

Parashah #9

(Updated 12.20.08)

VaYeshev ~ וישב ~ And he continued living (And he dwelt/he settled)

Torah: B'resheet/Genesis 37:1~40:23

Haftarah: 'Amos/Amos 2:6~3:8

B'rit Hadashah: Acts 7:9-16

Here we go again!!!! WAY too much material for us to cover in our allotted time span!!! This week's Parashah actually includes four stories:

1. It starts with **Yosef/Joseph** and his dreams, which infuriate his brothers, who sell him into slavery, which eventually puts him second in command in Egypt.
2. One of his brothers, **Y'hudah/Judah's** indiscretion is uncovered and we learn some interesting information concerning the lineage of Yeshua HaMashiach.
3. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce **Yosef/Joseph** and eventually has him imprisoned.
4. **Yosef/Joseph** interprets dreams from prison and their outcomes.

**A subtitle for this Parashah could be . . . "Joseph's Journeys:
From Papa's Pet, to the Pit, To Potiphar, To Prison, To the Palace"**

An interjection here. . . A friend of mine wondered why I used two names for people in my notes. I explained that it was for teaching purposes; so with that in mind, I will use those names interchangeably in the future. If it's confusing for you, please let me know and I will try to correct it.

So let's get started! First of all, just for clarification, when **Yosef/Joseph** was seventeen years old, his father, **Ya'akov/Jacob** was 108 and his grandfather, **Yitz'chak/Isaac** was 168 and Yitz'chak lived another 12 years. According to the Stone Edition of the Artscroll Chumash, we are told that the incident described below, occurred approximately 9 years after Ya'akov returned home and it is about the same time that Leah died.

CHAPTER 37

Over and over we are told that nothing is recorded in HaShem's Holy Book that is not of importance. Consequently, each year HaShem reveals something to be that I failed to catch the last time. (Okay, okay, maybe I'm just a slow learner!!!!) Anyway, in **verse 1** we are told that "Ya'akov continued living in the land where his father had lived as a foreigner, the land of **Kena'an/Canaan**." Now folks, this isn't any new information to us, is it? In fact, Torah went into great detail in **B'resheet/Genesis 36**, repeating itself over and over that **Esav/Esau** is Edom and that he will not receive the blessing of **Avraham/Abraham**. We already knew that **Yitz'chak/Isaac** and **Avraham/Abraham** lived in **Kena'an/Canaan** so why are we given this, simply worded verse, right here? According to Rabbi Ya'akov Youlus, (and I quote) *"it is placed here for the sake of contrast to all that was said before. Esau did not live in the land of Canaan, but clearly Jacob did! We can even recall in Genesis 36:6 where it says in black and white that Esau took his sons, his daughters and every animal and possession that he owned and that he left the land of Canaan, voluntarily. So the simple and concise language used in this first verse marks the contrast for us and for all of history right up to our present day, that Esau is not connected to the land of Canaan, but that Jacob is. And remember, when we use the name, Jacob, in this collective way, we are referring to all Jewish people."*

In **verse 2**, we learn that Yosef was in the pasture with Dan and Naftali (Bilhah's sons), as well as Gad and Asher (Zilpah's sons) and takes a bad report back to his dad, Ya'akov. At first glance, it looks like Yosef took a bad report back about Dan, Naftali, Gad and Asher and that Yosef is a little "tattle tale" and, in my opinion, starts digging his own pit! However, given the fact that over 25% of the book of Genesis is used to reveal Yosef's life, it would appear that Torah sees Yosef as a (tzah-deek) **tzaddik/righteous person**. Further study reveals when Yosef was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, he treated them, although they were sons of concubines, nicely and with respect because the other brothers did not!

As I have mentioned before, it helps to know and understand the cultural background, especially of the middle-east. In those days, it was common for men to have wives and also concubines. The (pay-lay-gehsh) **peleygesh** was a **woman without the status of wife**, in Biblical Hebrew. She was on the level of a maid or servant but was also used for the man's enjoyment and to bear children for him. She had an inferior status compared to the original wife or wives.

Therefore, the children of the concubines were considered of lower status. So when Yosef associated with Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons, he was showing compassion and treating them justly. He considered his father's concubines as having the same status of real wives. The evil report Yosef brought back to his father, Ya'akov, was not about those four but about the inappropriate treatment toward them by the other six!

