compared to allowing him to live, but, coming up with a way to actually profit from allowing Joseph to live. This "thinking" sets up Judah's follow up suggestions, which is shared with us by the Torah in the next Verse; Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 27.

Judah continues, "Come, let us sell him (Joseph) to the Ishmaelites and let us not lay our hands upon him because he is our brother and our flesh. And, his brothers harkened unto him."

Well, this certainly is a drastic modification of what was a shocking and brutal way Joseph's older brothers were apparently going to deal with their personal frustrations as to how Joseph was treated by their father as compared to how he, their father, treated them. Were they really planning to kill their younger brother Joseph? Perhaps they were not. But, it certainly sounded like they were. Perhaps, just talking about it helped get that frustration out of their collective system. We would hope that the great grandchildren of Abraham, our Father; the grand children of Isaac, and the children of Jacob would have been more humane and tolerant. But, perhaps the facts of life are that, given the right circumstances, people may be capable of doing some pretty awful things.

But, it is always the case that actions; i.e. what people do, counts far more than what they merely say.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 28, we learn what and who did what to Joseph. "And, there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they (the Ishmaelites) brought Joseph into Egypt."

The Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir, z"l, (Troyes circa 1085 to circa 1158), who was the grandson of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzaki; a/k/a Rashi, z"l, (February 22, 1040 to July 13, 1105) helps us clarify this for us by referring us forward in the text to Genesis Chapter XL Verse 15 when Joseph says,

"For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" So, Joseph's older brothers did not sell their brother Joseph but, it appears that after they put him into the pit, his screams were eventually heard by the Midianites, who took Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites who took Joseph to Egypt.

So, again, we cannot say that Joseph's older brothers were completely guilt free in what happened to Joseph. But, they certainly did not kill him. Nor did they apparently sell him to those who took him to Egypt. They "just" let it happen. We could discuss and debate the relative aspects of what happened to Joseph and the role that his older brothers played in what happened and how it happened. But, let us take a look at it from what Joseph saw, experienced and knew about it.

As we noted earlier, until Joseph's older brothers seized him, took off his coat of many colors and put him in the pit, Joseph had not the slightest inkling that his older brothers had such animosity towards him. We knew it because the Torah told us of their feeling towards their younger brother, which were engendered because of how they felt about their father, Jacob, treated and really honored, Joseph as compared to all of his Jacob's) older sons.

Was Joseph privy to his older brothers' conversations about him? We would have to say he was not. Did he know that they had been talking about actually killing him? He did not. Did he hear or know about their brief dialog about selling him to slave traders? There is no evidence in the Torah that would suggest that he did. So, when he was taken out of the pit by the Midianites who went on to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, Joseph could not, and really, would not have connected what happened to anything to do with his older brothers. We know differently. But, Joseph, with all his probable screaming and calling for help that fell on deaf ears when it came to his older brothers, could only attribute what happened to him to being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Yes, he could have wondered why his own brothers had seized him, as they did, tore off his coat of many colors and put him in a pit. But, for him to tie those admittedly unexpected happenings with being captured and, as he himself put it, "... indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" (in Genesis Chapter XL Verse 15)) there was nothing in his knowledge

bank that could lead him to believe that they, his own brothers, would have done, or even would have wanted such a thing to have happened to him.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 29, the Torah reports to us on the aftermath of Joseph's having been "stolen away" (to again use Joseph's own words); at least from the point of view of his older brothers.

"And Reuben returned unto the pit and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he (Reuben) rent his clothes." There are mild and brief inputs on the part of some commentators in an attempt to determine who did what and when with regard to the actual selling of Joseph and his ultimate disappearance from the pit in which he was put by his older brothers.

The meal that Joseph's older brothers were eating while their younger brother Joseph was at the bottom of the pit and was supposedly screaming and hollering in the background was attended by whom? Some say Reuben was not at the meal. But, does it matter where Reuben was during the meal? As long as he did nothing to free young Joseph from the pit, where he was or where he was not is basically meaningless.

Similarly, there are commentators who build scenarios about how Joseph's older brothers sold Joseph to the Medianites. But, going strictly by the text in the Torah, the selling of Joseph was strictly and only between the Midianites and the Ishmaelites. One commentator goes as far as to do the math for how much of the twenty shekels of silver each brother would have received when they divided it up. But, again, such stories are complete conjecture with absolutely zero Torah text to back them up.

What is clear from Verse 29 is that Reuben was expecting to find his younger brother Joseph in the pit when he went to it. Yes. He knew that there was the greatest possibility that the Midianites had absconded with Joseph, but he must have been hoping that that Joseph had somehow escaped being stolen by them. As Reuben approached the pit where Joseph had been imprisoned there was no screaming or yelling or pleading from Joseph to be let free. But, it must have been when Reuben actually looked into the pit and saw that his younger brother Joseph was gone that he knew for certain what had happened.

"He rent his clothes." Of course, the rending of one's clothing has become the Jewish custom that one performs when under extreme emotional stress

usually of grief at learning of the loss of a loved one and others say times of terror or even horror. We are not sure to what the horror or terror incidents may refer. Our modern way of "expressing" this practice, which we can see is as old as the Torah itself - older really - is when a rabbi clips a tiny black colored ribbon that is attached to a black button type pin, which gets pinned to ones clothing during the day to "show" that that person is in mourning.

Nice try!

But, what is missed by using this tiny symbol of mourning is the amazingly important release that comes from violently tearing one's own garment that one is actually wearing and then wearing that garment as a constant reminder not only to others who might be encountered, but to one's self. And, if one should put on other garments during the period of mourning one would repeat the process by rending that garment as well.

Now you're talking! Just as Reuben did when he realized that he had lost his younger brother Joseph; grief stricken; horrified for what may have or what will happen to Joseph and terrified about what will happen now going forward, he is absolutely transfixed and tears his clothing. It is not inflicting damage to one's own body. But, it is close and very effective in helping one manage one's severe grief.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 30 the Torah tells us that Reuben "returns to his brethren and said 'the child is not' and, as for me, whither shall I go?" Rashi helps us appreciate how personally troubled Reuben apparently was when he returned to be with his brethren after discovering that their younger brother Joseph had been captured and stolen away. Rashi explains that when Reuben asks or states rhetorically "where shall I go?" he means "where shall I go to hide from our father Jacob?" How will they (the brothers) be able to explain this to Jacob? Reuben refers to Joseph as "the child," which is still what a seventeen year old boy really is. Plus, Reuben is Jacob's oldest son, who, by the standards of most any family, would be expected to be protective of his younger siblings. What happened to Joseph has got to make Reuben look and feel like a complete failure as the oldest brother.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 31 "And they took Joseph's coat and killed a he goat and dipped the coat in the blood" Is a verse that reminds us that there is not necessarily a timed order in the Torah. But, we can see from

the way Joseph's older brothers acted, even Reuben in his deep dark feeling of guilt or responsibility, moved forward to manipulate the facts from being accused, let alone found out, as being at all involved, responsible or, G-d forbid, guilty of doing anything that would have led up to the disappearance of their younger brother Joseph.

Then, more so, in the way of obfuscating their involvement in what happened to their younger brother Joseph, his older brothers reached out to others who remain unidentified, to bring the situation to what might be called the light of day. Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 32 "And they (Joseph's older brothers) sent the coat of many colors (by the hands of others) and they (those other people) brought it (the coat of many colors) to their (Joseph's older brothers') father (Jacob) and said, 'This have we found. Know now whether it is thy son's coat or not?'"

The "messengers" surely had to have been local to the area who, certainly, would have known all of Jacob's sons and, without a doubt, the son, Joseph, who wore the amazing coat of many colors. One has to ask how Joseph's older brothers were able to handle the "sending" of the coat of many colors without leaving themselves open to being identified as having given the coat of many colors to these "messengers?" The Torah does not give us much to go on. So, we must make the assumption that it is not, or was not, a problem for the brothers; i.e. that they would not be dragged to the situation and that Jacob would take the evidence at the surface value, which, in the very next verse, we see comes true.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII 33 "And he (Jacob) knew it, and said, 'It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces.'" That is the fairly standard translation. But, at the end of the verse the words used to describe what have happened to Joseph are **נִשְׁרָף וְנִשְׁרָף** (Toroff Torahff), which is tantamount to doubling the word, which means "torn." When the Torah doubles a word, it is not simply saying the word twice but, rather, it is conveying to the reader that the word's meaning is to be magnified or multiplied to fully understand the message being conveyed. So, the Torah is not saying that Joseph had been "torn to pieces," or "surely has been torn by a wild animal," but, rather, he was completely shredded to pieces and we would guess, even devoured, by a wild animal.

The evidence before Jacob was apparently "that" convincing since his words **יִסְּרֵי טוֹרָה** (Toroff Torahff), are of that intensity.

As clear as this insight into understanding the intensity of what Father Jacob said maybe, we need to note that Rashi does approach the subject of how the brothers could feel so very secure that no one would divulge that they had others deliver Joseph's blood soaked coat of many colors to their father. Rashi offers that the Tanhuma (which is either Tanhuma bar Abba, ז"ל, of the 5th Century and one of the foremost Aggadists of his time - Aggadah is what we refer to as folklore and tales in the non-legalistic area of Jewish Biblical commentary). When Rashi attributes something to Tanhuma, it may also be referring to any of a number of Aggadaists who wrote in a similar conjecturing style as Rabbi Tanchuma bar Abba.

What Rashi says is that the brethren; i.e. Joseph's older brothers threatened to excommunicate and curse anyone who would reveal the truth of what happened to Joseph and they even combined the Holy One Blessed be He with them. Rashi notes further that Isaac knew that Joseph was alive yet he said to himself, "How shall I reveal (this) when the Holy One Blessed be He does not desire to reveal (it) to him (Jacob)?"

Again, please know that Aggada is not based on Torah as written; i.e. as law. But, rather, it is conjecture from those who have great insight into what the Torah is saying and is, therefore, considered worthwhile to include in any study of the subject at hand.

Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 34 tells us of how Jacob also rent (tore) his garments and put on sack cloth to wear and mourned for his son Joseph for many days. Rashi enumerates Jacob's mourning to be 22 years until he is forced to go down to Egypt. Then, in Verse 35, we learn that Jacob's sons and daughters rose up to try and comfort him (Jacob) but that he refused to be comforted saying "No. I will go to the grave mourning my son (Joseph)" and the Torah ends Verse 35 stating that "his father wept for him."

The Torah in Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 36 now returns its focus to Joseph by telling us "and the Midianites sold him (Joseph) into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the Captain of the Guard." They took place through the efforts of the Ishmaelite caravan. Potiphar means "the

gift of Ra (the sun god)". And, the word meaning "official" has come to mean "court official." Rashi explains that the office he held was the one in charge of slaughtering the cattle of the King.

The Rav (Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, z"l, points out that Potiphar was not the Chief Butcher but, rather, was the Chief Executioner of Egypt. The Rav notes that Targum Onkelos (Aramaic Translation of the Torah by a convert to Judaism, Onkelos, z"l, 35 to 135 of the Common Era) translates it as "Chief Executioner." The Rav also points out that there are no "accidents" in the Torah. There was surely a reason why Joseph was sold to the "Chief Executioner." The Rav says it was to show Joseph just who his own father Jacob was by comparison to this leader of another - and, yes, quite a different - culture. The Rav points out that the same was true of Abraham, who went to Mitzraim (Egypt) so that he would know what the other culture was all about.

The Torah now does what might be seen as the unexpected by focusing on Joseph's older brother Judah to show how a man raised in the same home and with the same values as Joseph could chose to act when faced with temptation. The Torah apparently does this so that later, when we see Joseph in similar circumstances chooses to act, it will be more meaningful and impactful. The comparison is surely to be a learning moment for each of us who gets the opportunity to study this Parsha (portion) of the Torah.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 1 opens with the phrase "And it came to pass at that time ,,,," which is the Torah's way of saying that the following did not necessarily take place in immediate chronological order to what has just been related. It could have been at a time in the past, or, it could even be at a time well after the event or events just related to us. But, it is shared with us here in order to illuminate something for us as we prepare to learn further in this area of focus.

Rashi adds the following possibility as well, which is that what is being related here is that Judah's brothers (other than Joseph of course) turned away from him (Judah) saying, "you told us to sell Joseph, and we did. If you had told us to return him to our father, we would have done so, and we would not be in this situation as we are."

What we learn next is how Judah dealt with temptation. But, as we will see, we learn a great deal more than that.

"He (Judah) turned away from his brothers until he came to an Adullamite man named Hirah." Rashi says that Judah entered into a partnership with Hirah (in some kind of business)

Verse 2 "And there Judah saw the daughter of a merchant named Shua and he took her and came to her." Others translate כְּנַעֲנִי "Kehnahanee" as Canaanite instead of as "merchant," which is how it is used in the Book of Zechariah Chapter XIV Verse 21 as compared to Genesis Chapter XXVI "merchant" 34F.

Book of Zechariah Chapter XIV Verse 21: "and there will no longer be a trafficker כְּנַעֲנִי (KehNahanee) in the House of the L-rd of Hosts on that day."

We can see where the Hebrew כְּנַעֲנִי (KehNahanee) can be said to be "Canaanite" or "merchant" But, for Judah to interact with a "Canaanite" is difficult to even envision.

That Judah was attracted to a woman and married her is by no means a crime. The story as it is related to us by the Torah, does reveal a certain amount of what might be referred to as questionable behavior on the part of Judah. We will see that, to a greater or lesser extent, he follows the rules or customs of the day, but, at the same time, we might expect "more" from someone of his station and position in the Covenantal Community.

Genesis Chapter 38 Verse 3, "And she (Shua) conceived and bore a son and he (Judah) called his name Er." The Torah does not tell us that Judah married Shua. But, at the same time, we are told that some kind of continuing and ongoing relationship did exist between Judah and Shua. The first indication of this is that the Torah tells us that "he called his name Er." One does not name one's son if one is not somehow intrinsically involved in the boy's life and future.

In Verse 4 of Genesis Chapter XXXVIII, we learn, further, "And she (Shua) conceived again and bore a son; and she called his name Onan." This verse lets us know that Judah and Shua have been continuing their relationship in some way; even without the benefit of being married. It is interesting that with this second son, it is Shua and not Judah who names the baby. The Torah does not make a "big deal" about this. So, perhaps that is the case; i.e. that it is no "big deal." Perhaps the relationship

between Shua and Judah was an "equal opportunity" one. Either one or the other could, and did, name their children with no negative or positive signs to be read into or from what we are told. Or, perhaps there was some kind of "drift" on the part of Judah even if he still maintained relationship (a familial relationship) with Shua. Or, perhaps Shua was feeling so secure in her relationship with Judah that she could name their second son knowing that she would (and obviously or at least apparently did) have Judah's approval.

In Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 5, we see even more evidence of how strong and on going the relationship between Judah and Shua was when we are told "And she yet again bore a son and called his name Shelah; and he (Judah) was at Chezib when she (Shua) bore him (Shelah)." But, the last few words in the verse, "And he (Judah) was at Chezib when she bore him (Shelah)" tells us that the relationship between Judah and Shua, indeed, or perhaps was changing.

But, we learn in Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 6 that no matter how strong or weak the relationship between Judah and Shuva may have been, it was a long term one; long enough to have lasted from the birth of their three sons to when the first son was old enough to become a "married" man. "And Judah took a wife for Er his first born and her name was Tamar."

(We should note that Tamar means "a date palm" and that this name occurs later in The Book of Samuel II Chapter XIII when we learn about King David and his daughter Tamar).

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 7 is one of those verses that seem to just come out of nowhere. There is no antecedent material that foreshadows the news we receive here and we are left to absorb the shock of it full force. "And Er, Judah's first born, was wicked in the sight of the L-rd; and the L-rd slew him (literally caused him to die)."

The reason that the L-rd found Er to be "wicked" enough to bring about his death is not directly given to us by the Torah. We learn from the next few verses, Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verses 8 through 10, that when the Torah tells us "and He (the L-rd) caused him (Onan) to die also" that it is stated in that way to indicate that we are to know that Er had done exactly

the same unacceptable (wicked) act that his brother Onan had done; i.e. coitus interruptus, which is so "wicked" that it warrants the death penalty.

This comes about because of the custom of the day that requires male relatives to assume the role of husband to the widows of their male relatives who have died. At the death of his brother Er, Onan is supposed to do the expected and, in the custom of the day, the honorable thing with regard to Er's widow Tamar; i.e. to take her as his wife in order to allow her to carry on her late husband's legacy by helping to give her children in Er's name.

This custom for the surviving male relatives of husbands who leave widows in the wake of their deaths to step in and assume the responsibilities of their deceased male relative with regard to their surviving widows was a well-known one. Surely, Er's brother Onan knew what his "social" and "societal" responsibilities were. But, it apparently took his father, Judah, to "remind" him of it as reported in Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 8.

"And Judah said unto Onan: 'Go (in) unto thy (late) brother's wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto, and raise up seed to thy brother.'"

Apparently, Onan was not going to do this community accepted requirement until his father, Judah, told him to do so.

We can ponder what was driving Onan when it comes to why he opted to go against the accepted custom to "stand in" for his deceased brother to allow his dead brother's widow to give birth to children in his late brother's name.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 9 "And Onan knew that the seed would not be his (in name only of course), and it came to pass, when he went in unto his (late) brother's wife, that he spilled it (the seed) on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother, (i.e. to advance his late brother's name in the future)."

Sibling rivalry may have been the driving force behind Onan's actions. Could he (Onan) really have believed that the seed that he would "give to his dead brother" would really belong to his late brother? Please. Apparently, Onan wanted to be what we might refer to as "his own man." And, he apparently chose to withdraw from his late brother's wife during

cohabitation in order to make certain that his late brother's name would remain unenhanced with progenitors.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 10 "And the thing which he (Onan) did was evil in the sight (eyes) of the L-rd; and He (the L-rd) caused him (Onan) to die as well." This verse is the focus of a deep and long term focus by Biblical commentators throughout the generations' right up until today. The term "Onanism" is derived from these verses (Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verses 7 through 10) the matter is expounded upon by D.M. Feldman in the piece "Birth Control in Jewish Law" (1968; 1970) and is available at the following online website: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org which is a project of American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. I invite the reader to visit that website and to gain a comprehensive appreciation of "Onanism."

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 11 "Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house until Shelah my son be (become) grown up' for he said, 'Lest he also die like his brethren' and Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house." There are those who "read into" this verse that Judah was of the belief that the cause of Er's death and of his brother Onan's death was Tamar herself in some way. The Torah tells us what had actually happened, at least in the case of Onan, but Judah was not aware of this at all. So, one can see why he might think that his two sons may have died for some unknown reason tied to his daughter-in-law Tamar.

The Torah does not elaborate as to why the L-rd labels the intentional spilling of one's own seed as being worthy of (or deserving of) the death penalty. The Torah simply reports it in the first instance; i.e. Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 7 "And Er, Judah's first born, was wicked in the sight (eyes) of the L-rd; and the L-rd slew him (caused him to die)." The evilness does not get clarified until verse 9 when we are told that Onan "went in unto his brother's wife that he spilled it (his seed) on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother." Then, we are told in Verse 10 "And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the L-rd; and He (the L-rd) slew him (Onan) (caused him to die) also."

We need to be careful here because in the Torah every word, everything, counts. "And the thing which he did was evil" could well be referring to the spilling of the seed, but it might also or, actually, be referring to "why" he

spilled his seed on the ground; because he did not want to elevate the value or memory of his late brother's name (by having children created by his late brother's wife. One may say that we are splitting hairs here, but we may be correct, none the less. And, if we are correct, then the "evil deed" that was worthy of death might be described as "insulting the dead," which is a line that one dares not cross. If the social or societal custom is to honor your dead brother's memory by "giving him children" by taking up the mantle of his marital responsibilities that he can no longer perform, then, do it.

The Torah does not actually or clearly illuminate for us why the older brother, Er, was labeled "evil." It is only by a commentator's interpretation that we come to the understanding that he (Er) spilled his seed as did his brother. But, why would Er have done so? There are those who project or proffer that he, Er, did not want his wife Tamar to become pregnant because her "girlish figure" would become history from the pregnancy and he was selfish enough to want her "prettiness" to be maintained so he would withdraw from her during coitus so as not to impregnate her. Right or wrong, why would what Er did be worthy of the death penalty?

We can see where the potential represented in a fertilized human egg could be considered to be extremely important and to where there would be those who would award it with the same value as a live human being even though the fertilized egg is still only potential and is not in actuality a human being. But, to take it to the next level and to say that an unfertilized human egg or human male seed by themselves are equal in potentiality or the same as a live fully formatted human being is quite a leap of faith and, more, not based on reality but, rather on the interpretation of what the various aspects of life are and nothing more.

So, what else could have been the reason that the L-rd found Er to be "evil" to the point that he deserved, in the eyes of the L-rd, to have his life ended?

At the most basic level, a man and a woman living together as husband and wife comes with certain natural expectations. For the woman, to become pregnant with child would be both expected and, we would imagine, desired. So, for a woman's mate to unilaterally take measures to deny his wife the opportunity to conceive and bear a child would be deceit

at, perhaps, the highest level. His wife's life and her chance to find the great happiness and meaning connected with giving birth to and raising a child being denied to her by her husband is tantamount to his reducing his wife to a "thing" for his pleasure only and with no regard to or for her as a person; his co-equal. She, his wife, in essence, then becomes meaningless to him. And, to do that is, in and of itself, "evil" in every way.

We can appreciate where and how the L-rd could see such inhumane treatment of another human being, let alone one's own spouse and partner in life, could be looked at as minimizing and, in essence, taking that person's life; i.e. murder in a certain way. And, for the L-rd to consider such deception and uncaring action as "evil" is understandable to us. Would it be evil enough for the L-rd to bring about Er's death? Yes indeed.

Before we leave Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse II, let us take a little closer look at it: "Then, Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law 'remain a widow in your father's house until Shelah my son be (become) grown up for he said, 'lest he also die like his brethren' and Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house."

That sounds so easy. But, the Rav (Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik) points out in his book "Abraham's Journey" page 179 and quoted in the "Chumash with Commentary based on the teachings of the Rav" (OU Press 2013) when it comes to the very next two words of the next verse: "Many days passed" Tamar was a heroic woman. She possessed the ability and patience to wait without end. Tamar waited many years. She was lonely, forsaken, forgotten by everyone. Seasons passed. All her friends married, reared families; all contact with them came to an end; people treated her with ridicule and contempt. Shelah married; Judah had forgotten her. And, she waited and never said a word. Was she not the incarnation of Knesses Yisroel which has waited for her beloved for hundreds and thousands of years under the most trying circumstances? Did not Tamar personify the greatest of all heroic action - to wait while the waiting arouses laughter and derision?"

The Torah tells us the death of Judah's wife and, in a sense, puts Tamar on hold; at least for a while.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 12 "And many days passed (meaning: after a considerable period of time) Shauna's daughter" and just a moment

here please because we just wonder why the Torah chooses to only identify this woman as either "Shauna's daughter" or as "Judah's wife" but does not share her name with us. Is there something to be learned from this? We understand that this "woman" existed and we know something about her background; i.e. who her father was and where her family was in relationship to the Covenantal Community, and that Judah was "stricken by" or certainly "attracted to" her enough to marry and have at least three children with her. And, we know that their marriage lasted a considerable number of years. We do not know what caused her death; only that she died. And, for some reason we are not told what her name was.

The Biblical scholar Dr. Tamar Kadari has done some extensive background study of what a number of Talmudic commentators have said about her, which you can investigate fully by clicking [HERE](https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shuas-daughter-midrash-and-aggadah) or by going to the following URL address: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shuas-daughter-midrash-and-aggadah>

But, the closest we have come to learning what this woman's name was, Judah's wife, is that she may have been called "Bat-Shauna" or "Bat-Shua" as her name, which is something like when we refer to a statesman like David Ben-Gurion, ז"ל, as "Ben-Gurion."

What the scholars or commentators seems to agree upon is that Shuana or Shua was not a Canaanite but, rather, was respected widely by those people (the Canaanites) for being a very successful merchant of some kind. They also agree that Judah, in marrying Shauna's daughter may not have broken away completely from the ways of his forefathers by marrying an idol worshiper, but he did not marry a woman from the Covenantal Community, which was seem by the Torah itself as a negative. In Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 1, the Torah says, "Judah left וַיֵּרַד יְהוּדָה (Vah-Yaired), which literally means "went down" from his brothers." So, the commentators take "went down" as meaning more than just physically descended, but, instead, "was diminished" from a reputational standpoint.

The name Shuana (Hebrew text) translates as "opulence" vs Shua (Hebrew text) translates as "a cry for help" and he was the grandfather of Er, Onan and Shelah.

Of course, there are those who point out that at that time, if one was not of the Covenantal Community one was, by definition, an idol worshiper, which is and was someone who would be forbidden to marry. So, what Judah had done was clearly a "come down" or a "decent" from what was considered the Covenantal Community norm.

Why we are not told the name of Shua's or Shauna's daughter remains a question. Perhaps it is the Torah's way of editorializing rather than announcing the passing of a judgment outright, and, thereby, letting us all know by intimation that what Judah had done, though perhaps not blatantly against one of, if not the key tenets of the Covenantal Community, was none the less something that would best not have been done. Why? That is easy. Because, by marrying a woman who was not a member of the Covenantal Community one is giving credence to the idol worshipers' beliefs, ways and practices, which is forbidden to do.

In our day, we often see where interreligious marriages that would not have been permitted or performed by an ordained rabbi of any stripe or denomination are now almost commonplace. To our knowledge, there is no religion-wide "hetter" (decree of permissibility) for interreligious wedding ceremonies to be performed, so, apparently, rabbis and cantors are making these decisions to do so independently. What the effect will be going forward will be something for historians in the future to determine. But, clearly, it was a bit of a "grey area" back in the time of Judah and his brothers as it is apparently again today.

There is a "Medrash" (rabbinical legend) that says that Judah's wife was named Allyath (Safer ha Yashar Chapter XLV - Verses 4 and 29) The Medrash does not define or give the meaning of the name Allyath nor does it give us any support for why it uses it here in the exact same situation as in the Torah but the Torah itself does not provide this name or any other name.

While we are in the area of Biblical commentary and what may also be labeled Biblical speculation or interpretation, there are those who say that the reason that the Lord caused the death of Judah's sons was a kind of "payback" for what Judah had done to his father Jacob by misleading him as to the disappearance of Judah's younger brother and Jacob's son Joseph. The pain he (Judah) caused his father Jacob by telling him the

untruth was excruciating and, more, he (Judah) could have directed his brothers to have returned Joseph to their father Jacob but he chose not to. So, this experience of having three sons and then having two die is seen by some as a kind of retribution for what he had done to Jacob vis-à-vis Joseph.

Of course, Shauna's daughter, Judah's wife, had done nothing to our knowledge that would have been deserving of the pain and anguish she surely from her sons' deaths. So, we would have to say that this "interpretation," though perhaps fitting regarding Judah, is at least, from what we know about Shauna's daughter, undeserved and, even, mean spirited.

(It is important when trying to fit things into an "interpretation" that all sides of the story be properly addressed).

Now, please, let us return to Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 12 "And many days past (meaning: after a considerable period of time) Shauna's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted and went up to the sheep shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite."

We hardly know this woman referred to as Shauna's daughter and Judah's wife, we do not even know her name but, somehow we grieve for the loss of her. Judah apparently grieved for the loss of her as well for some time and then, we are told, he and a friend of his went to the city of Timnah, which was a Philistine city in Canaan where, apparently, there was an event of some kind involving sheep shearing, which, apparently, he had members of his community in attendance and he went to observe or to supervise them. The word על (Ahl) which means "on" or "over" is used by the Torah rather than אל (Ell), which means "to" which tells us he was there to observe or even to supervise but we are pretty certain that his mission or outing was a "work related" trip, which was apparently his way of dealing with the death of his wife.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 13 "And it was told to Tamar (by someone): 'Your father-in-law now is going up to Timnah to shear sheep.'" As a member of Judah's family, it would have been fitting and proper for Tamar to have been informed of Judah's outing even though she was not living in Judah's house.

Rashi explains why the Torah says "is going up" when referring to where Timnah is located; when, as he points out in the Talmud Masechet (tractate) Sotah Page 10 Side "B" dealing with Samson when he "went down to Timnah." Rashi explains that it depends where one is in relationship to where Timnah is because Timnah is on the slope of a mountain and if one were below Timnah then one would have to go up to it and if one were above Timnah one would go down to get to it.

