



Matir Asurim ["The One Who Frees Captives"] connects Jewish spiritual, cultural, and communal resources and people experiencing incarceration or re-entry.

## Divrei Matir Asurim

Matir Asurim Words/Matters -- DEC 2023/Tevet 5784

*Divrei Matir Asurim* is available in three formats: straight text for copying into emails; formatted text for copying/printing for postal mail; and on-line (with some internet links for those who can access them). This month, *Divrei MA* includes two sections: 1) Meeting and Operations and 2) Torah Explorations. Feedback encouraged.

Inside readers, please send responses to news shared here, additional thoughts on MA operations, or Torah Explorations: through outside MA pen pal, if you have one; through USPS mail directly to: Matir Asurim, PO Box 18858. Philadelphia, PA 19119; or by emailing [matirasurimnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:matirasurimnetwork@gmail.com).

### MEETING AND OPERATIONS

#### Recent General Meeting News

Matir Asurim held a general meeting on December 13. Topics included procedures for record-keeping, planning a meeting in January for the "Core Organizing Group," and issues around support for healthful kosher meals. **NEXT MEETINGS:** December 27 and January 10.

#### Team and Working Group News

##### Penpal:

Team met to touch base on matches and statuses. Trying to match folks inside who are looking for first matches or additional penpals. Following up with new folks from volunteer interest form and orienting people digitally using the guidebook.

##### Communications:

Seeking to reach out to potential volunteers, from new volunteers' sign-up, to join this team.

##### Hubs:

Seattle Hub matched ten folks from local synagogue, Kavana, with ten folks at Twin Rivers Correctional facility. Everyone seems to be enjoying the relationship. Chanukah letter writing held during several local events. Two new people interested in becoming penpals and/or organizing with Matir Asurim.

##### Individual support:

One inside member expects parole soon. Outside members are sharing information and contacts for finding a Jewish community in which to settle.

##### Finance/Fundraising and Membership:

No updates from these teams.

##### Resources:

Shifting to quarterly schedule. First issue tentatively planned for Spring.

This team and editor of *Divrei Matir Asurim* met to discuss possible coordination of topics. Decision was to focus monthly *Divrei Matir Asurim* Jewish content on Torah portions and for the new Resources to focus on general Jewish values and practice.

----- **Memorial, Healing and Special Concern, Celebration** -----



**Healing and Special Concern:** Death, injury, and displacement in military conflicts -- in Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Ukraine, and worldwide -- and in community and state violence in US and Canada.

All seeking healing of spirit and repair of personal conflicts.  
All needing medical attention and healing of body.

Images:

L: lighted memorial candles (credit: Hadar Institute); R: reporter's notebook and pen

*Editor's note: As a writer, journalist, and educator, I grieve for so many lost to these fields.*

*Whom do you honor as a teacher? For whom do you grieve?*



### Recognizing Teachers

Scholars think that mourners' kaddish was originally recited for teachers. The practice then gradually widened to recognize deaths of other loved ones.

#### Journalists killed in Hamas/Israel in Kislev and early Tevet

12/15. Samer Abu Daqqa. Camera operator for Al Jazeera Arabic.

12/09. Ola Atallah, Palestinian freelance journalist; nine family members also killed.

12/03. Hassan Farajallah, Al-Quds TV.

Shaima El-Gazzar, Palestinian journalist for Al-Majedat network; family members also killed

12/01. Abdullah Darwish, Palestinian cameraman for Al-Aqsa TV,

Montaser Al-Sawaf, Palestinian cameraman for Anadolu Agency.

Adham Hassouna, Palestinian freelance journalist, media professor; family members also killed.

11/24. Mostafa Bakeer, Palestinian journalist and cameraperson for Al-Aqsa TV.

11/23. Mohamed Mouin Ayyash, Palestinian journalist, photographer; killed with 20 family members.

Since 10/7/23, four Israeli, three Lebanese, and at least 55 more Palestinian journalists, have been killed.