At this point in his life, he probably is not that much of a threat to his older brothers. Never the less, the fact that he is obviously Ya'akov's favorite does cause some frustrations on their part. I don't understand why someone as wise as Ya'akov would provoke his older sons by showing this favoritism. This is certainly a clear lesson to us to not show favoritism when rearing our own children.

According to the JPS Commentary, the Hebrew word in **verse 4** is (dahb-beh-row) **dabbero** is quite unique. Usually the suffix to this verb connotes a possessive sense, meaning **his speech**. This passage would then be translated: "They could not abide his friendly speech." In other words, they rebuffed every attempt by Joseph to be friendly.

Oh, by the way, according to **verse 3**, so much for Joseph and the amazing technicolored dreamcoat!!! How does your translation read? According to the commentary in the Artscroll Chumash, Stone Edition, the Hebrew renders the translation as "a fine woolen tunic". Rashi translates it as "a garment of fine wool" and further states that it was a long-sleeved tunic which was embroidered, made of variously colored strips of fine wool. According to Sforno, the tunic was a mark of leadership. Since Reuben discredited himself by "tampering with Jacob's bed" (**B'resheet/Genesis 35:22**), Jacob elevated Joseph to the status of the "first-born" and made him the tunic to symbolize his new position in the family.

An additional note concerning the long sleeves, would let us know that it was for someone in leadership or aristocracy for one would find it challenging to get any work done with "long sleeves" in the way. Most working garments had sleeves which were elbow length or no longer than mid-forearm or three-quarter length sleeve in today's vernacular.

According to Targum Jonathan the term "a coat of many colors" was used only one other time in the Tanakh in 2nd Samuel 13:18 where it describes a royal garment worn by a virgin daughter of a king. Based on this usage in 2nd Samuel and from an archaeological discovery of the painted tombs of Bene Hasein in Egypt, we can surmise that in the patriarchal age, Semitic chiefs wore coats of many colors as insignia of rulership.

DREAMS

I believe that sometimes, things are revealed to us for our knowledge **only**. Lacking maturity, Yosef tells his dreams, digging his pit even deeper!!! As if it were not enough to tell his brothers, Yosef then retells his dream to his father in front of his brothers and now they are fuming mad!!!! Ya'akov rebukes Yosef for doing so but "remembers these things in his heart". Another translation says, "kept the matter in mind" and yet another says "guarded the matter".

According to Rashi, Ya'akov spoke strongly against Yosef to remove the jealousy and resentment of his brothers. By ridiculing the dream, he attempted to reassure them that it had no validity with regard to them. He hoped to stop them from taking Yosef's aspirations seriously and being increasingly jealous of him.

We will see later how actual events parallel this first dream. The consensus among the Sages concerning the meaning of these dreams is that Jacob actually expected the dream(s) to come true but that isn't possible because Rachel was no longer living (**verses 2-11**). However, bear in mind that dreams mentioned in scripture are usually understood to be vehicles of prophecy.

Closer examination shows us in **verse 4** that "his brothers . . . hated him" and then in **verse 8** "And they hated him even more . . ." It was not until **verse 11** that "his brothers were jealous of him". Commentary indicates that this jealousy was a new thing in the brothers' attitude. At first they hated him because of Jacob's favoritism, but they were not jealous because he was a child in their eyes as he was much younger and they saw no reason to take him as a threat to them. But, when they heard his dreams, their attitude changed from hatred to jealousy because they perceived the source of the dreams to be providential.

So why did they take Yosef's second dream so seriously? One of the reasons has to do with the numbers that are reported. When you take the sun, the moon and the eleven stars, the total is thirteen. Now, Yosef was seventeen at the time. So when you add 17 + 13 you get the number 30. Fast forward to **B'resheet/Genesis 41:46** where it says Pharaoh saw that Yosef was a very smart man, after he had interpreted Pharaoh's dream. **Verse 46** says "And Yosef was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt . . ." Needless to say, we do know that the dream did become a reality.

(Verse 12) “Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem . . .” W-H-A-T?! Are they out of their minds? Isn’t this where Sh’mon and Levi wreaked havoc on the townsmen? Oh well, perhaps enough time had elapsed and the matter has been forgotten!

