

INCARCERATION

# On Joseph and Solitary Confinement

By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

When Joseph was jailed, wrongly accused  
of seducing his master's wife, what did he feel?

Did he remember his first stint in solitary,  
the pit where his brothers threw him –

empty of water but crawling with scorpions,  
empty of Torah but reeking with resentment?

Each time he prepared to start over  
life cast him down someplace worse.

But he knew all along that God was with him  
and that God meant everything for good.

And those imprisoned today – in what  
can they trust? Not in our nation's justice

when black men receive longer sentences  
than white though their crime is the same;

not in police who choose to stop and frisk  
dark skin though addiction knows no color.

Compassionate One, Judge of Truth: rouse us  
from slumber in which we let injustice pass.

Wake us to the nightmare of our prison system.  
Goad us to create change. For the sake of children

who learn that no one cares how violent  
their streets, how broken their lives;

for the sake of our own souls, damaged  
every time we look away.