-- Source: Committee to Protect Journalists.

CPJ, founded in 1981, works to protect the rights and safety of journalists and a free press.

CPJ, Knight Foundation Press Freedom Center, P.O. Box 2675, New York, NY 10108. [info@CPJ.org](mailto:info@CPJ.org)

#### Educators and Schools Lost

Teachers were among those killed in Hamas attack on Israel, Oct 7. On Dec 7, writer and educator Refaat Alareer, professor at Islamic University of Gaza, was killed along with his sister and her family. In addition, hundreds of teachers in Gaza have been killed, more injured, and 80% displaced.

#### Share prayer concerns, celebrations, and memorials for future editions.

Submit through an outside penpal, email [ethreporter@gmail.com](mailto:ethreporter@gmail.com),  
or mail to Matir Asurim, PO Box 18858. Philadelphia, PA 19119

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## TORAH EXPLORATIONS

The shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere falls on December 21, the 10th of Tevet. And then days begin to lengthen, as we move through Winter. The Torah reading cycle is closing out the Book of Genesis and bringing us into Exodus -- shifting from a story of individual and family struggle to a tale of collective oppression and redemption. The physical world and the Jewish calendar are both signaling time of transformation....

### Schedule of Torah readings: late Genesis and Exodus

*Hebrew title* [English]. Chapters: verse

Civic & Hebrew calendar dates  
for Shabbat the portion is read.

#### TEVET (Dec 13, 2023 - Jan 10, 2024)

##### GENESIS

*Miketz* [After]. Gen 41:1-44:17.

Dec 16. 4 Tevet

*Vayigash* [He approached]. Gen 44:18-47:27.

Dec. 23. 11 Tevet

*Vayechi* [He lived]. Gen 47:28 - 50:26.

Dec. 30. 18 Tevet

##### EXODUS

*Shemot* [Names]. Ex 1:1-6:1.

Jan 6, 2024. 25 Tevet

#### SHEVAT (Jan 10 - Feb 8).

*Vaera* [I appeared]. Ex 6:2-9:35.

Jan 13. 3 Shevat

*Bo* [Come]. Ex 10:1-13:16.

Jan 20. 10 Shevat

*Beshalach* [When he let go]. Ex 13:17-17:16.

Jan 27. 17 Shevat

*Yitro* [Jethro]. Ex 18:1-20:23.

Feb 3. 24 Shevat

#### ADAR I (Feb 9 - Mar 10)

*Mishpatim* [Laws]. Ex 21:1-24:18.

Feb 10. 1 Adar I

*Terumah* [Donation]. Ex 25:1-27:19.

Feb 17. 8 Adar I

*Tetzevah* [You shall command]. Ex 27:2-30:10.

Feb 24. 15 Adar I

*Ki Tisa* [When you elevate]. Ex 30:11-34:35.

Mar 2. 22 Adar I

*Vayakhel* [He assembled]. Ex 35:1-38:20.

March 9. 29 Adar I.

#### ADAR II (Mar 11 - Apr 8)

*Pekudei* ["Accounts of"]. Ex 38:21-40:38

March 16. 6 Adar II

**The Book of Vayikra**

begins 13 Adar II/March 23

## **TORAH EXPLORATIONS: The Narrowest Point of Light**

by Adam Gottlieb

Every year, as we approach the winter solstice in the Northern hemisphere, we read in the weekly Torah portion about Joseph's journey through darkness and oppression as he spends years incarcerated in the dungeon of Pharaoh. During this time when his faith, patience, and will to live are being tested, Joseph is ultimately saved by his strong connection to the language and symbolism of the dreaming realm. There is much wisdom to be gleaned here from contemplating connections between the symbolism in the story and the seasonal passages in which we read it.