The next event is a little hard for me to understand. Why would Jacob, knowing that there is animosity between “the brothers” and Joseph, send his favored son to where they are tending sheep, when he knows that there are problems? Perhaps Jacob wanted Joseph to make peace with his brothers, who knows?! Putting the possible danger aside, Joseph, as a very obedient son, agrees to go, and goes alone to find his brothers.

All too often, we read these verses, skipping over them, paying no real attention to what is being said. In **verse 13** Israel asked Yosef, “Aren’t your brothers pasturing the sheep in Sh’kehm? Come, I will send you to them.” “. . . (verse 14) So he sent him away from the **Hevron/Hebron** Valley.” Since we just returned from Israel, I had been to both of those locations and I knew they were not just across the street from each other so I got out my Israeli maps to see what I could find. The distance from Hevron to Sh’kehm traveling north over rough terrain is 62.5 miles!!! It must have taken Yosef three to four days to walk that distance. Can you imagine the reaction of a 17 year old, today, if he had to walk that distance and return? For that matter, can you imagine the reaction of anyone required to walk that distance.

Verse 15 says “a man discovered him . . .” It is believed that this “man” was actually the angel **Gavri’el/Gabriel** (the announcing angel), whom HaShem sent to lead Yosef to his brothers. When Yosef could not find his brothers, he had a perfect excuse to return to Ya’akov and avoid what he knew would be an unpleasant meeting. Instead, he displayed great loyalty to Ya’akov by searching for them persistently.

Anyway, the brothers have gone on to Dotan (or Dothan depending on your translation) where Yosef catches up with them (**verse 17**). Search as I might, I could find no Dotan or Dothan on any of the maps I have so there is no telling how many MORE miles Yosef had to trod before he caught up with his brothers. However, one of the ladies at Sabbath service had a map in her Bible which did show Dothan’s location and it appears to be another 10-15 miles further north!! Before we go further, I have what I believe is some interesting information. In (Eve-reet) **Ivrit/Hebrew**, there are several ways to spell Dotan. In each case, the numerical values equal “sin”, “lawlessness”, “rebellion” and the like. Given what takes place there, I thought it interesting.

Okay, so the brothers see Joseph coming in the distance and plan his demise. Reuben encourages them not to shed Joseph’s blood so his death wouldn’t be on their hands but to throw him in the pit. Reuben’s secret plan was to return later and free Joseph. Although Reuben was the first-born, he had the most to lose since Joseph was the favored son and he also had the most to gain from his death (**B’resheet/Genesis 25:22** and **1st Chronicles 5:1**). Yet, he had concern for Joseph and felt responsible for him. He was also aware, being the oldest of the family; he would carry the blame as well. (**Verses 18-24**)

Personally, I believe Reuben to be a man of compassion. Remember his compassionate gesture of finding the (due-dah-yeem) dudaim for his mother, Leah? And again, when he came to his mother’s defense with regard to Bilhah?

Before we move on, in **verse 24**, in parenthesis, my translation says “the cistern was empty; without any water in it”. These pits were dug primarily for water storage so this observation was necessary for us to understand that Yosef’s brothers were not trying to drown him.

Verse 25 tells about the caravan of (Yish-mah-eh-leem) Yishma’elim that was coming in the distance. In the meantime, (Mid-yah-neem) Midyanim merchants heard Joseph’s cries and removed him from the pit. In the Complete Jewish Bible, **verse 36** speaks of the Midyanim. However, other translations mention yet another group, the Medanites, who sell Joseph to Egypt, to Potiphar. Actually, I think I FINALLY have a better clarification on this for the first time in all the years I’ve been following Torah. These would have been descendants of **Yishma’el/Ishmael** who were from the Midian area as opposed to some other area of the middle-east.

Verses 31-35 Jacob identifies Joseph’s coat, declares his death and “mourns his son many days”, unable to be consoled by anyone. In fact, **verse 35** states “all his sons and all his daughters . . .” It is believed that this verse refers to his daughters-in-law, who were like daughters to him and his daughter Dinah (say Dee-nah). Some believe that Jacob actually mourned Joseph’s demise for the entire 22 years of their separation. I wonder if these 22 years of separation is a parallel to the 22 years that Jacob was separated from his family when he was living with/working for Laban? Just a thought.

