

For the last several weeks we have been reading through the stories of the patriarchs and their family's stories, trying to discern what Hashem has to say to us from these important lessons of life and humanity, and really family—which is the main institution that Hashem ordained for us to learn about love. Hashem's plan for man to not be alone back in the beginning of Genesis, is the beginning of the foundation of family life, in which Hashem will give forth the foundation of how we should live, and learn to love, and eventually teach our children—family is where we learn our foundations. Here we have again in the book of Genesis, another story for us to learn from, of an imperfect family, with dysfunctional relationships, that Hashem uses to teach us how to live in an imperfect world.

Today's Parsha Vayigash in its full portion tells the story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers, and Joseph's reunion with his father Jacob, who has believed for many years that his son was dead. It is a beautiful story of reconciliation. Before I dive in, my prayer today would be that this holiday season is a time when you can have reconciliation with your families and loved ones and remember from these stories that none of us are perfect!—all of us have issues—and Hashem can use our imperfections to teach us important lessons. My last time up here speaking to you I shared with you the story of getting to see my estranged daughter this past July, a moment in time that was a very long 5 year wait. It was a moment of reconciliation. A moment that was sandwiched between 5 years of waiting for it, and now another period of wait until the story continues. I know all about waiting---as a military wife, I am currently in the middle of a year-long deployment. I am all too familiar with the wait to see your family member and have reconciliation as a couple and as a family. I am blessed today to have Scott home with us and to have some time together as a couple but this too is a sandwich moment of reconciliation before I have to send him back and wait again.

If you are under the disbelief that military reunions are like hallmark commercials or that my life is simply like my facebook persona—I would be glad to tell you the story of how I took the metro last night to meet my hubby at Dulles so that we would not sit in hours of traffic—but his plane was late, my metro bus was late and the supposed Hallmark moment was additionally tainted by me inadvertently—between kisses—dropping my wallet on the transit bus—and we spent the next 3 hours trying to find it. I share that story to tell you how loving and supportive a husband I have who reminded me that life is not a hallmark commercial or facebook statuses. It is how we handle the crises big and small—and I can share we handled this together—hand in hand, in prayer, and by late last night we were picking up my lost wallet at the bus depot in Herndon—completely intact.

In Parash Vayigash---Vayigash literally means “he approached” and refers to the part in the story where Judah approaches Joseph. The setting as you may remember is when the silver cup has just been found in Benjamin's sack and the brothers return in front of Joseph knowing the penalty for stealing this cup is slavery. Judah's plea then is where “he approaches”—this is the word Vayigash—so he approaches Joseph as the viceroy of Egypt. Judah pleads with Joseph and asks if he himself can remain instead of Benjamin, because of the pain and suffering it will cause Jacob their father, if the brothers return without Benjamin. Judah states that Jacob's life is closely bound up in “the boy's life” (Benjamin) and if they return without him, Jacob could die from the pain. This whole scene reminds me of Esther pleading with the King in the story of

Purim—approaching a great figure in this time period was not without dangerous repercussions and Judah is seen here as the bold brother who is speaking out in both defense of his younger brother but also in a desperate plea to not cause more harm and suffering to their father and family.

