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**TORAH IS
PERFECT**
PSALMS

**JOSEPH &
PHARAOH**

PARSHA

DREAMS



Joseph's Response to Pharaoh's Dreams

Rabbi Israel Chait
Written by a student

How did Joseph know that Pharaoh's dreams were prophetic; maybe they were natural nightmares? Reviewing Joseph's first words to Pharaoh, it is amazing, and interesting. It shows you a truly important idea about life, that perhaps, you would not otherwise know.

"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.'" Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not I; God will answer Pharaoh's peace" (Gen. 41:15,16).

Pharaoh praised Joseph and built him up. Joseph responded, ascribing all his wisdom to God. It sounds like a false humility. Rashi comments:

"The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer — He will put in my mouth an answer that will give Pharaoh peace."

On the surface, Joseph appears to be saying the dream is a good one, but how does he know? He had not yet heard the dream. Furthermore, according to Rashi, is it not the height of arrogance to claim knowledge of God's plans? Pharaoh then retells Joseph his two dreams of the 7 healthy and 7 emaciated cows, and the 7 healthy and 7 withered ears of grain, where the latter 7 in each dream swallowed the former 7.

"And Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'Pharaoh's dreams are one; God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. The 7 healthy cows are 7 years, and the 7 healthy ears are 7 years; it is the same dream'" (Ibid. 41:25,26).

Later, Joseph tells Pharaoh:

"And as for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter is imminent by God, and that God will soon carry it out" (Ibid. 41:32).

Thus, Joseph first explains the dreams' repetition with this verse. Meaning, when he told Pharaoh earlier that the "dreams were one," he was not yet explaining the duplication, but a different concept. What was that concept?

Joseph did not know that the dream was prophetic; he hadn't heard it yet. When Joseph said, "God will answer Pharaoh's peace," he was not referring to the interpretation; he was referring to Pharaoh's state of mind. Pharaoh was suffering; conflict is the worst state of mind. Pharaoh was disturbed for he could not understand the dreams meaning. An ordinary dream will express one's conflict; one can be disturbed regarding an inner conflict of which he is ignorant. Or he can be disturbed because the dream is prophetic and he senses that it is bad, but he doesn't understand it. Either one of these possibilities would disturb Pharaoh. When Rashi says, "God will answer — He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh's welfare," he is not referring to the future. Joseph doesn't know the dream is prophetic; he hadn't heard the dream yet. Joseph meant that either way, "I am going to alleviate your disturbed state of mind." If it's a natural dream, the disturbance is an unconscious conflict, and Joseph will help to reveal that conflict and Pharaoh will achieve peace. And if the dream is prophetic and the outcome is hidden from Pharaoh, once Joseph would explain it to Pharaoh, it won't disturb Pharaoh any more, even if it forecasts something bad. Joseph said that either way, he could help remove Pharaoh's suffering. Ignorance traps one's mind; it makes one obsess on a matter. Joseph told Pharaoh he could help remove that ignorance. Understanding the dream alleviates one's mind.

The immediate suffering Pharaoh endured was greater than a bad outcome. The latter is just reality, but the worst thing is the inner struggle. More important than discovering the dream's interpretation, is psychological harmony. Joseph said he will help alleviate this turmoil. "I will make you whole, I will make

you at peace with yourself.” This is what Joseph meant. The dream could be bad or good; either way, he would alleviate Pharaohs’ distraught state. Joseph was not referring to assisting Pharaoh in the future reality [the dreams’ meaning]. He was referring to the fact that once the future reality ceases to be hidden from Pharaoh, the suffering will cease. But a prophetic dream disturbs a person, unlike a psychological conflict; it operates in its own orbit. That is, that the bad subject matter is hidden. In prophetic dreams, the event is hidden. But yet, man experiences the affect of the event. This affect—without a realistic cause—disturbs man. He has a disturbing affect, but he does not know why. He keeps trying to reach out to discover the cause. But once the cause is revealed, that pain is gone.

Let us answer Rashi, which always bothered me: *“The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer — He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh’s welfare.”* This sounds like false humility. Wouldn’t that make Joseph arrogant, claiming that God puts into his mouth an answer? Even if God had done so before, how can he know that God will do it again? And if Joseph means God always does this for him, is this not the height of arrogance? How does Joseph know for sure that God—from the heavens—will implant in His answer in Joseph’s mind? Maybe He won’t.

