



If God did not inform Joseph of Pharaoh and his stewards' dream interpretations, how did Joseph know their dreams were divine, and foretold true events about to transpire?

It's all in the dreams...but which aspect?

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## Weekly Parsha

# Vayigash

R.BERNARD FOX

"And He said, 'I am the Omnipotent G-d of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for it is there that I will make you into a great nation.'" (Beresheit 46:3)

Yosef asks his father to descend to Egypt with his entire family. Yitzchak

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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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.

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# 2 Divine Dreams: Amazing Lessons



(Vayigash cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

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decides to travel to Egypt with his family. He arrives at Beer Sheva. There, he offers sacrifices to the Almighty. He has a prophecy. Hashem tells Yaakov that he should not fear descending to Egypt. In Egypt, Bnai Yisrael will become a great nation. Hashem will continue to protect Bnai Yisrael. Eventually, Hashem will bring the Jewish nation back to the land of Israel.

This prophecy is difficult to understand. What was its purpose? Yaakov had already decided to travel to Egypt. Why did Hashem speak to Yaakov at this point in time? It would have been more reasonable for Hashem to reassure Yaakov before he made his decision!

There is another question. Hashem tells Yaakov not to fear transplanting himself and his family. Clearly, this assurance implies that Yaakov did have some fear. What was source of this trepidation?

Sforno answers these questions. His answer is based on one essential observation. The Almighty identified himself to Yaakov as the G-d of his father Yitzchak. Why does Hashem choose this specific appellation? In order to answer this question and our other questions, some background information is needed.

Sforno explains that Yaakov had not decided to settle in Egypt. Actually, this assumption is supported by a previous passage. Yosef had asked his father to settle in Egypt. In announcing his response, Yaakov explains that he will travel to Egypt in order to see Yosef. He does not express any intention to resettle in Egypt.[1] It seems that Yaakov's intention was to travel to Egypt, see Yosef, and return to Canaan.

Why was Yaakov reluctant to comply with Yosef's request? Why did he not wish to resettle in Egypt? Sforno explains that Yaakov was aware of Hashem's instructions to his father, Yitzchak. Hashem forbade Yitzchak to leave the land of Israel. He had specifically admonished Yitzchak against living in Egypt.[2] Yaakov was not willing to deviate from the instructions the Almighty had given to his father.

Now, we can understand the reason Hashem identified Himself as the G-d of Yitzchak. Hashem was responding to Yaakov's decision to reject Yosef's request. Yaakov was traveling to Egypt. However, he did not plan to settle there. He was following the instructions the Almighty had given to Yitzchak. Hashem began this prophecy by identifying Himself as the G-d of Yitzchak.

In this manner, the Almighty acknowledged the instructions He had given to Yitzchak. He was saying, "I am the G-d that forbade Yitzchak to leave the land of Canaan." Hashem then continued. He instructed Yaakov to settle in Egypt. He should not fear that this would be a violation of the Almighty's will.

We have now answered our questions. Hashem identified Himself as the G-d of Yitzchak in order to acknowledge the admonition He had given to Yitzchak. Yaakov did not need a prophetic message in order to make his initial decision. This is because that decision was to merely visit Egypt and see Yosef. He did not plan to resettle. However, after Yaakov embarked on this journey, Hashem spoke to him. The Almighty was not addressing the issue of traveling to Egypt. Instead, He was speaking to the purpose of this journey. Yaakov should not just visit Egypt. He should resettle. Yaakov was not subject to the prohibition placed upon Yitzchak.

This raises an additional issue. Why was Yaakov permitted – even commanded – to resettle in Egypt? Sforno explains that this was absolutely necessary for the development of Bnai Yisrael. According to Sforno, this lesson is also included in the prophecy. The Almighty told Yaakov that in Egypt He would make Bnai Yisrael into a great nation. The intent of this statement is to tell Yaakov that Egypt will not pose an obstacle to the development of Bnai Yisrael. On the contrary, the Almighty is telling Yaakov that the experience in Egypt is essential to the development of Bnai Yisrael. Why is this experience so important?