Let's look a moment to look at Judah. He is the fourth born son of Jacob, in this part of the story he becomes the brother who does the "right thing", he does the action of redemption, by sacrificing himself so another of his brothers are not sold into slavery. Judah if you remember is the brother who convinced the others to sell Joseph into slavery in Gen 37, so blood was not on their hands, Judah was also the brother who had relations with Tamar—do you guys remember that story: **Look this part plays a little bit like gossip to me**—(so I'm gonna add a little dramatic flair) Judah had left his brothers and gone off and married the *daughter* of a Canaanite man—gasp—they had three sons Er, Onan and Shimon. Well Er was evil in God's sight so when he got married to Tamar, he was put to death by God for his evil—and then as the custom was since Er died, Onan married Tamar his widow. Now Onan did not want to produce a child with Tamar --for his brother—you get that part right even though it would be his kid—it was seen as his dead brother's (Er)son....ok anyway--so he was not doing "the thing" that God wanted him to—well you can read the detailed story in Gen 38 but we will keep this PG for now. Anyway God put him to death too because he was not obedient. So Judah does not want to give up his third son—his youngest--to Tamar—since she has that whole "black widow thing going on" and he does not seem keen to the fact this is all due to the actions of his own sons. Judah is afraid of losing another precious son and so he also does not obey the custom of giving Tamar to his last son. To make matters worse....(another gasp) He later sleeps with Tamar but doesn't know it's her —so I guess we are going to throw the PG thing out the window for this part of the story--— Anyway Tamar then becomes pregnant and when they are about to punish her for adultery she reveals the items that Judah gave her during their tryst (seal, cord, staff) that prove she is carrying his child. Now caught in the act—he admits wrong doing he says to Tamar "you are more righteous than I". OY talk about family problems.....

So just to recap, Judah saves Joseph from dying in the pit by selling him into slavery. Then he marries a Canaanite woman and has three sons--two sons, who do evil, and are killed for their actions but then repents to Tamar his daughter in law, after wronging her and saves her from a certain death. He is the same Judah, who promises Jacob, that if he gives the brothers Benjamin-- to appear before Joseph—that no harm will come to him-- and if any harm does come to him Joseph can hold Judah personally responsible. He will bear the blame. So now here he is standing before Joseph begging to offer himself as a slave in Benjamin's place. He wants to right the wrong and knows if Benjamin is not returned to his father—his father will surely die from the pain and loss. At the conclusion of Judah's plea—Joseph can take the farce no longer—he clears the room and reveals himself to his brothers making reconciliation with them. Additionally when Pharaoh hears of Joseph's family reconciliation he invites the whole family to come live off the fat of the land and reside peacefully in Egypt. This sets the stage for Joseph and Jacob's reunion.

So the focus of the parasha—the Vayigash—is the approach: is that Judah is approaching Joseph—its that he speaks boldly when it matters.

If you all know me at all—you know I'm not shy. I'm very type A driven, extroverted and outspoken. As a matter of fact, my husband would be glad to share with you multiple stories of how I have spoken boldly over the years and gotten myself in hot water. However, that boldness is a "blessing" as well as a curse. Ask my husband *who* it is who takes the calls to the phone company, the cable company and any other "difficult conversation" we need to have with a vendor—yeah me. He knows that I can be counted on to speak up when there is injustice. It doesn't mean he loves it when I speak my mind, boldly, as this is not his nature meaning speaking boldly does not come natural to him. So, it therefore appears unnatural and a bit unnerving even to him. Additionally, I am not a good liar. Jared my youngest says—I have no filter. I basically say what I think and my boss tells me "I wear my feelings on my sleeve". All of these may sound like criticisms but in fact this is how Hashem made me and I have found my calling for these traits. As a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner these traits of being outspoken, wearing my feelings on my sleeve—these help me to be both an empathetic listener, a compassionate provider and an advocate for good health in my patients. Additionally I am a real person—like I said I'm not a good liar—so when you ask me "how I am?" I'm going to tell you honestly how I really feel—which may be a colorful answer along with a dramatic story. This may not be socially acceptable to some people, or the way people expect in our society to behave or of even in a believer of Messiah to not be walking around experiencing joy continuously. I beg to differ, I think storing up emotions, putting on airs, leads to depression, anxiety and unhealthy relationships. It also has taken many years for me to be this CALM---I actually used to be much more extroverted—much more energetic and outspoken—but my husband rubbed off on me and now I see the benefits of being quiet sometimes and not always being the first one to call out the answer. But I will say I can relate more to the impulsive outspoken bible characters like Judah and in the Brit Hadashah : Peter and although he is often read as a guy yelling out answers and speaking out of turn—Yeshua did build the church on that foundation—on the outspoken extroverted guy!