The winter solstice is the longest night of the year, the point at which the darkness of night is at its widest and the light of day is at its narrowest as we experience the physical rhythms of the earth's orbit around the sun. It is, in a sense, the "midnight of the year." Jewish tradition brings our attention even deeper into the interplay of light and darkness by fixing our Festival of Lights — Chanukah — to the new moon that falls closest to the winter solstice, calling us to bring more and more light into the world as the darkness grows deeper and deeper.

Again and again, the themes that we see playing out in the lives of individuals in the book of Genesis set patterns that we see reflected and repeated in the collective life of the people of Israel during the book of Exodus. In the case of Joseph, we witness one man's descent into *Mitzrayim*, literally "the narrow place" (as Egypt is referred to in the Hebrew Bible): We witness his passage through the depths of suffering during his time spent in "the pit," and then his ultimate redemption and rebirth into freedom. A freedom made possible by his understanding of the language of dreams, which is the language of imagination and possibility in the face of limiting situations.

For Joseph as an individual, as for the Hebrew people as a whole, passage through the narrowest, darkest, and most limiting experience of oppression ultimately creates the conditions for a new, transformed life to emerge. This is built on

the foundation of a deep understanding of life's true value and meaning. We see in Nature how darkness is the place from which life emerges in myriad forms:

- seeds sprouting,
- infants forming,
- life itself originating in the depths of the waters.

Our bodies are built to sleep in the dark time of night, and therein to find our dreams, which reveal to us new possibilities and ways of seeing the world. If we utilize the power of darkness, we can face our traumas and transmute our suffering into resilience, our confusion into clarity, and our fears into courage. We can emerge renewed, and our sense of freedom can become a beacon to others.

As the voices of those who escaped slavery traveling by night under the protection of darkness remind us in the old Black American spiritual:

When the sun comes back,  
and the first quail calls  
Follow the drinkin' gourd  
For the old man is waiting  
just to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinkin' gourd

\* \* \*

Another "beacon" image is found in the song, "The Midnight Special." A train would pass by late at night and and shine a light through the windows of the prison:

Let the Midnight Special  
shine its light on me  
let the Midnight Special  
shine its ever loving light on me (cont. p.5)

Lyrics for this prison song were first printed in 1905. Guitarist, singer, and song-writer Huddie William "Lead Belly" Ledbetter (1888-1949) learned and performed it while in prison in the US South and was the first to record the song in the 1930s. There are many versions, but the chorus remains the same.

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: The Narrowest Point of Light, by Adam Gottlieb, cont.

**(cont. from p.4)** I think we can think of this as a winter solstice song. I've written my own verses and lyrics to the song as a kind of meditation on the power of even the narrowest point of light.

"Midnight Special" (Gottlieb/Chicago version)

When you wake up in the morning,  
where does your mind go first?  
Do you remember what you're dreaming? Do  
you bless or curse?  
And in the middle of the night then,  
do you ever hear a train?  
Well if you listen at the window,  
you'll hear the whistle blow again

Let the Midnight Special  
Shine its light on me  
let the Midnight Special  
shine its ever loving light on me

We drink coffee when we're working  
We drink tea to chill out  
Reggae music keeps us floating  
The blues keep us on the ground  
That's how we weather through Chicago,  
The reason we survive at all  
You get to blooming in the springtime  
And digging deeper in the fall

Let the Midnight Special  
Shine its light on me  
let the Midnight Special  
shine its ever loving light on me

Do you remember being children  
and looking up into the sky  
never doubting or forgetting  
what it means to be alive  
if even part of you is still there,  
if any part of you survived  
well, let the music come revive you  
we'll get our freedom by and by

Let the Midnight Special  
Shine its light on me  
let the Midnight Special  
shine its ever loving light on me

May we embrace the power of darkness and narrowness to sharpen our focus on our innermost dreams, and allow our seasons of oppression to transform us so that our visions of freedom may burn ever more brightly when our hour of new possibilities arrives.