The unstated aspect of news about which Tamar is informed in Verse 13 is that while certainly Judah, her father-in-law, was gravely hurt by the death of his wife, he was apparently strong enough to accompany a friend of his on a trip to Timnah for sheep shearing of some kind, but his responsibility under the communally accepted custom of the day to have a male member of his family assume the marital duties of his dead sons' Er and Onan if possible, which could have been done either by his youngest son Shelah or by Judah himself. So, we can see that there is an apparent purposeful oversight by Judah with regard to his honoring his familial responsibilities to "take care of" his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar properly.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 14 And she (Tamar) put off from her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat at a crossroads (literally: at the entrance of ainah-eem which means eyes), which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up and she was not given unto him to wife.

The Torah now has us focus on Tamar, who we recall as having been widowed twice due to the death of Er, Judah's oldest son, who was her first husband, and who the L-rd caused to die, and due to the death of Onan, Judah's middle son, who Judah had marry Tamar in accordance with the custom of the time known now as "levirate marriage," which is where a brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his dead brother's widow if there were no children born of that marriage. (The term "levirate" is derived from the Latin word "levir" meaning "husband's brother"). The L-rd also caused Onan to die, which again, left Tamar a widow. Verse 14 brings Tamar's situation into very clear focus for us. We can see that despite the custom of the day where brothers marry the widows of their dead brothers and despite the fact that Judah had his younger son Onan assume the marital responsibilities of his older son Er by having Onan marry his widow,

Tamar, at this juncture Judah has either completely forgotten about his family's responsibility to have Tamar marry Judah's youngest son, Shalah, or he, Judah, has chosen to ignore the situation completely and leave his daughter-in-law Tamar to fend for herself; i.e. while living in her own father's home.

Tamar, seeing that she has, for whatever reason, been abandoned by Judah and his family, now decides to become proactive and to do what she can to improve her situation.

Verse 14 both sets the scene and describes what Tamar does to seek a remedy to her problem. The costume she selected becomes the focus of some observers.

There are commentators who flirt with the idea that Tamar sought to become a harlot because a woman hiding her face might be taken to be one, but it is rather clear from the text of the verse that Tamar was after one and only one person who, according to the custom of the day, owed her his every effort to take care of her by having someone in his family take on the responsibility of Tamar's late husband.

Tamar sets aside her clothing that labels her as being a woman in mourning and, therefore, not "available" to anyone who might be attracted to and wish to marry her, and puts on clothing that makes the exact opposite statement; i.e. that she is "available" and looking for the right guy. How we know that Judah is that "guy" for her is that she is careful to position herself on the roadway where Judah is sure to encounter her.

Again, we have commentators who "delve" more deeply into certain aspects of Verse 14. One suggests that the "entrance of ainaheem" indicates the tent of Abraham because Tamar wants to be part of the Covenantal Community. Perhaps. But, as attractive as the thought maybe, there is really no strong evidence that Tamar was seeking anything more than the security that would, or one would hope would be hers if she had a husband who would take care of her. Since Judah was apparently leaning away from his familial responsibilities and letting his daughter-in-law remain a widow rather than having his youngest son Shelah assume his or his family's levirate responsibilities and marry Tamar, Tamar decided to do something that would rectify the situation and attain for herself the secure life to which she was entitled.

We really could just do what most commentators do now when discussing Tamar and that is to move on to Verse 15. But, the Rav (Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, z"l, as quoted in the book "Days of Deliverance" pages 152 to 153, edited by Eli D. Clark, Joel B. Wohwelsky and Reuven Ziegler © 2007, Toras HoRav Foundation.)

".. Tamar showed the strength of waiting and hoping, of having faith even when she became the subject of mockery. She sat at a window in her father's house, waiting for Shelah. Tamar remained faithful and loyal. In her simplicity and naiveté, she instinctively trusted Judah. She could not tear herself away from him; something fateful, incomprehensible, tied her to him. Something larger would come of it. So, she made the desperate, imbecilic decision to sit at the crossroads. Fate pushed her to it. The strength of absurd loyalty is the second foundation of the concealed world of the Kingdom of the House of David, of the idea of the Messiah."

The Rav helps us appreciate the importance of Tamar to the Jewish People and, really, to the world at large. Tamar is an example to us all when it comes to having faith. But, even beyond that and, perhaps to build on what the Rav points her covering her face out to us about the importance of Tamar, we learn from Tamar that the L-rd helps those who help themselves. Though not a Biblical quotation, and not something that is guaranteed by anything we know. But, it seems correct none the less.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 15 When Judah saw her (Tamar), he thought her to be a harlot; for she had covered her face. Rashi notes that there are those who interpret her covering her face meant that she was available to men in general. But, Rashi explains that the only man to whom Tamar was available would be Judah.

And, again, the Rav helps us see what we might call the long view of this very special woman who was Tamar.

"Tamar was also determined to bear a child from this Jewish family. She disguised herself as a prostitute and lured her father-in-law, Judah, to lie with her. She conceived twins of this union and one of them, Perez, became the direct progenitor of David and the Messiah to come. Finally, Ruth the Moabite proposed to her deceased husband's kinsman, Boaz, to marry her. She married Boaz and gave birth to Obed, David's paternal grandfather. (Echoes pages 25 to 26)"

Genesis XXXVIII Verse 16 "And he (Judah) turned unto her by the way and said, 'Come I pray thee, let me come in unto thee;' for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law. And she (Tamar) said, 'What will thou give me; that thou mayest come in unto me?'"

Rashi explains that he (Judah) did not just turn his head while going on his way, but came off his route, leaving the road to go to her (Tamar).

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz (in his Humash, Genesis page 210 © 2015, 2018) explains the situation in more detail. "According to Torah law, it is forbidden for a father-in-law to marry his daughter-in-law. Thought this incident took place before the Torah was given, the law or custom of the day would still have prohibited the relationship. So, if Tamar had not hidden her face, Judah would not have approached her in this way. Further, when Tamar asks for payment for allowing him to enter her, she is further disguising herself as a harlot."

The following is not discussed by the commentators as far as I can tell. But, one could ask that since the two sons of Judah who married Tamar had withdrawn during intercourse and died shortly thereafter in each instance, were those marriages actually ever consummated? In Jewish law there are actually three different ways that a man can take or marry a woman. כֶּסֶף Kesef, שֵׁתָר Shtar and בִּיאָה BeeAw. Kesef כֶּסֶף is money. Shtar שֵׁתָר is contract. And, BeeAw בִּיאָה is intercourse. That is there could be the giving of a certain amount of money or something of monetary value in exchange for the woman becoming the man's wife. That method is represented in today's Jewish wedding ceremony by the groom putting a ring on his bride's finger. There are those who conduct a double ring ceremony where the bride gives a ring to her husband. But, that is not part of the tradition. Shtar שֵׁתָר is a contract and in today's wedding ceremony there is a written document signed by two Kosher witnesses (Kosher witnesses are men who are observant of Jewish law) who swear under oath that the groom said he would take the woman as his wife. And, BeeAw בִּיאָה , sexual intercourse, is represented in today's wedding ceremony by the performance of YeeChood (alone together; seclusion), which is when the bride and groom are observed by the Kosher witnesses who see them enter a room and then the door to the room is closed and remains closed for a significant amount of time; enough time for the couple to have consummated their marriage

by having engaged in intercourse. In today's wedding ceremony, the couple would have been fasting out of their extremely high focus about the importance of what they are about to do and before the Chupah (canopy) ceremony the couple enters the room for the Yechud part of the process but, instead of actually engaging in sexual intercourse the couple breaks their fast by enjoying breakfast that would have been prepared for them to enjoy. The witnesses observe the Yechud outside the room and later swear that the couple was in the room together and could have consummated the marriage while they were in the room alone together.

So, that being said, it could be, from a technical standpoint that because each of Judah's older sons apparently chose to withdraw during intercourse and were caused to die by the L-rd, that their marriages to Tamar were not actually or effectively or properly consummated.

If we are right about this, then the marriages between Judah's older sons and Tamar were not valid even though, clearly, Judah and more, Tamar, must have believed that those marriages had been consummated or they would not have acted as they did going forward; i.e. that Judah said, even if he did not follow through on what he said that Tamar should wait for Judah's youngest son to grow up and that he would have him marry her; and that Tamar herself believed that that was the right thing to do and, so, she did it; i.e. she waited.

But, when she (Tamar) saw that Judah did not intend to have his youngest son marry her, Tamar must have revisited the situation and decided to review things with, shall we say, new eyes, and realized that she could be seen as being an unmarried woman because neither of Judah's older sons had properly consummated their marriage, and, therefore, she decided to take actions that would bring about the end result that she wanted, hoped and faithfully prayed would happen as described so beautifully above by the Rav.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 17 "And he (Judah) said: 'I will send thee a kid of the goats from the flock.' And she (Tamar) said, 'Wilt thou give me a pledge, 'til thou send it?'"

Rashi explains that עֲרָבוֹן AiRavoon, a pledge, means MahShKoon, which means security according to Targum Unkelus.

There are a few things about Verse 17 that are deserving of consideration to help us gain a fuller understanding of what is going on here. In response to Tamar's question as to what he (Judah) will give her for allowing him to have sexual relations with her, Judah offers her a kid of the goats from the flock. From this we can learn that there does not appear to be a currency or some kind of money in common use at that time. One would have to say that there was apparently no standard or understood value for things, so whatever a person might offer to pay for a product or service it would be up to the recipient to determine whether the price or value was sufficient just like today. In this instance, Judah's offer of a kid from the goat herd, that in itself is interesting since we were thinking if he were to offer an animal it would have been a sheep related animal since he and the Covenantal Community were so heavily involved in raising sheep. Were sheep more valuable than goats? Or, were goat more valuable than sheep? Why would Judah offer a kid of the goat heard, which is a baby goat and not a full grown goat? Are we to assume that everyone keeps and raises animals? We can guess that without refrigeration one's meals were made from scratch each time. Nothing got saved for later. If you wanted chicken, you needed to have at least one chicken on hand. A kid goat is equal to the potential for it to grow to full size and then it could be a meal for how many people? We would guess quite a few. So, a kid goat was equal to whatever number of meals could be prepared from it. The financial dynamics of the day as represented here would need an expert with a much greater understanding of such things than I am able to offer. But, we can see that even at a very basic level there are things to be learned from Verse 17.

But, before Judah discloses or proposes to pay by giving her a kid form the goat herd he says he will sent it to her. That in itself is interesting. Sending it to her means, one, that he does not have the kid from the heard with him now, and, two, it indicates that he would have to know who she is and where she will be in order to have people, messengers, deliver the kid from the goat herd to her later on.

Perhaps that was part of the custom of the day; i.e. that one could purchase something and have the payment (whatever that might be) delivered later. Or, perhaps there is what might be obvious to most but perhaps not be as clear when one is looking at things through a certain level of naiveté, that once the two, Tamar and Judah, would have engaged

in sexual intercourse. Unless one might think that they would engage in sex but that she would continue to keep her face covered. The Biblical commentators do not appear to address this point. But, it seems that win, lose or draw, once the two of them, Tamar and Judah, made arrangements to engage in the marital act that when they did Judah would know immediately with whom he would be cohabitating. Talking about it is one thing. Doing it is something else entirely.

So now, with all the cards on the table so to speak, could it be that what we are seeing or witnessing or being told about is actually an acted out encounter between two people who really do know one another but who are going through this elaborate charade in order to justify doing what, otherwise, might not --- no, absolutely would not have been permitted --- given the custom of the day.

When Judah says he will send her whatever it may be, that means that right then, even with her face covered, he knew to whom he was speaking. He knew he is talking to or with Tamar; his daughter-in-law. Was it her voice that he recognized? He asks her to have sex as if she is a prostitute. She asks him for how much and he says I will send it to you as if he knew it was Tamar before she spoke it is doubtful he would have started in the first place unless he wanted her but knew he could not have her unless they came together in this highly unorthodox way. But, cleverly, once she speaks he must have recognized her voice and then he knew who she was and so he signals to her that he knows who she is by offering to have whatever he is going to pay her delivered later to her. Her reply looking for a security of some kind is her way then, of letting him know that she understands that he knows with whom he is speaking and that with the security in place all will be well for them to do what would normally not be allowed to be done; for a father-in-law to have relations and then to marry his daughter-in-law.

I could not find anyone among the Biblical commentators who interprets this Verse 17 in this way. But, when we look at it in this way, it seems the most logical way to read the text. It is actually quite simple and straight forward. It shows how respectful both Tamar and Judah were of the custom of the day; i.e. for fathers-in-law not to marry their daughters-in-law. But, that knowing what each knows about the other and given Tamar's strength

of her beliefs and conviction to bear a child from this family, Judah knows what he knows, that two of his sons died leaving Tamar a widow with extraordinary circumstances; i.e. her marriages to Judah's sons were perhaps never properly consummated leaving her available to him and he, not wanting her to marry his youngest son for fear that his younger son might meet the same fate as his two older sons. And, besides the natural physical attraction between Judah and Tamar, Judah had recently lost his wife and was surely feeling despondent and lonely. Everything fits so well together and, for us, it appears to be the correct and accurate reading of the text.

Please understand, we are not condoning any kind of "fancy footwork" to live around or manipulate the rules. Not at all. Here, in this situation, the circumstances are very special that make a person like Tamar take special steps to accomplish their goals and objectives but to do so with full respect for the rules of the day.

Genesis XXXVIII Chapter 18 "And he (Judah) said, 'What pledge shall I give thee?' And, she (Tamar) said, 'Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand.' And he gave them to her, and came in unto her and she conceived by him."

Just as simple as that. He asks what she would want in the way of a pledge or security that he will deliver the kid of the goat herd he promised to her. She gives him a list of three items: a signet, a cord and his staff. These items are very special and, surely, Tamar knew that when she asked Judah for them. The signet, the cord that holds it and from which it hangs and the walking stick or staff are all signs of an important person, like a sheik or a man of rank in the Canaanite society, which was the neighborhood in which they lived. The signet would be used to seal or officiate documents. Rashi tells us that Targum Onkelos explains that the cord actually translates better as a cloth that might have been a kind of sash that helped identify the wearer as a dignitary.

But, Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz holds that "The fact that Judah gave this unknown woman various personal items including his signet, an item not normally given out or lent, as it is used to certify legal documents, demonstrates that Judah was not acting judiciously at that time. (Steinsaltz "Humash" page 210).