Sforno responds that the people of Canaan accepted Bnai Yisrael. This acceptance would lead to intermarriage and assimilation. Sforno explains that it was impossible for the Yaakov's descendants to fully integrate into Egyptian society. Custom would create an impenetrable barrier between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians. Egyptian custom even forbade the sharing of a meal with Ivrim – the name by which Yaakov, his family and followers were known. They would be segregated into a separate district. Social interaction would be limited. In this environment a small band of co-religionists could develop into a unique nation. Segregation and prejudice would prevent assimilation and absorption.

These conditions could not be duplicated in Canaan. Social barriers between the Ivrim and the



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(Vayigash continued from page 2)

## Weekly Parsha

indigenous peoples were minimal. Before Yaakov's descendants could develop into an independent nation, assimilation would prevail.[3]

Yaakov's descendants would eventually return to Canaan, but only after they had developed into Klal Yisrael – the Jewish nation. This evolution could only take place in exile.

Sforno's comments can be more fully appreciated if we review an earlier incident. Dina, Yaakov's daughter, was abducted and violated by Shechem, who was a prince among his people. Shechem fell in love with Dina, and, accompanied by his father Chamor, he requested of Yaakov and his sons permission to marry her. The brothers responded that they would not allow Dina to marry an uncircumcised person. If Shechem, his father and all of the males of the city would circumcise themselves, then the children of Yaakov would agree to the marriage.

Shechem, Chamor and the inhabitants of the city agreed, and they performed the circumcisions. Three days later, while the men of the city were recovering, Shimon and Leyve, two of Yaakov's sons, entered the city and killed all of the males. They rescued Dina and eliminated all those who might have attempted to oppose their decision.

Yaakov condemned the actions of his sons. The sons defended their behavior. They argued that they could not allow their sister to be treated as a prostitute. What was the basis of this dispute between Yaakov and his sons? It seems that Yaakov is making a compelling argument. He agreed that it would be tragic to give Dina to Shechem. But neither he nor his sons had ever expected this outcome – that the people of Shechem would perform circumcision. However when they did perform circumcision, Yaakov and his sons were faced with the consequences of the bargain. Yaakov maintained that they should have accepted these unfortunate results and given Dina to Shechem in marriage. Yaakov and his sons had violated their bargain. This disturbed Yaakov. The people of Canaan would conclude that Yaakov and his sons were dishonest. This would reflect poorly on their morality and ultimately on Hashem. Furthermore, Yaakov and his sons were a small family in an alien land. The other people of the land would identify with the Shechem, Chamor and their people. They would seek to avenge this wrong committed by his sons. Yaakov and his children could not defend themselves from such an attack.

The sons responded that they could not allow their sister to be treated as a prostitute. This response seems irrelevant! Yaakov shared their abhorrence for the manner in which Dina had been treated. However, he argued that the brothers had jeopardized the mission and even the survival of Bnai Yisrael. How are the sons responding to this objection?

According to Sforno, the sons disputed both of Yaakov's arguments. They maintained that the people of Canaan were not so immoral as to condone the behavior of Shechem. They would recognize the right of Yaakov and his sons to rescue Dina. Finally, they would understand the necessity of using subterfuge. Shechem, Chamor and their people outnumbered Yaakov and his sons. They could not rescue their sister without first disabling her captors. Bnai Yisrael would not be condemned for acting unethically. Neither were they in danger of retribution.[4]

This incident is remarkably revealing. Before Bnai Yisrael would be prepared to possess the land of Israel, the family of Yaakov would need to grow into a nation. However, it is difficult for a family to develop into a distinct nation. A single isolated family is subject to tremendous pressure to assimilate into the surrounding nation and culture. Yaakov's children would be faced with this pressure. How could they resist this pressure to assimilate into the surrounding peoples?