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**Bio Note:** I'm Adam Gottlieb, musician, poet, and teaching-artist from Chicago. In my work I focus on collective liberation as a universal sacred tradition. I've organized with a wide range of grassroots groups around issues such as housing justice, anti-gentrification, Indigenous sovereignty, public education, and police/prison abolition. I lead a fusion band, Adam Gottlieb & OneLove, and work as a cantorial artist for Tzedek Chicago, an international Jewish congregation based on core values of justice, equity and solidarity. In the Western Zodiac my birthday falls almost exactly on the cusp of Libra and Scorpio, and in the Chinese Zodiac I was born in the year of the snake. I am the proud dog-parent of a sixteen year old black pug named Nibby.

## **TORAH EXPLORATIONS: 8 Stones in Jacob's Travels:**

as the story shifts from Jacob to Joseph and his brothers  
Torah portions *Vayetzei* (Gen 28:10-32:3) and *Vayishlach* (Gen 32:4-36:43)

**(1) Fleeing and Pausing.** Jacob flees from his brother Esau after stealing his blessing. "He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place." (Gen 28:11)

**(2) Experiencing and Naming.** Overnight, Jacob experiences a ladder full of angels, with God at the top. "Jacob woke from his sleep, saying 'Surely, God was in this place, and I didn't know it. How awesome is this place! House of God, Gateway to Heaven.' Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it." (Gen 28:18)

**(3) Noticing.** Reaching the land where his uncle Laban lives, Jacob notices: "There before his eyes was a well in the open....The stone on the mouth of the well was large. (Gen 29:2)

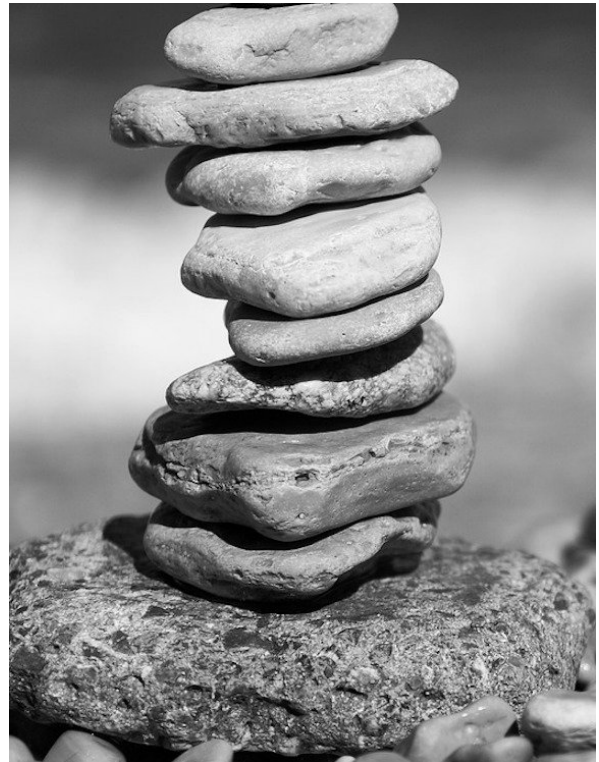
**(4) Opening.** "And when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban, and the flock of his uncle Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of his uncle Laban." (Gen 29:10)

**(5) Leaving and Returning.** After decades away from his first home, Jacob removes his new family from the only home they have ever known and heads back to his birthplace. On the way, "Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar." (Gen 31:45)

**(6) Dividing.** Marking separation of the two families, "Jacob said to his kinsmen, 'Gather stones.' So they took stones and made a mound; and they partook of a meal there by the mound." (Gen 31:46)

**(7) Revisiting and Acknowledging.** Back at Beth-El, the place of his ladder night, "Jacob set up a pillar at the site where [God] had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it." (Gen 35:14)

**(8) New Beginning and Fresh Grief.** With the whole family still traveling, Rachel gives birth by the side of the road, dying in the process. "Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel's grave to this day." (Gen 35:20)



Stones, photo credit: Schorsch via Pixabay.  
Description: 8 stones of varying size/shape piled atop a larger flat one and smaller stones

These are some moments in Jacob's life marked with a stone.