However, the explanation is that this was a prayer, not foreknowledge, for no man knows God’s thoughts. Joseph said to Pharaoh in other words, “It is my prayer that God puts words in my mouth.” As the Rav said on the words, “And God should give dread; V’chane tane pachdicha” (High Holiday prayers), it is a prayer that God “should” give man proper dread of God’s kingship. Joseph said, “I have no special powers, and I can’t guarantee an answer.” Joseph prayed that God “should” give him an answer so Pharaoh would be at peace, not that God “will” do this.

Now we have the question which we started with: How did Joseph know that Pharaoh’s dreams were in fact prophetic?

Dreams are wish fulfillment. Even in a bad dream, in a nightmare, there exists some positive element. It may not be the essence of the dream, which might be very bad, but there exists some good. However, Joseph said, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one.” Now, if with “Pharaoh’s dreams are one” Joseph meant to address the dreams’ repetition, Joseph’s words later would be redundant: *“And as for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter is imminent by God, and that God will soon carry it out” (Ibid. 41:32)*. This would be redundant. But the language in 41:32 indicates that Joseph did not yet discuss the repetition of the dreams. In truth, in 41:32, Joseph addresses the repetition for the first time. Thus, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one” stated earlier cannot address the imminent nature of the forecast. It does not mean that there are both: good and bad cows, one good element and one bad. “It’s one dream” means there are no good cows; there is no value in the good cows. The subsequent emaciated cows completely obscured the healthy cows; there was no good in the healthy cows as they were destined to inevitably be swallowed by the famine. The goodness of the healthy cows serves no good element, Pharaoh gains no benefit at all. It’s “one dream of bad cows completely removing the good of the healthy cows.” The dream is not “good cows” separate from “bad cows.” It’s tied together; the good cows are destined to be swallowed-up by the bad cows.

Thus, there was no good element in Pharaoh’s dreams. Thereby Joseph understood these dreams were prophetic, for they contained no positive element [natural dreams are partially wish fulfillment—a positive element—but Pharaoh’s dreams contained no such wish. Thus, the dreams must be prophetic]. Telling Pharaoh his dreams were one, Joseph was not explaining the duplication, but that in neither dream was there any positive element. This was not a simple nightmare with deeply rooted conflicts. As there is nothing good in these dreams, they must be prophetic.

Another important point is that primitive man is fatalistic about dreams. He feels that a dream forecasts inevitable doom. Joseph taught Pharaoh a different philosophy: man can act with intellect to avoid a forecast. [And that’s exactly what Joseph did.] Pharaoh always thought that an interpretation is final. Joseph taught Pharaoh that although the interpretation is horrible, “you are not bound by it.” Free will can override the interpretation [it can manipulate real future factors, and avoid catastrophe. The forecast was true, but depending on man’s response, he can either sit back and tolerate the doom—a primitive attitude—or he can devise a strategy to alter the outcome].

Pharaoh responded to Joseph’s suggestion to appoint a grain keeper: “Can we find another like him, a *man* in whom is the spirit of God?” (Gen. 41:38). Pharaoh expressed surprise at this new method: matters are not fatalistic; man has free will. A dream is just a revelation; God is informing man what will happen (without man’s intervention), but it does not have to result this way. All depends on man’s free

will. Pharaoh meant to say, “We never viewed life this way; we always viewed life/dreams as fatalistic.”

Pharaoh called Joseph a “man”; one not frightened by superstition. Nevertheless, Joseph is not an atheist; “God’s spirit is in him.” An atheist, you can say, is a man.” Putin said, “I can do as I will; there is no divine retribution.” OK, that’s his view. He is a “man.” But he has no “spirit of God.” But Pharaoh said of Joseph that he is a free thinker; he has free will, he does not fear acting, but he also has knowledge of God through his spirit of God. “Can we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?” Pharaoh was surprised; usually you find a heretic who is a powerful man, or you find a man with the spirit of God in him, but he cannot act. But Joseph possessed both qualities.

The Significance of Dreams

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week’s parsha, Miketz, describes the most unlikely turn of events one could possibly imagine. How could a Jewish kid, sold as a slave at the tender age of 17 to a nation whose people could not eat bread at the same table as the Hebrews, rise to become the most powerful figure in the country?

Not only that, but could this slave transform Egypt into the world’s breadbasket, providing sustenance to many nations at a time of deadly famine?

The ways of G-d are beyond our comprehension. Yosef was an extraordinary person endowed with the gift of prophecy. This proved to be the cause of both his downfall and his ultimate success. As a youth, he had had two dreams foretelling great things, which he carelessly related to his brothers. For this indiscretion he paid a heavy price.