Of course, if we look at the situation as we observed above, that Judah knew with whom he was dealing and that Tamar knew that he knew, then, what he did by giving her such important items as his official signet and his special garment or lanyard and his office holder's walking stick or staff, was done with great purpose. He was, if we have it understood correctly now, not at all acting in a non-judicious way. To the contrary, Judah was, instead, righting what was a long time wrong that needed to be resolved fairly and properly. The more we see it in this way, the more we are convinced that we are correct in our understanding of the "Pashat;" the simple reading of the text in the Torah without reading into it and twisting it to our liking.

And, to put the proverbial cherry on top of the ice cream sundae, let us go back to the basic economics of the "contract" being negotiated or stuck in Verses 17 and 18 between Judah and Tamar. What is the value of a kid from the goat herd compared to the value of the signet, the cloth or lanyard of official station and of the walking stick or staff with all its great significance and meaning in the community? The kid from the goat herd can now be seen to have been a joke between Judah and Tamar. As soon as she asks him what he will give her for him to be allowed to come in unto her, he knows from her voice or something who she is and he immediately signals to her that he is onto the charade by offering to not only pay her nothing now but, rather, to have her pay sent go her later, and offering a kid from the goat herd, which, now, I am guessing was worth next to nothing and if it were a real negotiation between a real harlot and a fellow looking for a fun time, she would have laughed in his face and told him to hit the proverbial road. Why do our commentators and all of us really who read this bargaining dialog and move on without realizing what is going on here? Because we are not looking at the people about whom we are reading and what they were going through. We are just reading the words. Would Judah just leave his signet, his cloak or cloth or lanyard of distinction and his walking stick or staff with someone he does not even know for any reason, even to be able to enjoy some meaningless sexual encounter? No way would he ever do anything like that.

The Rav told us of the ultimate importance of this encounter; i.e. that from it will come King David and, eventually, from King David will come the Messiah. Are we to believe that what we are listening to between Tamar

and Judah is just frivolous banter as it appears on the surface? This is a very serious and important moment in the history of the Jewish people; in the history of the world really. A non-Jewish woman, who is apparently completely sold on the ideals and beliefs of the Avos (the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) had been, or at least was supposedly married into the Covenantal Community with the intent of bearing a child to further the entire concept and essence of the one G-d way and belief in it. But, the young men with whom she was supposed to have married by having marital relations with them, both, for whatever reasons, denied her the completion of the marital act and left her to remain childless when each were caused to die by the L-rd, who found them to be evil and worthy of death for what they had done. She stayed the course with the family and believed that she at last be married and be given a chance to bear children for the betterment of the Covenantal Community. Finally, when she could see no other way to bring about an acceptable resolution to her situation, she brings the main decision maker, Judah, to a decision maKing moment that will allow him to act to satisfy both his familial responsibility; i.e. he is not allowed to marry his daughter-n-law, and, yet, to do what needs to be done to allow his daughter-in-law to have children as a proper member of his family and of the Covenantal Community.

Tamar made the decision for Judah by acting out the charade of being a prostitute, which freed Judah to have marital relations with her and, at the same time, be able to say, "I did not know who she was." And, it worked to a tee.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 19 "And she arose and went away and put off her veil from her and put on her garments of her widowhood."

Rabbi Steinsaltz tells us that "Tamar had achieved her goal because through her actions she effectively guaranteed that Judah would consummate a levirate marriage with her. She succeeded in changing her status from barren widow to married mother of Judah's family." Rabbi Steinsaltz goes on to say that "Tamar acted boldly despite the danger and without the consideration of the social or societal consequences of her actions. From an historical perspective, Tamar earned the approval of God, as her son "Peretz," was ultimately progenitor of the distinguished Davidic dynasty."

And, to a certain extent, that is true. Tamar was, indeed, bold and even courageous. But, when we read the words of Verses 17 and 18 for what they are clearly telling us, what Tamar did was to provide her father-in-law, or perhaps we should say the man who was considered to be her father-in-law but who, because both of her marriages his sons were not properly, honestly nor actually consummated, was really just another man, who was now a widower himself, and eligible to marry her. She brought all the moving parts together in such a way as to make it relatively easy for Judah to do what was, clearly, the right thing to do and to do so in such a way as to not besmirch his reputation in the slightest. It was absolutely a brilliant stroke on the part of Tamar and was, in a sense equally brilliant on the part of Judah to have seen how all the right things could be done to the good of all concerned.

One "take away" from this may be a lesson for us where ever in the Torah we might be reading; If we stick to the "Pashat" (simple) meaning of the words in the Torah, the message will eventually become clear.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 20 "And Judah sent the kid of the goat herd by the hand of his friend the Allumite to take (as in redeem) his pledge (i.e. the items he has given as his pledge to pay) from the hand of the woman."

What else could Judah have done? If he did anything that would indicate that he knew who the "woman" he has encountered on the way home from Timnah and with whom he had engaged in sexual intercourse was actually Tamar, it would have revealed to the community at large that he had disrespected the custom or law of the day that fathers-in-law were not to marry their daughters-in-law. So, in order to retrieve his signet, his cloth or lanyard of rank and his walking stick or staff that was also a symbol to all who would see it that he was a dignitary, he needed to send someone to redeem them for him. Choosing his Allomite friend makes sense as well since his Allomite friend had apparently been his travel companion on his way to and from Timnah and, therefore, during the "encounter" and, therefore, would have known exactly where the "woman" was supposed to have been. One would think or assume that the "woman" (Tamar), who was after all, a prostitute, would be at the same place each day or evening waiting for her regular or any potential new "clients." It makes sense too.

that the “woman” was not where Judah’s Allomite friend would have expected her to have been because her not being there would have allowed Judah to be “absolutely shocked” just like Captain Louis Renault, played by Claude Rains, says after orders everyone to leave Rick’s Place in the movie “Casablanca” and is questioned by Rick Blaine, played by Humphry Bogart, as to what he is doing and Captain Renault says, “I’m shocked’ shocked, to find that gambling is going on here.” And, then, one of Rick’s employees pops into the scene and hand an envelope to Captain Renault and says, “Your winnings Captain.” The Captain says, “Thank you” and then continues his mission to shut down the gambling operation.

He was “shocked, shocked!” which is just like Judah would have said when he learned from his Allomite friend that the “woman” to whom he had given his signet, his sash of office and his staff of merit as a guarantee that he would send her the payment of a kid from the goat herd as agreed upon was not where she was supposed to have been. Judah was surely “Shocked! Shocked!”

This entire story now brings to mind the wisdom of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes where, in Chapter 1 Verse 9, he says, “... the thing that hath been, it is that which will be; and that which is done is that which will be one; and there is no new thing under the sun.”

“Ain chadosh tachash he sheesh.” There is nothing new under the sun.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 21 “And he (Judah’s Allomite friend) asked the men of her place, saying, “Where is the harlot who was at Eniemi by the wayside?” and they said, ‘There hath been no harlot here.’”

Rashi zeros in on the word harlot (Ha KehDaisha) and says that that word is saying the one dedicated and prepared for loudness or “prostitution” going by the translation of the Rashi in the “Pentateuch and Rashi’s Commentary” © 1949 (Genesis page 387). Rabbi Steinsaltz gives us some of the history of the word הַכַּדַּיִשָּׁה “HaKeDaiSha” (Harlot) by telling us that the term “originally referred to prostitutes employed by priests to work in pagan temples, and their actions were considered a part of the idolatrous rites. Eventually, the term came to be used more broadly as a synonym for all prostitutes.”

What might be discussed, but is not, unless you look up the root word Koof Daled Shin שִׁדְדָּה and find all sorts of words dealing with “holiness” and, lastly, with prostitution. (See Ben Yehuda’s Pocket English-Hebrew Hebrew-English Dictionary by Ehud Ben-Yehuda and David Weinstein © 1961) The root appears to mean “dedicated” i.e. to set aside and to reserve in a special way. Prostitutes in a pagan temple were apparently set aside for the priests in the temple and not for the followers, or perhaps they were for the “use” of non-priests for a price and those “prices” would go towards the support of the temple along with any other funds collected for services rendered by the temple priests. How can we know for sure? Hey, I am not a heathen or a pagan. But, the whole thing; Kodesh, holiness, KehDu-sha, is not as simple as one might think at first blush.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 22 “And he Judah’s Allomite friend) returned to Judah and said, ‘I have not found her; and also, the men of the (that) place said, ‘There hath been no harlot here (in that place).”

The only aspect of this verse that makes us wonder is how did the men of that place, where Judah’s Allomite friend went to find the “woman,” not know that the “woman” (Tamar) had been there? We know she was there because we know Judah met her and, after “negotiating a price with her, “he add she had sex together. How could the men of that area not know that she had been there? We do not like what might be referred to as loose ends. And, we like to keep in mind that these people were real people. Our view of what took place provided exclusively to us by the Torah. So, if what we have learned from all concerned, including the men who were interviewed by Judah’s Allomite friend, then the following appears to be what happened so that everyone’s statements would make sense.

Judah went off the road after noticing the “woman” and since no one else of the men in that local had noticed her before or after Judah did, then we must surmise that she may have been waiting until she saw Judah and, when she did, she revealed herself in such a way that he would know that she was a harlot.

Could she have been in a tent or some kind of wagon-like structure that had a compartment or room on it where she could have been inside looking out of its window until she noticed Judah passing by but would remain unnoticed by other men who might have been passing by?

Yes, that might have been the scene. Something about the structure or vehicle in which she was staying or waiting drew Judah's attention in such a way as to make him leave the path and to approach it. The way the tent or wagon was built could have identified it to have been made by or owned by someone Judah knew to be connected with Tamar, which could have captured his attention initially; enough for him to check it out and approach it.

When Tamar revealed herself to him wearing the garb of a harlot, Judah was then able to see the entire scenario without needing any written script to guide him through the steps he would need to take to help Tamar accomplish her objective, and for him, Judah, help right the tremendous wrong that had been visited upon her through no fault of her own. All he had to do is ask her to allow him to have sex with her and then the bargaining we described earlier would ensue.

They would do what needed to be done and he would leave. His Allomite friend would have witnessed the initial encounter and, yet, not have been aware that Judah knew that the "woman" was Tamar since his Allomite friend was a Canaanite local and not aware of what Tamar might have used as a symbol or signal to Judah on the tent or wagon to draw him near. Tamar and Judah would have their private sexual encounter inside the tent or wagon and no one else would know who she was or that he (Judah) knew who she was.

This verse tells us plenty if we just listen to the simple "Pashat" meaning of the words that the Torah shares with us.

Genesis XXXVIII Verse 23 "And Judah said, "Let her take it (the items that served as his pledge to pay the woman/harlot) lest we (I) be (will be) exposed to shame. Behold, I sent this kid (of the goat herd) and you have not found her (the woman)."

Rashi harmonizes by explaining that what Judah is telling his Allomite friend; i.e. "to forget about it" or folks will know I was "fooling around," and Rashi explains further that even though the hard core rules would not come into play until the Torah was given, there was still an initial appreciation of living a life of respect for one's family by being faithful and not straying in such ways as patronizing prostitutes.

We must remember that in Verse 23 Judah is speaking to his Allomite friend. He is not at all embarrassed in front of his Allomite friend about the fact that he (Judah) had engaged the services of a prostitute. He is concerned, however, that others in the community might think poorly of him if they would find out that he (Judah) had done so. Therefore, he tells his Allomite friend that by trying to deliver the kid from the goat herd but finding that the “woman” (the harlot) was not there, that he (Judah) has done what he could and, therefore, will not pursue the matter any further.

Rashi offers on a completely different level that Judah is being given what might be called his “come up ‘ins” i.e. because Judah used the blood of a goat to soak his younger brother Joseph’s coat of many colors to help convince his father Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal of some kind, that now the goat from the herd being rejected by the “harlot” in favor of keeping the items he (Judah) had given her as a kind of “pay back.”

But, as interesting as Rashi’s observation about the goat and the “pay back” may be, we tend to focus on the way Judah just writes off his important and treasured items, the signet, the cloth of office and his symbolic walking stick or staff with not so much as a “woe is me” about it. He takes it as if those items meant nothing when we know full well that they far outweighed the kid from the goat herd he had offered, and now had sent to the “woman” and, because she was not there, he (Judah) gets to keep.

How could the loss of those items be no big deal?

Because Judah knows that he did not actually lose them. That is how. He knows who has them and he knows that one way or another he will be getting them back.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 24 “And, it came to pass about three months later that it was told to Judah, saying ‘Tamar, thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot; and, moreover, she is with child by harlotry’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her forth and let her be burnt.’”

Apparently, as head of the (his) immediate family, Judah has the power of life and death. And, since betrothal was considered to be as binding as marriage and going back to Genesis Chapter XXXI Verse 2 Tamar was betrothed to Shelah, Judah’s youngest son, she was in the family.

There are some commentaries, according to Rabbi Steinsaltz, “who have made the anachronistic claim that this (burning) refers to branding a symbol of disgrace on to her body using a hot iron. Such a practice was once common in Europe but not in the ancient Near East. (See: Rav Yehuda Ha Hasid Ba'al HaTurim) (born Cologne in the holy Roman Empire circa 1269 to 1340 Toledo, Castle) a/k/a The Baal HaTurim meaning author of the Turim (Master of Columns) and a/k/a Rabbi Yaakov ben Raash (Rabbeinu Asher).

Still, we need to ask what Tamar's own father, in whose house Tamar had been and was apparently still living, would have to say about this and why Judah would have life and death power of Tamar over that of her own father.

Judah's rush to judgement when he is told of his daughter-in-law Tamar's pregnancy under other circumstances, i.e. if we were not privy to what we know about how she became pregnant, might seem capricious and impulsive. The “woman” (Tamar) could have been raped. How do we know about harlotry? Was he (Judah) not going to hold some kind of inquiry or trial so that justice would be served? But, of course, we know better.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 25 “When she (Tamar) was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law saying, ‘By the man whose these are, am I with child; and, she said, ‘Discover I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff.’”

Commentators say that Tamar acts nobly by withholding the name of the betrayer. The commentators also say that Judah also shows his better side by confessing his sin later on. Rashi applauds Tamar for not embarrassing Judah in public, but, rather, sending him the items that are his to allow him to own up to what happened and to take proper responsibility.

Of course, again, we know that her doing this is all part of both of their mutual unspoken plan. This way, they both come out looking like heroes and are not at all able to be condemned for what they did or for why they did it.