- At #7, Jacob marks an earlier event. Is marking in the moment different from marking later?
- Does his pile of stones reflect our own?

## TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Joseph and Psalm 30

Psalm 30 is full of ups and downs, including the famous line, "weeping comes at night, but joy comes in the morning. Joseph's story, too, is full of ups and downs -- favored child, then in a pit and sold into servitude; successful in the palace, then in prison and forgotten; up again, as second only to pharaoh; finally, begging his brothers to make sure his bones are "brought up" from *Mitzrayim* after he dies. The Joseph story and Psalm 30 also share language:

### Psalm 30

- 1) A Psalm; a Song at the Dedication of the House; of David.
- 2) I will extol You, YHVH, for You have raised me up, and not let my enemies rejoice over me.
- 3) YHVH, my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me.
- 4) YHVH, You brought me up from Sheol, preserved me from going down to the pit [**bor**]
- 5) O you faithful of YHVH, sing to God, praise God's holy name
- 6) For God is angry but a moment, and when God is pleased there is life.  
One may lie down weeping at nightfall; but at dawn there are shouts of joy.
- 7) When I was untroubled, I thought, "I shall never be shaken,"
- 8) for You, YHVH, when You were pleased, made [me] firm as a mighty mountain.  
When You hid Your face, I was terrified [**nivhal**]
- 9) I called to You, YHVH, to my Sovereign I made appeal [**etchanan**]
- 10) "What is to be gained from my death [**mah betzah b'dami**] from my descent into the Pit?  
Can dust praise You? Can it declare Your faithfulness?
- 11) Hear, YHVH and have mercy on me; YHVH, be my help!"
- 12) You turned my lament into dancing,  
You undid my sackcloth [**pitachta saki**] and girded me with joy,
- 13) that [my] whole being might sing hymns to You endlessly;  
YHVH, my God, I will praise You forever. -- translation adapted from Jewish Publication Society

Verse 4 -- the pit, **bor** -- echoes Gen 37: 23-24:

(23) When Joseph came up to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the ornamented tunic that he was wearing, (24) and took him and cast him into the pit [**ha-bor**]. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Verse 8 -- terror, **nivhal** -- echoes Gen 45:3

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still well?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumbfounded were they [**nivhalu**] on account of him.

Verse 9 -- appealed, **etchanan** -- echoes Gen 42:21

They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded [**v'hitchannu**] with us. That is why this distress has come upon us."

Verse 10 -- what is gained from my death (literally: blood), **mah betzah b'dami** -- echoes Gen 37:26

Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain [**mah betzah**] by killing our brother and covering up his blood [**damo**]?"

Verse 12 -- undid my sackcloth, **pitachta saki** -- echoes Gen 42:27

As one of them was opening his sack [**va-yiftach ha-echad et-sako**] to give feed to his ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag.

## TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Joseph and Zelda Reread the Pit

As the Book of Genesis closes, Jacob dies and the brothers return to Canaan to bury their father (Gen 50:13). An ancient midrash adds that, on the journey, Joseph notices, by the side of the road, the pit where his brothers threw him decades before.

Watching Joseph look into the pit, the brothers worry. They do not believe Joseph has forgiven their past deeds and continue to fear he will take revenge. While the brothers are fretting, though, Joseph's thoughts are quite different.

Joseph recognizes the pit as the source of all that happened to him later: his servitude and incarceration in *Mitzrayim*, eventual rise to power, marriage and children. Most importantly to the Genesis story, he believes that his experience, beginning with this pit, was God's way of helping the whole family when famine strikes their homeland. Joseph recites a blessing: "Blessed is The One Who performed a miracle for me in this place." (*Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi 17*)

The teacher Avivah Zornberg writes:

[Joseph] has gone to the trouble of returning to that place of his terror in order to bring closure to the old narrative. He makes the blessing for a personal miracle, claiming the site of his trauma as the site of redemption. By this act, he rereads the pit as a space of rebirth, transforming pain into hope. The grave has become a womb.