However, the brothers’ abusive treatment of Yosef fit in perfectly with the Divine plan. In Egypt, his ability to accurately interpret dreams was the gateway by which he rose to supreme power. But the road to this goal would be a rocky one.

The first stage of Yosef’s ascension was his encounter with the wife of Potiphar. He was extremely handsome, and his mistress was very attracted to him. She persisted in pressuring him to accede to her desires, but he refused. One day she found herself alone with him at home, sought to seduce him, and would not be denied. She “caught hold of him by his garment, saying ‘Lie with me,’ so he left his cloak in her hand and fled outside.”

As one would expect, the spurned lady now sought revenge, claiming that Yosef had attempted to rape her, but when she screamed he fled in haste, leaving his garment behind. This piece of evidence lent credence to her case, and Yosef was cast into the dungeon.

One can’t help but wonder why Yosef was seemingly so careless. He had to know the extreme danger of leaving his coat behind. Had he grabbed it from her, there would have been no evidence substantiating her damning accusation. Why was Yosef so unconcerned about leaving behind an incriminating piece of evidence?

The great Biblical commentator Ralbag explains that Yosef acted intentionally. He says, “It is appropriate for a perfected person to overcome his inclination so as not to sin against Hashem, and he should not be afraid of any evil consequences he might suffer as a result. Thus we see that Yosef left his garment with his mistress for fear that he might be overcome by his desires, and he wasn’t worried about the harm that he would suffer at the hands of his master’s wife.” It was more important to Yosef to guard himself from sin than to protect himself from false accusations and imprisonment.

Yosef paid a heavy price for his righteous behavior. However, his unjustified incarceration was part of the Divine plan. For the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker were imprisoned with him. He noticed their despair on the morning after both of them had very disturbing dreams. Yosef confidently interpreted both dreams, and in three days, his predictions proved accurate to the last detail. The seeds for Yosef’s deliverance had been sown.

When the Butler was freed, as his dream had predicted, Yosef asked him to intercede for him with Pharaoh. However, the Butler (who had just received a great dispensation from Pharaoh) saw no benefit for himself in pushing his luck for the Hebrew kid. G-d, however, arranged a situation where it would be

in the Butler's interests to remember Yosef's deed.

Pharaoh had a strange and disturbing dream that none of his wise men could decipher. When the Butler saw that he could be a hero, the opportunity jolted his memory, and Yosef was summoned before the King. The Hebrew slave revealed the true meaning of the dreams and how Pharaoh could avoid the devastating calamity they portended. For one of the few times in history, true genius was recognized and appreciated. Pharaoh said, "Now that Hashem has revealed all this to you, there is none as discerning and wise as you." And he appointed Yosef to rule the land.

Yosef realized that his great wisdom and prophetic insight were a gift from Hashem to be used for the benefit of mankind. Most significantly, he sanctified G-d's name by showing Pharaoh that Hashem was the source of all wisdom and that He graciously shared it with those who truly feared Him.

The mission of the Jewish people is to proclaim and sanctify Hashem's name in the world by displaying the type of knowledge and understanding that will cause the nations to proclaim, "What a wise and discerning people is this great nation." Yosef showed that this can be achieved. May we merit to follow in his footsteps.

Shabbat shalom v'Chanukah sameach.

P.S. Have you almost finished reading the essays in Eternally Yours: Genesis? Eternally Yours: Exodus is now available. The articles offer a new and original perspective on the weekly parsha that will encourage you to think and enhance your appreciation of Torah and enjoyment of Shabbat. Both books are available on Amazon.com

And now we are close to finishing the third in the Eternally Yours series on Bamidbar. Please stay tuned.

Divine Dreams: Two Amazing Lessons

Rabbi M. Gisser

Dedicated to my dear friend Rabbi Roth, whose one question led to many insights

When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter comes to mind. This painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke, would be in awe of how with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of 11 sheaves bowing to his. And then in another dream, he saw 11 stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph...eventually selling him instead. It was his father who suggested and rejected an interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph: the 11 stars being his 11 brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, 13 years later, Joseph accurately and astonishingly interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's

dreams. All 3 dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills concerning his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in unraveling each dream solely through his own wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a further denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph, was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain. Having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph would be psychologically crippled, and certainly no viceroy.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." Rabbi Israel Chait said that this means that Joseph would use the divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma. Would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as divine in origin: a license to perfect his brothers. As Rabbi Chait taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to his—physical dominance—was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm, symbolized by the 11 stars, sun and moon bowing to him. Then first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them concerning their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers...but perhaps much earlier. Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

When did Joseph become such a great dream interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards and Pharaoh himself, with such precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "Ben Zekunim" or as Unkelos translates, "a wise son." Jacob taught Joseph all his knowledge attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed—if not caused—Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities.