This assimilation could only be avoided if Yaakov's children would see themselves as separate and different from the surrounding peoples. But the debate that Sforno describes between Yaakov and his children suggests that they did not see themselves as an alien family in the land of Canaan. They believed that the people of Canaan had accepted them as their own and would respect the measures they had taken to protect their interests. This attitude suggests that the environment for assimilation already existed.

This conclusion has important implications. The antecedent for assimilation already existed in Canaan. Therefore, the family of Yaakov could only develop into the nation of Bnai Yisrael in

another land – a land in which they would not be permitted to assimilate. Egypt was such a land. The Egyptians could not accept Bnai Yisrael – even Yosef – as their equals. In the environment of Egypt, assimilation would be impossible.

It emerges, that according to Sforno, the exile to Egypt was a direct result of the attitudes of Yaakov's children. They had acquired some level of identification with the people of Canaan and believed that they had been accepted by the indigenous peoples. This attitude created a perilous environment – an environment in which assimilation was a real possibility.

Based on Sforno's analysis, it is not surprising that Jewish history is replete with instances in which assimilation is followed by persecution. The exile to Egypt is a template for these latter episodes of assimilation and subsequent persecution. Yaakov's children were in danger of assimilating. Providence intervened and prevented assimilation though placing Bnai Yisrael in Egypt – an environment in which antipathy and prejudice prevented assimilation. This same pattern is then repeated throughout Jewish history. When the danger of assimilation develops, discrimination and persecution follow. This antipathy prevents further assimilation and Bnai Yisrael is preserved. ■

[1] Sefer Beresheit 45:28.

[2] Sefer Beresheit 26:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 46:3.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 34:30-31.



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## Dreams

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing to him. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling of these dreams, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason, to repeat his second dream first to his brothers, and then again, to all of them 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 eleven stars being his eleven 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, thirteen years later, Joseph accurately and astonishingly interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All three dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to 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.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams". 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 abandoned Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone else under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin, and as a license to perfect his brothers. As a wise Rabbi taught years ago, 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 eleven 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 in regards to 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. The 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.

We must now ask: when did Joseph become such a great 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 nature 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 also had many ramifications.

We mentioned 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 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 rechanneled 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 two 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 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?

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## Pharaoh and His Stewards

Ten 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. Two more years go by, 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 Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

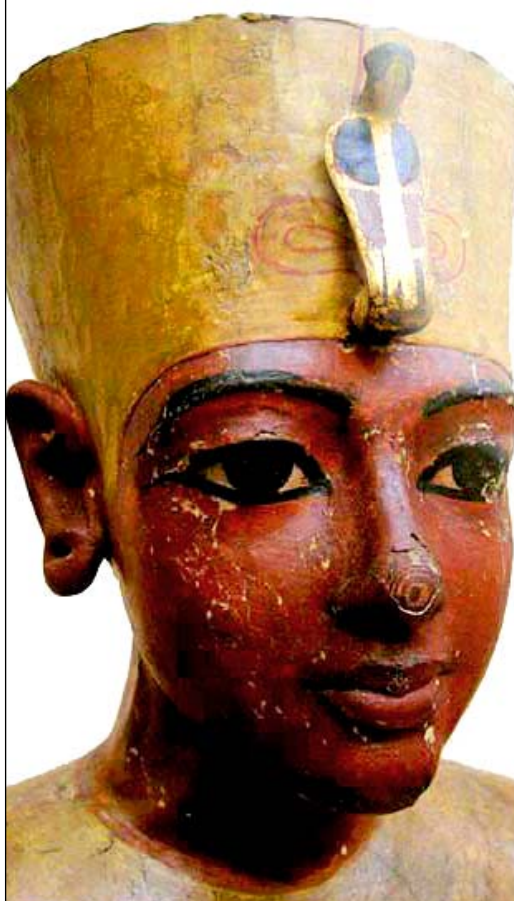
God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive". I believe God gave Joseph two dreams, for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. What do I mean? Besides the 'content' of the dreams, prophetic dreams also have a 'style': there is the chosen dream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

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received "two" dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of the dreams' content concerning the cows and the ears in one 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 two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph too had two separate dreams with similar content. (Gen. 37:9) In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: "[Divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies".

