



What right did Joseph have to place his father and brothers under such duress, albeit for their perfection?

What made Joseph feel his actions were condoned?

ESTD 1997

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

JewishTimes

Volume IV, No. 11...Dec. 17, 2004

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Weekly Parsha

Vayigash

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Yosef could hold in his emotions. Since all his attendants were present, he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” Thus no one else was with him when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers.” (Bersheit 45:1)

Yehudah completes his appeal.

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JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS

& HIS BROTHERS

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by student

In analyzing Joseph's relationship with his brothers we must ask several salient questions which will help shed light on the

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WHY WE BLESS GOD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM & SHAYA MANN

Last week I was studying with my close friend Shaya Mann. As always, we get quite caught up in our discussions. I cannot think of a time when our studies did not yield fruits. Speaking of which, somehow our conversation was redirected towards the

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(Joseph & His Brothers continued from previous page)



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entire sequence of events recited in the Torah.

We must first analyze the source of the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Joseph was their father's favorite since he was born the son of his old age. However, Joseph reinforced their resentment by telling his brothers the content of two dreams that he had. This fact indicated his arrogant nature. The dreams were obviously divinely inspired. However, we must understand why there were two dreams. Furthermore, the brothers' response to each dream was different. The first dream was concerning the bundles of wheat. The brothers' response to this dream was continued hatred. The second dream concerning the constellations evoked a different response; the brothers were jealous while Jacob heeded this dream.

The difference between the dreams can help us appreciate the different responses. The first dream reflected that Joseph would rule them physically. The bundles of wheat represent physical sustenance. Thus the brothers hated him even more for they resented that they would be physically subservient. However, the second dream reflected that Joseph would be the mentor, that he would lead them spiritually as well: the constellations represent spirituality. This evoked a response of jealousy. However, Jacob heeded the dream because he recognized Joseph's potential. We must appreciate that the brothers' envy was based upon the fact that Jacob had chosen Joseph as the one who would be the leader and carry forward the tradition. The brothers did not act upon mere jealousy. They determined, based upon Joseph's vanity and narcissism, that he was not deserving of such an honor. He constantly told their father lashon hara, derogatory talk concerning them. His revealing to them his dreams reinforced their opinion that he was arrogant and unworthy. It reinforced their image of his vanity. Jacob, however, realized Joseph's intellectual abilities and conviction and realized in time he would mature and mold his character as a wise man. As time passed Jacob's assessment of Joseph's abilities and nature was proven accurate.

The brothers sinned by misjudging the situation and not trusting their father. The dreams merely bolstered the resentment that they had for Joseph. As a result they sinned by allowing their emotions to control their actions and shape their opinion. They committed an injustice against their brother by selling him into slavery. They did not realize, because of his arrogance and vanity, that he was capable of change. This was the background that set the stage for Joseph's encounter with his brothers some thirteen years later.

At the outset, an important footnote throughout the entire ordeal must be examined. The brothers,

during their entire encounter with Joseph, did not recognize him, nor suspect that the Viceroy could be Joseph, despite their intimate knowledge of him. This incongruity could be explained because of the very nature of their sin. They miscalculated Joseph's potential for greatness. They viewed him as a vain and arrogant person. Accordingly, they felt by selling him into slavery, it would ensure that Joseph would not be the mentor. They felt that such an egotistical and vain person would succumb to the life of the physical. They thought the support and security of his father and family was essential and without it, he would desert the tradition. Therefore, the Medrash tells us that when they entered Egypt they looked for Joseph in the houses of ill repute. They never imagined nor appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was their "chate", sin. They misjudged his abilities and failed to realize that he was still a child at the time they passed judgment, and capable of change. Therefore, this image was still in their mind and prevented them from ever imagining that Joseph was the Viceroy.

When analyzing the entire sequence of events commencing with the brothers' descent into Egypt, and their meeting with Joseph and his ultimate revelation of his identity, one gets a rather puzzled picture. It leaves an impression of a rather prolonged, detached series of events without any type of logical nexus. Furthermore, many of Joseph's actions seem petty. When he recognizes his brothers he remembers his dreams and he responds by accusing them of being spies. Why didn't he reveal his identity to his brothers immediately? How come Joseph continues to place his brothers through a series of ordeals? The most encompassing question and perhaps the most disturbing, is once Joseph had the ability, why didn't he communicate with his father and tell him of his well-being. Surely he would have spared Jacob undue suffering.

In order to start to appreciate the import of these questions, we must assert one logical proposition: Joseph's entire intentions were to benefit his brothers by affording them the opportunity to do teshuva, repentance. All the events can be explained by keeping this motif in mind when analyzing each event. Joseph used his ingenuity throughout the entire sequence and did not arouse suspicions in order to enable the events to develop in a manner that would facilitate their ability to do "teshuvah gemura", complete repentance.

