

Repentance

Reflection, admission of guilt, and spritual perfection does not hold a high position in today's cultures. But this was the focus of our forefathers, and what G-d desired we learn, and apply. Judah went so far in his repentance, to eternally enslave himself. Let his virtues guide our thoughts.

Dedication: "To you, Esther Schwartz, for your enjoyable friendship and remarkable take on life."

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

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Vayigash

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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

Yehudah completes his appeal. Yosef is overcome with intense emotion. He commands his servants and ministers to leave him. He is

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Joseph's position as the granaries' overseer forced everyone, (specifically his brothers) to confront him for food. All planned by Joseph to direct their repentance.

Joseph and His Brothers

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

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 and 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

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brothers hated him even more, for they resented that they would be physically subservient. However, the second dream reflected that Joseph would be their 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 on 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 into 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 or appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was their "chate", their 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 of the events can be explained by keeping this motif in mind when analyzing each one. 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. Paragraph 42 verse 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, his accusation of their being spies had to have a basis in order to dispel any suspicions. He knew that they entered from different entrances in order to search for him. He thus concluded that they felt guilty and realized that this presented an opportunity for him to question them. As a result of their guilt they tried to impress Joseph by telling him that they were searching for their brother. They sought to impress him with their loyalty. Thus he asked them, "if your brother couldn't be bought would you fight for him?" They responded in the affirmative. Joseph had thereby set a basis for his accusations. They affirmed that they would break the law if necessary. Therefore, his claim that they were spies was valid.

Joseph thereby sought the imprisonment of Shimon for two reasons: He sought to have Benjamin brought to Egypt. He also desired to isolate one of the brothers. In order for it to be a complete repentance, the same situation must arise and the person must demonstrate that he has changed, not falling victim to the same trappings of the sin. Therefore, Joseph sought to create similar circumstances to afford them the opportunity of 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 father's 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", regret for their actions. It was not a mere emotional

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Joseph and His Brothers

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

response. Joseph 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 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 Chapter 42 Verse 22 states "And Reuben 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." Reuben'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 Reuben was the eldest, the brothers were attempting to shift much of the blame onto Reuben. However, Reuben's response was not merely defensive. Repentance demands that the wrong doer properly acknowledge his guilt. If one denies his culpability, his is incapable of doing teshuva and to change his character. The Torah emphasizes this point by phrasing Reuben'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 his brothers because he intended to keep them off guard. They suspected upon their return of the money, that Joseph 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, Joseph 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. Joseph wanted to place Benjamin in jail in order to recreate the previous scenario of the brothers' abandon of brother (Joseph), to the greatest extent possible. Recreating the same events, now using Benjamin in place of himself, Joseph sought to offer his brothers an opportunity to do complete repentance, which requires the exact same situation of their previous sin, their sale of Joseph.

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 Yisroel of doing teshuva. 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 Yisroel. 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. □



SINAI: Miracle VS Contradiction

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: After spending a significant amount of time reading through your website, I have become most impressed with many of the ideas and thoughts you have presented. I have had the chance to listen to many of the shiurim and read many of the articles posted. You have reiterated quite often the need to follow the mind (and not just listen to what other people say); while most of what I have read seems to meet this standard, there is one article that seems rife with problems.

The article written by Rabbi Yisrael Chait concerning Torah from Sinai seems to have some flaws that I am not sure how to resolve:

The premise of the proof invalidates the entire notion of mass conspiracy. Yet, in the area of religion there is a tremendous emotional drive. You yourself have said you have no interest in the fact that 99% of humanity does not accept Torah. Therefore, one must assume that 99% of humanity have got it all wrong, and are simply slaves to their emotions. What was different 2000 years ago? Were there more rational people? Look at Paul, he traveled to Rome with a book of stories about a guy who performed miracles in front of other people in the name of his "God". Any rational person would immediately look for the corroboration. Instead millions of Romans jumped on board. One must therefore assume they were guided by the intense religious emotion so common in man. Therefore, it would seem quite plausible to assume the following: Moses presents a book filled with stories, promises of good and bad, and laws to a bunch of people. Since most people are blinded by their emotions, why not assume that these people blindly believed the fact there is a claim of 600,000 of their ancestors witnessing Sinai? After all, millions of people believe in the Trinity!!!