God's Dreams: Altering History and Offering Perfection

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrong doings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams prophetically sent to Joseph had many ramifications.

Rabbi Chait taught that the dreams also provided perfection for the brothers, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph's plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was preoccupied "reciting the Shema." Of course the Shema (Torah phrases) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph's plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done.

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego, they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin, and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel expressed in her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing.

Dream Instruction

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were true and Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his 2 dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Aver, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state seeking repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

Pharaoh and His Stewards

10 years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine and bakery stewards were troubled by their dreams, and invited them to recount them before him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. 2 more years elapse, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision, and they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

2 Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." God gave Joseph 2 dreams, for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. What do I mean? Besides the "content" of the dreams, prophetic dreams also have a "style": the chosen dream recipient, and dream duplication.

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received "2" dreams. Ramban states that 2 separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of the dreams' content concerning the cows and the ears in a single dream (Ramban, Gen. 41:32). Pharaoh didn't wake up and dream similar content again...unless it was divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the 2 stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph too had 2 separate dreams with similar content (Gen. 37:9). Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their divine origin: "[divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies" (Num. 12:6).

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: "God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you..." (Gen. 45:7)

What did Joseph determine were indicative of divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the "recipient" also indicates divine intent. These 2 elements were contained in the stewards' dreams and in Pharaoh's dreams. The stewards' dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to 2 individuals. Pharaoh also had 2 dreams, and of additional significance, it was "Pharaoh"—the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine—who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication and a strategic dream recipient point to the dream's Divine nature. So convinced was Joseph of their divine origin that the recipient is of a

telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, “What God plans He has told to Pharaoh” (Gen. 41:25). Joseph meant to say, “Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its divine nature.” And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards’ interpretations, and rising to viceroy applying his wisdom to Pharaoh’s dreams.

Amazing!

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob’s household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation...the very matter essential for carving our Jewish history. The design of Joseph’s dreams contained the blueprint for determining the divine nature of the other dreams he would interpret. In other words, his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message in an alien language, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph’s dreams’ “content” contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream “design” (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph’s dreams, God 1) placed Joseph in prison to humble him, 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother, 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love, and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph’s imprisonment, also provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation.

We appreciate God’s wisdom: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph’s appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God’s will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God’s message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A Fifth Message

Additionally, dreams—by definition—are a manifestation of “hidden” material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His prophets in dreams, as stated in Numbers 12:6, it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, certainly God’s dreams conceal deeper ideas to a greater degree. God’s selected mode of communicating with His prophets via dreams is meant to underscore the principle that God’s words too must undergo man’s interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

Relevance to Us

Does this lesson have any relevance in our lives? Without witnessing a miracle, we certainly cannot determine with any certainty that a given action is the hand of God. Maybe it is, maybe not. We do not know. We must review our successes and failures with the possibility that God’s education of man can take one of 2 roads: 1) divine intervention for the individual, as with Joseph’s dreams; or 2) natural laws of general providence, such as “boredom” with new acquisitions. God designed man’s psyche to be frustrated with overindulgence in the physical pleasures, so as to redirect our energies back to the world of Torah wisdom. This is not individual providence, but a law of nature that applies equally to all members of mankind. Our consideration of our travails must straddle both spheres of God’s workings. And since the Talmud teaches that prophecy has ceased, our dreams are not prophetic. However, there is a primary lesson that does apply to us all.

A Life of Wisdom

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family and all of Egypt using wisdom alone. Since he guided his actions purely based on wisdom, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same, singular wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach. We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Viewing our misfortunes as divinely intended—"It's all for the good"—man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. Maimonides teaches that most of our misfortunes are self-inflicted. It is only through following Torah—"Let us search our ways, analyze, and return to God" (Eicha 3:40)—analyzing our ways and determining whether they match Torah ideals, that we will avoid many misfortunes, and our need to falsely pacify ourselves with "It's all for the good." Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis and internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, as God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention.

The Torah has all we need. Quick fixes like amulets, superstitious red bendels can't help us. They can't defend from God's punishments. They are also powerless to stop our foolishness. God says in Eicha that the approach to self-improvement and a good life is to engage wisdom, and to change our poor behaviors.