Rashi notes in particular how Tamar phrases her request that she sent to Judah; i.e. הִכָּרְנָא “HaBehRonaw “Recognize” if you please ...” the use of the word נָא “Naw” is the essence of request as to the L-rd by which she is

saying, 'please recognize your Creator (the L-rd) and do not destroy three lives; i.e. her own and the twins she is carrying.' Pretty heavy stuff. For certain. But, we know that Judah is up for the task because this was Tamar's plan from the beginning.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 26 "And Judah acknowledged them (the items Tamar had sent to him) and said, 'She (Tamar) is more righteous than I; for as much as I gave her not to Shelah my son, and he (Judah) knew her again no more."

One of the commentators states that the Torah does not hide the sins of its heroes and its heroines. That is nice to know of course. But, in this case, as presented by us earlier here, there really was no sin committed by either Judah or by Tamara. Only the way things "looked" to others could be perceived as sins were committed. But, we know differently.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin (b – 1940), Chief Rabbi of Efrat in Israel and a mentor of mine when I was a student at Yeshiva College in New York City in the 1960s, wrote in one of his weekly columns in the Jewish World newspaper in the week of December 4th through the 10th of 2015 entitled "Why Judah?" as follows: "But, why choose a forbidden sexual act of immorality, a father-in-law (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar) and an act of harlotry at that, which adds even further transgression, as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah? Ought the Messiah not emerge from a much purer act of sexual love within the context of marriage in accordance with Moses and Israel?"

Rabbi Riskin goes on to "defend" or to "justify" or to "rationalize" or to "explain" on the part of the Almighty to have Judah through Tamar become the progenitor of the Davadic line and, eventually, may it be soon, the progenitor of the Messiah. He explains that when "Judah publically admits his transgression with Tamar praising her for being more interested in the Jewish future – by taking responsibility for past generations – than he was. Repentance, responsibility to the past and commitment to the future are the skill that Messiahism is made of. Hence, the story of Judah at this juncture is a prefiguration of what it is eventually Judah and not Joseph who gives over the familial baton."

Thought I first read Rabbi Riskin's commentary on "Why Judah?" in 2015, it was not until the year 2019, when I began to write this commentary on

Parshas Vayeshev, that I was able to focus on it as is my custom, which is to make every effort to understand exactly what the real individuals in a “story” being related by the Torah did and why they did it. It is, in my opinion that in the Pashat, the simple understanding of the text, is where the answer is to be found.

Rabbi Riskin’s question, “Why choose a forbidden sexual act ... and an act of harlotry ... as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah?” actually helps us confirm the correctness of our understanding of what actually happened in the story of Judah and Tamar. When we look at the story of Judah and Tamar in the Pashat way, we see the actual purity of the intentions of both Judah and Tamar and that nothing that they did was perverse or forbidden in any way.

Rabbi Riskin was right when he asked, “Why would something as important as Messianism have its roots in anything even questionable, let alone negative or perverse? Indeed, it would not. And, looking at the story of Judah and Tamar as we have, we can say definitively that it was not.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 27 “And it came to pass in the time of her travail that behold twins were in her womb.”

Rashi helps us with his amazing ability to provide both an up close and personal appreciation of Tamar and the twins she is carrying and a comparative view by telling us of the pregnancy of Rebecca (ReevKah) when she too was carrying twins. Rashi points out by Rebecca we are told “when her day to be delivered were fulfilled ...” which tells us her pregnancy went to a full nine months, but, here, by Tamar they were incomplete; perhaps premature to a certain extent. Rashi does not stop there. He points out that in both instances when we are told that the mother is carrying twins the word used is תְּאוֹמִים TehOhMeem but Rashi notes by Rebecca that word is spelled without using the “Aleph” and the “Yud” because Rashi says that one of the twins (Esau) was wicked. But, here, by Tamar, the “Aleph” and the “Yud” are used because both babies were righteous.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 28 “And it came to pass when she travailed (went into labor) that one (baby) put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, “This came out first.”

The thread was tied on to secure that baby's right as the first born.

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 29 "And it came to pass as he drew back his hand that behold his brother came out; and she said: 'Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself? Therefore, his name was called Perez.'"

Perez is interpreted as "strong" in that he caused the breach to enable himself to be born when he was.

The Rav (Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik) in Yemei Zikaron pages 68 to 69 tells us VahYeekRaw ShiMo Perehtz "and he (Judah) named him Peretz all of Joseph's later machinations with his brothers in Egypt were for but one purpose to bring his father to Egypt; to have the family make obeisance to him, and thereby have his earlier dreams fulfilled. However, immediately after Joseph's sale, with the birth of Perez, Providence wrested the Kingship from Joseph and gave it to Judah."

Genesis Chapter XXXVIII Verse 30 "And afterward came out his brother that (who) had the scarlet thread upon his hand, and his name was called Zerah."

Rashi helps us understand that the scarlet thread was so bright that it became the impetus for the baby to be named Zerah which means "brightness" or "glow."

The Torah has placed this "chapter" here to help us maintain a balance between what had been happening to and around Joseph up until this point and, then, where things will go after this point. Apparently, the Torah wants us to know that in the way out, in the future, the long term view, there is more of a foundation that, without this episode, might not otherwise be known! Why is it shared with us now at this juncture? So that we do not get in the habit of prejudging the outcome and to know that we need to know the entire story and not just be satisfied with the highlights.

XXXX

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 1. "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the Captain of the Guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites that (who) had brought him down thither."

“... an Egyptian” – the story of Joseph took place during the reign of the Hyksos Kings, the Bedouin conquerors of Egypt. Potiphar, exceptionally, an Egyptian, was entrusted with a high government position even though he was not of the new conquerors, but, rather, of the old guard. Note: Hyksos were a Semitic and Asian group who had invaded Egypt and ruled it from about 1640 BCE to about 1532 BCE. The Torah now takes us back to what was happening to and with Joseph following the “interruption” dealing with the story of Judah and Tamar. The Soncino Chumash, edited by the Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, First Edition printed in 1947, notes for us that there were two reasons for the “interruption.” One was that “when the brothers saw Jacob’s intense grief (at the disappearance and supposed death) of Joseph they deposed Judah from his leadership position among them holding him responsible for it.” The second reason was “that the story of Potiphar’s wife is made to follow on that of the story of Tamar to indicate to and for us that with both of these women their motives were pure. Potiphar’s had seen in her horoscope that she was destined to have a child by Joseph. But, she did not know whether this applied to herself directly or, perhaps, to her daughter (who, Rashi says according to tradition which identifies the Poti-phaera of Genesis Chapter 41 Verse 45 with Potiphar he did marry). At the same time that Judah was demoted by and departed from his brethren, Joseph was brought down to Egypt. This is according to the Sforino. (Obadiah ben Jacob Sforino, ז”ל, b. 1475 Cesena, Italy – d. 1550 Bologna, Italy).

It says that Joseph was bought by the Ishmaelites but he was actually “brought” by their camels. He had been bought by the Midianites.

The Rav hones in on the phrase שַׂר הַטְּבָחִים (Sar HaTeeBawCheem) “Chief of the Executioners” Potiphar was the Chief Executioner for Pharaoh. G-d placed Joseph in this most impure environment so he could fully appreciate the purity of Jacob and his home. Joseph had to live in the house of Potiphar to come face-to-face with evil, to be present at a hanging, to see how Potiphar himself tied the noose in the public square while the blood-thirsty nation enjoyed the sight of the terrified writhing victim. Only then could Joseph appreciate the sheer greatness of his father’s teachings; the supreme beauty of the laws of “egla arufa” which he had reviewed with his father just prior to his being exiled. Only then did Joseph appreciate the magnitude of the spiritual revolution of

justice and righteousness that his great-grandfather Abraham had introduced. (Yemei Zikaron page 96 and see commentary on 45:27).

Deuteronomy Chapter XXI Verse 4 וְעָרְפוּ-שָׁם אֶת-הָעֵגְלָה בְּנָחַל (VeAirFu Sham Ess HaEggLah Bah NaiChal) “And there in the valley they shall decapitate the calf.” Rashi says that Sotah says not decapitate but break its neck).

Deuteronomy Chapter XXI Verse 6 הָעֵגְלָה הָעָרוּפָה (HaEggLah HaAhRuPhaw) “The calf that was decapitated (or had its neck broken).”

The Rav makes the assumption that we will have already visited and studied the laws of הָעָרוּפָה (HaEggLah HaAhRuPhaw) “The calf that was decapitated (or had its neck broken).” Or, that upon reading about it that we will do so. הָעָרוּפָה (HaEggLah HaAhRuPhaw) is the situation described in Deuteronomy Chapter XXI Verses 1 to 9 where a murder has taken place and is described and the outcome of which is what the Rav explains as the kind of “higher thinKing” that goes into Torah law than what might be found elsewhere; and in our Parshah, where Joseph is now in Egypt and viewing firsthand how the Egyptian culture compares to that of the culture created and built upon Torah Law.

In Deuteronomy we are told of a dead body of person who had been murdered that is discovered outside the city limits so to speak and there is no evidence as to who had killed this person. The Torah describes what is to be done; i.e. the measuring of the distance between the body and the nearest city. Once the nearest city is determined, the elders of that city are to slaughter a calf in a nearby area outside the city in an area that has not been cultivated at all; i.e. that yields no fruit of the earth for people to enjoy. Also, the calf is to be one that has known any type of labor at all so it too had yielded no fruits of its labor to the benefit of mankind. The symbolism here is that the murder victim, who had been cut down by someone and therefore would not be able to produce fruits such as children or any kind of products or productive enterprises. The amount of attention paid to the situation is said to have an effect on the community to where people would talk among themselves and serve as an unofficial detective-like arm that would, hopefully, bring about the fleshing out of perpetrator. Joseph was apparently studying this when

last he had been with his father Jacob. Now, in Egypt he is able to compare firsthand the Egyptian culture with the culture that is the result of the establishment of the Covenantal Community when the L-rd and Abraham established it.

The Rav takes it a step further for us. His focus is on Jacob and on the Jewish People as a whole. The Rav says with regard to וַיֹּסֶף הַיֹּדֵד מִצְרַיִם (VeYoSeph HoRahd MeetsRahyMah) “And Joseph had been brought down to Egypt,” which is Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 1, in order that Jacob himself would get to experience firsthand the depravity and outright evilness that was the Egyptian empire. The Jewish People could only appreciate the importance of their role on earth if they had a complete, a direct and a firsthand knowledge of what evil incarnate could really be and was in Egypt of that time. Only with that experience could the Jewish people know the importance of their mission on earth to serve as a light to the other nations. The Rav says, “Had we (the Jewish People) not spent years of horror, we could not have grown and developed into a great nation.” (Song 2:2 on Festival of Freedom page 125).

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 2. “And the L-rd was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.”

“Prosperous man,” all that he did prospered. Rabbi Steinsaltz points out that “Joseph arrived in Egypt as an inexperienced youth with no knowledge of the Egyptian language. He also needed to cross the cultural divide between his upbringing in a small village to life in a developed city. Never the less, his success was evident for all to see.”

“And he was in the house of his master the Egyptian” why does the Torah state that Potiphar was “the Egyptian?” It is obvious that Potiphar is an Egyptian. Perhaps not so obvious. The rulers in Egypt at that time were, as noted above, the Hyksos. So, the fact that this high ranking person, Potiphar, was an Egyptian may well have meant that the Hyksos were ones who could “integrate” certain “home grown” talent into their governing structure, which is perhaps what is meant by our being told that Potiphar was an Egyptian; i.e. because he was not a Hyksos.

But, what can we learn from knowing that Potiphar was of the Egyptians before the Hyksos conquered the then rulers of Egypt and apparently chose to retain him in his position or, perhaps, even elevated him to his current position of leadership? Perhaps we can learn that Potiphar was skilled enough to have risen to a certain height in his field of expertise, whether it have been as a butcher as some have said or as an executioner as others have held, and that when the Hyksos conquered Egypt and replaced the leadership with their own people, Potiphar somehow was able to stand out and impress the new leader with his capabilities to a point where they felt confident enough to leave him in charge or to elevate him to be in charge so that they would not have to concern themselves about “staffing” that area with one of their own. We would imagine that if there was a language difference, Potiphar must have been able to deal with it. Potiphar the Egyptian. It certainly meant more than just Potiphar all by itself.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 3. “And his (Joseph’s) master (Potiphar) saw that the L-rd was with him (Joseph) and (that) everything that was in his (Joseph’s) hand the L-rd caused to prosper.”

Rashi interprets “the L-rd was with him” to mean that Joseph constantly referenced the L-rd and spoke the L-rd’s name.

The real life pieces of Verse 3 in this Chapter add a certain amount of color or texture or characterize what life was like in Potiphar’s home. Potiphar noticed that Joseph, who was apparently give certain important tasks to accomplish, enjoyed success that these tasks were accomplished and, perhaps, in the way that he accomplished them; perhaps with a certain amount of ease that was appreciated by the master of the house; Potiphar. The L-rd’s name being on his (Joseph’s) lips would indicate that there were times, perhaps, when he would speak to someone else in the house and mention the L-rd for some reason or that he might have been in dialogue with the L-rd; perhaps in the fashion of Tevya in the Broadway Musical hit from 1964, “Fiddler on the Roof,” where Tevya, the father of five daughters in Imperial Russia of 1905 and who would chat in dialog with the Almighty at every step of the day. (Play by Joseph Stein, Composer Jerry Bock and Don Walker based on

“Tevya the Dairyman” a/k/a “Tevya and his Daughters” by Shalom Aleichem).

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 4. “And Joseph found favor in his (his master Potiphar’s) sight and he (Joseph) ministered unto him (Potiphar). And he (Potiphar) appointed him (Joseph) overseer over his (Potiphar’s) house and all that he had he put into his (Joseph’s) hand.”

Commentators indicate that this verse is telling us the progression that took place. First, Potiphar took notice of Joseph and how he worked. Then, Potiphar had Joseph work for him as a personal aide and assistant and, then, Potiphar promoted Joseph to be the one who ran things for him in every respect with regard to the household and its various needs and requirements. Rabbi Steinsaltz adds that not only did Potiphar note how “successful” Joseph was in all that he was assigned to accomplish, but, also, that Joseph was honest.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 5. “And it came to pass from the time that he (Potiphar) appointed him (Joseph) overseer in his house, and over all he had, that the L-rd blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake (for the sake of or on account of Joseph); and the blessing of the L-rd was upon all that he (Potiphar) had in the house and in the field.”

