

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed.

Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak.

His brothers are envious and hate him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, and sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He is acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever, as it were, he is onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He runs Potiphar's household. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to God.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house: "God was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realised that God was with [Joseph], and that God granted success to everything he did." (39:2-3).

"As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, God blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. God's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field." (39:5)

Here is Joseph in prison: "God was with Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favour with the warden of the dungeon. Soon, the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. God was with [Joseph], and God granted him success in everything he did." (39:21-

23).

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams: "Interpretations are God's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about [your dreams]." (40:8)

Of no other figure in Tanakh is this said so clearly, consistently and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised and successful and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but God who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is God who makes what she wants morally impossible: "How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before God!" (39:9)

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids. (39:2) This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of God (as for Joseph's dreams -- were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? -- that is another story for another time).

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom: "When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me a favour and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place." (40:14)

What happens? "The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him." (40:23) The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended the parsha of Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question "What happens next?" is intense, and we



have to wait a week to know.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them -- itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. "Two full years passed." Those, the words with which our parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But God did not forget about him. God, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events -- specifically Pharaoh's dreams -- that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. God is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes -- as here -- He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures -- it wasn't me; it was someone else's fault; I couldn't help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn't so. We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will." God is intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle -- or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said God does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by God. The Pharisees believed in both fate and free will. "It was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph

as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week's parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph's acts -- his interpretation of the steward's dream and his plea for freedom -- he would not have left prison. But without divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh's dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: "All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: "We have to believe in free will: we have no choice." We and God are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without God's help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank God. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success he attributes it to God. That is how we too should live. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not. But he behaved like a stranger and spoke harshly to them. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of, and said unto them, ‘You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.’” (Genesis 42:8–9) In the Torah portion of Miketz, the drama of Joseph and his brothers takes on new dimensions. From a situation in which Joseph is the hunted and the brothers are the hunters, we move into the very opposite. Joseph becomes the hunter and the brothers the hunted, although they don't understand why!

But we also realize that until now the text has been silent about Joseph's relationship to his past. This forces us to query how Joseph can spend twenty-two years of his life in a foreign country like Egypt without ever looking over his shoulder to find out how his family in Canaan is faring. When he sat in Egyptian prisons it was impossible to communicate, but what about the years when he ruled as the Grand Vizier of a great empire? Could he not have sent servants, carrier pigeons, messages on papyrus? Even if he had no desire ever to see his brothers again, should his aged father who loved him so much have been made to suffer for their sins?

Nahmanides tells us that Egypt is only a six-day journey from Hebron but "...even if it was a year's journey, he should have notified him" (Genesis 42:9). The longer Joseph is silent, the longer Jacob is deprived of his beloved son, the greater our question on Joseph's character.

Nahmanides explains that Joseph was prevented from contacting his father because he was driven by his dreams, and guided by their inevitable course. It was his intention to wait until all elements of his dream – the sun, moon and eleven stars, symbolic of his father, mother and eleven brothers bowing down to him – came together in Egypt, when and where the details could be fulfilled exactly. The dreams controlled Joseph. Emotions could not outweigh what he believed was destiny. Therefore, sending word home before the famine would force his entire family to go down to Egypt and would have negated the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled (Nahmanides on Genesis 42:9).

Abarbanel paints Joseph differently, saying that it was impossible for him to contact his father until he was convinced that his brothers had truly repented; otherwise the joyous news that Joseph was still alive would have also meant a father facing ten lying brothers who now would be forced to reveal their role in the murderous deception amidst all sorts of recriminations. From this perspective everything Joseph does while concealing his identity is intended to increase the brothers' awareness, reliving what they inflicted upon him. Since he was thrown into a pit, he puts them in a pit. Then he tells them to return home without Shimon whom he keeps in prison as a hostage until Benjamin will be brought to Egypt. This should make them realize that for the second time in their lives they are returning with a brother missing – and Shimon had been the primary instigator against Joseph. And indeed they declare, "We deserve to be punished because of what we did to our brother. We saw him pleading with us, but we would not listen..." (Genesis 42:21).

