

JewishTimes

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WEEKLY PARSHA

JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

JUDAH'S PERFECTION

RABBI REUVEN MANN

JOSEPH THE LEADER

RABBI BERNIE FOX

**DREAMS,
PROPHECY,
METAPHOR,
NATURE...**

RAMSES: PHAROAH
OF JOSEPH'S ERA

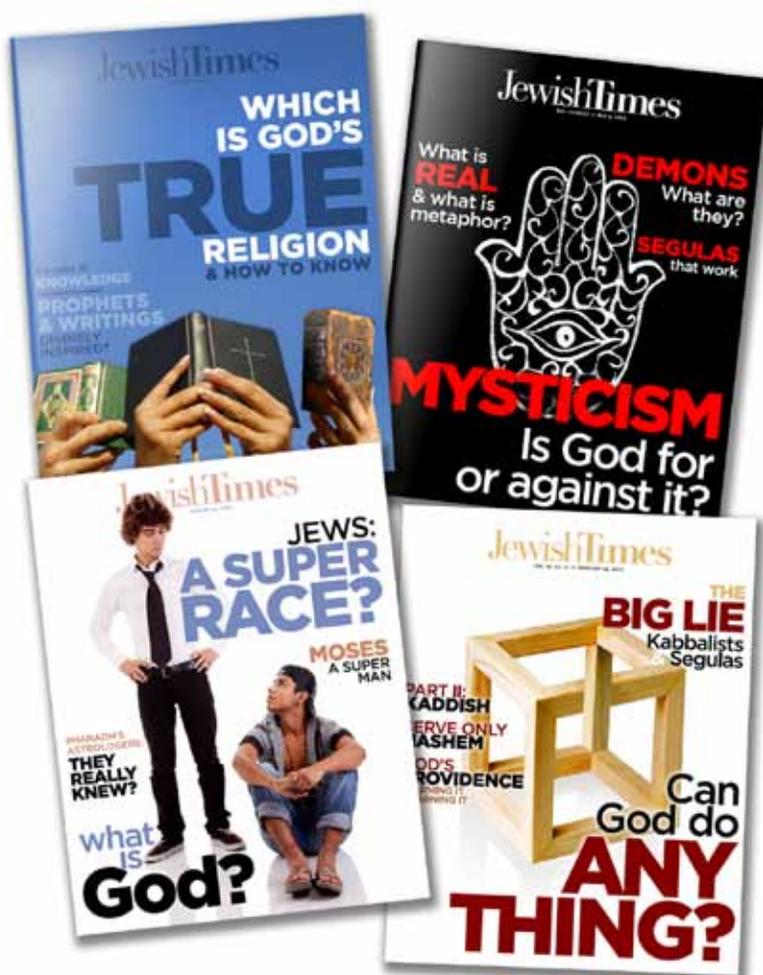
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LETTERS

Deception of Isaac

Reader: Dear Rabbi, I studied the account of Jacob's deception, taking the birthright blessings. Maimonides wrote, "It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than his reasoning, his senses and matters received from the Prophets or the righteous." I am certain Isaac possessed the above knowledge, made public by Maimonides 2789 years later. We learned that Isaac's father Abraham was very knowledgeable and taught Isaac Torah concepts.

I wonder, since Isaac was blind, did his remaining senses get sharper? Focusing on Isaac's use of his senses, can we extrapolate that his remaining senses led him to an incorrect

conclusion concerning Esav? When man tries to arrive at truths utilizing his senses, are there different weights of importance given to the different senses? Was there Divine Intervention? And finally, was Rebecca ever punished for contriving this deception?

Rabbi: It is difficult to assess anyone's sensual capacities and quantities. This is compounded as we possess limited knowledge of the person in question, Isaac, and also that he passed

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on many years ago. I have heard, and it is reasonable, that as one sense fails, others are heightened. This is due to the lack of distraction of one sense, bringing other senses into greater focus: particularly, the distraction of sight in Isaac's case. And we do read that he was aware of the "aroma of the field" that permeated Esav's garments. But at the same time, loss of sight also can bring a loss of details, leading Isaac to have an impaired view of his son Esav. This was the case, and why Isaac was frightened that God allowed the blessings to be bestowed on Jacob. Esav must have not been as fit as Isaac imagined.

The Torah hints at the Divine intervention that enabled Jacob's success in stealing the blessings: "For it wasn't after the moment that Jacob left [Isaac's presence with the blessings], that Esav entered." God orchestrated the events for Jacob's success. He also granted Rebecca – not Isaac – the prophetic information so she might manipulate events to ensure Jacob was blessed, and not Esav. God knew Isaac was not ready to accept Esav's unfit nature, so all of His Divine communication went through Rebecca alone. She was informed that the older Esav would serve the younger Jacob. She also saw Jacob clutching Esav's heel at birth, indicating Jacob's makeup as one who could usurp a superior. Rebecca must have also wondered why Esav was born hairy. Rebecca wisely used all this information. She relied on God's word to ensure Jacob would cause Esav to serve him; she urged Jacob to rightfully steal the blessings as she saw at birth his ability to usurp Esav; and she used the goatskins to deceive Isaac, as she realized Esav's hairy exterior was for a reason.