The word בְּגִלְלָהּ (BeegLahel) is translated most often as “for Joseph’s sake” i.e. “for the sake of so-and-so.” But, it can also be understood to mean “on account of so-and-so,” which has an interesting effect on the situation being described. But, first, what is a blessing? We usually think of a “blessing” as a kind of gift being bestowed upon the recipient as in “G-d bless you.” But, after that level of understanding, which is at the most basic level, as that of a young child, we need to “remember that blessings are a two way process.” G-d can “bless a person in a certain way, but it is always still up to that person, each of us, to put that with which they (we) may have been blessed to use appropriately or the blessing may come, in the end, to be meaningless.” (See: Sedrah Painting for Naso at the following URL address:

<http://www.echelonartgallery.com/artists/dgk/paintings/jewish/35-naso/naso.html> search for: “blessings are a two-way process”)

So, let us say a person is “blessed” with a beautiful singing voice. But, for some reason the person only sings in the shower and shares his or her beautiful tones as a singer with nobody else. What has he or she done with their blessing? Nothing at all. That is an example of how a blessing can be circumvented, ignored and left unrealized. Blessings are a responsibility and not just a gift from above.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 6. “And he (Potiphar) left all he (Potiphar) had in Joseph’s hand, and, having him (Joseph) he (Potiphar) knew not aught save the bread which he (Potiphar) did eat. And Joseph was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon.”

Iben Ezra, z”l, (Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra – b. Tudela, Spain 1089 – d. Calabria, Spain January 23, 1167) refers us further on in the Torah to Genesis Chapter XLIII Verse 32, which states that “and they (his servants) set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptian, that did eat with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

This explains why Potiphar would have chosen to “eat bread” i.e. “be aware of the bread he ate” while Joseph took care of everything else is of course the source that Iban Ezra sites and it tells us that Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews. But, it does not say that their food could not be prepared for them by the Hebrews. It does not really change the issue of Potiphar being “aware” of the bread he ate is now clear, or at least more clear to us.

It is a very interesting aspect of Egyptian life and their culture of that time. Now, just for detailed accuracy, remember, the Torah was careful to let us know that Potiphar was an “Egyptian.” Which we pointed out was done to let us know that he was not one of the new leadership; i.e. the Hyksos, who had conquered Egypt and deposed the old leadership. So, now, when we are told that Potiphar had given the running of his house over to Joseph except “for the bread he ate,” which we understand to mean that he, as an Egyptian, would not eat with Hebrews, because it was an abomination for Egyptians to do so, we need to ask, would the Hyksos feel the same way about the Hebrews? Would they also not eat with them? And, while we are at it, would the Egyptians not eat with the Hyksos? Would doing so be an abomination to them as well? We can guess. But, we are not here to just guess. But, we are here to ponder about what drives people to act

in such ways as that. And, we can tell you, who have no such memories of such things that in our own life time, we recall seeing signs on the entrances to eateries in the southern states of our country that warned: “No Blacks” or “Whites Only.” And, if our southern states seem foreign to you, since they still have self-perpetuating feelings all their own in many ways, then I can tell you of fancy private golf and country clubs that had ornate brass plaques on their front gates that stated unabashedly: “No Jews or Dogs.”

This “holier than thou” discriminatory thing is not new and is very much alive in our world today. The Torah, here in וַיִּשָּׁבֶה Vayashev, is not telling us how to curb or defeat it, but, is, rather, reporting to us that it existed way back when. I think it is important too for us to see it in the same story where we learn of how the non-Jewish Tamar is welcomed into the Covenantal Community and eventually her descendants become the lineage of King David. The exact opposite of someone not breaking bread with the Hebrews in the way of Potiphar the Egyptian.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 7. And it came to pass after these things, that his (Joseph’s) master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, “Lie with me.”

Dr. J. H. Hertz, in the Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftarahs second edition © 1960 originally published in 1936; notes that the phrase “after these things” refers to the two-fold advancement of Joseph, when he was no longer a slave; but, had become overseer “and trusted confidant (of Potiphar) his master’s wife makes advances to him. The immorality of the ancient Egyptians, both men and women, was notorious.”

Rashi points out that the use of the word אַחַר (Achar) in the phrase אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים (Achar HaDevoreem) “After these things ...” Whenever the word אַחַר (Achar) is used it means “immediately thereafter.” If it said AchaRay it would mean “long thereafter.”

Rabbi Steinsaltz points out that after Joseph was promoted above Potiphar’s other servants and, presumably, began to dress in more impressive clothing “that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph;” she desired him, “and she said ‘Lie with me.’” Despite his elevated status, Joseph was still a slave. She therefore spoke directly and in unequivocal terms.”

The key thing to remember here is that Joseph is still a slave and no matter what his capabilities might be, or how trustworthy and creative he might be, his life is not his own he is solely the property of Potiphar and nothing in his life is his to decide other than that which is proscribed by Potiphar. From this we can gain a better understanding of what slavery means; perhaps even more so than what we learn about slavery one later on in the Torah, that the Jews became slaves in Egypt, i.e. this is the beginning of that experience.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verses 8 and 9. “And he (Joseph) refused and said unto his master’s wife, ‘Behold, my master, having me, knoweth not what is in the house and he hath put all that he hath into my hand.’”

Verse 9: “He is not greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against G-d.?”

Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz on “and sin against G-d.” Joseph would not betray his master’s confidence neither would he sin against G-d. Potiphar might never know of the sin but G-d would know.”

Rashi reminds us that the descendants of Noah were enjoined against incest. (Really against illicit sexual relations). That would include the Egyptian of course. But, again, the Seven Mitzvos of B’nai Noah (the Noahide Laws) were put in place to distinguish civilized peoples from barbarians. We should, perhaps, keep that in mind more often nowadays as well. Barbarians are absolutely not to be trusted. Barbarians would kill you (anyone) and feel no qualms about having done so. Barbarians are totally untrustworthy and must be isolated from the rest of society for safety sake.

The Rav asks us to focus first on the first two words of Verse 8 which are: וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר (VahYehMawAin VahYoMair) “And he refused and he said” The Rav notes for us that above the first word is a “Trop” (a musical incantation symbol) called “Shalshels” (which is the configuration of a chain) and it is there to tell us when chanting these two words that they are to be distinct and separate from each other. The word וַיִּמָּאֵן (VahYehMawAin) “And he refused” is therefore not linked to the other part of the beginning of the statement. Why? Because he,

Joseph refused to act in any way that would dishonor his commitment to the honor and holiness of being a member of the Covenantal Community, which was started by the Lord and Father Abraham, Joseph's great grandfather. The Rav notes further that this kind of unwillingness to engage in this type of behavior is characteristic of the Jewish People and has been throughout the millennium.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 10. "And it came to pass as she spoke to Joseph day-by-day (every day), that he harkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her."

Rashi elaborates by saying the phrase "to lie with her" means even without intercourse. Rashi also notes that when the Torah says "or to be with her" it means in the world to come. The commentator Ibn Ezra says that "or to be with her" means even to be alone with or even to simply converse with her.

It is in scenes (situations) such as this, where the Torah not only relates the experience of those who were the forerunners of the Jewish religious community, but where it also reminds us that these men and women were real people with the same appetites and drives that are there for us to enjoy in the appropriate circumstances and ways and to hold in check when inappropriate opportunities present themselves to us. It was important then, It is important today, now; for each of us as well.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 11. "And it came to pass on a certain day (on this very day) when he (Joseph) went to the house to do his work and none of the men of the house were within. (or, "not even one man of all the men who worked in the house were there in the house.") This description really helps to set the scene. Now, in Hebrew, many times when they talk about people, the masculine gender is chosen to represent "everyone" including the females in the same group. Example: Yeladeem is children but it is literally "boys." Yaldos is always "girls or girl children. But, Yeladeem "boys" or it could mean "boys and girls." So, here, where the Torah says "not even one man of the men of the house" does it refer to men only or is the Torah telling us that none of the workers who work in the house of Potiphar, men and women workers, were there in the house at that time?

Well, let us be frank. Unless Potiphar's wife would be willing to risk that one of her female domestic staff persons might catch her "fooling around" with Joseph and reporting it to Potiphar, we would have to surmise that none of the domestic staff, other than Joseph, was in the house at that time. That would mean that the phrase אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת (Eesh May AnShai HaBahYees) meant "not one domestic servant of the staff of domestic servants," i.e. including the women and not simply or only the men.

Rashi notes that at the moment when Joseph might have been overwhelmed with temptation to lie with Potiphar's wife, the image of his father Jacob appeared to him or came to mind, which helped him resist.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 12. "And she caught him by his garment (jacket) saying 'Lie with me.' And he left his garment (jacket) in her hand and fled and got him (himself) out."

Rabbi Steinsaltz points out that garments in those days were like wraps that covered a person completely but which could be unwrapped, which would have allowed Joseph to free himself from Potiphar's wife's grasp leaving his wrap or garment with her. What is not discussed is something we rather take for granted in our day and age and that is that people today generally wear undergarments; i.e. underwear, briefs, for men and panties for women and bras for women as well. That may not have been the case in the time of the Avos. Joseph may very well have fled the house of Potiphar wearing whatever footwear he had on and nothing else. We would have guessed that he must have lived very close by so he could have gotten into another garment rather quickly. But, this is all left to our understanding by the Torah.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verses 13 and 14. "And it came to pass when she saw that he (had) left his garment in her hand and that he (had) exited to the outside of the house." Verse 14 "And she called out to the workers (literally: to the men) of the house and she said to them saying: "See! He (Potiphar) hath brought in among us a Hebrew man to mock us (to make light of us) he (the Hebrew man) came in unto me to to lie with me and I cried out with (cried out in) a loud (a big) voice."

Rabbi Steinsaltz tries to help us understand what was going on in Potiphar's wife's mind through this entire seduction attempt on her part and her being rejected by Joseph even when the time was ripe for them to have "played around" without getting caught. After all, they were alone in the house. She might have been thinking that Joseph's initial rejections were just his way of flirting with her until the "time" was right. So, she continued until the "time" was perfect. But, with this rejection, she was either insulted and did what she could to punish him for either just defying her as his "superior" when she invited him to lie with her or because she felt insulted by his having been "able" to resist her proposal as he did.

Rashi comments on what Potiphar's wife was actually meaning when she referred to Joseph as "a Hebrew." Rashi tells us it is from the word עִבְרִי (AiVerr), which means "over" or on the "other side" as in the phrase on the other side of the river. The descendants of Eber, according to the Braishes Raba (written between 300 and 500 of the Common Era, CE, with some pieces added later. Certain rabbinical homiletical interpretations of the Book of Genesis).

The Rav does what we might call some fine tuning of what others have said. "Had Joseph not withstood the blandishment of Potiphar's wife, Joseph's name would have been erased from Jewish history(Sotah 39b) His genius, his goodness, the mercy he showed his brothers and the fact that he had saved the House of Israel from destruction would not have mattered at all had Joseph defiled himself (by lying with Potiphar's wife) he would have lost eternity. (Droshos un Ksuvim Page 186).

The Rav also talks about the commandment "Honor thy Father and thy Mother" since thinking about his father was what helped Joseph, apparently, to resist Potiphar's wife's advances. The Rav says, "The true gauge of the relationship between son and father is not the Mitzvah of "KeeBud Av Vah Aim" (Honor thy Father and thy Mother) but, rather, EeMo VeAveev TirahOo, (the Mitzvah of Motah. Morah means "respect," recognizing the parent's authority. As the memory of a parent's physical

appearance blurs, the greater the gap in time, the stronger the “Morah” (respect) bond. While “KeeBud” wanes, “Morah” only grows with distance.” (Yahrzet Shiur, 1953 see commentary on 25:28).

The Rav also takes time to expand upon the outright lie told by Potiphar’s wife when she says in Verse 14 “He (Joseph) came to me to lie with me.” The Rav notes that with that experience Joseph learned the value of what we learn later in Leviticus Chapter 19 Verse 16: “You shall not go around gossip mongering amidst your people” and the full implications of his (own) tale bearing against his own brethren. (Yemel Zikaron pages 97 to 97).

“Every man (including also women – added by Rashi) shall fear his father and his mother.” 1, Why say “Eesh” (every man)? Why not just say “Fear your father and your mother?” 2. In the Book of Shamos 20:12 says “Honor your father and your mother” the word here could mean visit or revere and not just fear.

When we read of such pivotal situations and of men and women on whom so much always seems to ride, there may be a tendency for us to become somewhat detached from what we are reading or learning because it does not easily fit into our lives today. Or, does it? You see, we you and I today, all of us, always need to be ready to make the necessary command decisions, such as the ones Joseph made, in order to be able to make them when life presents us with the opportunities to make them. This is not a rehearsal for the big show. This is the big show and each and every one of us is in it every single moment of every single day that we are fortunate enough to be alive.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 15. “And it came to pass when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried (out) or called out that he left his garment by me and he left to the outdoors.”

You are probably screaming out like I do whenever I read this Verse, “Liar! Liar! Pants on fire!” We are outraged at how a person can act in such a way; to be so vindictive and cruel with not the least amount of concern for what kind of harm they may or will be doing to the person about whom they are telling such lies.

Then, we tend to say, “Well, it’s just a story on the Bible and treat it like a Television show we can just turn off and move on to do something else. After all, this happened a zillion years ago and we cannot do anything about it. But, what we can do, is to learn something from Joseph’s experiences; how Potiphar’s wife acted towards him; and what Joseph might have been able to do had he perceived what level of maliciousness Potiphar’s wife was capable of reaching. In short, Joseph trusted Potiphar’s wife. Even in light of her previous “invitations” for him to lie with her, Joseph dared to enter the house of Potiphar without making absolutely certain that he was not alone with Potiphar’s wife.

And, therein lies (sorry) our learning moment or our takeaway for this Verse. Pay attention and act accordingly. We are not supposed to put ourselves into a dangerous situation a MahKoM TsahKawNaw. So, when we see that someone is speaking or acting in such a way as to be suspicious, inappropriate, manipulative, disrespectful and with no regard for propriety, we have to see flashing lights that are warning us to “Watch Out’ Danger Ahead.” Could Joseph have prepared himself better? Could he have made sure that someone else was with him when he reported to do his work at Potiphar’s house even if he himself was the “boss?” Perhaps he could have. But, even if he was clearly too trusting of Potiphar’s wife or so trusting of her that she would do what she eventually did do, we can at least learn from what the Torah has reported to us here and be ready to protect ourselves against anyone who we might encounter who might demonstrate signs that all is not right with this individual.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 16. “And she laid his (Joseph’s) garment next to her, until his (Joseph’s) master came home.”