-- *The Murmuring Deep*, p.319

What Zornberg describes is powerful and hopeful. And, maybe this kind of re-reading of our past stories is needed for reconciliation. However, this

*The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*. Penguin/Random House, 2011.

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg is a contemporary scholar who teaches and writes about Torah. She often includes literary and psychological insights. Zornberg was born in Scotland and has lived in Jerusalem since 1980.

seems to be asking a lot of Joseph, who was once a victim of his brothers' mean schemes.

The years seem to have given Joseph a different perspective.... one that is not focused on blame. The brothers do not seem to share this view, though: They are still feeling guilty and still worried that Joseph, who now has much more power than they do, will retaliate.

....Of course, Genesis is not a soap opera or a novel. And it's not a psychology or a self-help book. But it can be helpful to consider these stories, along with commentary from over the centuries, to see what might reflect on our own stories.... and vice versa....

The Israeli poet known as Zelda (1914-1984) also shared thoughts about the pit and the past:

...The past is not a piece of  
jewelry sealed in a crystal box  
nor is it a snake preserved  
in a bottle of formaldehyde—  
The past trembles within the present  
when the present falls  
into a pit the past goes  
with it —  
when the past looks  
toward heaven all of life  
is upraised, even the distant past.  
— Zelda, from "In That Strange Night"

"When the present falls into a pit, the past goes with it." A little like Psalm 30's reflection on struggles, past and present.

Zelda Schneersohn Mishkovsky (1914-1984) was born in Russia and moved to pre-State Palestine as a child. This poem, translated by Edward Feld, appears in the *Selichot* [forgiveness] prayers of *Machzor Lev Shalem*, high holiday prayerbook of the Conservative movement. (NY: Rabbinical Assembly, 2010).



## TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Joseph, Power, and Relationship

### Joseph's Power

As already discussed, Joseph experiences lots of ups and downs: personally, with his family of origin, and in his engagements with *Mitzrayim*, biblical Egypt: arriving as property and ending as a high-ranking, powerful official.

His power has a huge impact on his own family and the nation they eventually become. Through his service to Pharaoh, Joseph reunites with his brothers and their families. He arranges for the whole clan to settle in *Mitzrayim* during a famine; the family is invited to tend the crown's cattle, and they thrive becoming a sort of not-quite-nation.

At the end of Genesis, the brothers are described as first sojourning, then settling, and finally, acquiring land -- or, perhaps, being grabbed by the land. The rest of the *Mitzrayim-ites* also experience a kind of progression with regard to the land: at first they sell their cattle to Pharaoh due to the famine; then their land; finally, they offer themselves as *avadim* [serfs] in exchange for basic supplies (Gen 47:19).

In this way, Joseph engineers an enormous national economic shift. Commentaries over the centuries have seen this as a brilliant strategy for managing the crisis and/or a huge land- and resource-grab for the crown.

Joseph's ups and downs are essential to the literary and religious themes of the story. There is one constant, however, that cannot be overlooked: Pharaoh is never down. His power remains unchanged.

### Joseph's Relationships

Joseph lived decades in *Mitzrayim* separated from his birth family. This is one reason midrash tells us that Joseph needed "the Torah of Exile," explored a bit in *Kislev Divrei Matir Asurim*. Such a need is not mentioned for his brothers, perhaps because they arrive together, with their entire households.

We don't learn many details about his brothers' lives or what kind of relationships they had with *Mitzrayim* culture and people. Were they living

completely separate lives? Or were they neighbors, maybe even family?