Thus, Rebecca followed Divine directives and was thereby worthy of God's rewards, not punishments, for this mandated deception. It's vital to realize that God Himself used deception on a number of cases[1], since truth may be compromised for a greater good. ■

[1] God told Samuel to lie to Saul about his trip to anoint David and He lied to Abraham when Sarah said Abraham was too old, as God said "Sarah said she was too old to bear children."



Do Dreams Convey Truths?

Reader: It appears to me there exists some things that are capable to speak to people in thoughts and in dreams. Psychologists say such dreams are merely a person's own thoughts. I know of a case where something spoke to someone in a dream, and those matters eventually came to be true in reality. I spoke in detail with one Rabbi from Chabad and he said those might be demons. However I couldn't understand why this Rabbi seeks as solution, praying to some long-passed Rabbi or placing a letter into his grave. I see through Mesora.org you are very keen to remember that God is one, so I thought I might rather consult you in this matter if possible.

Rabbi: Don't talk with Chabad: they reject Torah principles by praying to the dead Rebbe and placing notes in his grave. Not one Chabad Rabbi has publicly denounced these violations. This Chabad Rabbi's suggestion that the dream included a demon, if meant literally, displays an ignorance of the nature of demons. The Talmud teaches, through analysis of its

metaphor, that demons are psychological constructs of our own emotions, not intelligent talking beings, whether in dreams or otherwise. The Talmudic Rabbis wrote many clues about demons that require study to arrive at their meaning.

God alone is all we need, and the Only One who can respond to prayers. Even in the Talmud when a Rabbi was requested to pray on behalf of others, the people did not look to him as the cause of blessing, but they knew that Rabbi would pray to God, and God alone controls the world. And they never prayed to the dead or placed notes in their graves. This violates God's words.

Mere dreams sometimes put facts together we've heard and draw conclusions, and thereby "seem" to predict. But that's nothing other than a manner of intuition, similar to what we do during the day when we intuit something might happen, and it does. And when these events do in fact occur as we imagined, or dreamed, don't think these are prophetic. Again, it is merely intuition either at day or in dreams that sometimes one concludes what probably will happen in the real world, based on events we already know occurred and how they might play out. ■



WHY GOD CONCEALS HIS LESSONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rabbi Israel Chait taught, "Let the verses talk to you." Meaning, offer only those explanations demanded by the text; don't force an answer. You will also find the answers alongside the questions. It is a remarkable system, unlike any other work.

"And it was at the end of two years, and Pharaoh dreamed, and he stood on the Nile River. And behold, from the Nile, went up seven cows of fine appearance, healthy of flesh, and they grazed on the vegetation. And behold, seven other cows emerged after them from the Nile, bad of appearance, and thin-fleshed, and they stood next to the [healthy] cows on the Nile's shore. And the poor-looking cows ate the cows of good appearance and healthy, and Pharaoh awoke (Gen. 41:1-4)."

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QUESTIONS

Why are we told that Pharaoh dreamed “after two years”?

Why did Pharaoh awake: what disturbed him so?

As Rabbi Chait taught, the clues are in the verses.

God gave Pharaoh these dreams, only at this time, as Joseph required two more years in prison to help perfect himself. Joseph relied on the favor he beseeched from the wine steward, still harboring the same self-confidence that caused him to retell his original dreams to his brothers and father (Rashi). In fact, that is the very story Joseph recounted to the wine steward.

Prison breaks down one’s self esteem. Two years of incarceration helped perfect Joseph’s flaw, and only then, could God create the events (Pharaoh’s disturbing dreams) that would require Joseph’s skills. Thereby, Joseph could be elevated to viceroy so as to orchestrate the descent of the Jews to Egypt. Thus, we are told that only “after two years” did God give Pharaoh these dreams. The dreams were not meant for Pharaoh, but for Joseph’s use, and the benefit of Israel.

What disturbed Pharaoh? Notice that Pharaoh is actually walking on water, “...he stood on the Nile.” (A familiar trend) The Nile was a deity; it provided Egypt’s water supply. And Pharaoh stood on it?! This means he viewed himself superior to this deity (R. Israel Chait). Then, Pharaoh witnessed emaciated cows devouring healthy ones. And they emerged from the deity, which Pharaoh thought he ruled over. In other words, Pharaoh viewed a negative and uncontrollable phenomenon, over which he yearned for control. Pharaoh’s image of omnipotence was shattered. This fear awoke him.

Enter Joseph. The scene is primed for his quick elevation by this ruler, desperate to replenish his self-image as a deity. So desperate was Pharaoh that he elevated a Hebrew slave to second in command. He gave all power to Joseph except the throne.

WHY DREAMS?

In parshas Beha’alosecha, God tells Miriam and Aaron that he informs prophets through dreams and visions. At

times, God communicates through words alone with no imagery, and other times through visions, like when He showed Abraham the stars, or Joshua the menorah, or when Jacob saw the angels on the ladder. What consideration demands that God instructs man cryptically? Why not just come out and tell Pharaoh a clear message...without these cows?

Again, regarding Sodom, God is cryptic. He tells Abraham he will decide whether to destroy the five cities or not. This offers Abraham the opportunity to inquire of God’s justice: where and when will He annihilate or spare mankind. Why doesn’t God openly instruct Abraham, thereby removing Abraham’s need for inquiry?