Joseph foresaw that his brothers would be coerced to come to Egypt to buy provisions because of the famine. As a result, he viewed the situation as the opportune time to allow his brothers to repent. He was hoping that they would

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search for him and rectify the situation. Upon their first meeting with Joseph he acted as a stranger to them. The Torah tells us that Joseph remembered the dreams and accused them of being spies. Joseph was not vengeful. He was aware that the prophecy would become true and that this presented an opportunity to allow his brothers to change and ultimately acknowledge him as the mentor. Genesis 42:3 states, "And the ten brothers of Joseph went down to Egypt to buy provisions." Rashi comments that they are referred to as Joseph's brothers because they regretted their actions and were determined to buy Joseph's freedom, at whatever price. Thus they had started on the path of repentance. In fact, they entered Egypt from ten separate entrances. This would facilitate their secondary mission of searching for Joseph and obtaining his freedom. However, Joseph's accusation of their being spies had to have a basis in order to dispel any suspicions. He knew that they entered from different entrances in order to search for him. He thus concluded that they felt guilty and realized that this presented an opportunity for him to question them. As a result of their guilt they tried to impress Joseph by telling him that they were searching for their brother. They sought to impress him with their loyalty. Thus he asked them, if your brother couldn't be bought would you fight for him. They responded in the affirmative. Joseph had thereby set a basis for his accusations. They affirmed that they would break the law if necessary. Therefore, his claim that they were spies was valid.

Joseph thereby sought the imprisonment of Shimon for two reasons. He sought to have Benjamin brought to Egypt. He also desired to isolate one of the brothers. In order for it to be a complete repentance, the same situation must arise and the person must demonstrate that he has changed by not falling victim to the same trappings of the sin. Therefore, Joseph sought to create similar circumstances to afford them the opportunity of teshuva gemura, complete repentance. This required that they must face their father and advise him of their need to bring Benjamin to Egypt. They had to countenance their fathers' despair and take responsibility for Benjamin's well being.

Upon being presented with these circumstances the brothers stated that this sad state of events had befallen them because of their unjust actions against Joseph. Joseph heard their misgivings and turned from them and cried. Rashi comments that he cried because he heard that they had "charatta", they regretted their actions. It was not a mere emotional response. He cried because he realized that one of the components of teshuva was present. They had regrets over their past actions. The Torah specifically tells us that they

were upset because they did not have mercy upon their brother (Joseph) when he cried to them. They were callous to his pleas for sympathy. However, he could not reveal himself as yet, because he wanted to ensure that they would be completely forgiven and elevate themselves to a higher level of conduct. This could only be done after his entire plan had unfolded.

The Torah also affords us an interesting insight into the process of repentance. Genesis 42:22 states, "And Rueben answered them saying, 'Did I not speak unto you saying do not sin against the child and you would not hear, and also behold his blood is required'." Rueben's statement seems to be a response to a question. However, no question was asked. It follows the verse whereby the brothers acknowledge their guilt for not responding to Joseph's pleas for mercy. It therefore appears that since Rueben was the eldest, the brothers were attempting to shift much of the blame onto Rueben. However, Rueben's response was not merely defensive. Repentance demands that the wrong doer properly acknowledge his guilt. If one denies his culpability, he is incapable of doing teshuva and to change his character. The Torah emphasizes this point by phrasing Rueben's response as an answer. The brothers had to acknowledge their guilt if repentance was to be effective.

Upon their return home, Joseph secretly returned the money to them because he intended to keep them off guard. They suspected that he would accuse them of stealing the money. However, when they returned with Benjamin, he made no such accusation, but on the contrary he befriended them. This allowed him to place the cup in Benjamin's sack without raising suspicions. They totally discounted any doubts they had because he did not question the earlier incident. Psychologically he allayed any fears that they may have possessed. Therefore, on their return, he ate and drank with them and they feasted together.

It is interesting to note that since Joseph was sold into slavery, he did not drink wine. He missed their absence. Although he was ruler of a great land and had his own children, there was still a void in his life. He respected his brothers as wise men, as individuals with whom he shared a common intellectual heritage. This vacuum was always felt and prevented him from indulging in wine. This day, with his brothers present, he allowed himself to partake.

Before sitting down to the meal he used his cup ostensibly as a tool for divination. He sat them in order at the meal based upon their ages. The brothers were amazed. They did not suspect magic but were in awe of the fact that he was totally prepared for their meeting and had

(Joseph & His Brothers continued from previous page)

Why We Bless God

obtained such detailed information about them. He used the cup because it would serve as the perfect excuse for Benjamin's unlawful possession of the cup. Benjamin ostensibly stole the cup to help him find his brothers whereabouts. At the meal he desired to foster their emotions of jealousy, so he sat with Benjamin. He again discounted their suspicions by claiming that he would sit with Benjamin since they both did not have mothers. Joseph also favored Benjamin by giving him portions five times greater than the other brothers. Joseph was not merely expressing his fondness for Benjamin. He was recreating the same situation that existed between Jacob and himself. In furtherance thereof, he placed the goblet in Benjamin's sack. He wanted to place Benjamin in jail in order to recreate his entire ordeal, to the greatest extent possible.

The brothers responded by ripping their garments and acknowledging that G-d was punishing them for their sin of selling Joseph. Thereby, Judah made an appeal on behalf of his brothers for Benjamin's freedom. He acknowledged their guilt by selling Joseph and offered himself as a slave in Benjamin's stead. Judah's appeal was a lengthy plea to Joseph's compassion. They had to appeal to his mercy because they couldn't deny their guilt and say that Joseph set them up. They also sinned against Joseph by not acting compassionately. A complete teshuva demanded that they recognize their oversight; therefore they were coerced into appealing to his kindness. Thus, when they offered themselves in Benjamin's place, they demonstrated that they were at a higher level of perfection and their repentance was complete. Joseph immediately revealed himself unto his brothers. Upon his revelation, his primary concern was his father Jacob's welfare. Until this point he could not inform his father that he was still alive. To do so, would have prevented his brothers, the progenitors of B'nai Yisrael, of doing teshuva, repentance. Had he advised his father earlier of what transpired, the brothers might have been incapable of facing their father. They might have fled and this would have jeopardized the continued existence of B'nai Yisrael. Accordingly, Joseph was forced into remaining silent. However, after they did teshuva and elevated themselves to a higher level, they were able to face their wrongdoing. Therefore, when their repentance was complete and he was able to reveal himself, he immediately sent a message to Jacob advising him that he was still alive. This message contained an allusion to the last topic they were learning together. This served to comfort Jacob, for he realized that the tradition would be carried on through Joseph, as Jacob had envisioned. ■

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topic of blessings over fruits, and other matters. We wondered at the basic need for blessings in general. We took three examples: blessings over food, beautiful people, and deformed creatures.