It is only after Joseph treats Benjamin with favoritism, and then condemns him to imprisonment as a thief – and Judah offers himself and all the brothers in Benjamin's stead – that Joseph realizes the depth of his brothers' repentance. After all, Benjamin is also a son of Rachel, a favorite of Jacob – and this could have been a marvelous opportunity to be rid of him as they had gotten rid of Joseph. If the brothers are now willing to offer themselves as slaves so that their father will not have to suffer further grief at the loss of Benjamin, they apparently really have changed and repented for their sale of Joseph!

A third way to understand why Joseph didn't get in touch with his family is the simplest in terms of the plain meaning of the text. What happened to Joseph in Egypt was a natural result of remembrances of past resentments, a man who was almost murdered by his own brothers, whom he never suspected bore him such evil designs.

Until he had been cast into the pit, Joseph was basically an innocent child, basking in the love of his father with no comprehension as to how much his brothers hated him. He was so beloved that he took that love for granted; he naïvely and unselfconsciously

believed it was shared by everyone in his family. Only someone with absolutely no guile could have advertised his supercilious dreams of mastery over his brothers to those very same brothers. But in the harsh reflection of the fact that his brothers were willing to leave him to die in a provision-less pit, the venom of their hatred was clear.

And in addition to condemning his brothers, he lays a good part of the blame upon the frail shoulders of his father, who should have realized where his unbridled favoritism would lead. The coat of beautiful colors was the first thing the brothers tore off him, eventually turning it into a blood-soaked rag. In the pit, Joseph comes to realize that the ingredients of excessive love can be transformed into a poisonous potion and that his father had totally mismanaged the family dynamic. One might even justify Joseph's uttering in the pit: I hate my father's house. I will never communicate with my father or my brothers again.

Joseph's subsequent behavior in Egypt would indicate that he really tried to escape his father's house, severing all ties to the past. The Midrash teaches that there are three reasons why the Jews didn't assimilate in Egypt: "They didn't change their names, their clothes, or their language." If the Midrash is an indication of how to protect oneself against assimilation, Joseph, who changed all three, left himself completely open. The first step begins after his success in interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. In reward, Joseph is appointed Grand Vizier, and the text is explicit about his change of garb: "[Pharaoh] had him dressed in the finest linen garments; and placed a gold chain around his neck..." (Genesis 41:42).

The second change is a new name which Pharaoh gives him, Tzofnat Paneach – from all textual indication, an Egyptian name. With this new name, he marries Asnat, the daughter of the priest of On, hardly a fitting match for Jacob's beloved son and Abraham's great-grandson.

When the first child of Tzofnat and Asnat is born, the name given to the boy, Menasheh, seems to hammer in the nail of farewell to Joseph's former life. "God has allowed me to forget my troubles and my father's house" (Genesis 41:51), the verb 'nasheh' meaning forgetting.

And although the Jewish slaves in Egypt may not have changed their language, Joseph obviously did. Amongst themselves, his brothers speak Hebrew; "...They knew not that Joseph understood them, for the interpreter was between them" (Genesis 42:23), testifies the biblical text.

Given such changes, one may very well conclude that the Grand Vizier and Joseph, the son of Jacob, had drifted worlds away from each other. To be sure, in his moral life, Joseph



certainly remains true to the teachings of his father and grandfather. He demonstrates almost superhuman piety in rejecting the advances of Mrs. Potiphar – being unable to display faithlessness to his generous employer and still unwilling to “sin against God” (Genesis 39:9). And indeed, he turns to God constantly, stressing that whatever he accomplishes is actually due to the Almighty. However, the name of God the text chooses is Elokim, the universal presence of the universe, while the four-letter personal and more nationalistic (Abrahamic) name is deliberately avoided.

Joseph remains moral and may even privately have conducted himself in accordance with his childhood rituals. However, certainly from the public perspective, he willfully turned himself into a consummate Egyptian. And I would certainly maintain that he has no desire to contact the family which caused him such pain and suffering – especially his father, who must ultimately assume responsibility, albeit inadvertent, for the sibling enmity. And indeed, it would seem that Joseph had succeeded in erasing his childhood years and settling in quite well in the assimilating environment of Egypt – until his brothers’ arrival to purchase food.