The physical too is wrapped in mystery. Only after careful study, do we cut through the veil of nature’s external beauty, to find precise laws, such as the harmony of the human body’s various systems. Wonders abound, from the billions of galaxies, to the subatomic world. All of creation reveals astonishing phenomena, and these phenomena, when studied, reveal intelligent laws.

God is the Source of all wisdom. The physical world – even the words of Torah – cannot contain all His wisdom. How then does God communicate His endless wisdom? He does so through designing a natural world, which, through study and analysis, slowly reveals layer after layer of wisdom. The Torah and His prophetic communications too are designed precisely to cause man to ponder further. “What are these cows?” “What is this ladder?” “What are tefillin?” A wise man such as Joseph understands there is deep meaning. Were it not for this cryptic design, we would not be prodded further. It is the very design of a cryptic Torah and a mysterious universe that propels our curiosity further, leading us to more and more of God’s wisdom.

In order that man enters the world of wisdom, God designed all His creations in a manner that questions arise, leading us to answers, and then greater questions. The world is finite. To reach the infinite, i.e., God’s wisdom, we must see past the physical and engage our minds, not merely our senses. ■

PHARAOH'S WISDOM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Genesis, 41:45, we find that after Pharaoh sees the undeniable brilliance of Joseph, Pharaoh selects Joseph to be his second in command over Egypt. The passage states three ideas, 1) Pharaoh changes Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach, 2) he gave Asnas, the daughter of Poti-Phera (now subtly referred to as "Priest" of Ohn) to Joseph as his wife, and 3) Joseph goes out on Egypt (to rule).

We have a mesora - a tradition - that when one pasuk (passage) contains many points, they must all be related, since God determined they be placed in a single verse.

We then have the following questions:

1) What is the connection between all the points in this passage?

2) Why give Joseph the daughter of Poti-Phera? Her mother accused Joseph of attempted rape! Wasn't there a better choice of a mate, if he must have a wife?

3) Why is Poti-Phera suddenly referred to as a "priest"?

4) What does Joseph "going out on Egypt" have to do with anything?

5) Why does Pharaoh change Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach?

With a little consideration, the answers leap from this passage.

Pharaoh was in his position - not without intelligence. Upon summoning Joseph from prison to interpret his dreams, Pharaoh was cognizant of the future political problems faced with elevating an imprisoned Jew to viceroy status. More to the point, Pharaoh was appointing one accused of rape. This would not wash well with his subjects, or his country. How would Pharaoh deal with this? With the following answer, we unveil insight into Pharaoh's wisdom.

Pharaoh attempted to dispel any rumors of Joseph's ill repute by giving him this specific woman for a wife. Who in their right minds would believe that Joseph attempted rape of a woman, the wife of Poti-Phera, and then marries her very daughter? Pharaoh caused Egypt to believe that the rape accusation was not true. Further, Poti-Phera's wife would no longer accuse Joseph, as any accusation would bring shame to her daughter, and to herself. In addition to silencing the wife of Poti-Phera, Pharaoh sought to silence Poti-Phera himself about Joseph's alleged rape attempt. What do people desire more than anything else? More than money? Power. Pharaoh again displayed his cunning by granting a status of priest to Poti-Phera, in exchange for

his silence. At first, Poti-Phera was not referred to in the verses as a "priest". This is changed afterwards to silence him. Finally, Pharaoh's changing of Joseph's name was an attempt to transform his Hebrew slave reputation, into an Egyptian icon. One's name creates a perceived status.

We now see how these ideas are all connected, and why God desired them to be in one passage. All of the elements in this passage aim towards Pharaoh's one goal of denying Joseph's alleged wrongdoings. But what about "Joseph going out on Egypt"? What is the Torah's lesson of placing it here? I believe it is to show that regardless of Pharaoh's success in rendering Joseph into a leader acceptable by the Egyptians, Joseph never shed his identity as "Joseph the Righteous". It was still "Joseph" who went out upon Egypt, and not the fabricated, Egyptian veneer "Zaphnas Paneach" created by Pharaoh.

It is enlightening to see the precision of the Torah - how it is written so sparingly. Just enough information is revealed to suggest the problem, and just enough for the answer. It is brilliant that those very statements, which cause the problem, are in fact the very clues to the answer. ■