Mesora: You confuse two divergent points: Mass Testimony versus Blind Faith. Christianity did not profess that any event was witnessed by the masses, but perhaps by a handful at best. (Conspiracy exists only in small numbers.) Had they claimed masses witnessed any event, they would be required to produce these masses. The creators of Christianity knew this all too well, and concocted a "blind faith" credo as their line of defense. They conveniently fabricated fantastic, emotionally riveting stories about Jesus and his so called miracles, and also demanded "faith" to alleviate one's guilt from sin.

The combination of a need to be forgiven, with the ability to attach to someone supernatural (i.e., Jesus) who does "wonders", is quite appealing, and attracted millions. But do not let emotional attraction be confused with "proof". Christianity offered its adherents many satisfying feelings; 1) they were guilt free, 2) they could attach to the divine, 3) and it was so simple, just believe! Followers were thereby afforded an instant gratification in the religious sphere. But this in no way compares to the event at Sinai, and why we accept the latter as proof.

Moses could not convince 2.5 million people at Sinai that they all saw something, which did not occur. Christianity generated "belief" in a theory. Thus, it spread. However, one cannot convince others of "events" that they saw. This is where Moses' story differs from Jesus' story. Christianity did not require anything but blind faith, as its code is based on belief in a "theory". Moses, on the other hand, was not asking the people to believe a "theory", but rather, to attest to "what their eyes saw".

You said, "Most people are blinded by their emotions" so Moses could fool people into a belief system as did Jesus' followers. But now you must admit that this is not what Moses did. He did not request blind faith, but testimony of an event. One, identical story of Sinai was thereby spread unanimously, as the Jews did in fact witness the only mass revelation where G-d gave His one religion to mankind - Judaism.

Reader: The article strongly opposes the entire notion of using the miraculous as the basis for the acceptance of Judaism. There is even a nice footnote of how Einstein would not accept the "supernatural" claim made by the doctor, even if he witnessed it. This seems to present a quandary. First of all, was the event at Sinai a miracle or not? It would seem that God producing a voice is indeed a miracle; yet if this is the case, then the acceptance of Torah was based on a miracle, which would be a contradiction!

Mesora: There is no contradiction, as I will explain. But let us all first read the quote from Rabbi Chait's article:

"When visiting the Rockefeller Medical Institute, Albert Einstein met with Dr. Alexis Carrel, whose extracurricular interests were spiritualism and extrasensory perception. Observing that, Einstein was unimpressed. Carrel said, 'But Doctor what would you say if you observed this phenomenon yourself?' To which Einstein replied, 'I still would not believe it.'" (Clark, Ronald W. Einstein: The Life and Times. (New York: 1971, Avon Books) p. 642). Why would the great scientist not capitulate even to evidence? It is a matter of one's total framework. The true man of science who sees knowledge permeating the entire universe from the smallest particle to the largest galaxies will not be shaken from his view by a few paltry facts even though he may not be able to explain them. Only the ignorant are moved by such "evidence." In a similar manner miracles do not affect a man of Torah who is rooted in Sinai and God's infinite wisdom. His credo is his cogito."

Rabbi Chait's article denounces the acceptance of miracles, but only when it contradicts reason. This is the sentiment expressed in his footnote above quoting Einstein. Einstein would not accept that which contradicts reason, i.e., extrasensory perception, even upon viewing evidence. In such a case, he would dismiss visuals in favor of what his mind tells him is true. Similar to a magic trick, we cannot explain it, but we know that an elephant cannot disappear off of a stage. We follow reason, and not the visual perception. However, Rabbi Chait cannot suggest we abandon ALL miracles, as Sinai was the miracle par excellence! So what is Rabbi Chait's theory? He states that miracles are not believed when they contradict reason. This he supports from the Einstein quote. However, Sinai does not contradict reason, and Einstein would have no difficulty accepting G-d's revelation. But tell Einstein that the human mind can tap another mind, knowing another person's thoughts, and he will dismiss such a claim, as this phenomenon contradicts the design and abilities of the human mind.