Pharaoh's Wisdom

Rabbi M. Gisser

In Genesis 41:45, we find that after Pharaoh sees the undeniable brilliance of Joseph to interpret his dreams, 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—tradition—that when one pasuk (passage) contains many points, they must all be related, as God determined all ideas 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? His wife 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, and 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? I believe 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 false. 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 as a "priest." This is changed afterwards to silence him. Finally, Pharaoh's changing Joseph's name was an attempt to cloak Joseph's Hebrew slave reputation with an Egyptian veneer. One's name creates a perceived status.

We now see how these many ideas are connected, and why God joined them 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 personal 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. 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, clues to the answer.

Torah is Perfect

Rabbi M. Gisser

"The sun is like a groom coming forth from the chamber, like a hero, eager to run his course. His rising-place is at one end of heaven, and his circuit reaches the other; nothing escapes his heat. The teaching of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimonies of the Lord are trustworthy, making the simple wise." (Psalms 19:6-8).

King David (Psalm's author) first discusses the sun's benefit, followed by Torah's benefit. Although both the sun and Torah benefit man independent of each other, this progression from sun to Torah contains yet another message.

Radak comments:

Why does he [King David] join the idea of the Law with that of the sun? His meaning is, that as the heavens and the sun and the spheres are witnessing to and declaring the glory of God and His wisdom, so [too] the Law and the Commandments which He has commanded His people Israel witness to His wisdom and uprightness, as it says (Deut. 4:8), "What great nation is there that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Law?" And further he says that as the heavens and the sun benefit the world, and through them the world continues to exist, so [too] is the Law, which is perfect and restores the soul, and upon which (depends) the preservation of the soul, as the preservation of the world (depends) upon the sun. For the soul in the body is as a stranger in a foreign land who has none to help or assist him, for the agents (the instincts) which minister to the body are for the most part such as follow after the appetites, and she (the soul) is as a solitary one and captive amongst them. So also says

Solomon, who compares her to a poor wise man (Koh. 9:15). And notice the Law restores the soul in that it teaches man the right way and draws him away from worldly desires and from many stumbling-blocks. And notice it restores the soul from captivity and confinement to her (rightful) birth and the place of her glory. And David declares in respect of the Law and the commandments and the judgments, their truth and uprightness.

The Soul is a "Captive"

Radak refers to the soul as a "captive," and rightfully so. The soul is an alien in a world (man's psyche) which contains many strong passions that inhibit the soul's expression. From youth, these passions and lusts deter man towards instinctual gratification. Abraham was unique in his independent thought. But the typical man's soul requires time to develop, and external instruction in order to grow towards preferring knowledge and mastering our appetites, instead of satisfying our instincts. Torah or course is that training.

Although from birth, we already possess a soul—just like we possess instincts—the instincts naturally and without training operate in full form from birth and throughout life, tapping man's energies to chase desires. Instincts don't need to be trained to desire physical pleasure, just as we don't need to be trained to breathe, eat or laugh. But intelligence is different. Man must first learn about existences: parents, siblings, trees, sky, animals and so on. It then must learn about causal relationships and natural laws: sharp things make us bleed, and gravity causes things to fall. The intellect stores all these lessons, and then starts realizing deeper truths, like human feelings: taking a toy from another child makes him cry. Throughout maturity, the child learns about fear, friends, ego, morality, and eventually, God.

To this point, man has been on an absorption, fact-finding mission. Self-reflection, self estimation, responsibility, insecurity, trust and more mature attitudes finally set in. Now, with an understanding of the main aspects of life, a person can appreciate both, physical existence, psychological existence, philosophy and God. With the backdrop of factual knowledge, philosophy, psychology and God's Torah, a person only then may judge what is true and what is morally correct. But until this age of roughly 13, the soul was captive to the emotions: it has grown accustomed and comfortable with an instinctual existence. And here is the battle: to overcome what feels good, in place of what intelligence says is best, as is God's plan.

Torah Restores the Soul

Radak continues:

...it (Torah) restores the soul from captivity and confinement to her (rightful) birth and the place of her glory.

Radak means that Torah benefits man in two ways. First, as the instincts ruled man since youth, this damaged the soul. It is no longer in its original untarnished state, which it was at birth. Following the instincts has distanced the soul from wisdom, and caused it to not seek wisdom. This is the damage to the soul; it is not pursuing thought. Although the soul retains its capacity to explore wisdom, it has not done so, and it has not grown in its attachment to truth. The second benefit is that Torah enables the soul to reach its potential, "the place of her glory."