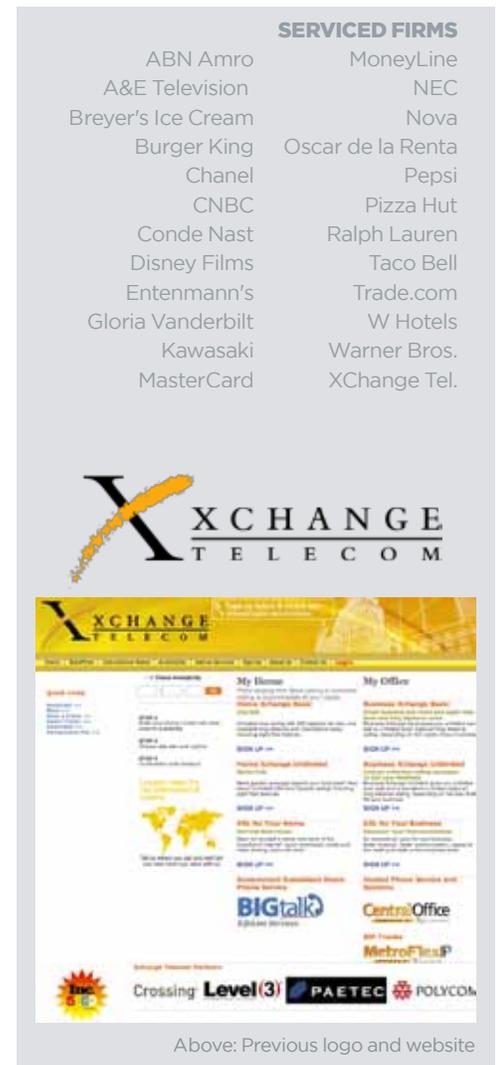


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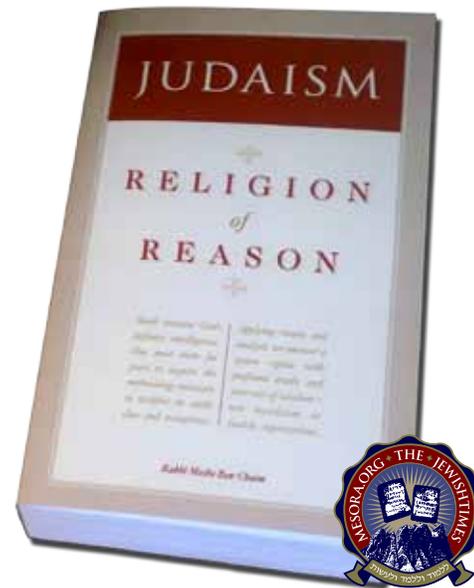
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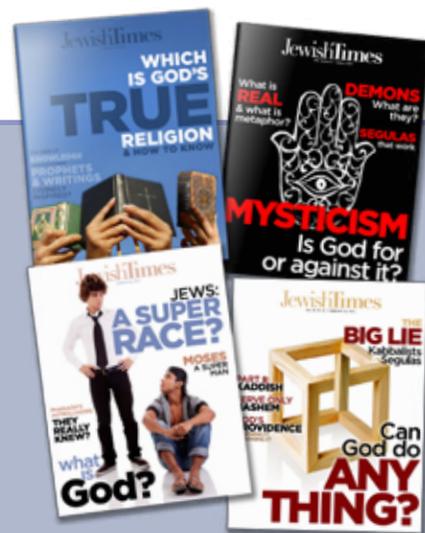
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Joseph & His Brothers

Rabbi Israel Chait Transcribed by a student

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

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tive. 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 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. ■

Unanticipated Consequences

RABBI REUVEN MANN



Joseph and his Brothers Dore

This week's Parsha, Vayigash, is easily the most dramatic in the entire Torah. It begins with the "approach" of Yehuda to speak to the Egyptian ruler. Yehuda who was a natural leader had been opposed to the killing of Yosef. It was he, who upon spotting the caravan, had convinced his brothers not to kill their younger sibling, "for he is our brother, our flesh" but to sell him as a slave to the Ishmaelites. Yehuda's conduct needs to be evaluated. It was meritorious in the sense that he saved Yosef from a terrible death in the pit; however, he failed to achieve a true rescue. Yosef would live, but as a slave to strangers in a foreign land. Is that fitting treatment for one who is "our brother, our flesh"? The story, which comes after the sale of Yosef is that of Yehuda's separation from his brothers. Rashi says this was triggered by the brother's reaction to Yaakov's extreme and inconsolable mourning for Yosef. They suddenly felt regret for what they had done and blamed Yehuda. They said, "You told us to sell him. Had you told us to return him we would have listened to you." There is an important lesson here for leaders. If they think they will retain popularity by giving in to the desires of their people, when they are clearly immoral, they will be sorely disappointed.

However, great people learn from their mistakes. Yehuda went through tragic experiences, losing both of his sons. At the time of the famine, he was back together with his brothers and accompanied them on their first journey to Egypt. The harsh treatment they had received at the hands of

the Egyptian ruler had caused the brothers to engage in serious introspection. They questioned their judgment and treatment of Yosef. They were now in a difficult situation. Shimon had been taken hostage and they were told they could not return without their brother, Benjamin, who would corroborate their story that they were not spies, but members of one family.

This demand created an existential crisis for Yaakov. Upon losing Yosef, Yaakov had become closely attached to Benjamin. He had kept him behind when the other brothers went to Egypt. He was extremely reluctant to subject his beloved Benjamin to the risk of the return journey to Egypt. Yehuda issued a guarantee of responsibility for the beloved son saying, "If I do not return him to you alive then I will have sinned against you forever."

Upon their return to Egypt things went well, initially, with Yosef hosting them and showering them with gifts. However, they had no idea what he had planned for them. His special goblet was hidden in the saddle of Benjamin who was accused of theft and sentenced to be a lifetime slave of Yosef. At this point, Yehuda remembered his guarantee and stepped up to speak to the Egyptian ruler. He was prepared to take the place of Benjamin and spend the rest of his life in bondage. He needed to find the right kind of argument, which would resonate with this tough ruler who had said he would only punish the guilty party.