CHAPTER 38

Y'hudah/Judah “gits n splits” (verses 1-8) when he sees the grief, his father, Ya'akov, is going through because of his decision to sell Yosef. Although these people have been told time and time again not to take Canaanite brides, Y'hudah does so anyway and three sons are born in rather quick succession. **Er**, meaning **Awaken**, was the firstborn. The second child was named **Onan**, which means **complaining** or **sorrow** and the third child was named **Shelah** from a root word meaning **to inquire, to request** or **to demand**.

Before we proceed further, let's look into the **Levirate Marriage** (D'varim/Deuteronomy 25:5): According to the Jewish Rabbis, the Torah considers having children to be a primary purpose of marriage. If a man dies childless, his widow is required to marry his brother, if feasible, and the child/children are considered the children of the deceased. There is no legal act involved, because it is considered a continuation of the dead husband's marriage. This is called (ye-boom **NOT** ye-bum!!!) **Yibbum**.

If it is not feasible for the widow to marry her brother-in-law, then a legal act called (kah-leet-zah) **Chalitza** is performed, to dissolve the dead brother's marriage and enable the widow to marry outside of the family.

Okay, back to our story: Y'hudah's eldest son, Er, married Tamar, the daughter of Shem. According to **verse 7**, Er was evil in the sight of Adonai so He killed Er. Then Yehudah told his second son, Onan, to sleep with Tamar per the commandment of that time. **Verses 9 & 10** Oh yuck!!! This is definitely not material for young eyes to read. I do not know why anyone needs to read pornographic material! There is some pretty explicit stuff right here!!! After Onan's death, Judah glitches!!! Not sure that he wants to lose his third and youngest son, Shelah, to death, Y'hudah requests that Shelah be allowed to mature before fulfilling his obligation to marry Tamar.

According to the Chumash commentary, Er and Onan died because of their wickedness, and the nature of their sin is in **verse 9**. Tamar was a beautiful woman and Er and Onan did not want her beauty marred by pregnancy, so they wasted their seed and they died for the gravity of this sin. Because Er and Onan were the grandsons of Jacob and the sons of Judah, HaShem considered this sin most serious. Remember, the primary reason for marriage was to have children.

Shortly thereafter, Judah's wife dies (**verse 12**); after he had mourned, he went to oversee his sheepshearers. The commentary states that sheep shearing of a prominent man was a festive occasion that was accompanied by a public feast for the poor.

After quite some time, it becomes apparent that Judah doesn't have any intention of allowing the marriage between Shelah and Tamar to take place. So, when Tamar heard that Judah was coming to her area, she dressed herself as a harlot, veiled her face and offered herself to Judah. Thinking that she was a prostitute and his wife is deceased, he chooses to consort with this “harlot”.

The agreed upon payment was to be a goat but until it was delivered, Tamar required a security deposit, if you will. In **verse 18**, we learn that she asked for “Your signet/seal, your cord and your staff that is in your hand”. Why three items? And for that matter, why **THESE** three? In my opinion, Tamar was one smart woman! She had already experienced Judah's reticence in taking care of business properly, so her requirement was personal identification, which was used to her benefit later on.

Long story short, Tamar becomes pregnant. Upon hearing this news, Judah is told, and believes, that she has committed harlotry so he calls for her execution. She has a messenger take Judah's personal belongings to him to identify them, saying that they belong to father of her pregnancy.

The Chumash states that HaShem repaid Judah measure for measure. For it was with the words of “identify, if you please” that Ya'akov was given Yosef's tunic dipped in blood, which was Judah's idea. It was with these same words, “identify, if you please”, that Judah was confronted with his personal items proving that he was the father of Tamar's pregnancy. Judah has no choice but to acknowledge that the items are his and declare that Tamar is more righteous than he.