Their arrival brings back a flood of thoughts, memories and emotions which Joseph had desperately tried to repress. First, we see his anger. He treats his brothers with understandable hatred and punishes them by taking his revenge and casting them into a dungeon similar to the one they had cast him into. But that night he cannot sleep, his mind overactive with pining for his full brother Benjamin, who had been too young to join his half-brothers in their crime against Joseph. Joseph aches to see this pure and whole brother from his same mother – and so sends the brothers (sans Shimon) back with the mission to return with Benjamin.

Joseph’s ruse with the silver goblet plan may very well have been to keep Benjamin at his side, thereby holding on to a part of the past he now realizes he has deeply missed, while rejecting the rest. But when Judah evokes the image of an old grieving father whose life will be reduced to a pathetic waste if word reaches him that Benjamin has become a slave in Egypt, Joseph, the Grand Vizier breaks down.

Perhaps as Judah speaks, Joseph poignantly remembers Shabbat moments inside his father’s tent, whose simple beauty far eclipses the rowdy Egyptian debaucheries. Perhaps, he conjures the wisdom of Jewish teachings he heard as a child at his father’s knee. The mature Joseph finally understands that although his father may have ‘set up’ the family dysfunction, it was not because he loved Joseph too little, but rather because he loved Joseph too much. And if Jacob’s love had been the first step causing Joseph’s alienation from the family, it was that same love which had given him the ego strength to always land on his feet and eventually return to his father’s and brothers’ embrace.

In effect, according to this interpretation, Joseph

was our first ba’al teshuva (penitent). The Joseph stories – and the book of Genesis – conclude, “And Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father’s house” (Genesis 50:22) – he and his father’s household, he and his father’s lifestyle from their common home in the land of Canaan. He even recognizes the centrality of the land of Israel, telling them with his dying breath that God will surely remember them and take them to the land He promised their fathers, adjuring them at that time “to bring up my bones from this place [Egypt] with you” (Genesis 50:22).

From this perspective, Joseph teaches that no matter how far one wanders, one always returns in some fashion to ‘beit abba’, one’s earliest memories and one’s original traditions. This is especially true if those formative years were filled with parental love. ©2024 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Yosef always expected his dreams to come true in this world. So did his father Yaakov. And in truth so did the brothers and that is why he discomfited them so deeply. Had they felt the dreams of Yosef to be utter nonsense they would not have reacted as strongly when he related the dreams to them. They were threatened not because the dreams were nothing but rather because they were something.

Their apparent blindness and stubbornness, at not recognizing Yosef standing before them, stemmed from their necessity to deny the validity of his dreams. When Yosef will reveal himself to his brothers they will instinctively believe him because of the stock they subconsciously placed in his dreams all along.

Practical people are afraid of dreamers not because of the dreamer’s impracticality but because the dreamer may turn out to be right after all. This has been proven time and again in Jewish history. The holiday of Chanukah, that we are currently celebrating, proves the dreams of the Maccabees overcame the practicalities of the Hellenist Jews who chose to survive by becoming more Greek than Jewish.

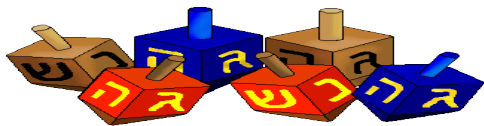
Jews over the ages could have reasonably quit and given up the struggle to survive as Jews countless times. It was always the dreamers that persevered and they have always been proven to be right and practical.

The Torah attributes the success of Yosef to the fact that he remembered his dreams. It is one thing to remember dreams of grandeur when one is poor and imprisoned. Then the dream provides hope and resilience to somehow continue. Yosef’s greatness lies in his ability to remember and believe those dreams when he has risen to power. He could easily have ignored his brothers and put all of his past behind him.

He was now a great success so why continue to pursue his dreams. which by so doing could ultimately sorely endanger his position and achievements.

But Yosef doggedly pursues the full realization of his dreams. Many times in life we are frightened of advancing because we think we might risk what we already have. Judaism preaches caution in tactics and how to achieve certain goals, both spiritual and physical. But it never advocates compromising the great Jewish dreams as outlined in our Torah and tradition.