Yehuda made an impassioned appeal for mercy. Justice, he argued, must be tempered with compassion. He told him

about his aged father and his special relationship with Benjamin. He revealed how much his father had suffered upon learning that Yosef had been "torn to bits." Benjamin's failure to return would not be just another loss to Yaakov, but would be a deathblow. And now, said Yehuda, since I have taken personal responsibility for the lad let me take his place as a slave and avoid bringing this terrible catastrophe upon my aged father.

At this point, Yosef decided that all of his goals in reuniting the family through Teshuva (repentance) had been accomplished. It was not enough that they had atoned for their mistreatment of Yosef. They had, in addition, been completely insensitive to the impact his death would have on Yaakov. When they witnessed his suffering, they turned against Yehuda. Yehuda had learned first-hand of the pain a father feels at the loss of his son. Yosef set things up so that the brothers would have to repent for the inadvertent sin they had committed against their father. Yehuda did not shirk from his responsibility to keep the promise he had made. He was prepared to sacrifice his life to spare Yaakov from re-experiencing the loss of Yosef. It was a heroic gesture, which atoned for his previous sin of callousness toward the emotional state of his father. Yosef was ready to forgive and move on, with the family united, to the next phase in the formation of the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

ABRAHAM & SODOM

How God Teaches Man

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



How did Abraham understand God's justice prior to God's communication with him? As he had no Torah or communication with God as of yet, by what means did Abraham arrive at a true understanding of God's will? God said "hamichaseh ani may-Abraham; will I keep hidden from Abraham (Gen. 18:17)." Of what knowledge was Abraham bereft, which he couldn't acquire on his own? What in God's words which introduced Abraham to new concepts?

Without the Torah, Abraham first posited that there is a Cause for all existences. The sciences, which relentlessly guide the spheres and all matter, were all too well organized – catering precisely to the world's daily needs – that it should exist without a Designer. There is a God. One initial Cause. Monotheism.

Abraham saw man as part of creation. He concluded; man is not merely to live his life without self-guidance, drifting aimlessly with no purpose. The existence of man's mark of distinction – his mind – taught Abraham that the Creator desired man to engage this very faculty. It was given only to man, and thus, it must be God's will that the mind is to be

used by man, above all other faculties. Therefore Abraham thought into all matters. Essentially, Abraham thought, "How does this Creator desire I live my life?"

Abraham understood that the primary acknowledgement of man's thinking must be his complete understanding and embrace of monotheism. To this end, Abraham debated with many individuals and proved through rational arguments that polytheism and atheism are false notions.

Once Abraham understood the pursuit of wisdom as God's wish for man, Abraham pondered many aspects of the world. They included natural law, philosophy, and laws of government. Abraham thought, "As God desires many men to populate the world, and all men have the goal of learning, all mankind must then work together to ensure a safe haven geared towards that goal of obtaining wisdom. Therefore, moral codes must be followed, i.e., man must ensure another's pursuit of the good."

As Abraham proceeded to teach his neighbors, God desired that Abraham have the correct ideas. Abraham was able to

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understand a great amount on his own, but other truths would go unrealized without Divine intervention.

This brings us to God's statement, "will I keep hidden from Abraham..." God introduced some new idea to Abraham. But what was it? God spoke very few words. He said:

"The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I (God) will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not, I know (Gen. 18:20)."

In these words alone was a new lesson to Abraham. (It is essential when learning to isolate wherein lays the answer.) Upon this prophecy, Abraham thought, "God knows whether they deserve to be destroyed, He knows all, so He knows their sin. However, God is saying that there are two possibilities here, destroying Sodom, or sparing them. Abraham then responded:

"Will you wipe out these cities if there are 50 righteous souls there? It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won't do justice!?" God then responds, "If find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake".

What did Abraham ask, and what did God respond? Abraham made a few statements, but one was not a question. When Abraham said, "It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won't do justice!?", he was not asking, but rather, he was stating, "this is not how You work". Abraham repeats the concept of justice in that passage, teaching us that he was only talking about justice. Abraham had no question on this, a



righteous person should live, and a wicked person should die. Justice demands this. What Abraham was asking on was "tzedaka", charity, i.e., whether God would save even the wicked, if enough righteous people were present in the city. And this is precisely what God answered Abraham:

"If I find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake".

The question is, from where did Abraham obtain this idea, that God would not only work with justice, but He would engage traits over and above pure justice, something we would call charity, or tzedaka?

Abraham realized this idea from God's few words, "I (God)

will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not..." God said there was an option. Meaning, although God knew Sodom and Amora were sinful, and He knew the exact measure of their sin, nonetheless, there was an option regarding their fate. Abraham deduced from God's words that there are criteria other than the sinners' own flaws, which God views to evaluate the sinners' fate. This is precisely what God intended Abraham to learn. This is not something a person can determine from his studies. And since Abraham was to be a "mighty nation", and that he was going to "teach his household to keep the ways of God (Gen. 18:18-19)", Abraham needed to be instructed in those ways. (Note: We learn that God teaches man through engaging his mind, and not simply spelling out the idea. God made Abraham use his reasoning to learn the concept.)