We referred back to the Talmud, which states, "Rav Chanina son of Rav Pappa said, 'one who benefits in this world without blessing God, is as one who steals from God'." (Brachos, 35b) This makes sense. One must realize that all from which we benefit, is due solely to God's creation, and kindness. Benefiting without recognizing God through blessings is as though we have stole. We feel we are entitled to the fruits of the Earth, when in fact we are not. Our mission in life is not physical gratification, but knowledge of God. And even in the simple activity of eating, if we forsake this realization, we are taking something for another reason than intended by God: we are stealing from Him.

We asked: "Why must we bless God when we see a beautiful person, trees or fields? What is the nature of this blessing?" The text is as follows, "Blessed are You, God, our God, King of the universe, Who has created such as these in His world." Shaya explained this as similar to the blessing over foods: we must not benefit without blessing God. He explained that blessings over foods are physical benefits, whereas blessings over beauty are psychological benefits. Qualitatively, however, there is no difference in their nature. In both cases, we derive



some type of pleasure; be it physical satiation, or psychological pleasure when witnessing those beautiful creations, which engender this positive affect.

We then examined the blessing over seeing deformed or unnatural people or animals: "Blessed are You, God, our God, King of the universe, Who distorts the creatures." This is certainly not a blessing over a pleasurable experience, as our reaction is usually repulsion. Why then do we make a blessing?

Not all blessings are similar. Many objectives are achieved by our various blessings. I suggested that this blessing has another objective.

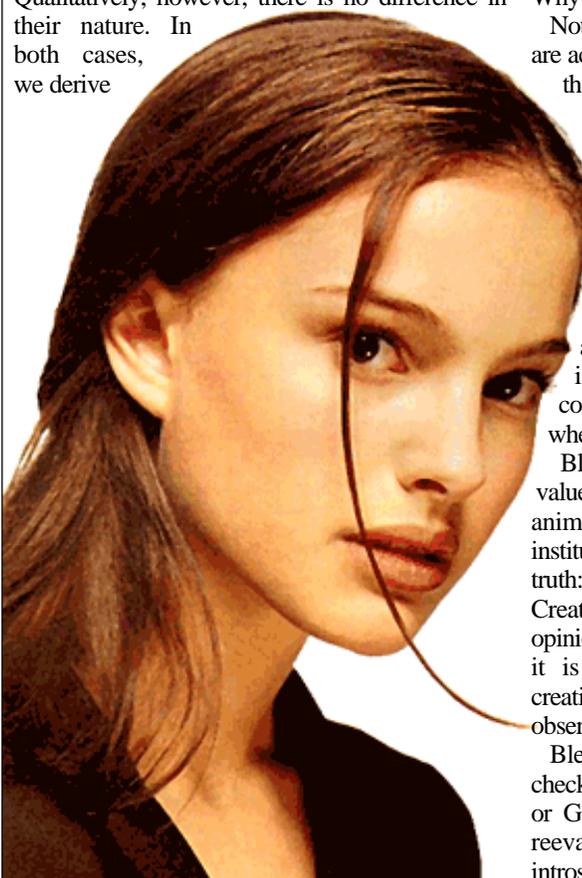
I asked, "Why are we repulsed?" The answer is based on our value system.

"Repulsion" is indicative of that which we feel does not conform to what we value.

We do not place value in those creatures, which repulse us. We feel we gain nothing from them. However, this is a corrupt value system. We feel that if we do not agree with something, that our determination is an objective and true one. We feel we are correct. We feel our notions are true. This is where this blessing comes in.

Blessings exist to address and correct our false values. In place of walking away from a distorted animal or person with disgust, the Rabbis instituted this blessing to realign our notions with truth: God may distort His creations. He is the Creator, and no human may advance his own opinions as more accurate than God's. If God feels it is necessary to create distortions in His creations, He has full right to do so, and ours is to observe and understand, not ridicule.

Blessing help us place our false notions in check: be they notions about entitlement to food, or God's rights as the Creator...directing us to reevaluate our opinions. We must be this introspective in all areas. ■





RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
& SHAYA MANN

Light and Wisdom

In Talmud Sabbath 23b, Rav Huna makes an enigmatic statement:

“One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students.”

Rashi comments: “lights” refers to the two commands of Sabbath and Chanukah lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon’s “Proverbs” (6:23) “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light...” Rashi’s meaning is that the former generates the latter: the act of igniting a flame on Sabbath and Chanukah results in wise sons who possess Torah wisdom. Rashi may have found a supporting verse for Rav Huna, but what is the sense of this verse, and Rav Huna’s statement? How does the simple act of lighting Sabbath and Chanukah lights create sons who are wise? What is the relationship between lights and wise sons?