Tamar has twins (imagine that!). According to **verses 28-30**, there was a struggle in Tamar's womb regarding the firstborn. The hand of one of the twins appeared first and the midwife put a scarlet thread around the wrist. However, the firstborn was (Peh-rehtz) **Peretz**, which means **breaking forth** or **strength** and alludes to the midwife's exclamation of “what strength you exerted”. The other son was named (Zeh-rahk) **Zerach**, which means **scarlet** or **dawning**. As it turns out, Peretz is the great-great grandfather of (Dah-veed) David, considered to be one of the greatest kings of Israel. As we know, out of David will come **HaMashiach/The Messiah**, Yeshua.

This whole episode points out again, that deception within the family, is sometimes necessary to obtain what belongs to you. It was true with Esav and Ya'akov and it appears to be true here as well.

I found the following information quite interesting. In **verse 21**, the Hebrew word used for **prostitute** is (keh-die-shaw) **kedaisha**. Surprisingly, the root for this word is the same as (kah-doesch) **kadosh** which means **holy**. As I understand it, Torah is revealing the degree of degradation to which a prostitute lowers herself because Judaism/Torah teaches that sex should be an act of spiritual elevation not an act of base animalistic action.

The above account actually takes place sometime during the 22 years that Joseph is estranged from his family. So why is it placed right square dab in the middle of Joseph's story? Some say it is to place emphasis on the fact that the sale of Joseph caused the loss of two brothers, not just one. Judah was demoted from his #2 position, so to speak by his brothers, when they saw the anguish it caused their father, because it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph. So, he leaves the family compound, becomes associated with Hirah, the Adullamite, met Shua's daughter, married her and had three sons.

See what a mess our lives can become when we stray from our roots and don't stay connected to our families, especially our spiritual families?

CHAPTER 39

The rise of Yosef in the royal government of Egypt was very impressive when we consider the hostile attitude Egyptians had toward the Semites. However, according to an article from First Fruits of Zion, there is a possibility that Yosef went to Egypt during the reign of the Bedouin Semitic conquerors, the Hyksos. The Hyksos took over the government of Egypt rather peacefully by taking advantage of a weakened Middle Kingdom leadership. There were not Egyptian, but from the east. They ruled in Egypt sometime between 1700 and 1550 BCE. If, in fact, the Hyksos were ruling Egypt when Yosef was there it would help explain two things. First, aside from the grace of HaShem, it may explain when Yosef rose to such great heights. Perhaps he, being a Semite, was favored by the Hyksos, who were also Semites. Second, it might also explain why Potiphar is referred to several times as "the Egyptian" (**verse 5**). He would have been an exception in government service if the Hyksos were ruling.

Okay, here we are, back to the on-going saga of Yosef. In **verses 1-6**, we learn that even as a slave, Yosef prospers. So much so, that Potiphar, an Egyptian idolater, could recognize Yosef's spirituality and appoints him head of his household. Ultimately, Yosef is appointed chief administrator over all of Egypt (**Acts 7:9 & 10**)

Think about it! Wherever he went, he ruled . . .

- · As a slave of Potiphar, he was put in charge of the household
- · As a disgraced prisoner, he was placed in charge of the prison
- · As a despised Hebrew, he was rushed to interpret Pharaoh's dreams AND was made viceroy of all Egypt, as well as all the surrounding countries
- · And finally, his entire family bowed down to him

Verses 7-20 entail the story of Potiphar's wife continually imploring Yosef to "lie with me" or more specifically, "sleep with me" which had nothing to do with sleep at all!!! Yosef's refusal over and over didn't seem to faze her. In fact, in **verse 8** before he ran away, he said, "How could I do such a thing to my master and if I do it, I will sin towards G~d." and finally, one day, as Yosef's was about his business, in **verses 11 & 12**, she caught hold of his robe and of course we know how she proceeded to frame him. Carelessness can cause serious problems. Obviously, Potiphar didn't believe his wife's story or he would have executed Yosef. However, he had no choice but to punish his servant, (**verse 20**) but get this . . . Potiphar sends Yosef to the "royal" dungeon where the important prisoners were kept. Important prisoners??? Oh well . . . **verse 21** Adonai was with him; even here Yosef was successful.

First Fruits of Zion had some interesting information concerning Joseph's conduct and how the Jewish culture views what happened.