What is this idea, that God will spare the wicked, provided righteous people are present? I believe it teaches us that God will tolerate the wicked, provided there are proper influences with the potential to change the wicked. In such a case, the wicked are not doomed. This teaches us the extent to which God endures sinners. "...do I desire the death of the wicked? Rather, in the repentance of the wicked and that he lives. Repent, repent from your evil ways, and why shall you die, house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11)

We also see earlier that God desires Abraham to know both charity and justice, (Gen. 18:19) "...and he will keep to God's ways to do charity and justice."

What is the difference between charity and justice, and why is charity so essential, that God made certain Abraham possessed this concept? Justice,

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we understand, is necessary for any society to operate. Deterrents must exist to prevent people from venting their aggression and destroying society. Where does tzedaka come in? I believe tzedaka is necessary for the individual, as opposed to justice, which is for the society. If there is injustice, it must be corrected so a society may continue. But what if a person has endured a tortured existence, now facing penalties from a justice system, which treats him equal to all others, with no consideration for the unique side effects affecting him, resultant from pure, strict justice? Won't this person have the potential to break at some point? He may even commit suicide. Without tzedaka, charity, one may feel that his specific situation is not recognized. Feelings of persecution and victimization may lead to self-destruction.

It is man's nature when things go bad, to close in on himself,

feeling that a streak of misery is upon him. This feeling strips him from all hope. He eventually feels alienated from society at large which seems to be 'doing fine', and the "why me" attitude sets in. He begins a downward spiral. Without another person showing him pity, and a desire to assist, he may be doomed.

This is where I feel tzedaka plays a vital role in society. If we are to ensure the well being of society with the aforementioned goal of securing mankind's haven for intellectual pursuits, we need to recognize and insure the presence of more than justice alone. We must also recognize that man needs individual attention in the form of sympathy, empathy, care, hospitality, generosity, and all other forms. The fortunate among us must also initiate such care, and not wait until the fallen person calls out, for it might be too late, and he never calls out, but ends matters drastically. For this

reason, the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) teaches, that giving tzedaka is not simply giving money. We are obligated to commiserate with the unfortunate soul. The uplifting of his countenance is the goal, and money is only one item through which we accomplish this goal. Maimonides states that the highest level of man is when he is concerned with his fellow man.

Man's nature is that he needs to be recognized as an individual. Without this recognition, man feels no integrity, and will not move on with his life. Therefore, tzedaka is essential to a society's laws. Justice and charity must go hand in hand. Justice serves the society, while charity addresses the individual. Both are essential. And I would add that at times, there are many who require tzedaka, but this must not be confused with broader societal norms, i.e., justice. Both affect the many, but for different reasons. ■



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YOSEF'S TRIALS

In Parshat VaYigash, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. His father, Yaakov, his brothers, and their families join him in Egypt. Yosef's family settles in the area of Goshen and Yosef provides for them for the duration of the famine. The narrative of the parasha describes the realization of the dreams that Yosef dreamt as a young man. In those dreams Yosef envisioned himself as his family's leader and provider. Yosef had achieved a position of power and authority. His family joined him in Egypt not as equals, but as subjects. Yosef also managed the distribution of the provisions that would sustain his family during the years of famine. He was his family's provider.

However, it is also clear from the Torah's narrative that Yosef's dreams were realized only after he experienced long years of torment, and loneliness. Why was this extended period of isolation from his family necessary? Why was Yosef only allowed to realize his childhood visions after a prolonged period of intense suffering? Apparently, Yosef's experiences, in some way, transformed him and prepared him for his role as leader. What was the nature of this transformation and how did Yosef's long lonely years bring about this transformation?

And his brothers said to him: Shall you indeed reign over us or shall you indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. (Sefer Beresheit 37:8)