Let us examine the context of the quote (Proverbs, 6:20-23):

“[20] My son, guard the commands of your father and do not forsake the Torah of your mother. [21] Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck. [22] When you walk, it will guide you, when you repose, it will guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you. [23] For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.”

We note many ideas, even within a single verse. For example, verse 20 compares “guarding father’s commands” to “not forsaking mother’s Torah”. We learn that Torah as a complete system straddles both: 1) commands and 2) Torah, or moral instruction. It is insufficient that God give a system of commands, without also offering us a moral code. This necessity of a dual approach, or borne out of man’s dual nature: he is intellectual and emotional. Both aspects of man’s nature are

molded through, 1) following commands, which enlighten our minds to new, intelligent insights, and 2) moral restrictions, necessary for transforming our raw, emotional natures into individuals with refined, moral codes. The term “guard” applies to commands, as we must adhere meticulously to Torah performances. “Guarding” is applicable to that which must be carefully performed. We must not deviate, as God knows which commands will benefit our human nature, which He too created. Knowing both as the Creator, it is foolish for man not to cleave to and guard the 613 Commands. The term “do not forsake” is applicable to moral instruction. For it is here that man feels emotionally restricted, thereby wishing to abandon and forsake these stressful restrictions. As such, man is warned by King Solomon not to “forsake”, since his natural, yet infantile emotional make up yearns for instinctual gratification. He will desire to run from imposed, Torah morality, as it stifles his current drive towards instinctual satisfaction...at every turn.

Verse 21. “Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck.” King Solomon advises us to tie the Torah’s principles to our “heart: and “neck”. What is the metaphor of these two locations? The heart is our very life source, more than all other organs. King Solomon advises man to tie the Torah’s principles to our very being. These ideas must penetrate our soul, until they become our very values. Only when man values something, can it be truly said that he has changed himself. Simple utterances are meaningless, if we do not truly believe what we enunciate. Additionally, as my close friend Rabbi Roth taught me, Maimonides teaches in his Commentary on the Mishna, (last Mishna in Talmud Maccos) that when man performs a Mitzvah for no other reason than his love of that command, only then does he entitle himself to the Next World. Again we see that Torah demands

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honesty, and that one truly values his performances. But performance alone is insufficient. King Solomon states that we must also “bind them on our necks.” The neck is the seat of what activity? Speech. Meaning, we must not only confirm with our hearts the truths of Torah, but our “speech”, or primary mode of expression and activity, must be engaged in Torah discussion. Only when man reaches this level, do we say he truly values Torah, to the point that he engages regularly in Torah discussions. Man’s activity is the barometer of his convictions.

Verse 22. “When you walk, it will guide you, when you lie down, it will guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you.” How do we define these three states? “Walking” refers to our conscious, daily life. In this state, Torah “guides” us. This is easily understood. When we “lie down” to sleep, we now enter the stage where we lose our control; we are vulnerable. The Rabbis teach on the first page of Talmud Brachos, that we must recite the Shima prayer before going to sleep. We must ponder the Torah fundamentals, which the Shima contains at the time that our consciousness state slips away. At this critical moment, our emotions gain the upper hand. Sleep, and falling into it, are emotional states. And at such a time, we must strengthen our bond to the Torah principles, lest we allow our emotions to destroy us. Thus, King Solomon chooses the expression of “guard”. At this time, we are in desperate need of a guard against our emotional impulses. And the opposite state of falling to sleep is our waking up. If we earnestly study, delving into God’s wisdom, applying His absolute, Torah truths during our daily lives, these ideals make their mark so indelibly, that they are the first thing on our minds when we awake. We are caught up with brilliant insights that we cannot wait to reengage in further study. This concept that the Torah is personified, as “speaking to us”, teaches that one who is devoted to his studies, has an additional ally: his studies take on a ‘life of their own’. Their appeal is so great, that his mind, unconsciously, initiates him back into Torah thought - even upon his waking. Just as one is impatient about an upcoming trip - waking on the day of his journey with great anticipation - so too the Torah student. Upon his waking up, he is immediately drawn back by the appeal of Torah, as if it “speaks to him”. King Solomon sums up the three states of our existence: consciousness, losing consciousness, and regaining it. In all three, the King advises us to insure we never abandon Torah thought.

This may seem insurmountable to many of us, but think about how King Solomon referred to Torah as a “plaything” of God (Proverbs, 8:30). Just as a child with a new toy is engulfed with an

exhilarated exuberance, so too were the Rabbis and our prophets. Thus must teach us that although we misdirect our childlike, excitement towards mundane activities and values, it is quite achievable that we too may reach an attachment to wisdom with this very same emotional draw. Do not be misguided by the fact that you do not see many adults – if any at all – with a youthful excitement about life. Children possess this excitement, and we are but older children in this respect. We have not lost this capacity for zest and abandon. What we have lost, is our accurate selection of what object truly fuels the fire of our passions. King Solomon refers to wisdom as “playing” before God. It is something God created, containing unlimited enjoyment. Let us heed his words, and not the misguided masses.