"Judaism has learned well from Joseph's example. Jewish law forbids an unmarried (and unrelated) man and woman to be alone together. Even if there is no impropriety between them, the mere fact that they are secluded together in a place where the potential for impropriety exists is non-kosher and regarded as adulterous. Similarly, among Orthodox Jews, any physical contact between an unmarried (and unrelated) man and woman is expressly forbidden."

Let's go back to **verse 20** "then Joseph's master took him . . ." indicates to me that Potiphar personally escorted Joseph to the prison, which displays his high esteem for the young Hebrew and an indication that he did not believe his wife's charge. It is said that he explained to Joseph that unless he punished him, people would say that his wife was routinely unfaithful and that Potiphar ignored her behavior.

CHAPTER 40

Verses 1-23 The Minister of Wine (cup bearer) and The Minister of Bread (baker) are imprisoned. The Sages tell us because there was a fly in the cup of wine and a stone in Pharaoh's bread. These two are relegated to the royal 5-star dungeon where the warden treats them very well and Yosef is appointed to serve them.

Both men have dreams on the same night and we are told they were very depressed about them. Yosef offers to interpret the dreams, however, he makes it very clear that the "interpretations are from G~d." (**Verse 8**) As you can see, Yosef is introducing HaShem to two high Egyptian officials whom he has met in prison.

The story is told that on Pharaoh's birthday, he was thinking of his former stewards and trying to reason why and how the situations had occurred that caused their imprisonment. After all, it wasn't the Cup Bearer's fault that a fly had flown into his cup. However, on the other hand, the Baker was careless in not sifting the flour to be sure that all foreign matter was removed. Consequently, Yosef's interpretations for both men were correct and in three days, the Minister of Wine was released from prison and returned to his position and the Minister of Bread was executed. Yosef begged the Wine Minister to remember him to Pharaoh but he forgot about Yosef (**verses 5-19**).

The Chumash records that Yosef's prison term was extended an additional two years because he placed his trust in the Wine Minister instead of G~d. In **Tehillim/Psalm 118:8** it says, "It is better to trust in the L~rd, than to put confidence in man." And in **Tehillim/Psalm 146:3**, "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a human being in whom there is no help." Unfortunately Yosef did and consequently the story ends, declaring that the butler did not remember Yosef but forgot him. It is important for us to remember this important lesson from Torah . . . **Trust only in G~d!**

Pharaoh also has some dreams – which we will read about next week . . . so stay tuned!!!!

VaYeshev ~ וישב ~ He continued living (He dwelt/He settled)

Haftarah: 'Amos/Amos 2:6~3:8

Right away we see an allusion to Yosef being sold for silver in **verse 6** and then in **verses 7 & 8**, (Ah-mose) 'Amos/Amos describes the immorality of father and son sleeping with the same girl which we have just read, concerning Y'hudah sleeping with his daughter-in-law, Tamar.

Essentially, Amos is delivering HaShem's message of love but expectations to Israel. Amos lets Israel know that HaShem loves them most intimately more than any other peoples on the earth but because of their rebellion and sinfulness, HaShem is going to punish them, should they choose to continue following their own ways instead of repentance and restitution.

It is imperative for us to acknowledge that Israel is HaShem's Chosen People and always will be. But just as any parent who loves their child; expects that child to follow rules and expectations of their parents and if they don't there are consequences. The same is true of Israel and the same is true of us as well, as grafted-in Israel.

VaYeshev ~ וישב ~ He continued living (He dwelt/He settled)

B'rit Hadashah: Acts 7:9-16

Immediately in **verses 9 and 10** we see the direct parallel to our Torah Portion. As far as the remainder of the reading, we will see that played out in the weeks to come.

As we walk with Yosef, we can see many parallels with Yeshua.

- Both came to do the will of their fathers.
- Both came to see their brothers.
- Both were plotted against by their brothers.
- Each were sold for pieces of silver
- Both were stripped of their robes.
- Both were put in a pit
- A meal was consumed after their disposal
- The pit was empty when Rueven went back and . . .

the tomb was empty when John and Peter went there.

- As Yosef was passed to the hands of a gentile, so did salvation through Yeshua pass on to the gentiles.

I'm sure there are probably more but this is what I have for now.

The corresponding Psalm for this Torah portion is: Psalm 112

(An interesting note concerning this particular Psalm is that many Jewish women read this over their husbands each Shabbat.)