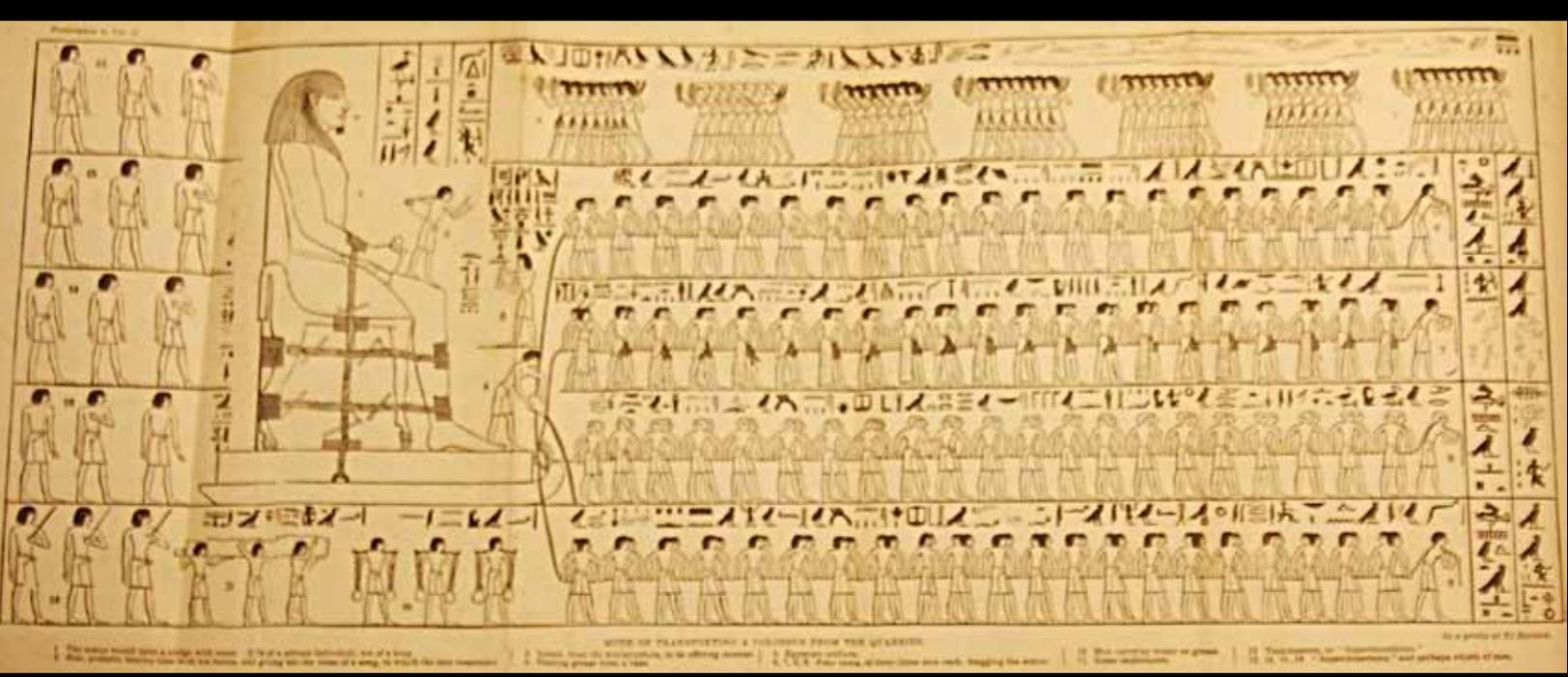
And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither; for G-d did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years has the famine been in the land; and there are yet five years, in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. And G-d sent me before you to give you a remnant on the earth, and to save you alive for a great deliverance. (Beresheit 45:5-7)

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THE MAKING OF A LEADER

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And Yosef said unto his brethren: Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said: I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. (Sefer Beresheit 45:4)



YOSEF'S TRANSFORMATION

The first step toward answering these questions is to identify the change that took place in Yosef over the long period of his exile from his family. Yosef is introduced in Parshat VaYeshev. He is Yaakov's favored son. He is apparently being groomed by his father for a position of leadership within the family. His father provides him with a special garment – a jacket – that confirms his special status. The Torah tells us that he is sent by his father to check upon his brothers and to report back on their welfare. This incident leads to Yosef's tragic encounter with his brothers and his descent into bondage. However, the incident also indicates that Yaakov relied upon Yosef to monitor his brothers.

Yosef's brothers resent his favored position within the family. Their attitude toward Yosef does not seem to be unfounded. Yosef shares with his brothers his dreams of grandeur. They sense that he wishes to impose himself over them and to lord over them. They regard him as self-engrossed and deluded. The Torah seems to suggest that the brothers' assessment of the young Yosef is not completely unfounded.

In Parshat VaYigash a dramatically different image of Yosef emerges. Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. His brothers respond with astonishment and are overwhelmed by confusion. It is not difficult to imagine the thoughts that occupied the brothers. They had sold their brother Yosef into slavery. They could imagine the suffering he had experienced before somehow rising to his current position of power. They presumed that Yosef resented and even hated them. They assumed that he held them responsible for all that he had suffered. They did not know how to respond to Yosef's revelation of his identity.

Before the brothers can respond Yosef intervenes. He tells his brothers to not fear him. They sold him into bondage. But their actions were a part of a greater providential plan. Hashem has chosen him to be the rescuer of the family from the ravages of the famine. He has been selected by Hashem to assure the survival and development of a great people.

Yosef's message to his brothers communicates the emergence of a personality unknown to the brothers. This was not the self-absorbed boastful brother whose dreams and fantasies of dominance they had intensely resented. The Yosef who stood before them was an individual who completely set aside his own ego and saw himself as an instrument of Hashem and an actor in a historical drama that would shape the future of humankind. Rather than assessing the actions of his brothers from the perspective of the personal, he only viewed their behaviors as necessary elements within a Divine plan to rescue the family of the covenant.

And Yosef was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Paroh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the hand of the Ismaelites, that had brought him down there. (Sefer Beresheit 39:1)

And Yosef's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound; and he was there in the prison. (Sefer Beresheit 39:20)

And Yosef answered Paroh, saying: It is not in me; G-d will give Paroh an answer of peace. (Sefer Beresheit 41:16)

YOSEF'S PATH TO TRANSFORMATION

How did Yosef's experiences in Egypt bring about this transformation? This question requires an extensive analysis. This discussion will only deal with this issue briefly.