Verse 23. “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” A command offers illumination. Yet...it is but a single flame. It possesses the characteristic of illumination, but falls short in terms of giving us a full picture. However, Torah as a complete system is “light”. Only when one embraces the complete system, is he afforded with sufficient light for his life’s journey. Life has many twists and turns. Our nature as human beings is very complex. Knowledge is not readily available without due study and long hours. To live life properly, making correct decisions in all areas, to guard against destructive emotions, and to take a course that ensures success for our families and us...we require a charted map. One command is beneficial, but it cannot imbue us with the complete knowledge necessary for a full lifespan. The Torah is a complete system, addressing each and every aspect of our existence. Following a few, or even most of God’s law, we will fail. No, we cannot do it in a day. But our mind’s eye must be focused on this essential idea: everything in the Torah is absolutely necessary. Unlike the boors who ridicule “all those restrictions”, God’s opinion is different. He knows our nature, and created the Torah as a remedy. Just as a doctor would be listened to when he warns us that we will avoid death from disease by talking 10 pills daily, and we do, certainly, we must have greater conviction in what our Creator advises...not just for physical life, but the life of our soul.

“For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” Notice that this verse commences with “For”, meaning, it comes to explain the King’s previous statements. He is explaining exactly why Torah will guide, guard and engage us: it is that which “illuminates”. Without knowledge of reality, what use is our life? The world operates by a design, and only through understanding this

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design, adhering meticulously to a system, which follows this design, will we find happiness, avoiding the conflicts experienced by those devoid of understanding. And as we said, intelligence is but one half of the equation...we also require moral instruction to restrain our instinctual impulses. Thus, the King concludes this verse with, "and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life." Following our emotions can remove us from life, both here and in the next world.

We may now return to our very first question: What does Rav Huna mean by "One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students"? We mentioned that Rashi comments: "lights" refers to the two commands of Sabbath and Channukah lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon, "For a command is a flame, and Torah is light..." Thus, if one is careful with these two commands (flame), he will beget wise sons (light).

What is specific to Sabbath and Channukah lights, that these two commands were designated as essential to begetting wise sons? I believe by defining the nature of both Sabbath and Channukah, we will arrive at one possible answer.

Sabbath celebrates God as the 'Creator'. Channukah celebrates God as the 'Worker of miracles'. We must appreciate that God does both: He created the universe, and by definition, controls it, at times, creating a suspension in the very universal laws: what we refer to as miracles. On a deeper level, God's act of creation teaches us that the universe operates by set laws, by wisdom. Our lives must be led by this truth, and by our relentless search for new knowledge. Whether we are walking, lying down, or rising up, we must never lose sight of this, our essential goal in life. But not only is God the Creator of all, including knowledge, He is also very much

involved in our lives. He performs miracles. Thus, our knowledge of God is twofold: 1) He is Creator and 2) He is our God, readily available to intervene with miracles for those who follow Him.

If we possess an accurate knowledge of God as Creator, and the One who intervened at Sinai with His gift of the Torah, and guarding all of His followers with miracles, we then gain a true appreciation and knowledge of Judaism's fundamentals. We then will pass this on to our children, and they too will be come wise.

One who is careful with the Sabbath and Channukah lights is one who understands Judaism's fundamentals concerning the most essential of all ideas.

What is God? He is the Creator of all: "Sabbath celebrates Creation". He is the Controller of all: "Channukah celebrates Miracles." ■

Banning God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Genesis 37:33, when the sons of Jacob presented to him the bloodied coat of many colors to cover-up of their sale of their brother Joseph, Rashi quotes an astonishing Medrash (allegory):

"Why didn't God tell Jacob the truth?" (That Joseph was indeed alive). The Medrash continues, "The reason God didn't disclose the truth about Joseph, was that when the brothers banished and cursed all who would reveal to Jacob their sale of Joseph, they included God in their banishment and curse." But Isaac - Jacob's father - knew the truth that Joseph was alive, but Isaac said to himself, "How can I reveal that which God does not reveal?"

The obvious problem is the brother's inclusion of God into their ban and curse. How do we understand such a statement? It is blasphemous to think that man possesses any control over the Master of the Universe. Such a notion is completely against all foundations of Judaism. Our first step must be to know that this cannot be taken on face value, and the Rabbis authoring this Medrash have something else in mind.

I believe this statement teaches the same idea derived from another Rabbinical saying, "the righteous decree and God fulfills." This means to say that those who are completely righteous, i.e., those whose actions never veer from God's ways, live in a manner completely endorsed by God. A person who is so in tune with God's ways can be described as one who "decrees and God fulfills". Thereby indicating his complete adherence to God.

Similarly, the brothers are termed to have "included God in their ban and curse", should God divulge their cover up to Jacob's sale. This means that the brothers' wish that Jacob not find out about Joseph's sale was actually in line with God's will. It is completely impossible that man have any control over God. All similar statements must be understood in a manner, which maintains an uncorrupted view of God.

We can speculate why God wished that Jacob not discover truth: It seems God wished that the Jews enter Egypt, only to emerge from servitude to freedom via God's salvation. A Rabbi once explained that God desired that the Jewish nation emerge in a state of salvation, thereby indelibly branding

the identity of the Jewish nation as one "redeemed by God". God is thereby inextricably bound up in this nation's identity as its Redeemer. We see that the Jewish law also incorporates this central concept, as we align our prayers with the concept of God's redemption.

We now come to the question of how Isaac knew of the cover up. If all who were present at Joseph's sale were the nine brothers alone, and they all swore each other to secrecy, there is no possible means for any communication to reach Isaac about this event. The only other possibility for Isaac's awareness of the sale is what Isaac himself perceived upon the brother's return.