Getting back to Joseph at the start of his life we see him acting pretty oblivious arrogant even when he tells his brothers about his dreams and how he will be the ruler of them all. —It is interesting that part of the story is in the parash entitled Vayeshev—which means to sit—Jacob at the start of that section is just wanting to settle in, to rest—he wants to retire. But Hashem is not done with him—not done teaching us through his family. So at the start of that parsha begins Joseph's difficulties with his brothers and Jacob realizes he cannot rest yet. We know this because When Jacob tells Joseph to go out to his brother in the field just before the part where he is thrown in the pit—Jacob calls to Joseph and he (Joseph) says Henini a word that means "Here am I." This phrase is often used in the torah before Hashem reveals an important calling to the person. So there is an implication that both Jacob and Josephe realize something important is about to happen.

In our parsha Judah approaching Joseph, he is no longer the arrogant youth so Judah does not recognize him. Joseph has come a long way in the story now more in control of his thoughts and words and emotion and he has found God's calling for his life and is using his gifts for God's purpose. He knows that Hashem has used all these circumstances in his life for God's greater purpose. In fact the name pharaoh gives to Joseph when he appoints him as ruler Zaphenath-peneah is an Egyptian word which has been defined by various authors as "God speaks and he lives, God sees and he lives, my provision is God the living one, the one who

furnishes the nourishment of life and even “Savior of Life”—all of these definitions show the purpose that without Hashem revealing Pharaoh’s dreams to Joseph they all would have been wiped out by the famine. So even though Joseph was thrown into a pit and sold into slavery—God’s purposes were ultimately fulfilled.

When Joseph is staring into his brother’s eyes and he is overcome with emotion in fact—Joseph cries no less than 4 times in these passages. Both, I think from the emotions he has stored, having been left for dead by his brothers and sold into slavery, as well as the emotions of getting to see his brothers again and having the reunion, the reconciled relationships that he thought were lost. And even the realization of his Henani statement—his willingness to be used by Hashem for a greater purpose is now revealed.

I find life on this planet to be filled with moments of beauty and wonder and joy but equally with struggles and pain, and crises of circumstances that Hashem allows us to go through to experience a deeper relationship with him. I love musicals—some of you know this. In Joseph’s Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat Joseph sings a beautiful lament when he is thrown into the prison, he is alone he is in despair---and yet as a child of Israel he believes the truth that children of Israel are never alone because we have a greater God who has promised us a greater future.

I am amazed with how Joseph could forgive so freely and go forth ---he and his brothers—from this moment and have a harmonious reconciliation: There are some lessons here for us about reconciliation.

First the brothers took responsibility for their own actions. They had hated for Joseph, because they were jealous and what they saw in him as: his malicious arrogance. But they had years to think about this and see the pain they caused their father, and had come to feel sorry for their actions. Joseph had reason to hate his brothers—they threw him in a pit of snakes and sold him into slavery. But Joseph had both emotional sensitivity and a foundation of religious ideology. He had said the word Henani—he knew Hashem had a plan. Joseph was a sensitive guy. “he turned away from them and wept...” (Genesis 42:24); when he first sees his younger brother Benjamin, “he was overcome with feeling...He went into a room and wept there...” (ibid. 43:30); unable to contain himself after Judah’s confrontational address, “his sobs were so loud that...the news reached Pharaoh’s palace...” And finally, as we will read in next week’s Torah portion, Joseph’s responds to his brothers’ plea for explicit forgiveness: “and Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.” (ibid. 50:17).—he knew Hashem had a plan greater than their own. If there is one lesson that Joseph learned from his father Jacob during his disrupted adolescence, it was the belief in a GOD who ultimately controls man’s circumstances and man’s destiny. When a person wholly has that belief, he is able to dismiss even the most painful insults against him and the most difficult circumstances become much smaller. He is able to attribute these difficulties to God’s plan and not to blame the perpetrators of the insult. So was Joseph able to say to his brothers, “it was not you who sent me here, but God...” (ibid. 45:8)

Rabbi Israel Salanter, the 19th century founder of the Mussar Movement which advocated the perfection of our ethical behavior:

“When you’re young, you think you can change the world.