We are bidden to be prudent about life's decisions but the goal of ascending the ladder of Yaakov is never erased from our consciousness. When seeing his brothers before him, Yosef has the choice to leave everything as it is. But he chooses to pursue his dreams to their fateful end. That has become a lesson for all later generations of Jews as well. The full realization of Yosef's dream is the catalyst for reuniting all of Israel as a nation. ©2024 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com



RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Anger can energize people to act more passionately and more powerfully. But we must also remember that anger consumes a great deal of energy – and everyone, even the youngest and most ardent among us, have limits to our energy. The energy we possess should be used constructively rather than expended destructively, in ineffective fury and rage.

But it is not simple to deal with anger. It often requires the help of others, as reflected in the Joseph story. Joseph had every reason to be angry – after all, his brothers had sold him into slavery. And so, when his brothers came to Egypt, Joseph expressed his anger by doing to them precisely what they did to him. He accuses them of being spies, casts them into a dungeon just as he was thrown into a pit, and takes Simon – one of the prime movers of Joseph's sale – hostage.

With help, Joseph's rage is abated.

- The Talmud notes that when appearing before Joseph, Benjamin reveals that his ten children are named for Joseph. This no doubt stirs Joseph's compassion (Rashi, Genesis 43:30; Sotah 36b).

- Yet another Midrash notes that Manasseh served as his father's interpreter (Rashi, Genesis 42:23; Bereishit Rabbah 91:8). Is it possible that Manasseh played a role in convincing Joseph that the brother who stole his goblet should become a slave, while the others would be freed? This was a nonaggressive, less angry sentence, as in truth, the brother who stole the goblet should have been killed and the others taken as slaves. If so, Manasseh's mercy may have impacted Joseph (Genesis 44:9, 10, 17).

- And when Benjamin is detained by Joseph for allegedly stealing the goblet, the same Judah who twenty-two years earlier instigated the sale of Joseph now comes to the defense of Benjamin. Here Judah shows his remorse, which again, must have touched Joseph's soul (Genesis 44:18–34).

Only after Joseph heard that his brother Benjamin had missed him so, only after his son Manasseh helped temper the brothers' sentence, only after Judah defended Benjamin, was Joseph's anger calmed. Through Benjamin, Manasseh, and Judah, Joseph's outrage was counterbalanced; he was able to learn from them the importance of compassion, of running from anger.

These lessons, as taught by Benjamin, Manasseh, and Judah, were especially poignant as each would take a backseat to a sibling during their lives (Benjamin to Joseph, Manasseh to Ephraim, and Judah to Joseph). When hearing their message, the angry, aggrieved Joseph becomes soft, caring, and forgiving – able to reveal himself to his brothers. ©2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

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Chanukah

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Outside of Israel, Shavuot is a two-day *Yom Tov*, and both Pesach and Sukkot begin and end with two days of *Yom Tov* as well. In ancient times, the new month was proclaimed by the *Beit Din* in Jerusalem. Messages were then sent to the surrounding and outlying communities, telling them when the new month began. Because the more distant communities did not receive the message before the start of the holidays, those living outside Israel observed two days of *Yom Tov* due to the uncertainty of the correct date. Although today there is a set calendar, we still maintain this tradition of observing two days in the Diaspora.

Nevertheless, when it comes to Chanukah, everybody celebrates it for eight days, including those in the Diaspora. Some explain that we only add a day to biblical holidays but not to rabbinic ones (such as Chanukah). Others feel that the number eight has special significance vis-a-vis Chanukah. This is either because one of the evil decrees of the Greeks against the Jews banned circumcision, which takes place on the eighth day, or because Chanukah was designed to parallel Sukkot (which at the time of Chanukah's origin was eight days long even in the Diaspora).

We would like to suggest an additional approach. The *Beit Yosef* poses a famous question: Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? Since the Jews found enough oil to last for one day, the miracle lasted for only seven days. One of the answers proposed

is that had they celebrated seven days, then on the fourth day it would have been impossible to tell who was following Beit Hillel and who was following Beit Shammai. Beit Shammai says that on the first night we light eight candles, and on each succeeding night we decrease the number by one. On the final day of the holiday, only one candle is lit. In contrast, Beit Hillel maintains that on the first night we light one candle, and on each succeeding night we increase the number by one. Thus on the eighth day, eight candles are lit. (This is the current custom.) It follows, then, that if we celebrated only seven days of Chanukah, on the fourth day there would be no discernible difference between those following Beit Hillel and those following Beit Shammai (as both would light four candles). To avoid this problem, Chanukah is eight days and not seven. Similarly, if we were to add a day (as we do on other holidays) and celebrate nine days of Chanukah in the Diaspora, this problem would arise on the fifth night. For this reason we do not add a day in the Diaspora, but rather celebrate Chanukah for eight days everywhere.