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 two elements were contained in the stewards' dreams, and in Pharaoh's dreams. The stewards' dreams' duplication was a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two 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 confront. 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.

God, with a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 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 are – by definition – a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates to 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, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. 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 learned. 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

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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 two 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.

Responding to our misfortunes with safe-sounding beliefs that "it's all for the good", man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors that caused him to say that the first time. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals, that we will terminate 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, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention.

The Torah has all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address what God says requires wisdom and personal perfection. "For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem." (Jeremiah, 9:23) ■



# JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS

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RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

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*Transcribed 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 while Jacob heeded this dream.

The difference between the dreams can help us appreciate the different responses. The first dream reflected that Joseph would rule them

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

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

At the outset, an important footnote throughout the entire ordeal must be examined. The brothers, during their entire encounter with Joseph, did not recognize him, nor suspect that the Viceroy could be Joseph, despite their intimate knowledge of him. This incongruity could be explained because of the very nature of their sin. They miscalculated Joseph's potential for greatness. They viewed him as a vain and arrogant person. Accordingly, they felt by selling him into slavery, it would ensure that Joseph would not be the mentor. They felt that such an egotistical and vain person would succumb to the life of the physical. They thought the support and security of his father and family was essential and without it, he would desert the tradition. Therefore, the Medrash tells us that when they entered Egypt they looked for Joseph in the houses of ill repute. They never imagined nor appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was

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## Weekly Parsha

their “chate”, sin. They misjudged his abilities and failed to realize that he was still a child at the time they passed judgment, and capable of change. Therefore, this image was still in their mind and prevented them from ever imagining that Joseph was the Viceroy.

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

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

Joseph foresaw that his brothers would be coerced to come to Egypt to buy provisions because of the famine. As a result, he viewed the situation as the opportune time to allow his brothers to repent. He was hoping that they would search for him and rectify the situation. Upon their first meeting with Joseph he acted as a stranger to them. The Torah tells us that Joseph remembered the dreams and accused them of being spies. Joseph was not vengeful. He was aware that the prophecy would become true and that this presented an opportunity to allow his brothers to change and ultimately acknowledge him as the mentor. Genesis 42:3 states, “And the ten brothers of Joseph went down to Egypt to buy provisions.” Rashi comments that they are referred to as Joseph’s brothers because they regretted their actions and were determined to buy Joseph’s freedom, at whatever price. Thus they had started on the path of repentance. In fact, they entered Egypt from ten separate entrances. This would facilitate their secondary mission of searching for Joseph and obtaining his freedom. However, Joseph’s accusation of their being spies



had to have a basis in order to dispel any suspicions. He knew that they entered from different entrances in order to search for him. He thus concluded that they felt guilty and realized that this presented an opportunity for him to question them. As a result of their guilt they tried to impress Joseph by telling him that they were searching for their brother. They sought to impress him with their loyalty. Thus he asked them, if your brother couldn’t be bought would you fight for him. They responded in the affirmative. Joseph had thereby set a basis for his accusations. They affirmed that they would break the law if necessary. Therefore, his claim that they were spies was valid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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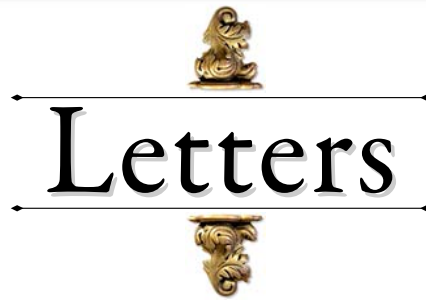


(Joseph continued from page 7)

## Letters

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

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



## Distortions

**Reader:** Are Atheists idolaters? The 7 Noachide laws talk about not worshiping false gods but atheist don't worship any god at all, so it will suggest to me they are not idolaters, am I wrong?