The Patriarchs' Perfection

Radak continues:

The book (itself) is called by the name of the Law (Torah) from Genesis to Deuteronomy, as is written (Deut. 31:9): "And Moses wrote this Law"; "Take this book of the Law" (ibid. 26); (this is) because it narrates the history of Creation and also narrates the affairs of the Fathers; it likewise sets forth every single one of the things which teach about God: that He is the founder of the world, of His goodness and of the beings created by Him, and His providence in the case both of the good and the evil. He mentions the commandments also – that is, what God commanded (man) to do in the ways of the service of God and love of Him, as of a master who gives commandment to his servant.

Radak identifies the “affairs of the Fathers.” The patriarchs and matriarchs had no Torah. They demonstrated man’s ability to arrive at perfection using intellect alone. This is why I said above that man “typically” requires external instruction to perfect himself. But rare individuals rise above their instincts and realize God’s truths and plan for man. Torah discusses these great people at length to declare that man is capable, and ultimately responsible for choosing truth and morality, regardless of his upbringing. “Who gives commandment” teaches that without commands, man cannot learn from nature that he is to be subservient to God. This explains why God also commanded Adam. Although a perfected intellect (Ibn Ezra), Adam would not know of his subservience to God without God commanding him in something. This cannot be gleaned from studying nature alone.

Man Errs; God’s Knowledge is Absolute Truth
Ibn Ezra comments:

The sun testifies that Torah is perfect. And according to my thinking, until here it is mentioned how an understanding person can find testimony [proof] on God’s existence and His works. And King David said that Torah is a greater testament and more trustworthy [than creation] and that is God’s Torah, and its testaments, and its statutes and its commands and the fear of Him, and His laws.

Ibn Ezra shares a beautiful thought: “Torah is a greater testament” to discovering God than is nature, stated as “The sun testifies that Torah is perfect.” This metaphor that “nature confirms Torah as superior” means nature cannot offer man the greatest wisdom. This is because what man learns from nature is human derivation and deduction: man has no monopoly on absolute truth and makes many errors in thought. Star worshippers embody this error, for they deduced idolatrous notions by viewing nature. Maimonides states that Adam’s grandson Enosh and his generation assumed God to “be in the heavens,” and like viceroys who minister to the king are to be respected in respect to the king, stars which “minister before God” too must be revered (Laws of Star Worship 1:1).

But God’s Torah is His words, not man’s thoughts. Torah is an amazing gift, for God articulated absolute truths. True, man can and does misinterpret Torah, but he is still a huge step ahead of a person without God’s precise words. With God’s brilliantly formulated Torah, “Torah is a greater testament” to God and His will for man than is nature, which depends on flawed human deduction. Even religious adults today think “God is everywhere.” But with Torah study, they will eventually learn—as the rabbis taught—“God is the place of the world, and the world is not His place” (Rav Huna in Rav Ami’s name, Beraishis Rabba 68:9). This means that God is the necessary existence (“place”) for the world, but He does not occupy space. This is why we refer to God as “Hamakom”—“the place.” God is not everywhere. In fact, God is not anywhere. He existed prior to the creation of time and space. Therefore, His existence is unrelated to the universe in any manner. Enosh and his generation erred by assuming God occupies space, in the heavens. Upon that grave error, they added more errors, that stars are beings with will, and that they minister before God. Their underlying error is that they did not mature from their false view that all is “in the universe.” Man thereby baselessly forces God into the physical world, simply because man could not accept that something exists other than the physical. Many religious Jews and religious books over the generations have not matured through Torah study, and suggest that “part of God is in man,” that God literally “fills the world,” and other heresies. But Torah and reality demand we accept that that which created the physical universe—by definition—cannot not occupy the universe. God has no form, so place, no size, as Moses taught us, “Take therefore good heed to yourselves; for you saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire” (Deut. 4:15). And even that voice was not God “talking.” It was a creation, just like the fire. God created sounds to communicate with man.

King David was one of the wisest men. His quote above says that “God’s Torah is perfect”: perfect for guiding our lives towards the most rewarding existence. It is foolish for a person to ignore Torah, as God created man and He knows best what will offer man happiness. God said this happiness comes from Torah, and the wisest of men and women agreed. We trust our temporary bodies only to experienced and knowledgeable doctors. We must trust our potentially eternal souls to God, who knows more than doctors.