Your question is answered as follows: It is "contradiction" which is unacceptable, not G-d's ability to perform miracles. Miraculous claims will be dismissed when they contradict reason. But they will be accepted when supported by proof.

Reader: Furthermore, looking at the Einstein quote, one can see a potential problem. Why did Einstein say he would not even accept the "supernatural" event to be true even if he witnessed it? After all, why distinguish between the natural and supernatural? Einstein could assume the doctor had no motive to lie, therefore why question the validity? Yet if Einstein did distinguish between the supernatural and the natural, then it would make sense why he would not accept it. He would have a set of rational "rules", trusting his intellectual intuition that such things could not happen. If such an event did happen, it would violate the rules he established. This does not presuppose it could not happen! For example, if Einstein were presented with the proof of Sinai, he would have two seemingly rational choices to make: either, he must accept the proof and abandon the rules he established concerning natural events, or accept his rules and deny the proof. Furthermore, the very notion of a mass conspiracy appeals to the same rational faculty as the basis for differentiating between the natural and supernatural. Why choose one over the other?

I present these questions in as respectful of a manner as possible. Please understand I am merely, like you, searching for truth. I look forward to your answer.

Mesora: As I mentioned, Einstein is not favoring natural over supernatural, but rather, reason over contradiction. Sinai presents no contradiction, and its miraculous content opposes no abilities of G-d. Hence, Sinai is perfectly acceptable. But tell someone that people can read minds, and Einstein would deny it. That phenomenon denies reason. ■

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Vayigash

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prepared to reveal himself to his brothers.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Yosef's question is odd. Yehudah has argued

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

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

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

Yosef's brothers originally entered Egypt in order to purchase provisions. Yosef accused them of spying. The brothers responded by describing their family structure. They told Yosef that they were all sons of a single father. They told Yosef they had a younger brother who had not accompanied them. This brother was in Canaan with their father.

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

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

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

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Vayigash

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lives of all of his children. The brothers argued on this basis that they could not be spies. They are the sons of a single father. He would not allow ten of his eleven sons to risk their lives as spies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yosef was a person of great authority in Egypt. He was second only to Paroh. It is clear that he had complete freedom of action. He loved his father. He certainly knew of the sorrow his father must have experienced in believing that his son was dead. It would seem Yosef could have easily contacted Yaakov earlier. Why did Yosef not communicate with Yaakov before this point?

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

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

Perhaps we can understand Yosef's theory if we return to his dreams as a youth. In these dreams Yosef discovered that some day he would become the leader of the brothers. Even his father would be under his authority. The brothers regarded these dreams as youthful

fantasies. But Yosef never doubted the authenticity of his visions.

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

The other path was far more radical. It required that Yosef achieve power and authority independently. Once this position was achieved events would cause the brothers to submit to Yosef's leadership. This second path would require Yosef's separation from his family until the proper moment. Then, Yosef must wait for the moment at which his brothers would be forced to submit themselves to his leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



“The fool does not desire understanding, but only the revelations of his heart.”

(Mishlei 18:2)

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

The wording of this pasuk is ambiguous. What is meant by “the revelations of his heart” and why should such an attitude toward tevunah, or understanding, characterize a person as a fool?

Rashi writes:[1] But only the revelations of his heart: his desire is to reveal his heart, that which is in his heart.

In order to understand Rashi’s comments, we must first examine a fundamental principle of thought.