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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Yosef's Brothers Go Down to Egypt

When the seven good years predicted by Yosef had finished, the people of Mitzrayim (Egypt) began to experience the seven bad years of the famine.

Any grain that they had stored themselves rotted, but the grain that Yosef had stored from the taxes he had imposed on the people remained fresh. This was enacted by Hashem so that they would immediately have to seek grain from Yosef. The same appeared to be true of all the lands surrounding Egypt, which included Canaan, where Ya'akov and his sons lived. Mizrahi argues that the famine did not yet reach Canaan, but did affect the Southern lands of Yishmael and Eisav.

The Torah tells us, "And the seven years of abundance that came to pass in the land of Egypt ended. And the seven years of famine began approaching, just as Yosef had said; and there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. All the land of Egypt hungered, and the people cried out to Par'aoth for bread. So Par'aoth said to all of Egypt, 'Go to Yosef. Whatever he says to you, you should do.' And the famine spread over all the face of the land, Yosef opened all that had within them and sold to Egypt; and the famine

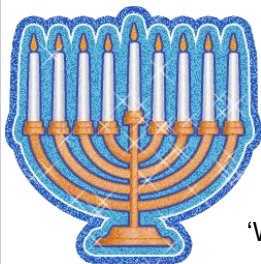
became severe in the land of Egypt. All the earth came to Egypt, to Yosef, to buy provisions, for the famine had become severe in all the land. Ya'akov saw that there was grain in Egypt; so he said to his sons, 'Why do you make yourselves

conspicuous?' And he said, 'Behold, I have heard that there are provisions in Egypt; go down there and purchase us from there, that we may live and not die.' So Yosef's brothers –ten of them—went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Binyamin, Yosef's brother, Ya'akov did not send along with his brothers, for he said, 'Lest disaster befall him.' So the sons of Ya'akov came to buy provisions among the arrivals, for the famine was in the land of Canaan."

There are two sentences which, when read together, seem to contradict each other. In one sentence we are told that the famine was in all the lands, but there was bread in Egypt. In the sentence which follows, we are told that Egypt hungered and they cried to Par'aoth for bread. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the bread mentioned in the first sentence was the grain which Yosef had stored in each city during the good years. This grain was not available to the people until it was purchased from the granaries that Yosef had established. When the process of purchase is retold at a later section of this parasha, we are able to see the way in which Yosef acquired all of the land and the wealth of Egypt for Par'aoth. There were Egyptians and others who themselves stored extra grain during the abundant years, but Hashem arranged for all of their grain to rot, thus creating dependence on Egypt for everyone. This somewhat contradicts an explanation that we will see later for the state of Ya'akov's family during the famine.

There is a word in Ya'akov's response to the famine which has many different meanings and gives us a variety of interpretations of Ya'akov's reaction. The Torah states, "Ya'akov saw that there was grain in Egypt; so he said to his sons, 'Why do you make yourselves conspicuous (titra'u)?'" The verb is in the hitpa'el, a form of the verb which indicates to act as if one agrees with the verb, namely in this case, to act as if one is satiated. This would indicate that the Torah is saying, "why act as if you are satiated (and do not need to go to Egypt.) The Ramban indicates that Ya'akov was saying, "Do not show yourselves before the children of Eisav and Yishmael as having plenty to eat." The Ramban also quotes others who say that the translation is an expression of leanness. This would indicate that the brothers did not have sufficient grain to eat and should have gone to Egypt already. Ya'akov's command to go to Egypt, "that we may live and not die," indicated that Ya'akov did not want to have the brothers wait until the last minute when all the extra grain they had stored would be gone in Canaan. The families might starve if the brothers procrastinated too long.