Can an atheist be a righteous gentile? What about agnostics? I know only atheists, agnostic or Christians. I have a friendship relation with some of them. I cannot talk about God with them. They think Judaism is not for a non-Jew...they think I am crazy. I need friendship. Do you agree I cannot isolate myself?

I used to think good doings would be enough to be in grace with God (I had a wrong perception of God) I didn't teach my children about God, because I didn't want them to become Christians (I wanted them to be rational and to use their minds and not to believe in blind faith). I was ignorant about Judaism. Is being ignorant a sin? Am I responsible?

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** I would agree that atheists are not idolaters, since the latter must worship his false concept of God. But a Rabbi once said that there is no such thing as atheists. I don't know his reasoning, but I would suggest it means that any atheist is in fact "denying" God...and not simply absent minded, which is what atheism suggests. For example, once I deny there is a bus in front of me, I simultaneously accept the concept of "bus". So too, one who denies God, accepts the concept of God.

An atheist cannot be a righteous Gentile, for "righteousness" is defined by following God's righteousness. The same applies to agnostics.

And no, one cannot isolate themselves...we are all social beings by nature. We need friendship.

Being ignorant is only a sin, if one knows his or her ignorance, and does not act upon it. But in my opinion, and in the opinion of the aforementioned Rabbi, God enables each human the opportunity – at some point in his or her life – to see the truth, and act upon it. God's justice is that He offers humans a chance in their lives to realize our potential. ■

## Proportions

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi, I found your Mesora site and was impressed by some of it's content. In one article you stated that you could eat a product even if it contains pork, provided that less than 1/60 of the substance is pork. You wrote, "The Torah prohibition is not to eat an object called pork. But when eating an entire mixture with acceptable proportions of ingredients, it is permissible. One is eating a "mixture", not pork."

Where specifically according to Jewish law does it state that "1/60" is a maximum limit of a bad substance in kosher food? The reason I ask is because this is complete news to me. My mother used to buy toaster pastry cakes that contain milk in the icing. She stopped buying them 10 years ago because they were no longer "kosher" despite having the same ingredients. Was her response consistent with Jewish halacha?

Also, in another place on your site you said that a person who finds a truth in the scriptures is required to follow that truth even if all the rabbis contradict it. (I hope I reiterated correctly) Is there a scriptural source for that idea?

*Regards,  
Michael*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** The Shulchan Aruch, Laws of Mixtures (Ta'aruvos) 98:1 states that if a non-kosher food item has become undiscernibly intermingled with kosher food item(s) in a ratio of 1/60 or less, then the entire mixture may be consumed. The prohibition of eating non-kosher is either when the item is isolated; when it forms more than a sixtieth of a mixture and is not discernable in that mixture; or can be isolated and removed. Until that non-kosher item that is greater than 1/60 of the mixture is removed, the entire mixture is prohibited. But if a non-kosher item is less than a sixtieth, and one cannot discern it from the kosher, and one cannot separate it, then the entire mixture may be consumed.

Regarding your second question, I will quote a Rabbi. He taught that if we know something to be true beyond any doubt, we do not say it is false, even if we come across the contrary words of a Rabbi. The principle being that a clear truth is not discounted by inconclusive or cryptic words. What is proven trumps all else. We should not immediately suggest what we determined as proven, now must be discounted due to a Rabbi's words, which may only appear as contrary due to our misunderstanding of what he wrote. ■



Collected from published news sources



## WorldNEWS

DECEMBER 29, 2006

**Bush Signs Anti-Hamas Bill into Law**

By Hillel Fendel. US President George W. Bush signed a law Thursday forbidding direct aid to the Hamas Authority - but not Fatah - until it accepts Israel. Two more men have been killed in Hamas-Fatah fighting.

The new U.S. bill, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act, outlaws aid to Hamas, but specifically permits funding to Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah. This anomaly is based on the split in the PA government: Hamas won elections a year ago, giving it the prime ministerial slot and a majority in the legislature, while Abbas (Abu Mazen) is the Chairman, parallel to the position of President.