Rashi makes certain that we understand that the verse is telling us that Potiphar’s wife is waiting for her husband to come home and not Joseph. The word אֲדֹנָיו (AhDoNav) means the owner of but only refers to people; i.e. his owner, i.e. the person who owns Joseph, which here means Potiphar. If the Torah were to have used the BahAl it would have referred to the owner of the thing; i.e. in this case the owner of the garment, and that would have been Joseph.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 17. “And she spoke unto him (Potiphar) according to these words, saying, ‘The Hebrew servant whom thou hast brought into us came in unto me to mock me.’”

Now, it could also be translated “... came to me to mock me.” Either way would have accomplished the objective of Potiphar’s wife; i.e. to get Joseph in trouble, and to, in an offhanded way, “blame” or even “humiliate” her husband Potiphar for having brought the Hebrew into his house at all.”

Rabbi Steinsaltz leans towards the milder translation, i.e. “came to me...” but he adds “who you promoted” to his understanding of what she was saying,

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 18. “And it came to pass as I lifted up (raised) my voice and cried out, that he (Joseph) left his garment by me and fled to the outside.”

Potiphar’s wife continues to plead her case against Joseph. Of course, there is no way for anything approaching justice to be done in this instance. Potiphar is not going to conduct an investigation or even seek the input of the accused, Joseph, for his side of the story. It is over before it has even begun. And, that shows us with whom Joseph will be dealing going forward. He is still a rather young man and still learning.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 19. “And it came to pass when his (Joseph’s) master heard the words of his wife, which she had spoken unto him saying, ‘After this manner did thy servant to me.’ that his (Potiphar’s) wrath was kindled.”

Rashi makes the report that Potiphar’s wife gave to him about Joseph even more impactful by telling us that she delivered the report she and Potiphar were engaging in marital relations and that her words “after this manner” became even more impactful to help her case. She is one very angry woman.

Rabbi Steinsaltz points out that the Verse does not say with whom Potiphar was incensed; just that he was incensed. Now, to help Rabbi Steinsaltz's take on the matter, Potiphar is still stuck. He cannot take Joseph's side. He cannot even investigate, So, what he might actually be incensed over is that he will be losing the services of his excellent and loyal servant Joseph and all because of his wife's accusation and he knows his wife so this may not be the first time she has been involved with another man.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 20. "And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the King's prisoners were bound; and he (Joseph) was there in the prison."

The phrase **בַּיַּת הַסֹּהַר** (Bais HaSoHar) the prison apparently is used only here in the entire Torah and it is felt that it is an Egyptian word. It is interesting that Joseph is put in a prison. Why? Because if Potiphar wanted to, he could just as easily killed Joseph. So, why prison? The Sforno says that Potiphar put Joseph in prison to save his wife's honor. (Obadia ben Jacob Sforno b-1475 Cesena, Italy – d- 1550 Bologna, Italy) Some say Potiphar had some "difficulty" believing the claims his wife had made. Rabbi Steinsaltz offers that there were two kinds of prisons; one for criminals and one for political prisoners, which is what Joseph, apparently, was relegated to be incarcerated. The whole thing between Potiphar and his wife might have been an ongoing game with them. They are barbarians please remember.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 21. "But, the L-rd was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."

Dr. Hertz points out that "the L-rd was with Joseph" is that Joseph still believed and it gave him comfort and strength to endure the suffering and the shame. Joseph wins the confidence of the

keeper of the prison as he did his Egyptian master. The light of the superior mind and the soul cannot be hidden even in prison.”

The Rav asks, “What is this favor?” He explains it for us and helps us appreciate not only who Joseph was and what made him so special, but also what we ourselves see in certain people we meet and also what people may see in us when they meet us that makes them take note and be drawn to and want to be close to that person. The Rav says it better: “The Hebrew word יָדָה (Chain) refers to the attribute of charm, in counter distinction to beauty. While beauty is usually a result of the combination of several physical factors and external features, charm comes from within. It flows from the deep recess of the spiritual personality. Charm is engendered by the presence of G-d in the human being. It is the reflection of the Devine presence within man. One radiates charm for the “imago Dei” is the source of charm. The symmetry of the body, the complexion; and the color of the eyes are all irrelevant to the charm-personality. What is important is the Devine in man. The two clauses, “the L-rd was with Joseph” and “Joseph found favor in his (his master’s) eyes,” constitute an equation: “Joseph found favor in Potiphar’s sight because G-d was with him.” (Days of Deliverance pages 64 to 65).

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 22. “And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in prison; and whatsoever they did there he (Joseph) was the doer of it (Joseph made it happen).”

Rashi says that according to the Targum this means that everything done by the prisoners was or would be done according to Joseph’s instructions.

We must also remember that life in Egypt of that time was not at all related to modern day countries with democratic governments and where there are judicial systems and laws and where citizens had rights. Egypt of the day might be better compared to a totalitarian government like Russia or of if one could a country ruled by the Mafia. Joseph’s owner, Potiphar, had bought him. Right away civil rights were clearly non-existent. When something went wrong at home, the incident with

Potiphar's wife playing her games with a handsome young man and the affections of her husband, Potiphar opts to put Joseph in prison. No trial needed. Just put him in and, surely, give the prison keeper the good word on how capable Joseph is with everything organizational and let the prison keeper do as he pleases to make his own life at work easier. What might that be worth for favors later on? Why are we not told of this type of thing by the Torah? The Torah does not need to take time to point out the obvious. It really does not matter. But, at the same time, having an appreciation for what clearly was the way of the world in Egypt of the day is, we would think, worth mentioning.

Genesis Chapter XXXIX Verse 23. "The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand because the L-rd was with him (Joseph) and that which he (Joseph) did, the L-rd made it to prosper."

Now, where have we heard that before? We need to have all of this background about Joseph in order to be able to appreciate what will be happening as we read on. We see the growth in the man from his being a lad of seventeen to, now, a rather sophisticated manager of people and things to the advantage of whoever is fortunate enough to have him in their organization. Joseph is a young man who is going places even though, at this point, he may be in prison, but, he is also running that prison. Joseph, in his short life, has grown into and made himself a rather sophisticated person who is still G-d fearing and dedicated to the precepts of the Covenantal Community. I say "rather sophisticated" because of his having allowed himself to have been "used" by Potiphar's wife as he was. It was a learning experience for certain. We will now see what Joseph is able to accomplish with all he has in the way of talents and his charming and glowing personality; a very special person.

XXXX

Joseph and the Prisoners

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 1. "And it came to pass after these things, that the Butler of the King of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the King of Egypt."

Rashi explains that אחר הדברים האלה (Achar HaDivoreem HawAila) “After these things” is referring to all the terrible “stuff” that was caused by Potiphar’s wife when it came to Joseph. Rashi further explains how the Butler and the baker sinned. The Butler allowed a fly to be in the King’s poterion (Greek meaning a drink vessel or a cup or the actual drink that the drink vessel contains). The baker, who, according to Rashi judging by the word used to describe the baker, only baked bread, allowed a pebble to be in the King’s white bread. Some read the Rashi to mean a fly was found in the King’s wine and chips (some kind of pebbles) were found in the King’s bread. The Sapirstein Edition of the Torah with Rashi Commentary © 1995 by Mesorah Publications Ltd. (Art Scroll Series) calls the Butler the cupbearer. Rabbi Steinsaltz’s understanding of the phrase “after these things” differently. He says the phrase means after Joseph was put in prison and made to be in charge of the prison for all practical purposes, that the two servants of the King of Egypt, the Butler or the wine barer and the baker had “sinned” against their master, the King of Egypt, and were put in prison. No one takes it that the two servants to the King of Egypt were in league with one another and that there was some kind of conspiracy against the King of Egypt by them.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 2. “And Pharaoh was wroth against his two officers, against the chief of the Butlers and against the chief of the bakers.”

Nachmanides (Rabbi Mosheh ben Nachman b – Genoa, Spain 1194 and d – in the Holy Land circa 1270) says that the nature of the word סַרְסָוִי (SairSav) which is translated as “officers” has the connotation that both men were “eunuchs,” which meant that they stayed in the women’s quarters.

Rabbi Steinsaltz notes that both of the positions discussed here, the chief bread baker and the Head Steward or Butler or wine server were extremely prominent and important positions because the health and safety of the King were the main concerns of these two personages. If someone wanted to hurt the King, it could be easily done with poison.

So, these two men were what stood between life and death at every meal or with every sip would take throughout every day.

It is important for us to appreciate the relative importance of both of these servants of the King. Today, we tend to take servers somewhat for granted. But, we must be aware that as lowly as one might think the person who pours a glass of water for you when you are dining out at a restaurant of any type, they have your life in their hands. So much of life depends on trust that each of us will do the right thing. It is very serious indeed.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 3. “And he (Pharaoh) put them (the Head Baker and the Head Wine Steward) in the ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound (imprisoned).”

Dr. J. H. Hertz, in the Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftarahs, tells us that “in the ward” means in confinement, pending their trial. The captain of the guard he says means Potiphar. In the prison, the keeper in charge was apparently responsible to Potiphar.

Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that this “prison held distinguished prisoners. Since the courtiers of Pharaoh were men of status who might someday return to their lofty positions, they were provided special privileges.

As the Torah continues to describe the inner workings of the Egyptian culture of that day, the more we can see how corrupt and Mafia-like it really was. The Torah is presenting it to us in all its frightening ways so that we will better appreciate how amazing it was for a young and relatively inexperienced man to negotiate it as Joseph was able to do.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 4. “And the Captain of the Guard charged Joseph to be with them (the prisoners) and he (Joseph) ministered unto them (the prisoners) and they continued a season (for a time) in ward (in captivity).”

Dr. J. H. Hertz explains that “Potiphar appoints Joseph to be with the imprisoned officers. Not over them but to attend to their needs as a mark of courtesy on the part of Potiphar to his unfortunate colleagues.”

Rashi explains that that phrase indicated the time was an entire year.

The Torah helps us understand the conditions “on the ground” for Joseph so that can better appreciate what the young man was going through if not to understand how he was adapting to the new situations as they presented themselves to him. We can also get an understanding that time is advancing as well, which is important in order to get a full feeling for where Joseph was in his life; in his pretty amazing life is what I should have said.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 5. “And they (the Head Butler and the Head Bread Baker) dreamed a dream both (each) of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the Butler and the Baker of the King of Egypt who were bound in prison.”

The commentators alert us that these two men dreamed their individual dreams on the same night and that the eventual interpretation of their dreams, which eventually in the Torah would be related to us started first with the dreaming of their dreams.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 6. “And Joseph came to (visit) them (the Head Butler and the Head Baker) in the morning and saw them and behold they (both) were sad.” The translation of the word זָעִיִּים (ZahFeem) might be more accurately rendered as either “enraged” or, better under these circumstances, “vexed.”

But, Rashi agrees with the “sad” translation or what he says is “vexed” are “grieved” referring to the Book of Kings I Chapter 20 Verse 43 סָר וְזָחֵאִים (Sar VeZahAits) is translated as “displeased” and “sad.” Their spirit turned away from them. An expression of sadness. Still, these two officers of the King of Egypt, now in prison for offences that apparently were key infractions of their responsibilities but by no means potentially dangerous to the King, are clearly “off balance” about their future knowing the _____, apparently, of the King himself.

Rabbi Steinsaltz offers that they were “distressed,” which we can also appreciate as how they must have felt.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 7. “And he (Joseph) asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in the ward of his master’s house, saying, ‘Wherefore look you so sad (vexed or distressed) today?’”

The Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Mosheh ben Nachman, z”l, b- 1194 Gerona, Spain – d- 1270 Israel) provided us with a special understanding of why and how Joseph asked these men how they were. Under normal circumstances Joseph would not have risked speaking so directly and frankly to Egyptians since he, as a Hebrew, would have been, if he were anyone else but himself; despised. His feeling such self-confidence is exemplified by his being so direct with these men.

The Sforno, z”l, (Obadia ben Jacob Sforno b – 1475 Cesena, Italy – d – 1550 Bologna, Italy) concurs but explains that only because he (Joseph) had been appointed to minister to their needs did he have the temerity to ask them (why they were so uptight).

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 8. “And they said unto him: ‘We have dreamed a dream and there is none that (who) can interpret it.’ And Joseph said unto them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to G-d? Tell it to me I pray you.’”

Dr. J. H. Hertz on “none that (who) can interpret” tells us that in the day there were an array of magicians, soothsayers and other such “wise men” available to interpret dreams etc. But, in prison, none were available.

Chizkuni (Hezekiah ben Manoah or Hezekiah bar Manoah, a French rabbi and Biblical commentator b – 1250 France d – 1310), z”l, on the phrase “do not interpretations belong to G-d?” He says it means, “Maybe G-d, who sent the dreams, will give me the interpretations of them. Man cannot by his own wisdom interpret dreams. G-d alone can reveal their true meaning. Pray tell me the dream, perhaps He will favor me with wisdom to explain its (their) importance.”

There are any number of commentators who echo such thinking that dreams are meaningful but need interpretation, which is not easy to access.

What is demonstrated here that may or may not be mentioned in and among our Biblical commentators is that Joseph, in offering his services and, in a way, perhaps, the services of the Almighty, which demonstrates that Joseph had a firm belief in G-d that he was willing to risk asking the men to share their dreams with him on the chance that he would be able to interpret them with the help of G-d.

Genesis Chapter XL Verses 9 to 11. “And the Chief Butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him: ‘In my dream, behold a vine was before me.’” Verse 10 “And in the vine were three branches; and as it was budding, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters there of brought forth ripe grapes;” Verse 11 “And Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and I gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.”

Dr. J. H. Hertz on “pressed them ...” (referring to the grapes) that grape juice mixed with water is mentioned as a refreshing drink on Egyptian inscriptions.

The Ramban notes that in verse 10 “as it was budding, its blossoms shot forth” indicates that one blossom followed immediately after the other and from this Joseph understood that the interpretation would be fulfilled very soon. Hence, he interpreted the number “three” as referring to days and not to weeks or months.