What were the facts? Isaac saw the brothers presenting the bloodied coat to Jacob, asking Jacob to recognize if it was Joseph's. To this, Jacob concluded that a wild beast devoured Joseph. I would speculate that what might have transpired is as follows: Isaac saw that only the coat was returned. Perhaps thinking, "Why should they find only the coat and no remains of Joseph? This isn't normal, that an animal will separate the food, (Joseph) dragging him to a place without his coat. Additionally, perhaps Isaac said, "Why am I - Isaac - the only one who sees this question? After all, why should not at the least one brother have the same question as I have?" Perhaps Isaac concluded from this that the only way all the brothers would be satisfied that a garment alone was proof of Joseph's death, was if they were all trying to force that conclusion as a lie. A true investigator will wonder about two things, as did Isaac: 1) why the coat was no where near any remains, and most powerfully, 2) why the brothers were unanimous in their acceptance of Joseph's death by an animal, with no need for an alternative explanation, although no remains were found. Isaac concluded the brothers were conspiring a lie. However, Isaac felt that something so grave as Joseph's sale, must not be revealed by himself, as silence in this matter must be in line with God's will. Isaac had a keen understanding of God's providence, and realized this is a matter certainly being addressed by God. Isaac's hands were tied.

We can also ask why Jacob didn't see through the smoke screen: Perhaps he was so distraught at the possibility of Joseph's death, and then seeing the precious garment he gave to Joseph, that he was overcome by emotion and could not see clearly as Isaac did. Perhaps even the brothers knew how Jacob would react to this sight of a bloodied coat, and planned it that way.

Through this explanation, we arrive at an intelligent understanding of the brothers "banning God." It refers to God's compliance with the brothers' sale, and although corrupt, it paved the way for the Egyptian enslavement deemed necessary by God. ■

(Vayigash continued from page 1)

Yosef is overcome with intense emotion. He commands his servants and ministers to leave him. He is prepared to reveal himself to his brothers.

Why did Yosef command his servants to leave? The Torah provides an ambiguous response. The pasuk seem to indicate two reasons. First, Yosef could no longer restrain his feeling. Second, he planned to reveal himself to his brothers. What is the connection between these two factors?

Our Sages offer different explanations. Rashi reinterprets the passage. He explains that Yosef was not overcome with emotion. He offers an alternative translation of the opening phrase of the passage. "Yosef could not endure." The Torah is telling us that he could not endure displaying his brothers' shame. He was prepared to reveal himself. He would tell his brothers that he was Yosef. He was the brother they had plotted against and sold into slavery. The brothers would be confronted with the injustice of their behavior. Yosef did not want the Egyptians to learn of his brothers' intrigues. He did not want to disgrace his brothers in the presence of the Egyptians. [1]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers another explanation. He accepts Rashi's assertion that Yosef did not want the Egyptians present when he confronted his brothers. However, Ibn Ezra explains that Yosef was overcome. Yosef was prepared to reveal himself. Ideally, he would have waited until he was alone with his brothers. However, he could not wait for this opportunity. Why could he not delay the revelation? He was overcome. He could no longer maintain his disguise. Therefore, he was anxious to remove his servants.[2]

Nachmanides offers a very interested variation on these explanations. He also agrees that Yosef did not want the Egyptians present at the moment of his revelation. However, he offers an alternative explanation for this concern. Yosef planned to bring his father and brothers down to Egypt. His plan would require the acquiescence of Paroh and the Egyptian people. He expected Egypt to open its borders to foreigners. This new group must be positively represented. Yosef needed to convince the Egyptians that they should not fear these foreigners. The Egyptians could not discover that Yosef's family had intrigued against him and showed disregard for their father's feelings. This knowledge would evoke suspicions. How could the Egyptians trust the loyalty of a family that sold a member into slavery? Would the brothers be faithful to Paroh? They had not been faithful to their own father! In order to avoid creating these suspicions, Yosef hid from the Egyptians the events leading to his bondage.[3]

"And Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?' And his brothers were not able to respond to him because they were startled." (Bereshit 45:3)



Binyamin has been accused of stealing Yosef's goblet. Yosef has pronounced Binyamin's punishment. Binyamin will not be permitted to return to Canaan. He will remain in Egypt in servitude. Yehudah appeals to Yosef to spare Binyamin. He asks Yosef to allow Binyamin to return to Canaan with the brothers. Yehudah will remain in Egypt and serve as Yosef's servant. He will accept upon himself the punishment due Binyamin.

Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. He tells them that he is their brother, Yosef. He asks if his father Yaakov is still alive.

Yosef's question is odd. Yehudah has argued that Yosef should spare Binyamin. He argued that the loss of Binyamin would destroy Yaakov. Obviously, Yaakov is still alive. Why does Yosef ask Yehudah for a further confirmation of this fact?

There are various answers to this question. The most obvious is that Yosef suspected that Yehudah might have been dishonest. Yehudah was begging Yosef to spare Binyamin. Perhaps, Yehudah had claimed that Yaakov was alive in order to support his plea for Binyamin's freedom. He asserted that Binyamin should be freed in order to spare Yaakov. This suggested the possibility that Yaakov had really died. However, Yehudah was asserting he was still alive in an attempt to save Binyamin.

There is another possible explanation of Yosef's suspicion. In order to understand this possibility, we must explain a previous incident.

Yosef's brothers originally entered Egypt in order to purchase provisions. Yosef accused them of spying. The brothers responded by describing their

family structure. They told Yosef that they were all sons of a single father. They told Yosef they had a younger brother who had not accompanied them. This brother was in Canaan with their father.

Yosef asserted that their narrative supported his accusation. They could only clear themselves by bringing their youngest brother to Egypt.