We do know Joseph's career, how he dressed, what he ate, and a little about his wife -- all *Mitzrayim-ite*. When Jacob dies, Joseph arranges embalming, a *Mitzrayim-ite* practice, and 40 days of mourning in the land where the clan had settled.

But Joseph also arranges for burial "back home" in Canaan. In essence, Joseph organizes an interfaith, intercultural memorial for Jacob. But this hint is one of the few clues as to how Jacob's extended family and the existing culture interacted.

### After Joseph

At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, we are told that there were two roads to *Mitzrayim*:

Now these are the names of the sons of *Yisrael*, who came into *Mitzrayim* with Jacob, every man his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher...And Joseph was in *Mitzrayim* already. -- Exodus 1:1-5

Of course, *Mitzrayim-ites* must have been already in the land for many generations. But we don't learn much about them.

We don't learn much about the brothers, either, in Genesis or here. Even Judah -- whose name will become one name for the nation -- only gets a main role in one chapter (Gen 38). Jacob's death speech (Gen 49) mentions each brother, but it's set in the story of Joseph's leadership.

And, at the start of Exodus, the focus is still on Joseph: "And Joseph died, and all his kindred, and all that generation" (Ex 1:6). Immediately afterward, the *Yisrael-ites* increase and fill the land (Ex 1:7), with *Yisrael-ite* women birthing so quickly there is no time for the midwives to attend (Ex 1:19). One generation dies -- or is it all about Joseph, the only one named in the verse? -- and the *Yisrael-ites* are suddenly nameless, almost inhuman: a fertile pack spreading out across the land.

(cont. p.10)

**(Continued from p.9)**

Next: "A new king arose who didn't know Joseph" (Ex 1:8). Immediately after that, Pharaoh schemes to oppress the *Yisrael-ites* (Ex 1:9ff), and the brutal story of enslavement begins.

Fourteen chapters of Genesis tell about Joseph's work in and for the government, about his access to power and how that protected his family. Before the tenth verse of Exodus, all that is gone... and worse, as the descendants of Joseph's family are suddenly enemies of the state to be feared.

What can this story tell us about power? About how personal relationships relate, or don't, to cross-cultural understanding?

What might we learn about different "roads" to one place and how those roads influence the experience there?

As we leave Genesis and move into Exodus, may we find new ways forward through our personal stories and the wider Torah tale.

Drink water from your own cistern, Running water from your own well.

Your springs will gush forth, In streams in the public squares.

They will be yours alone, Others having no part with you. -- Proverbs 5:15-17

cistern = *borkha* -- your own pit, in a sense. Water and well are linked in commentary with Torah.

One reading: Each of us has our own stuff to deal with. And we each have our own Torah to understand and to share.....

.... so do please consider sharing yours!



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**Who We Are**

We are a collection of Chaplains, Rabbis, Cantors, Kohanot/Hebrew Priestesses, advocates, activists, volunteers, loved ones of incarcerated people, and people with direct experience of incarceration. We are an all volunteer group who began meeting in 2021. We live and work across Turtle Island, in territories, cities, and rural settings of the US and Canada.

**Vision**

We are striving toward a world free from oppression, where aspects of social identity like race, class, and gender no longer limit our safety, opportunities, and agency to live into the fullness of our sacred potential.

We are striving toward a world where individuals are mutually accountable to one another and where wrongdoing is addressed through reparative and transformative justice, guaranteeing the human dignity of all parties.

We are striving toward a world where all people are provided with the conditions for healing trauma and for *teshuvah* (repentance/restoration), surrounded by resources, guidance, and social support networks.

We are striving toward a world where nobody is isolated and everyone has opportunities to connect to something larger than ourselves—whether to community, culture, or spirituality. Within that world, we envision a Judaism that is radically welcoming and accessible to all seekers.

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*Divrei Matir Asurim* is a publication to promote religious education and solidarity among members and all interested.

If not otherwise noted, content is provided by V. Spatz, an outside member of Matir Asurim. Please consider sharing your own and providing your feedback.