Albert Einstein is said to have defined “common sense” as “the collection of prejudices acquired by the age of eighteen.” Obviously Einstein did not mean for this statement to be taken literally. Rather, Einstein’s intention was to shed light on a commonly overlooked aspect of human psychology. Each and every person has a set of premises[2] to which he ascribes validity. These premises may be ethical principles, religious beliefs, societal values, intuitive “gut feelings,” rules of etiquette, or even aphorisms or maxims. The origins of these premises differ depending on the particular person’s upbringing and environment. They may have been inculcated during youth by one’s parents or teachers, they may have been absorbed from society, or they may be products of one’s personality or emotions. Whether one realizes it or not, these premises greatly influence one’s thinking process and determine what information one decides to accept or reject and which authorities one chooses to trust or distrust. For example, it is likely that a person who was raised in a strictly religious home will be less likely to accept “secular ideas” than a person raised in a non-religious home. His premise is that “religious ideas” are valid and “secular ideas” are not. These premises usually take root at an age during which the person is either too young or too intellectually immature to notice their inception. Consequently, the majority of people will live their entire lives in ignorance of this important principle of psychology, examining neither the validity of their premises nor the manner in which these premises influence their thinking.

The average person views “learning” as the process of analyzing information and accepting

that which makes sense and rejecting that which does not make sense. In actuality, however, people do not “learn” this way, contrary to what they may wish to believe. Rather “learning,” for most people, consists of accepting ideas, which are in agreement with their premises and rejecting ideas, which challenge or contradict them. Their criterion for accepting, and rejecting of ideas is not the inherent rationale of the ideas, but the ability of those ideas to conform to their premises. During a person’s youth, he is typically more open to accepting ideas, which differ slightly from his premises, but this limited stage of open-mindedness only lasts for so long. As a person continues in his learning he will begin to develop a framework[3] based on the information he gleans. It is this framework, which Einstein would refer to as “the collection of prejudices.” It is this framework which will dictate all of one’s opinions and beliefs, guide one’s intuition and the way one approaches any new information, and will determine the position one takes on any given issue. Occasionally an idea will have a big enough emotional or intellectual impact to dramatically alter, or even uproot, a premise. Only in such instances will one’s framework undergo change. Unfortunately, such occasions are few in number and tend to decrease with time. Eventually, a person will reach a point at which his framework is so rigid and inflexible there is no longer a chance that any new ideas will be admitted. At this stage “we see only what we are prepared to see, what we have been taught to see. We eliminate and ignore everything that is not part of our prejudices.”[4] By the time a person has reached this stage he has completely exhausted his intellectual integrity as well as his potential to advance in learning.

We can now understand Rashi’s interpretation of the pasuk, as well as the moral injunction of its author. The k’siel, or the fool, utilizes an erroneous approach to learning. Rather than treading the lonely and often perilous path of open-mindedness and independent thought, the k’siel chooses the path of least resistance, allowing his premises do all of the thinking on his behalf. Rather than struggling to withstand the clash of a rational idea with an irrational

premise, the k’siel surrenders his mind to that irrational premise and discards the rational idea without giving it a second thought. He may claim to desire understanding, and he may even convince himself that this desire is real, but deep down the k’siel is only interested in that which is already in his heart, that which is in line with his premises, which he is already inclined to accept. For the k’siel, pursuit of wisdom is nothing more than a search to find ideas and opinions, which fit into his preexisting framework of beliefs.

The chacham, the wise man, on the other hand, utilizes the correct approach to learning. The first step he takes is to identify his premises. Once the chacham has identified his premises, he will then examine them to determine which are true and which are false, which of them have a basis in rationale and which have no basis at all. Once he has made this determination, the chacham will attempt to guard against the influence of his false premises. He will seek to understand precisely which areas of thought are likely to be affected by them. When studying those areas, he will check himself to make sure that his acceptance of the ideas is not based on the influence of his irrational premises. Whether the chacham succeeds in this difficult endeavor or not, it is clear from his attitude that he truly desires understanding. The willingness to step outside of his framework and contemplate an idea based on its own merit is what differentiates the chacham from the k’siel. Indeed, “the chacham’s eyes are in his head, while the k’siel walks in darkness.”[5] A person should be guided by his framework - not blinded by it. ■

[1] Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Mishlei 18:2

[2] From here and on, every mention of the word “premises” must be understood as a reference to this idea.