As you get older, you realize that you can't do that, but you're still convinced that you can change the town in which you live.

Then, there reaches a point where you realize you can't do that either.

But you're still sure that you can change your family.

Finally, you become aware that the most you can do is change yourself."

Sometimes I convince myself I can change other people. This is a false parable—a false belief. We can only change ourselves.

Joseph could have become bitter from all that happened to him and we might be telling a different story—one that looks more like Dicken's Ebenezer Scrooge.

Judah's choices did not leave him without honor—for we know since we are looking back that Judah's tribe, would be the tribe that would remain loyal to king David and therefore the promised Messiah would come from his line—in fact the origin of the word Jewish comes from the tribe of Judah.

-- And if you remember that story Tamar who was impregnated by Judah?—well she has twins--- one who came out first gets a scarlet thread around his wrist and then the other breaks out : they name him Perez—he will be in the line of Yeshua as one of King Davids great grandfathers...

So, in this parasha we see two brothers become great leaders in Jewish history. It is interesting to note that neither Judah or Joseph were first born.... And also the offspring of Perez (second born) becomes a great grandfather to King of Israel and eventually the Messiah. So none of the first-born of the families of Torah become the leaders ... Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Reuben and Joseph / Judah, and finally Tamars's sons – Zerah and Perez. What is wrong with the first born? (yes that's right I am the youngest) We all know that the world in almost every culture, recognizes the first born as first in line gets the inheritance, the one who holds the expectations of great things, and who be the presumed elevated one. Once again Hashem can use any one he pleases to show forth His glory—and especially in the circumstances we are not expecting. In this case catastrophic circumstances. Joseph being sold into slavery and Judah's mistakes with Tamar and Jacobs pain of believing his son was dead for the majority of his life all of these catastrophic difficult circumstances were used for God's greater purpose. In fact God's greater purpose in Jacob's life is why God gave him the new name ISRAEL. If you think why are these stories important why do I care about the ancestors of the Jewish people? This is how Hashem taught the lessons of the Torah—how he wanted us learn from generation to generation. In fact the patriarchs and matriarchs are all contained in the name, Jacob's new name ISRAEL: I yud-Isaac, S shin Sarah, R resh Rebecca, Alef Abraham and L Lamed Leah. Additionally just before Jacobs reunion with Joseph he is finally convinced that it is true that his son Joseph is alive and has become a great leader in Egypt. When Hashem again speaks to Jacob and Jacob answers Henani. Hineini means, "I am here for you fully, with the trust and

vulnerability to do whatever it is you ask of me." Hashem basically explains to Jacob that now—he can go to Egypt where Hashem will make him a great nation. His purposes will be fulfilled because of these men being willing to put their trust in God.

\*\*here I read the last paragraph from the Tanach commentary of the relationship between the torah and haftarah portions. —The paragraph relation of the haftarah to the parashah...the portion that starts with "What the Torah portrays as a family event, the prophet Ezekial projects as a national hope; the reconciliation and reunification of all the people Israel.

\*\*\*Additonally in the Brit Hadashah we see the revelation of the coming Messiah: Then I read the verse from the New Testament passage "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell....

Joseph's story is about redemption and reconciliation and his name given by Pharoah as defined "God speaks and he lives or "Savior of Life". This is a powerful story. But there is a greater Joseph story I challenge you to read this weekend---another Joseph who was used by Hashem for the greater purpose of His Kingdom and plan—the good news of Joseph the earthly father of Yeshua. This Joseph could have run away from a terrible situation having found his young bride to be with child...but instead we have the miraculous story of Messiah's birth—straight out of God's handbook for our life---it again is amazing story which can only be believed by faith. How Hashem gave to us the revelation of His son for the ultimate reconciliation to His creation—he came to earth to commune among us to reconcile us to Him and ultimately to be the Redeemer we had longed for.

I challenge you all to be Henani people—to accept Hashem's calling on your life and put your trust completely in him in all circumstances.