Rashi explains that the sons of Ya'akov did not need to go purchase food at that time because they had stored away some food for later use and did not need to travel to Egypt yet. That would mean that they were satiated, but Ya'akov had a different reason to send them now. Ya'akov's concern was much greater. Eisav's and



Yishmael's families would travel through Canaan on their way to Egypt. If it appeared that the B'nei Yisrael still had food while others were starving, the brothers might become jealous and attack the B'nei Yisrael to take their grain from the storehouses. The Maharsha indicates that the Canaanites also had no food, but it was less likely for them to be jealous because they were not family.

All ten brothers went down to Egypt to purchase grain. Sforno explains that the Egyptians would only sell enough grain to each person for his immediate family. The Abarbanel tells us that each of the brothers were married by this time, and each brother would need to buy food, sufficient enough for his own family. Yet, Binyamin was not permitted to go, and this explanation does not account for either his family or Ya'akov himself. The only reason for Binyamin to remain with his father is the fear that Ya'akov had of losing both sons of his favorite wife, Rachel. This was, at least, according to the plans of Man. It is possible that Hashem designed that Binyamin unwittingly would be absent at Yosef's first encounter with his brothers, because Binyamin had not been present at the sale of Yosef by his ten brothers. Rashi explains that the Torah calls them "the brothers of Yosef" rather than the "sons of Ya'akov" because they regretted selling Yosef and vowed to work together to try to locate him and free him from Egypt.

It is noted that Binyamin was held back by his father, "lest disaster befall him." Binyamin is called Yosef's brother and is not identified with the ten other brothers. Binyamin was the only brother who was the son of Rachel together with Yosef. Our Rabbis tell us that there is a greater chance of disaster on the road than at home. Ya'akov did not want lose the comfort that Binyamin provided him after the loss of Rachel and Yosef. The trials and tribulations of Ya'akov during this famine were emotionally significant, and he tried to control the situation by keeping Binyamin by his side. This was not Hashem's plan, as we often discover only after the fact. We face those same decisions in life. May we have faith that Hashem is leading on on His path which is best for us. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin



RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

The thin ears swallowed the seven full ears, and Pharaoh awoke and behold it was a dream." (Beraishis 41:7) Pharaoh dreamed two dreams of similar content and he looked for someone to interpret them to his satisfaction. This would be the opening for Yosef to come into the picture as a man of wisdom and insight, as well as humility. It would set the stage for his rise to power and the advent of the Jewish People to Egypt.

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh dreamed a dream, then awoke. Then, he slept again, and when he awoke the second time, he became aware that what he had seen was a dream. Why was it necessary for this all to transpire?

On one hand, the two variations of the dream were necessary to convey that this was a question of famine as opposed to war, as the commentaries explain. Each dream provided some necessary information, but we'd like to focus on the waking up.

It says that Pharaoh awoke, but it is unclear whether he actually woke up, or simply imagined that he did, and kept sleeping. The dreams needed to be divided by a period of awareness and wakefulness so that it was clear there was a repetition and not that it was one long dream. That's why he had to "awaken" in between.

In order to ensure that Pharaoh took it seriously, the dream had to be repeated. Of course, Yosef told Pharaoh this was a sign of the swift manifestation of the dreams, but in truth, there was something else in it. When people experience a dream, or some other inspiration or fright that shakes them up, human nature is to shrug it off and forget about it. Therefore, Hashem had to repeat the dream so Pharaoh would be so upset that he would not let the moment go by without acting upon it.

In life, we are confronted by messages all the time. Sometimes we get them and take them to heart. Sometimes we don't like what they're telling us, and we ignore them. Other times, we recognize the message but the intensity fades with time, and it's lost. Pharaoh needed to get the message, so the dream was repeated, as many lessons in our lives are, so we get the point.

But on Chanuka, when we focus on the miracle of the oil, we're fanning the flames of the inspiration to keep them lit. The miracle was relatively small, observed by only a few in the Bais HaMikdash, but the message that Hashem was proud of us resonated clearly through it. In order not to lose that, we re-enact it each year, lighting the flames and letting everyone know that Hashem loves us and wants us to purify ourselves. He wants us to be as dedicated to Him as He is to us, and that is the greatest gift we could ask for.

R' Chatzkel Abramsky, z"l, was once riding in an Israeli cab and the driver told him a story.