[3] In the Jewish world the term commonly used to describe such a framework is “hashkafa,” or outlook.

[4] Jean Martin Charcot, De l’expectation

[5] Sefer Kohelet 2:14

"Banning" G-d

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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

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

One unavoidable problem is the brothers' inclusion of G-d into their ban and curse. How do we understand such a statement? Man has little control over his own life, let alone an inclusion of G-d in a ban! Such a notion is completely against all foundations of Judaism. This cannot be taken on face value. The Rabbis authoring this Medrash have something else in mind.

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

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

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



"saved by G-d". G-d is thereby inextricably bound up in this nation's identity as its Savior. We see that the Jewish law also incorporates this central concept, as we align our prayers with the concept of G-d's salvation.

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

What were the facts? Isaac saw the brothers presenting the bloodied coat to Jacob, asking Jacob to recognize if it was Joseph's. To this, Jacob concluded that a wild beast devoured Joseph. I would speculate that what might have happened is as follows: Isaac saw that only the coat was returned. Perhaps thinking, "Why should they find only the coat and no remains of Joseph? This isn't normal, that an animal will separate the coat and drag it off to a place without any of the body. There should have been some remnant of Joseph near the coat. This would be normal, and as a result, there would be no question on behalf

of the brothers, that they should need Jacob's recognition as confirmation. Joseph's remains would be proof of his death." However the coat alone was "found", raising Isaac's suspicions. Additionally, perhaps, Isaac said, "Why am I the only one who sees this question? After all, why should not at least one brother have the same question as I?" Perhaps Isaac concluded some idea from this unanimously presented story. Perhaps he thought that the only way all the brothers would be satisfied that a garment alone was proof of Joseph's death, was if they were all trying to force that conclusion, as a lie. A true investigator will wonder two things as did Isaac, 1) why no bodily remains were found, and 2) why the coat was no where near any remains. Isaac concluded the brothers were conspiring a lie. However, Isaac felt that something so grave as Joseph's sale must not be revealed by himself, as silence in this matter must be in line with G-d's will. Isaac had a keen understanding of G-d's providence, and realized this is a matter certainly being addressed by G-d. Isaac's hands were tied.

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

Postscript

According to my suggestion earlier, one may submit good reason (according to the brothers' fabrication) for the coat being found separate from any remains: the brothers stripped Joseph of his coat before he was supposedly devoured, as stated in the Torah. However, this is problematic. For if, according to the brother's lie, the coat was no where near Joseph when devoured, the coat would not contain any blood. To keep in line with their fabrication, the brother's did not disclose the fact that they stripped Joseph. They conspired as well, that the coat remained on Joseph when he was 'devoured'. This is how the brothers presented the story, and what led Isaac to see through their lie. □

Teaching FAIRY TALES

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I have an 8-month old daughter and I know that I am thinking too far ahead on this one, but here goes. Is it permitted to use children stories with adventures of talking animals, "magic" objects, or perhaps even dinosaurs? What about talking puppets? My logic is that since the Torah discusses a couple of talking animals, and plenty of miraculous objects, that this might be an acceptable avenue for children's fantasy stories. I figure it is not proper to teach children stories about fantastic creatures that have absolutely no basis in reality and quite likely come from pagan stories, but children have great imaginations, which I think should be encouraged and channeled into morally appropriate stories. I have actually seen some Jewish children's books that seem to draw from Eastern-European legends from the shtetl, such as Hasidic children stories about goblins and kabbalistic inspired stories, golems, etc. Thank you in advance for your response.

Mesora: Let's clarify your statements: the Torah contains only one talking animal, the Snake of Eve's era, and no objects were "miraculous". G-d caused all miracles. (Bilam's talking donkey took place in a vision, according to Maimonides.) The Torah does not have a "style" in the sense that it gives license to create similar stories. This is dangerous. Only G-d's stories form truths. When we create "similar" stories, we are creating fallacy, which will lead others astray. Teaching children fantasy only trains them to expect reality to conform. It starts them off on the wrong path, and stories at such young ages, create indelible imprints. Adults who believe in horoscopes, ghosts, evil eyes, golems and the like, are proof of just how alluring and permanent fantasies are.