Rabbi Steinsaltz notes that the Pharaoh’s birthday was to take place in three days and that Joseph was aware of that and somehow tied it in with the three branches mentioned in the Head Butler’s dream. Rabbi Steinsaltz surmises that Joseph figured that the Pharaoh would be magnanimous on his birthday and pardon the Head Butler judging his offence to be of minor importance. It is a convenient observation given that in Verse 20, which is just a few verses forward in the Torah, we do learn of the Pharaoh’s birthday. But, how then do we explain away the Pharaoh’s not being magnanimous with the other offender; the Head Baker. Convenient, indeed it is. But, it is also somewhat contrived. But, it is worth noting none the less.

For us, we learn here more about Joseph and how he apparently had grown to relate to others in an effort to help those who were not able to help themselves; a good deed doer if there ever was one.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 12 and 13. “And Joseph said unto him (the Head Butler) ‘This is the interpretation of it: ‘The three branches are three days” Verse 13 “Within yet three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head, and restore thee unto thine office; and thou shalt give Pharaoh’s cup unto his hand after the former manner when thou was his Butler.”

“lift up thy head” in honor by restoring you to thy post says Dr. J. H. Hertz and Rashi.

The Torah does not guide us in understanding how Joseph was able to now interpret someone’s dreams when the last time we had tuned in to Joseph and his own dreams and the interpretations thereof, he was not able to read them even at what might be called a grade school level. So, how did Joseph find a way to graduate from being totally inept in the dream interpreting department to feeling confident enough to offer his services as a reader of dreams to total strangers who were, as Pharaoh’s Butler and Baker were, in deep trouble? The answer may be in Verse 8 where Joseph asks what surely was to him a rhetorical question, “Does not interpretations of dreams belong to G-d?” and he made the amazingly bold statement of request, “Tell it (your dream) to me, I pray you.” And, it was surely Joseph’s deep faith in G-d and the Covenantal Community that had been established by G-d and his great grandfather Abraham.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 14. “But have me in thy remembrance when it shall be well with thee, and show me kindness, I pray thee unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house (the prison).”

Dr. J. H. Hertz says regarding “have me in thy remembrance” all he asks in that the Chief Butler should not forget him; but (also) try to secure his freedom. The Rashbam (Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir, 1085 to 1174, z”l, was the grandson of Rashi, who was also his teacher) is even more certain about how optimistic Joseph was about the opportunity to have

the Butler be able to bring Joseph to the attention of the Pharaoh who would then listen to him. Rashi explains that the use of the word נָא (Naw) makes the request special by adding the word “please” to it, which is only used in requests.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 15. “For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrew, and here also I have done nothing they should put me into the dungeon (here in the pit).”

“stolen away” Dr. J. H. Hertz refers us back to Genesis Chapter XXXVII Verse 28 implying that he (Joseph) was not a slave by birth. Dr. Hertz also comments on “Land of the Hebrews” the land where Jacob was dwelling. He points out further that there are those who identify the word Hebrews with Habiri, the invaders of Palestine in the 14th Pre-Christian (BCE) century who are mentioned in the Tell-el-Amarna Tablets. The term Habiri is sometimes written as “Hapiru” and more accurately as “Apiru” meaning “dusty” or “dirty” for all sorts of people in the Fertile Crescent described as rebels, outlaws, raiders, mercenaries, bowmen, servants, slaves and laborers.

No commentator brings any clear evidence that these people known well after the Torah was written as “Hibrus” had anything to do with any connection to “Hebrew” as we understand the word referring to the Jewish People.

The Ramban helps us with the “the Land of the Hebrews” i.e. from Hebron, where Abraham had dwelt. Abraham had been known as the עברי (EveRee) having come from the other side עבר (A-vair) of the Jordan (River) and his descendants were known, likewise, and had given their name to the land where they lived.

Just a moment to comment briefly on the phrase “for which they have put me into the dungeon (pit)” כִּי-כִי-שָׂמוּ אֹתִי בַּבּוֹר (Kee Seem-OooOh-see BahBeeOr). It is interesting. Joseph’s brothers put him into a pit and, now, again, he finds himself in a pit.

The Rav has a special observation after reading “for I was stolen from the Land of the Hebrews.” The Rav tells us of a Midrash, which is a legend or an old or ancient commentary, where Moses petitions the L-rd

to bury him in the Holy land since he carried Joseph's bones through the desert for forty years. But, he is denied because Joseph acknowledged his homeland but, when Moses had his chance to do so, he did not. Here, in this situation, as a prisoner in an Egyptian prison, Joseph identifies as a Hebrew. "I was stolen from the Land of the Hebrews." Moses, in the Book of Exodus Chapter II Verse 19, Jethro's daughters mistakenly identified Moses as an Egyptian. Moses does not correct them. As a result of this omission, he (Moses) did not merit burial in the Land of Israel. The Rav goes on to detail how much travail Joseph experienced in his life and how he never lost his belief in and positive support for the L-rd and for the Covenantal Community; including his family, i.e. his older brothers who had treated him so horribly. The Rav goes further by focusing on the Covenantal Agreement and, in particular, that the Jewish People would become enslaved and remain so for 400 years. The Rav says, "Before the children of Abraham became involved in the adventure of exile and servitude a basic truth had to be established: whether it is possible for the Covenantal Community to spend so many years in a land that is not theirs and not lose its identity. (Quote is from the Chumash with Commentary Based on the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik – Breishis, pages 297 to 298 and from Days of Deliverance pages 160 to 161 and Derashot Ha Rav Pages 198 to 199).

If I had an opportunity to sit with the Rav again and enjoy lunch together, as I did when I first became a high school student at Yeshiva University in 1962, I believe I would be comfortable sharing the following observations with him about Joseph and how different he was from Moses and how both Joseph and Moses were amazing in their own ways, but how beyond amazing Joseph was in how he did what he did to make the longevity of the Covenantal Community able to last the 400 years it would need to survive even without the advantages of having a Torah, which it did not, or major personalities such as the Avos (the Forefathers) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to lead them, which they did not have, or, really, any kind of community other than the way they were enslaved and held in close quarters by their Egyptian rulers and owners.

When Joseph knew he was going to die, he met with those who were the elders of the Jewish Community in Egypt and exacted from them an amazingly brilliant promise that they, the Jewish slaves in Egypt, would hide and protect Joseph's bones in order that generations down the road the Jewish Community of the day would return Joseph's Bones to his homeland, the Holy Land, to be buried there with his forefathers.

That promise was a veritable anchor that gave the Jews who were slaves in Egypt for so many generations, the ability to survive as a community, which was, of course, underpinned, by a deep faith in the Almighty and that He, the L-rd, would redeem his people from slavery and take them back to the Promised Land, which in actuality that the phrase Promised Land actually was derived. Joseph's exacting the promise from his brethren to return his bones to the Promised Land is what ended up being the driving force behind the ability of the Jewish People to survive as the Rav said they would need to do.

Genesis Chapter XL Verses 16 and 17. "When the Chief Baker heard that the interpretation (of the Head Butler) was good, he said to Joseph, 'I also in my own dream (I saw) three baskets of white bread were on my head;' Verse 17, 'and in the uppermost basket there was all manner of baked food for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.'"

Dr. J. H. Hertz notes that since the interpretation of the Head Butler's dream was good, he felt encouraged to relate his dream to be interpreted. He tells us that the Rashbam (Samuel ben Meir, grandson of Rashi, b – 1085 Troyes, France – d- 1158 Ramerupt, France), z"l, regarding "baskets of white bread" refers us to the Book of Nehemiah Verse 18 where it mentions baskets of open wicker work enabling the birds to peck at the contents. Dr. Hertz also notes that "the Butler dreamed that he actually performed the duties of his office, where as the Baker only sought to do so but was prevented. The further ominous circumstance was the birds darting down upon the food, he being powerless to drive them away."

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 18 and 19. "And Joseph answered and said, 'This is the interpretation there of, 'The three baskets are three days,'"

Verse 19 “Within yet three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.”

We learn more of just how barbarous barbarians can be in Verse 19 when the Baker is told his body will “hang from a tree.” The Egyptians would take the decapitated corpse of a malefactor and allow it to hang exposed to the public view and to become the prey of the birds. In Israel, this barbarous custom was prohibited. See Deuteronomy Chapter XXI Verse 23 (per Dr. J. H. Hertz) where Rashi says that man is made in the image of G-d and the dignity of humanity must be respected even in a criminal death (execution) Judaism teaches that execution atones his sins, therefore, his body shall, at the earliest moment, receive the same reverent treatment that is due to any other deceased. The hanging was delayed until near sunset, so that the body might, without delay, be taken down for burial.”

Even until today, we see a great difference in how death is handled in the Jewish community as opposed to most every other community. The Jewish custom is to bury our dead as soon as possible. In most other communities, bodies can wait for weeks even before they are finally buried.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 20. “And it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he made a feast unto all his servants and he lifted up the head of the Chief Butler and the head of the Chief Baker among his servants.”

Apparently, on Pharaoh’s birthday, he annually reviewed the work of his servants and acknowledged their service on way or another accordingly. When he came to evaluate his Chief Butler and his Head Baker, neither of them were present at the festive meal. Rabbi Steinsaltz advances that perhaps when each of these servants had been sent to prison there had been no formal trial; just a quick and perhaps an angry decision. Now, at Pharaoh’s birthday celebration he brings both of these men out of prison to consider their fates.

Genesis Chapter XL Verses 21 and 22. “And he restored the Chief Butler back unto his Butlership and he (the Butler) gave the cup (of wine) unto Pharaoh’s hand.” Verse 22 “But, he hanged the Chief Baker as Joseph had interpreted (their dreams) to them.”

Here is where Joseph’s interpretations of their dreams are proven to be accurate. We could just read on and take the results at face value; i.e. Joseph “guessed” right. Or, we can gain a better appreciation of Joseph and the young man he has become and how he is learning to comport himself under rather adverse circumstances.

In this instance, Joseph offered his services as an interpreter of dreams and only requested that he be remembered to Pharaoh when all is said and done. Is it that Joseph was naive or was there anything else Joseph could have done to protect against his being forgotten? We might think Joseph had faith in the L-rd to take care of him. If so, then why did Joseph request of the Head Butler to remember him to Pharaoh when all is said and done? The L-rd helps those who help themselves. So, we can see he was trying to advance his position in the miserable situation in which he had found himself but that does not mean that he did not have complete faith in the Almighty.

Genesis Chapter XL Verse 23. “Yet did not the Chief Butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

Rashi sees it differently. Rashi says that since Joseph did not put his faith exclusively in the L-rd by asking that the Butler remember him later. Joseph was punished by having to stay in the prison after this matter transpired for two more years.

Dr. Hertz notes that the Chief Butler’s forgetfulness in the enjoyment of his own good fortune is, sadly, natural. Nothing, alas, is more common than ingratitude. Man forgets but G-d does not forget his own. And, when the night is darkest, the dawn is near.”

Commentators line up on both sides of this issue. Rashi and others see Joseph’s requesting help from the Egyptian Cupbearer or Butler as a certain lack of faith in G-d on Joseph’s part. Others see the Midrash (Braishes Rabba 89:2) makes precisely the opposite inference from the

initial part of the verse in Psalms and states that “Fortunate is the man who has made G-d his trust ...” refers to Joseph. But, the Midrash then continues with Rashi’s point regarding Joseph’s punishment based on the second part of the verse in Psalms: “and does not put his trust in the Egyptians who are called arrogant” – because he asked for the Head Butler or the Wine Steward to remember him two years were added to his imprisonment. The Rav brings the Bais HaLevi (the commentary by Yosef Dov Soloveitchik who was the grandson of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin (b- 1820 Niasviz, Belarus – d – May 1, 1892 Brest, Belarus), z”l, father of Chaim Soloveitchik and grandfather of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav, and others), who resolves the contradiction between Rashi and the Midrash as well as the internal inconsistency in the Midrash itself. The Bais HaLevi explains that although asking the Head Cupbearer or Head Butler for help would be considered completely acceptable for an ordinary person, the request betrays a slight lack of faith for a person on Joseph’s level. Indeed, because Joseph’s faith was so exemplary, “making G-d his trust,” only someone with his level of faith would be punished for requesting the Head Butler’s help.”

Certainly having to remain another two years in the prison was not something that Joseph would relish. But, to say that it was a punishment for having done something to try to help himself out of his current predicament, i.e. being in prison for having done nothing other than being victimized by Potiphar’s wife, which is not necessarily an act of unfaithfulness, is a little over the top in our opinion.

Actually, to say so reminds me of all those people who do not make a decision to do anything but, rather, just put their faith in the L-rd to take care of them. To me, that seems like a complete lack of responsibility. That is not why we are here on this earth, i.e. to let life just push us along as supposedly the Good L-rd wants it to go along. That, finally, would be meaningless. No. We are not here for nothing. And, with all due respect, the phrase, in all of this, that makes most sense to me is “The L-rd helps those who help themselves.” It is admittedly not from the Torah or from any of the Writings or the Prophets. But, this phrase harkens back to the entire concept of responsibility, which brings us back to what Rabbi Shlomo Riskin pointed out about “Repentance,

responsibility to the past and commitment to the future are the skill that Messianism is made of.” He, of course, was using it to explain why Judah, through Tamar, was chosen to be the progenitor of the House of David and, through that house, to the messiah. But, here, at the end of the Sedrah with Joseph in the Egyptian prison, for Joseph to do what he could to help free himself from that bondage is actually a demonstration of his faith in the L-rd rather than any kind of lack of faith. He took action by telling the Head Butler to remember him later on. The fact that the Head Butler did not do so is really nothing against Joseph. Verse 23 actually has an interesting little “twist” to it that we have not noticed any commentator as having focused on it. The Verse says, “But the Chief Cup Bearer or Butler did not remember Joseph” and then it says, “and he forgot him.” Would the Torah reiterate that the Chief Butler not only did not remember Joseph but he also forgot him or was the Torah telling us that the Chief Butler did not remember Joseph and that Joseph forgot the Chief Butler? If that is the case, it would make sense. Because, it would be saying that at a point Joseph did not hold out hope any longer that the Chief Butler would help him. And, at that point, he, Joseph, relied solely on the L-rd.

So, why the additional two years for Joseph in the prison? If it was not a punishment, then, perhaps it was a part of the learning experience that the L-rd felt Joseph would need in order to be fully prepared for what he would be needing to do as his life in Egypt continued.