This entire exchange seems bizarre! First, why did the brothers respond to Yosef's accusations with an account of their family structure? What relevance does this response have to the accusation? Second, Yosef rejected their response. He claimed that their reply supported his accusation. How did the brother's description of their family support Yosef's charge? Third, Yosef demanded that the brothers clear themselves of suspicion by bringing their youngest brother to Egypt. How would bringing Binyamin to Egypt prove the brothers' innocence?

Gershonides offers a comprehensive response to these questions. Yosef accused the brothers of spying. The brothers responded that they shared a single father. Gershonides explains this response. Their account of their family was an attempt to persuade Yosef that they were not really spies. Spying is dangerous. A father might allow one of his children to engage in such an endeavor. Perhaps, in a desperate situation, he would allow a few of his children to engage in such a perilous mission. However, a father would not risk the lives of all of his children. The brothers argued on this basis that they could not be spies. They are the sons of a single father. He would not allow ten of his eleven sons to risk their lives as spies.

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(Vayigash continued from previous page)

Yosef responded that their account of their family actually undermined their claim of innocence. Their father had not allowed all of his sons to travel to Egypt. He had insisted that one son remain home with him. If they had come to purchase provisions, eleven sons could accomplish this more than ten. Keeping one son at home indicated that their father perceived their mission to Egypt as dangerous. Therefore, he had insisted that one son be spared this peril. Why was their mission dangerous? They were spies! One son had been held back. If misfortune befell the brothers, one son would be spared.

Yosef demanded that the brothers demonstrate their innocence. This could be accomplished by returning with their remaining brother. This would prove that they had not come to Egypt on a dangerous spying mission. Their father would only allow all of his sons to travel to Egypt if their mission was truly innocent and harmless.[4]

Based on Gershonides' explanation of the dialogue between Yosef and his brothers, we can understand Yosef's question in our pasuk. Yehudah told Yosef that their father was alive. Yosef recognized that this assertion could be a response to the test he had formulated. Bringing Binyamin to Egypt was designed to prove that the brothers were not spies. Their father, allowing all of his sons to travel to Egypt, would prove this. In other words, Binyamin's presence could only establish their innocence if Yaakov was alive. Yosef feared that Yehudah had reported that Yaakov was alive in order to avoid undermining their defense.

Now, Yosef has revealed himself to the brothers. They no longer need to fear the accusation of spying. They can be honest with Yosef. Therefore, Yosef again asks if his father is alive.

“And Yosef harnessed his chariot and he went up to greet his father Yisrael at Goshen. And he appeared to him and he fell upon his shoulders and he wept upon his shoulders for a long time.” (Beresheit 46:29)

Yosef is finally to be reunited with his father Yaakov. The pasuk tells us that he harnessed his chariot. Our Sages comment that although Yosef was a ruler in Egypt, he personally prepared his chariot. This was an indication of his deep respect for his father.[5] He greets his father and is overcome by emotion. He falls upon Yaakov's shoulders and weeps.

This reunion is not the first indication of Yosef's deep concern and love for Yaakov. He had repeatedly asked the brothers to report upon Yaakov's well-being.

Yosef was a person of great authority in Egypt. He was second only to Paroh. It is clear that he had complete freedom of action. He loved his father. He certainly knew of the sorrow his father must have experienced in believing that his son was dead. It



would seem Yosef could have easily contacted Yaakov earlier. Why did Yosef not communicate with Yaakov before this point?

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam makes an enigmatic comment about this issue. He explains that Yosef recognized that Divine Providence was at work. He felt that revealing himself to his father would interfere with Hashem's plan.

The difficulty in Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam's explanation is that it is based upon a number of unstated premises. The explanation assumes that Yosef had some understanding of the nature of Hashem's plan. Based upon this understanding, Yosef concluded that he could not communicate to Yaakov. Any communication would undermine the ultimate objective. Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam leaves it to us to deduce Yosef's theory regarding Hashem's plan.

Perhaps we can understand Yosef's theory if we return to his dreams as a youth. In these dreams Yosef discovered that some day he would become the leader of the brothers. Even his father would be under his authority. The brothers regarded these dreams as youthful fantasies. But Yosef never doubted the authenticity of his visions.

Yosef realized that there were two possible paths to the fulfillment of his dreams. He could ascent to a position of authority over the brothers through their recognition of his leadership. This path was closed by the enmity that developed between Yosef and the brothers.

The other path was far more radical. It required that Yosef achieve power and authority

independently. Once this position was achieved events would cause the brothers to submit to Yosef's leadership. This second path would require Yosef's separation from his family until the proper moment. Then, Yosef must wait for the moment at which his brothers would be forced to submit themselves to his leadership.

Yosef understood that the decision of his brothers to sell him blocked the first path. He would not achieve his proper role through the willing recognition of the brothers. He concluded that his experiences in Egypt, in some way, were a journey along the second path. These experiences would ultimately end with a reunification with the brothers. However, for this reunification to result in his ascension to a position of power among the brother, he must patiently await the proper moment.

Yosef could not contact his family before this proper moment. Any reunification, before the intended time would undermine the plan of Hashem.

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 45:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 45:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 45:1.

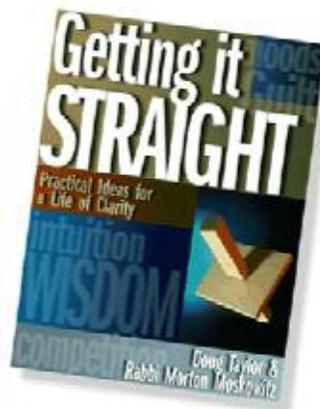
[4] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), pp. 235-236.