"After our IDF military service was over," said the cabbie, "some friends and I went on a hiking and camping trip. In the middle of the night, we heard shouts and awoke to find a large snake wrapped around one of my friends. It was squeezing him so hard he could not breathe."

"We didn't know what to do, as it slowly killed him, and one of my friends said, "You're going to die, say 'Shema Yisrael!'" As he did, the snake uncoiled and slithered away. He was so moved that he became a baal Teshuva, studied Torah, and is completely religious today."

R' Chatzkel asked him, "And what about you? Did you become more religious too?"

"Me?" replied the taxi driver quizzically, "Why should I have become more religious? The snake wasn't wrapped around me!" © 2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

“Why display yourselves when you are satiated, before the children of Esav and Yishmael?" (Rashi, Beraishis 42:1). That is the Gemara's (Taanis 10b) understanding of Yaakov Avinu's exhortation to his sons, *lama tisra'u* (understood, apparently, as "why be conspicuous?"). His rhetorical question was posed to ensure that "they will [the children of Esav and Yishmael] will not be jealous of you...." as he sends them to Mitrayim to garner food during the famine.

Chazal say that, in general, "a person should not indulge in luxury" [ibid]. But especially when it might generate jealousy and resultant animosity.

It is a lesson for the ages, and needed throughout the ages. Among others, the Kli Yakar, who died in 1619, lamented the fact that some Jews' homes and possessions in his time proclaimed their material success. The problem has hardly disappeared today.

(One of the things that attracted me to the community where I live was the basic uniformity of the homes there. There are no mansions here, not even McMansions.)

Several commentaries wonder at the Gemara's reference, in the opening quote above, to the progeny of Esav and Yishmael. Yaakov was in Cna'an. Wouldn't it have made more sense for Chazal to make their point about not standing out with regard to Yaakov's neighbors, the Cna'ananim? There's no reason to believe that Esav and Yishmael's people were nearby.

What occurs to me is that there is a poignant prescience in Chazal's comment. They may have sensed, or even foreseen, a distant but long-running future of Klal Yisrael, where so many of its members would be residing, as has been the case for many centuries, amid cultures associated with Esav and Yishmael. © 2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Miketz, we find Paroh having two dreams that none of his advisors can interpret satisfactorily. Yosef is then introduced, and he tells of the 7 years of plenty that will be followed with the 7 years of hunger. As part of the interpretation of the dreams, Yosef tells Paroh to appoint a man that is 'smart and wise' to overlook the storage of food for the hunger years. Paroh promptly appoints Yosef as that person, reasoning that Yosef has the 'spirit of G-d', and therefore is smart and wise. Paroh then gives Yosef more power

then anyone in the entire country. Many of these actions need explanation.... Why would Paroh need a wise man to be in charge of storing food? Wouldn't it be enough to have an efficient person? And if it was important to have a 'smart and wise' person in charge, why did Paroh then choose Yosef because he had a 'spirit of G-d', when it wasn't even the requirement he was looking for? Furthermore, once he did appoint Yosef, why was he so eager to give him so much power?

To answer these questions, we first need to know Rav E. Lopian's insight into the 'smart and wise' requirement. He explains that although any bright person could have arranged for food to be stored, it takes a wise person to plan and implement for the future. It's that extra bit of foresight a wise person has that gives him the added push to do what he knows must be done, although the results are not immediate, or immediately apparent. With this we can now explain what Paroh saw in Yosef... Not only was Yosef wise, but he also had the 'spirit of G-d' -- meaning -- Not only was he wise enough to think of the future, but he had G-d's help in knowing how to do it, which is an even higher level. That's why Paroh was so eager to give him all that power. Paroh himself knew that he didn't have the potential Yosef had, and it was all because Yosef had G-d's guidance. When we follow the guidelines of the Torah, we too show that we're wise enough to not only think of what the Torah wants, but use those actions to save up for our future (in the next world), which takes the spirit of G-d, and even more of a commitment. It's ironic that Paroh is the one that reminds us of how lucky we are to even have the Torah as our guide. We should all be wise enough to 'store' all the Torah study and good deeds we can, and enjoy their reward when it counts -- in the future world. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



... "Anybody got a match?"

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