Hamas and Fatah are greatly at odds, unable to agree on either a policy towards Israel, the formation of a government, or a date for new elections. Supporters of both terrorist groups have shot and killed each other over recent weeks, including in the last few hours. ■

**PM Olmert, DM Peretz: Restraint Also Has Its Limits**

By Nissan Ratzlav-Katz. In the wake of stepped-up rocket attacks from Gaza on Wednesday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared that Israeli restraint also has its limits, which are being reached.

The prime minister said that the restraint Israel has displayed thus far in reaction to the ongoing rocket attacks from Palestinian Authority-controlled Gaza will soon end.

"Over 40 rockets landed in Israel since the ceasefire and the last one was fired as we speak," Prime Minister Olmert said during a joint press conference with the Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg in Jerusalem. A barrage of six

Kassam rockets fired by elements in the PA struck targets in the western Negev during the meeting between Olmert and his Norwegian guest.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attacks, which sent one person into shock and nearly slammed into a gathering of hundreds of children in Sderot. One of the rockets landed just south of the city of Ashkelon, on Israel's southern coast. ■

**Death of President Ford**

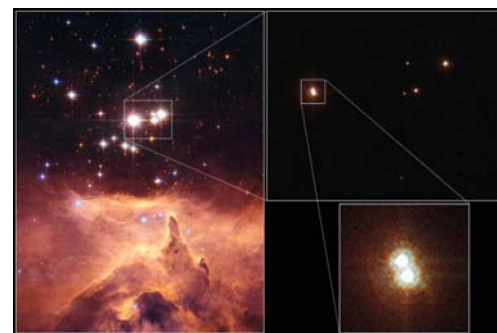
Democrats and Republicans on Wednesday remembered the late former President Gerald R. Ford as a man who led the nation out of the dark days of the Watergate scandal. Ford, 93, "died peacefully" Tuesday evening at his home in Rancho Mirage, California, his widow, Betty Ford, said in a statement. An official cause of death was not announced. ■

**Giant Dinosaur Found In Spain***Science Daily*

Fossils of a giant Sauropod, found in Teruel Spain, reveal that Europe was home to giant dinosaurs in the Late Jurassic period - about 150 million years ago. Giant dinosaurs have previously been found mainly in the New World and Africa. This dinosaur may have been the most massive terrestrial animal in Europe. ■

**Unlocking The Frozen Secrets Of Comet Wild 2***Science Daily*

Eleven months ago, NASA's Stardust mission touched down in the Utah desert with the first solid comet samples ever retrieved from space. Since then, nearly 200 scientists from around the globe have studied the minuscule grains, looking for clues to the physical and chemical history of our solar system. Although years of work remain to fully decipher the secrets of comet Wild 2, researchers are sure that it contains some of the most primitive and exotic chemical structures ever studied in a laboratory. ■

**Heavyweight Stars Light Up Nebula**

The small open star cluster Pismis 24 lies in the core of the large emission nebula about 8,000 light-years away from Earth. Some of the stars in this cluster are extremely massive and emit intense ultraviolet radiation. The brightest object in the picture is designated Pismis 24-1. It was once thought to weigh as much as 200 to 300 solar masses. This would not only have made it by far the most massive known star in the galaxy, but would have put it considerably above the currently believed upper mass limit of about 150 solar masses for individual stars. However, high-resolution Hubble Space Telescope images of the star show that it is really two stars orbiting one another. They are estimated to each be 100 solar masses. The Hubble Advanced Camera for Surveys images were taken in April 2006. ■



WorldNEWS

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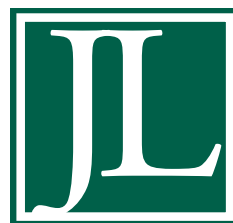
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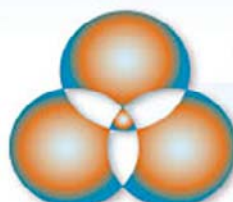
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