Yosef entered Egypt as an exile and as a slave. Exile is a humbling experience. Our Sages suggest that exile from the familiar surroundings of one's home encourages humility. In addition to exile, Yosef was also subjected to servitude and bondage. Apparently, these measures did have some impact in tempering Yosef's youthful self-absorption. This is indicated by the ascent of Yosef from the status of a common household servant to a position of authority within the household of an important minister. However, it is also apparent that the exile and servitude Yosef endured were not adequate to prepare him for the leadership role for which he was destined.

Yosef was subjected to new afflictions. He was unjustly imprisoned. Imprisonment undoubtedly further tempered any remaining egotism. However, the series of events that led to his unjust imprisonment also communicated to Yosef an important message. The individual – regardless of his genius and ability – is not the master of his own destiny. We are all subject to forces we neither can predict or control. Even the most wise and powerful person can only succeed through the benevolence of Hashem.

With time, Yosef grasped this message and openly expressed it when he was finally summoned by Paroh. Paroh summons Yosef to interpret his disturbing dreams. Yosef carefully explains to Paroh that any interpretation that Paroh receives will not come from him – from Yosef. It will be a message from Hashem delivered through Yosef.

THE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP EMBODIED BY YOSEF

This account of Yosef's emergence as the leader of his family provides a description of the Torah's model of leadership. It is not a model that most leaders can hope to fully embody. However, the model establishes a standard for which every leader must strive. It also communicates a clear message regarding the basis for the leader's decisions.

A lay or religious leader cannot use his or her position of authority and influence for the pursuit of a personal agenda or to further the aims of a special interest group for whom the leader has an affinity or bond. The Torah's leadership ideal requires that the leader focus on his mission and the needs of the community that he serves and not upon the personal. The leader must be self-effacing and assess each experience and decision on the basis of this mission. Personal disappointments and even intentional wrongs cannot deter the leader from striving to fulfill this mission. Personal ambitions or self-interests cannot be the basis for decisions. This is the leadership modeled by Yosef. ■

Das Torah & Rabbinic Infallibility

Moshe Abarbanel



The first time I heard the concept of “Das Torah” it struck me as strange. It is widely understood as current Torah leaders possessing flawless knowledge.

A friend explained that the great wise men (chachamim) receive divine inspiration allowing them to make correct decisions. This is why they are consulted for answers to our problems. But I asked him if we have greater divine providence today than back in the day of the prophets. Did the prophets – who were of the greatest moral and intellectual character – never make mistakes? If so, how could it be that today when we have no prophecy and even our greatest intellectual minds are nothing in comparison, that our current Rabbis might be infallible? His explanation struck me as well-meaning, but he projected papal infallibility onto Judaism.

I asked Rabbi Israel Chait about this concept. He told me that people have it all wrong. In fact, Rabbi Chait used this week's Haftarah as a proof. When King David planned to build a permanent house for God, he first consults with Nathan the prophet: “See now I dwell in a house of cedar wood while the Ark of God dwells within a curtain.” (Samuel II 7:2) Nathan the prophet thinks this is a great idea, and in fact he tells King David “Whatever is in your heart go and do for Hashem is with you.” (ibid 7:3) At that point in time, Nathan, one of our great prophets analyzed the plan presented to him and gave it his blessing. That night Hashem appears to Nathan in a prophecy telling him that David shall not build the Temple. We learn from this prophecy that Nathan mistakenly endorsed David's plan to build the Temple. Now, if one of our prophets could be so wrong in a case involving such holiness as constructing the Beit Hamikdash, certainly, our current leaders are fallible.

A second proof that our leaders can make mistakes appears in the Torah portion of parshas Shemini. After the death of

Nadav and Avihu, Aaron and his remaining sons entirely burn a sacrifice on the altar. This disturbs Moshe. He inquires. There are many different interpretations of what actually happened to the sacrifice, but Aaron explains what happened: “Were I to eat this day's sin offering, would Hashem approve?” When Moshe heard Aaron's answer the Torah tells us, “Moshe heard and it was well pleasing in his sight.” (Leviticus 10:20) Clearly, Moshe – our greatest prophet – mistakenly accused Aaron and his sons of wrongdoing. In fact Rashi supports this saying “He admitted and was not ashamed to say ‘I did not hear’”.

If the greatest prophet who ever lived made a mistake, how much more so does any wise man who came after him? In fact the greatness of Moshe here, according to Rashi, is his humbleness. He admitted his mistake to his brother and nephews without hesitation. He did not allow his exalted position to justify any expression of arrogance, or conceal his error. This is a great lesson for all of us. Those who have a misconception of Das Torah must take an example from Moshe Rebbenu.

So what is Das Torah? I believe it is a strength and inspiration given to our leaders in their time of need. This does not make them infallible. I would like to note that on decisions pertaining to Jewish Law (Halacha) we must listen to the Rabbis; even if they tell us our left hand is our right. (They have rights to define our relationship to reality) If each person chooses the law for himself, Judaism will cease to exist. But we are not commanded to give up our minds. We must question the Rabbis and point out inconsistencies in thinking and in law. In the end we are all truth-seekers. We must question even our great Torah Scholars.

Have a good shabbos. ■

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