[5] Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit 55:8. ▀

Taken from "Getting It Straight"
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Wisdom

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ



"Slow down!" I yelled, with every ounce of vehemence I could muster. I might as well have spit at a hurricane. The souped-up brown station wagon, piloted by a teen-ager and crammed with about a hundred more, squealed around the corner and flew down the street doing at least 45 in this quiet residential 25 mile-per-hour neighborhood. I turned back to my friend, the King of Rational Thought.

"I may not know much about wisdom," I said, "but that sure wasn't it."

The heady fragrance of early blossoms, propelled by a mild afternoon breeze, wafted around us like exotic perfume as we continued our walk. We had been discussing the difference between wisdom and foolishness. I had thought it was pretty obvious until he asked me to define wisdom. Then I had gotten stuck.

"True," he said, emotionally unruffled by the event. "In fact, that was a perfect example of a lack of wisdom. If we agree that wisdom and foolishness are opposites, and the driver of that car was foolish, how would you define wisdom?"

I struggled again. "It's making smart choices. It's not being dumb. It's not driving your car like an idiot." I finally stopped, realizing I was venting, not defining.

As usual, my friend sensed my dilemma.

"Consider this," he said. "Why does auto insurance for single male drivers under age 25 cost more than for any other demographic category?"

"They have more accidents," I replied.

"I know," he said. "But why do they have more accidents?"

This time I thought before I spoke. "Well, they take more chances. They're more reckless. They're less responsible."

"Let's look at the first one," he said. "They take more chances. Why do they take more

chances?"

I hesitated. "Because they think they're immortal and don't see the consequences of their actions?"

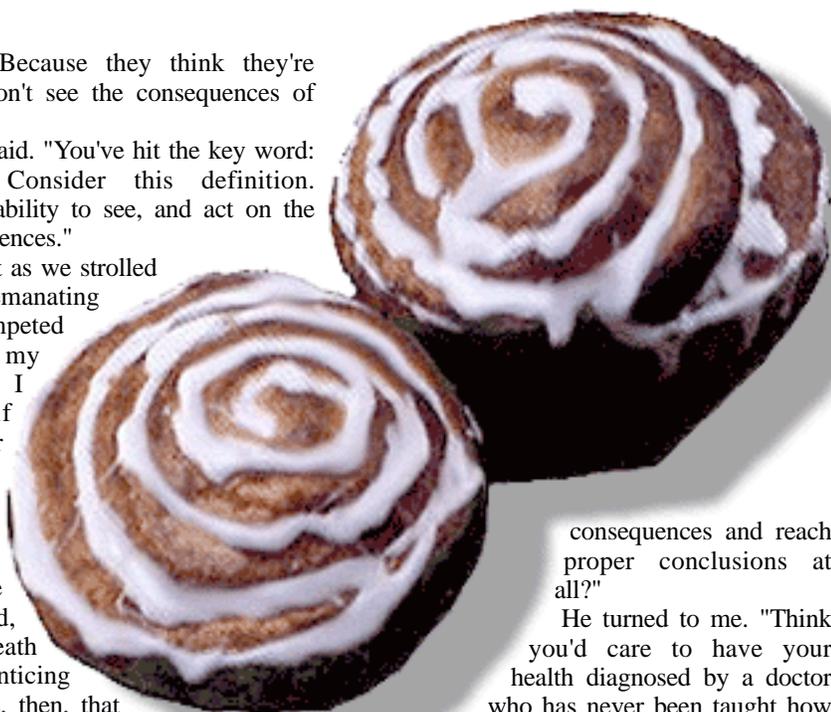
"Exactly," he said. "You've hit the key word: consequences. Consider this definition. Wisdom is the ability to see, and act on the basis of, consequences."

I pondered that as we strolled past a bakery emanating smells that competed hard for my attention. I wondered if Socrates ever had to do battle with freshly baked cinnamon rolls.

"Makes sense to me," I said, holding my breath to avoid the enticing scent. "I assume, then, that foolishness would simply be the inability to do that."

"Right again," he replied. "Unfortunately, seeing consequences and reaching proper conclusions, let alone acting on them, is not something we often study, in school or otherwise."

"It's ironic," he continued, "that we expect mathematicians, scientists, physicists, doctors, and engineers, to deduce proper conclusions. Yet we fail to teach and apply the same principles in everyday life. Logic is offered in many colleges and universities as an elective. Yet there was a time in history when the study of logic was considered a prerequisite to learning any other subject. For how could you possibly reach a correct conclusion in any area of study without knowing how to analyze



consequences and reach proper conclusions at all?"

He turned to me. "Think you'd care to have your health diagnosed by a doctor who has never been taught how to reach a proper conclusion?" he

asked.

I winced at the idea. And then I thought about politicians, and policy-makers, and judges, and

"Not a terribly encouraging idea," I replied, cutting off my own scary thoughts. "So what's the answer?"

"Practice," he said. "Take any situation or decision that you're facing, and analyze it rationally. Look at the consequences of the various choices open to you. Avoid letting your emotions creep in. They're likely to give you a false picture. Then make a decision based on your best analysis of the consequences."

I put his advice into effect immediately. I thought about the cinnamon rolls two blocks back, then took one look at my waistline.

I kept walking. □