I digress for one moment to note that the source of such imaginary stories, and idolatry for that matter, are not to be viewed as if having their own existence. G-d does not create fallacy, so there is but one other possible source: man. Over the years, men and women concocted many fables. For the same reason they created them, others attached themselves to them. The reason for both errors is the combination of man's imagined personification of inanimate or mindless objects, with the emotion of insecurity. Combine the two, and you have an individual with wild dreams and fantasies, who is unsure of their truth. Therefore people strive to find support for these beliefs. They create stories as a solution, and even believe to see things not really in existence. This we already explained is the Talmud's depiction of demons, or shadim. The Talmud notes that demons occur in but four instances: mountaintops, deserts, pits, and at night. We explained that the common feature to all is "isolation". It is in this state of mind that man seeks others, and imagines there to be others, when they are not there. Man has many emotions, and his disposition, without education, is to believe his fantasies. Teaching stories to children is easy, as they are so attentive, and well behaved. It is no wonder many parents encourage this practice - they finally have their children in a calm state. But the children are attentive as they too partake of our same emotional makeup, the makeup, which led the story's creators to write them. When we teach these stories, or worse, create them,

we are simply giving in to unchecked emotions, while arousing false beliefs in children. These beliefs are difficult to battle in adulthood, and move a person away from viewing G-d as the only force in the world. Since this is the primary concept man must have clear, fairy tales must be avoided. At first, these tales seem harmless, but upon a closer examination of their source and effects, we see they are quite dangerous.

Let us return to the topic. We must recognize where the need to tell fantasy to children comes from. It is from the parent. It is a form of manipulation of the child, and gratification for the parent. The parent knows the story is false, but wishes to launch the child into a wonderland. Perhaps this offers the parent some satisfaction that he/she is providing enjoyment or entertainment to his child. But the parent should take this good emotion of desiring to please his child, and do so in a manner, which is truly beneficial. Good parents are those who recognize what is best for a child, and provide accordingly. However, many parents respond to their children in a manner, which in fact, satisfies some wish of the parent, not a goal for their child. We need not look far. Parents who push their child into a career that the parent likes, is a most common example. Also, parents will reprimand their child if the child acts in a way embarrassing to the parent. Why is the parent embarrassed? This is because the parent seeks approval from others, (a poor consideration) and views his child as an extension of himself. He uses the child as a means of displaying his personal success of raising a "good kid". When the child acts out, the parent senses failure, and wishes to avoid disapproval from his peers. Again, the parent in this case acts to please himself, not benefit the child. If we are sensitive to this major emotion possessed by many parents, we can avoid further harming a child's healthy development.

Parents feel empowered to retain their role as "parent" at all costs. They yell at their children, raising their voices in an attempt to justify their cause, thereby teaching the child that power is more important than reason. Very few parents have the humility to step down from the role as master, and allow the child to develop in his or her own time and curiosity. We should provide children with the fun time they need, depending on their age, and continually increase instruction as they develop, but never compromising truth, for entertainment. Regarding puppets, cartoons and the like, children eventually learn that your hand animated the puppet, or the drawing, which animate into cartoons. There is no fallacy there. But try teaching science instead. You will be as happily surprised, as they are excited about learning. Fairy tales are unnecessary, while science is truth, setting the stage for healthier growth.

Do not be impressed by what is in print. Do not be impressed what comes from European times, shtetls, kabbala, hassidic sources, etc. People tend to give credence to that which is old, or comes from a recognized source, as the ones I just mentioned. But this too is an emotion, and not guided by reason. Man believes, that which is old, is part of "history", and is true. But there are no grounds for this thinking. Examine all areas of life, especially when they effect unknowing children, and use reason to guide your decisions. ▣